

Library Review Research Executive Summary 2018

For Kirklees Council

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1. Executive Summary

Background and Methodology

- Kirklees Council has a statutory duty to deliver a library service within a current budget of £2.238 million. Since September 2016 the Library Service has been working collaboratively with partners, volunteers and Friends groups to deliver a wide range of services, both in libraries and in other community venues. However, budgetary constraints mean that changes to the existing service are needed in order for the service to fulfil its statutory duty and continue to deliver a range of services.
- Therefore, the Council was keen to undertake a wide-scale consultation with local residents, volunteers and library service staff to evaluate how the service may be delivered going forward. The purpose of this consultation was to:
 - Explore public opinion on different models of service delivery
 - Provide an opportunity for community groups and individuals to propose other ideas
 - Provide an opportunity for staff members to propose other ideas
 - Establish the level of interest amongst individuals and groups to support or take on delivery of some or all aspects of the service in an area of Kirklees
- Key aspects of the consultation analysed in this report include;
 - Self-completion paper/online survey made available to all residents and completed by 3,057 respondents – *note that respondents to this survey were entirely self-selecting and were overwhelmingly library users and as such, the survey should be seen as representing the views of library users*
 - 5 focus groups with Library Service Users
 - 5 focus groups with Friends of groups
 - 4 focus groups with staff
 - Consultation with 86 children and young people carried out by the Council.



Summary of Key Findings

The table below summarises the response to key questions amongst respondents to the self-completion survey;

Question	Quantitative Survey
How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	
<i>I would be in favour of moving my local library to another building e.g. a school, community centre or a privately run building</i>	
Agree ('strongly agree or agree')	19%
Disagree ('strongly disagree' or 'disagree')	73%
<i>The Council should reduce the running costs of libraries by sharing space, integrating services and (where appropriate) staffing with partners</i>	
Agree ('strongly agree or agree')	51%
Disagree ('strongly disagree' or 'disagree')	34%
<i>I would be willing to volunteer</i>	
Agree ('strongly agree or agree')	34%
Disagree ('strongly disagree' or 'disagree')	43%
<i>The Council is considering using volunteers to help deliver home library services.</i>	
Agree ('strongly agree or agree')	57%
Disagree ('strongly disagree' or 'disagree')	27%
How far would you support the following ways of delivering library services in Kirklees?	
Please give your answer on 10 point scale, where 1 is do not support at all and 10 is fully support	
<i>Remaining as a service within the Council</i>	
Supportive (score 7-10)	79%
Unsupportive (score 1-4)	9%
<i>Local Authority Trading Company (LATC)</i>	
Supportive (score 7-10)	36%
Unsupportive (score 1-4)	38%
<i>Public Service Mutual (PSM)</i>	
Supportive (score 7-10)	30%
Unsupportive (score 1-4)	40%
<i>Outsource</i>	
Supportive (score 7-10)	7%
Unsupportive (score 1-4)	79%
<i>Joint Venture</i>	
Supportive (score 7-10)	12%
Unsupportive (score 1-4)	63%
Base: 3,057	All valid responses (variable)

Conclusions

Conclusion 1: Libraries are perceived to fulfil a wider societal function beyond book lending.

Although the majority (86%) of survey respondents saw borrowing books as one of the most important functions of a library, it is clear from the qualitative research that libraries are no longer seen as services purely for book lending alone.

Library users, volunteers, and staff emphasised the wider community function of the local library and subsequently expressed concern over the potential for closure. The qualitative research in particular highlighted this theme, with consistent concern expressed across all discussion groups over a core number of service users who frequently used libraries for social connection. There was agreement amongst staff and Friends of groups that these softer library outcomes were hard to evidence and as a result the library service was an 'easy target' for budget cuts and reductions in service.

Consultation findings also highlight the importance of the IT function of the library service (and the support provided to access this) with 28% of respondents highlighting this as the most important library service after book lending. The qualitative research also highlighted that this is an important service for some, e.g. people on low income or looking for work. However, concerns were raised around how this function could be sustained within the context of further budget cuts.

Conclusion 2: Views are mixed on the issue of library location/buildings.

Moving the local library to another building (or privately run building) attracted limited support, with 52% of library service users disagreeing with this idea. The qualitative research highlighted that for some areas, the library building itself was held in high regard as a historic building and focal point for the community. Opposition to this idea is more apparent when communities cannot see a viable alternative building in their locality.

However, there appears to be more support for bringing other services into the library environment instead of moving the library out. Just over half (51%) of respondents supported the idea of the Council looking to reduce the running costs of libraries by sharing space, staffing, and integrating services. Within the qualitative research, this idea i.e. the community hub concept was viewed positively by some if it meant that library services could continue to be delivered within the community. In terms of sharing staff across the library service, it was noted that this was happening already in terms of library staff however some people found it difficult to understand how other department staff could fulfil library roles. There was strong feeling that there is still a need to retain trained librarians.

However, consultees noted that this type of model might work better in some communities than others, reiterating the theme of 'one size fits all' does not apply to the delivery of library services within all Kirklees communities.

Reflecting this, and remaining consistent within the different strands of the research, the view was expressed that libraries should be 'local', reflecting the fact that users primarily visit their nearest library run by the Council. Overall, participants were not willing to travel further afield to access library services, with 37% disagreeing with this. The qualitative research identified concerns about older people and those from deprived areas who might be less likely or able to travel to access library services. A further 36% of respondents felt they would stop using library services altogether. This was a view most prevalent amongst older residents, with younger participants being more likely to travel further afield.

Conclusion 3: Volunteers have played a pivotal role in recent years but there are concerns about sustainability.

Only 34% of survey respondents felt they were willing to volunteer, leaving the majority disagreeing that they '*would be willing to volunteer to help run a library*' (43%). This support is also evident in the number of participants who stated they would need a full-time, qualified and paid member of staff to support them in their role as volunteer.

Within the qualitative research, there was a general view that volunteers have made a very positive contribution to Kirklees Libraries and have been vital in maintaining opening hours and assisting paid staff. However, many people questioned the sustainability of any model which was reliant on further expansion of the volunteer pool. There was acknowledgement that volunteer management and retention can be challenging and training and engagement is an ongoing task. There was also concern that any further reduction of paid library staff would have a negative impact on the quality of the service. Although many volunteers are willing and able, in some cases they are many in number covering short shifts and this can mean it is difficult for skills to be developed and retained.

Discussion within the focus groups centred on the characteristics of the volunteer base, e.g. mostly older retired residents. However, the consultation reveals support for/interest in volunteering from younger people. For example, a NET majority of 56% of young people (16-24 year olds) stated they were willing to volunteer and were often more willing to travel to libraries out of their immediate locality. This suggests there could be some value in attempting to widen volunteer recruitment strategies to try and attract younger volunteers perhaps by and/or linking in with any existing volunteering schemes.

There was also discussion around the capacity of more deprived communities to respond to the call for volunteers to support library services given that people living in more deprived areas are less likely to volunteer.

However, there is clear support for using volunteers to support the delivery of the Home Library Service with over half (57%) of respondents agreeing with this proposal.

Conclusion 4: The results of the children's consultation largely reflect the findings from the qualitative and quantitative research conducted, and remain consistent in terms of how libraries are used and ideas for sustaining services for the future.

Children were full of praise for library staff and struggled to envisage an effective delivery of library services without staff. The majority (47%) of children disagreed with the statement '*do you think moving your library to another building is a good idea?*' and found it difficult to identify alternative spaces which would ensure high quality library services are maintained.

Although combining library services with schools was a frequent suggestion in other parts of the research, from the perspective of a school pupil, it should be noted libraries are often a place for children to relax away from school and home. This is also reflective of a wider theme found in this research that libraries are often more than book lending facilities, but have become alternative spaces of social care, particularly for children and older people.

Conclusion 5: There are seen to be different advantages and disadvantages to keeping library services within the Council, but generally there is a clear preference for library services to remain within the Council.

The majority of residents (79%) expressed a preference for there to be no change in how library services are currently run, and would like services to remain Council led. Less than one in ten residents did not support the idea of library services remaining within the Council (9%).

The qualitative research revealed confusion around the alternative delivery models. Many focus group participants were reluctant or felt unable to express a preference for a particular delivery model or whether they supported the Council exploring these models. Thus, this may have led some respondents to default to the status quo.

Preference for library services to stay within the Council came out strongly in the qualitative research, and many felt a significant number of Kirklees residents would suffer should libraries go outside of the Council's jurisdiction.

Conclusion 6: Support for the idea of alternative delivery models is variable.

The alternative models were met with varying levels of support, although, as mentioned previously, it should be stressed that many struggled to comprehend the delivery of services outside the Council, and therefore found it difficult to discuss the different model types.

This was particularly evident when discussing each model in the qualitative research, with findings for each model broken down as follows;

- **Local Authority Trading Company-** beyond remaining within the Council, this model was seen as most preferable amongst survey respondents (NET support of 36%). The qualitative research allowed a number of concerns to be voiced, with many centring on the mention of profits and confusion over how libraries might generate an income.
- **Public Service Mutual-** those taking part in the qualitative research could identify merits in exploring this approach, allowing communities a greater degree of autonomy in running their own local library. From the survey, 30% of all respondents supported this model.
- **Joint Venture-** The majority of qualitative participants felt this model was inapplicable to the Kirklees area. Generally, participants could see merit in exploring this option, but not in the Kirklees area. Whilst some thought it might work well in Huddersfield, it was felt smaller towns and villages might subsequently lose access to a local library, should funding go towards a Joint Venture model. This is reflected in the results of the self-completion survey, with a net majority of 63% of participants not supporting this model.
- **Outsource-** This model generally received the least amount of support across the qualitative and quantitative research. Concerns were raised over the types of external organisation which would become involved in delivering library services, and elements of trust were raised as to whether external support would deliver an effective service. Discussions in the qualitative research centred on profit-making and the feasibility of libraries generating an income, leaving residents with a question mark over the practicalities of the involvement of external companies in the running of libraries. Uncertainty and dislike of this model is also reflected in the results of the quantitative research, with a net majority of 79% of respondents not supporting Outsourcing.

From the discussions with Friends of groups, it is apparent that they vary in terms of their capacity and willingness to develop further. Some appear highly organised, with a clear structure of roles/responsibilities and have already developed business plans and received funding for projects, whereas others appear to be more content to remain as they are. This variable capacity includes the extent to which they would like/feel able to engage with discussions on alternative models of delivery; some of which are community-led to varying degrees. In terms of taking this element forward, Friends of members, staff and library users alike would like to see the Council develop a clear business case which includes some analysis of how/where alternative delivery models have worked in other areas, how they have enabled library sustainability, and how they might operate within Kirklees.