

BRACHDY HOUSE (OLD LIBRARY RUMNEY)

SUMMARY

- Name of Organisation/ Parent Organisation: Rumney Forum
- Start date: 2016
- Number of Employees: 1 (on a contract basis)
- Number of Volunteers: 6 trustees; 20 regular volunteers; additional 40 volunteers for specific events.
- Structure: Charitable Incorporated Organisation
- Turnover: £56k (2018-19)
- Website: <https://rumneyforum.wordpress.com/>

PRODUCT/SERVICE

The ground floor of Brachdy House, formerly The Old Library Rumney, is managed by Rumney Forum for the benefit of residents within the CF3 postcode area. Its objects are to provide leisure, recreation, education and to alleviate poverty for this community.

To deliver this, Rumney Forum run a wide range of community focused projects and events including clubs such as 'Knit and Natter', prize bingo, community lunches and PACT meetings, and the annual Christmas Tree and Beach festivals. Notably the forum is also a 'FareShare' partner, delivering a self-referral foodbank. It has also established Benthg, Wales' first local 'library of things' - a place where you can borrow things you need but don't own, and donate things you own but don't need - and has become a place where people meet to share knowledge and skills with their communities. All events and projects are run by Rumney Forum and their volunteers.

Whilst the asset is privately owned, Rumney Forum manages the ground floor of the building to run this community hub via a peppercorn 99-year lease.

HISTORY

The building used to be the Cardiff Council run library in Rumney. Following the decision by the council to close the facility in 2014, the local community campaign group, Community Action for Rumney Library, was established in an effort to save the library.

Whilst the library was in the end closed, the new council-run Rumney Hub was developed, and the area was left in the situation where they had a library, but not a real community hub which they wanted and needed. As such, the existing Rumney forum, a small group running one-off events, and Community Action for Rumney

Library, merged and became one entity, registering as a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO) in 2016.

They were now faced with the challenge of securing the building, as the council advised that community asset transfer was not an option, as the sale of the building was necessary to pay for the new hubs.

A local business owner came forward and bought the property from the council, with agreement to lease it back to Rumney Forum for use as a community centre. Whilst Rumney Forum had been advised that there would be a covenant on the building that it could only be used for community use, this did not happen. Under a template lease reportedly provided by the council, Rumney Forum now has a 99-year peppercorn lease on the ground floor of the building.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Key successes and highlights within the journey of Rumney Forum, include formerly establishing themselves as a CIO, securing the long-term lease to use the property and delivering the major events and projects within the community.

According to the group, a major part of the success behind Rumney Forum and its running of the community hub, is that, in the words of one of its founders, it is “truly community-led”. People come forward with ideas about what they need and how they need it, and this is developed and put into place. An example was given of the school uniform exchange – an idea put forward by a local parent, with the aim of supporting those who cannot afford to buy school uniform by providing a mechanism for them to come and get items, away from the school site, if they need them.

The group feel that it is genuinely community-led, by and for people who need it, run by the community for the needs of the community, not on what others think those needs are or in a tokenistic way.

Volunteers believe it provides a much-needed place for community to thrive, making a real difference in the lives of those involved in it, and being supported by it, through social interaction, networking and engagement, and helping to alleviate poverty.

The group say there is nothing else like this in the area, and whilst it did exist previously with the old library, this would have been lost if Rumney Forum had not stepped in. They say that it is recognised by the community as a brilliant project, which people keep coming back to, to be a part of.

CHALLENGES

The greatest obstacles and challenges faced by the group along the way were a lack of capacity, knowledge and funding.

As a volunteer-led organisation, capacity to run and manage the programme has been a significant challenge, extremely difficult to do as a volunteer and as in many cases, falling predominantly on the shoulders of a small few.

A lack of knowledge has also been a large stumbling block for them, particularly about how to establish a CIO and run a charity, ensuring governance arrangements and strategic planning are in place.

A lack of knowledge and expertise around lease arrangements and asset management has become extremely problematic for the organisation. The council provided the lease for use between the private owner and Rumney Forum, which the organisation trusted and relied upon, given their relative inexperience in this matter. Over time, as building management issues have arisen, conflicts over responsibility for certain aspects have emerged, which lawyers now say is difficult to resolve as due to a lack of clarity in the original lease.

The group says that further challenges arose as a result of the council themselves, who they felt have had no input. There is a general feeling that from the outset, there was no proper consultation on the closure of Rumney Library with the community; no support due to the council decision not to allow a community asset transfer, and now the problems with the lease which have been hugely problematic for them. The feeling has been that they should be working hand in hand with the council, as experts at running community facilities, but this has not been the case.

Securing funding has also been a challenge. Being run by volunteers with limited capacity and knowledge, applying for and securing funding for projects and ideally paid staff has been difficult. The group say that support from the local CVC has not been forthcoming and has been poor even when made available, with no real support to seek funding or build capacity within the organisation.

WHAT COULD BE DONE DIFFERENTLY?

The group says that 'real support', and ideally a constant point of contact, being available for community groups could make a huge difference during the early phases of the organisation's establishment, particularly support to help with business planning and raising funds.

As they are working on a purely voluntary basis, those involved are often unable to spend any time past the day to day tasks in order to do more fundraising, governance and strategic planning work. Securing funding for a paid member of staff to undertake the day to day tasks would free up volunteers time for these broader activities, and could make a real difference.

Advice and guidance on how to form and establish a charity would be welcomed by the group. They say this is a slow, complex process, which it is recognised it should be, and so smaller groups with limited experience need trusted people to get advice and guidance in these areas. They say that this was not readily available from the local CVC and in some cases poor advice was received.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

The group say that the following factors are critical for any group going forward:

- Community buy-in – it has to feel like everyone has a part in the design, development and delivery of the project.
- Good legal and financial advice / knowledge throughout the lifetime of the project from inception to delivery.
- Funding – advice on how to access it, and capacity to access it to enable the long-term viability of a project.



