Library Review Research 2015 – Executive Summary

For Kirklees Council

11 June 2015

Qa

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The document outlines the Executive Summary for the Kirklees Library Review Research undertaken in 2015. A full report is also available which details the findings from the research.

Background and Methodology

- It's anticipated that the Kirklees Library Service will need to contribute a budget saving over the next three years and it's clear that considerable changes to the existing service are likely to be needed. Therefore, the Council was keen to undertake a wide-scale consultation with local residents, stakeholders and library service staff to evaluate how the service may be delivered going forward.

- A key requirement of the consultation was to ensure that the views of a robust and representative sample of residents (including both users and non-users of the library service) were gathered, while at the same time providing the opportunity for other residents, key stakeholders, Library Service staff and others to take part in the consultation. Consequently, a multi-method approach was undertaken, with some elements carried out by Qa Research and others by the Council.

- Key aspects of the consultation analysed in this report include;
  - Face-to-face sample survey amongst a representative sample of 1,072 residents
  - Self-completion postal/online survey made available to all residents and completed by 4,675 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*
  - 2 focus groups with Library Service users and 2 with staff
  - Telephone survey with 50 users of the Transcription Service
  - 8 focus groups carried out by the Council with stakeholders
  - Survey of 162 children and young people carried out by the Council.

Summary of Key Findings

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

	Quantitative survey	
	Face-to-face survey	Self-completion survey
How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements?		
The local community should take a more active role in running their local library		
Agree (*'strongly agree'* or *'agree'*)	57%	40%
Disagree (*'strongly disagree'* or *'disagree'*)	13%	33%
Access to a quality library service is more important to me than the number of library buildings the service operates		
Agree (*'strongly agree'* or *'agree'*)	49%	40%
Disagree (*'strongly disagree'* or *'disagree'*)	21%	43%
I'd prefer to access the library service online rather than visit a library		
Agree (*'strongly agree'* or *'agree'*)	29%	7%
Disagree (*'strongly disagree'* or *'disagree'*)	52%	85%
I am willing to travel to get access to better quality library services		
Agree (*'strongly agree'* or *'agree'*)	21%	20%

Disagree ('strongly disagree' or 'disagree')	61%	67%
How far would you support the following approaches to delivering library services in your local area? Please give your answer on a 10 point scale, where 1 is do not support at all and 10 is fully support.		
Providing services in other community locations such as schools, community halls and Children's Centres rather than in a dedicated library building		
Supportive (score of 7-10)	35%	21%
Unsupportive (score of 1-4)	38%	60%
Transferring the running of your local Library and Information Centre to local volunteers		
Supportive (score of 7-10)	34%	16%
Unsupportive (score of 1-4)	30%	62%
Providing a much reduced service, such as only providing book drops, while online services would still be available		
Supportive (score of 7-10)	11%	4%
Unsupportive (score of 1-4)	68%	89%
Stopping the Mobile Library service completely so that more of the available budget could be used to provide library services at fixed sites		
Supportive (score of 7-10)	8%	22%
Unsupportive (score of 1-4)	71%	57%
Closing your Local Library and Information Centre and using the money this saves to reduce the budget cuts to other local services		
Supportive (score of 7-10)	3%	3%
Unsupportive (score of 1-4)	83%	92%
Merging the Tourist Information Centre and the library in order to save money. This would not necessarily mean a reduction in service.[1]		
Supportive (score of 7-10)	89%	71%
Unsupportive (score of 1-4)	5%	16%
How far do you support the following for your local library? Please give your answer on a 10 point scale, where 1 is do not support at all and 10 is fully support.		
Community Supported Libraries		
Supportive (score of 7-10)	59%	36%
Unsupportive (score of 1-4)	16%	42%
Town Library		
Supportive (score of 7-10)	52%	32%
Unsupportive (score of 1-4)	22%	48%
Community Run Libraries		
Supportive (score of 7-10)	24%	8%
Unsupportive (score of 1-4)	48%	79%
How likely would you be to give unpaid help, by volunteering to deliver library services in your local area in future		
Likely ('very likely' or 'quite likely')	18%	25%
Unlikely ('not very likely' or 'not at all likely')	70%	61%
Base:	All respondents (1,072)	All valid responses (variable)

[1] *Figures shown here are amongst respondents from Holmfirth only.*

Conclusions

Conclusion 1: This broad consultation covers the views of a range of interested parties and highlights that support exists for the Council to explore new ways of delivering library services in future.
This consultation provides a comprehensive assessment of the views of the district regarding the future provision of library services. It explores findings amongst more than 5,000 residents including library users and non-users, as well as Library Service staff, children and young people and other stakeholders and interested parties. The research highlights that existing users of libraries and information centres and the other services provided by the Library Service are generally very satisfied with the current service. In line with this, residents don't want to see a complete loss of service in their area and would rather accept reduced facilities, services and hours instead.

It's clear from this research and the Budget Consultation carried out by Kirklees Council that there is recognition of the need to find alternative ways of providing library services and to work within future budgets and residents are generally positive towards the Council finding alternatives. But, it should be stressed that the research consistently highlights that having physical library buildings in the local area that are staffed by experienced Library Service staff is the ideal for most and migrating services to new forms of delivery will need careful management, particularly amongst existing users who are the most resistant to change.

Conclusion 2: Libraries and information centres are felt to be at the heart of communities throughout the district and the localised provision of services is important to maximise use of library services.
The qualitative research in particular highlights that libraries are often at the heart of the community, especially in areas where no community centre exists, and data from the self-completion survey especially identifies the wide range of activities that these buildings are used for. Consequently, it's important to note that the loss of a library building and (potentially) the services provided there would be compounded by the associated loss of other community resources such as a meeting place and storage for equipment/resources used by local groups.

Reflecting this, consistently 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 and Information Centre run by Kirklees Council. Generally, residents are not willing to travel *'to get access to better quality library services'* with 61% disagreeing that they'd do this and there were wider concerns expressed about how realistic is was to expect older residents and those with disabilities to travel.

When asked specifically, 46% of respondents to the self-completion survey (nearly all of whom are library users) said that if their local library were to close they would simply *'use the Library Service less'*, suggesting that any changes to the number of libraries operated would result in lower usage of library services overall across the district. Children in particular felt that if their local library were to close, they would use the library services less, although around half felt that they would travel to access services or use online services instead, while recognising that being able to travel was dependent on their parent's help. Of course, the replacement of 'traditional' Library and Information Centres with newer models of delivering services is likely to mitigate this, assuming they can be successfully implemented.

Conclusion 3: There is generally support for the role of the community in helping to deliver services, although concerns exist about the practicalities of successfully integrating volunteers.

The majority (57%) of all residents, whether library users or not, agree that *'the local community should take a more active role in running their local library'* and there is clearly support for this approach. This support is also evident amongst Library Service staff who highlight that volunteers may bring new skills and ideas to the delivery of services and will be important given reduced budgets.   Generally, it was also recognised that volunteering in this way could, and should, offer tangible benefits for those prepared to take part, such as providing a reference for a future employer or some form of certificate or accreditation as well quantifiable 'work experience'. Older children in particular could see the attraction of this.

Ironically, while offering this level of personal development would probably help attract volunteers, it may also lead to issues over retention, and the challenge of not only recruiting but also maintaining a core of suitable volunteers was mentioned by residents and staff alike when considering how this would work in practice.

Additionally, concerns were expressed by both frequent library users and Library Service staff about the calibre of volunteers and the need to train and co-ordinate them. Staff felt that there are already backlogs in training new employees and that reduced staff numbers would transpose this problem to volunteers.   Issues around reliability, long-term commitment and volume of 'suitable' volunteers were all raised.

Conclusion 4:   There is a clear willingness amongst some to volunteer to deliver library services, but further detailed and localised research would be required to determine the level of commitment and skills that volunteers are able to offer.

Amongst all residents, almost a fifth (18%) said that they'd be willing to volunteer to provide library services. As a note of caution, only one-in-twenty (5%) said they'd be *'very likely'* to do this, although this proportion increases to 14% amongst those that have used a library in the last 12 months. Positively, 65% of children and young people said they'd be willing to volunteer. It's clear that there is support for helping, but it's also clear from the research that volunteers are likely to need a lot of direction and management to be effective, with many unable to say how they could help and many staff unsure as to the actual contribution that they could make.   It should be recognised that not all communities are likely to be able to offer the same level of support.

Conclusion 5:   Opinions are mixed as to whether moving services into community facilities would be acceptable or not, but the findings suggest that residents will only be able to make a true assessment of this when the detail of what would happen in their local area is available to them.

Attitudes in the face-to-face survey were polarised towards *'providing services in other community locations...rather than a dedicated library building'* with almost equal proportions expressing support and not supporting this, although those in the Huddersfield and Rural District Committee areas were most supportive. This might reflect the fact that little detail of where services could be located was made available to respondents and it's clear that the detail is important for residents when considering this approach.

For example, most Library Service staff and library users interviewed qualitatively supported the idea of a *'one-stop shop'* and could see advantages for residents in being able to access different services from the same place. However, children were less supportive and this was driven by concerns about the resultant lack of space to work in and concerns around noise levels. Also, some children and young people didn't like the idea of moving services into schools as an environment that they already spend a lot of time in.

Conclusion 6: There are seen to be different advantages and disadvantages to each of the three approaches to delivering library services tested in the research and not all are considered workable in all areas. It's evident that there is a desire for new models of service delivery to include professional support to some degree.

The three possible approaches to running libraries were met with different levels of support, reflecting different concerns regarding the implementation of each one. It should be stressed, that a theme throughout this research and one emphasised by Library Service staff in particular, was that different communities have different needs and a 'one size fits all' approach was not seen as desirable or workable. It was felt that in areas with a strong community and excellent social capital a community run or supported approach would be more likely to succeed, but the opposite is likely to be true in other areas, although others felt that the very act of the community taking on the delivery of library services would be community building in itself. Details of each approach are as follows;

- **Community Supported Libraries** – Amongst face-to-face respondents, this was the approach that had the highest level of support, with 59% giving a score of 7-10 out of 10 and the majority of both users and non-users were supportive.

- Notably, this approach also had the highest level of support amongst those who said that they'd be prepared to volunteer to deliver library services, suggesting that of the three approaches tested in the research, it would be easiest to recruit volunteers for this one. This is likely to reflect the fact that under this model library services will remain local (and therefore not require volunteers to travel) and also that professional support will be available, two aspects that were mentioned favourably by qualitative respondents.

- **Town Libraries** – More than half (52%) of all respondents in the face-to-face survey indicated that they would support this option and this approach was supported most by staff, reflecting that more staff members would be employed under this model. Staff also felt that retaining Town Libraries would enable hub services to be established more easily in future when austerity is reduced. Additionally, it was recognised by stakeholders especially that this approach provides trained and experienced staff to help deliver services and would help to ensure that specialist services continue to be provided, something it was felt might not happen with the two other approaches.

- The main drawback of Town Libraries was seen as the need for users to travel to them, given the lack of willingness to do so amongst many users and potential users. Consequently, it was felt that they would lead to lower service usage overall.

- **Community Run Libraries** – This was the least supported option amongst face-to-face respondents with only 24% considering this approach to be acceptable, while only 8% of self-completion survey respondents felt the same. Explaining this, concerns were expressed in the qualitative research about the need for volunteers to manage a building and budget rather than just library services and about how realistic it was to expect to find volunteers capable of doing so in all communities. Also, concerns were expressed that moving to this approach would mean the loss of essential or specialist services, such as benefit advice, in some areas.

- More positively, this type of library was seen by stakeholders as a means of generating a community spirit and some felt that it may be possible for an entirely community led library to attract more funding from alternative revenue streams and also that the use of volunteers in this way could lead to more flexibility in the provision of services.

Conclusion 7: While there's little support for book drops, Librarian Outreach is considered more favourably and both the Home Library Service and the Transcription Service are generally seen as very important.

Overall, residents do not support *'providing a much reduced service, such as only providing book drops…'* and while this is tied into the desire to retain services in as wide a form as possible, some specifics about book drops and specialist services were noted in the research as follows;

- **Book Drop** - Library users were dismissive of book drops, expressing concerns about the logistics of the process and about how much choice (in books) there would be and whether they'd actually be returned. Also the importance of access to IT and the service libraries offer in ensuring digital inclusion is evident within this research and it was felt that book drops alone would not provide this.

- **Librarian Outreach** – There was support for this amongst qualitative respondents and some saw it as a potential alternative to Mobile Libraries. It was also considered to be a way of potentially promoting library services, but concerns were expressed about where services would be targeted and how the district as a whole could benefit.

- **Mobile Library Services** – Generally, respondents favoured preserving this service, although the suggestion from this research is that it's not well used. In total, 71% of all face-to-face survey respondents didn't support stopping this service, although few had actually used it. Amongst those self-completion survey respondents who had ever used it a similar proportion (72%) didn't support stopping it, but this figure is by no means overwhelming. Amongst Library Service staff, there were mixed feelings and some felt that it was expensive and had low demand.

- **Home Library Service** – Generally, this was considered to be more important than the Mobile Library Service as it targets vulnerable users more. However, staff in particular recognised that volunteers could deliver this service relatively easily and that it serves a comparatively small number of residents.

- **Transcription Service** – This was also considered to be *'essential'* to those that use it and concerns were expressed about whether this service would suffer if library Service staff were reduced in number.

Conclusion 8: Amongst respondents in Holmfirth, there was overwhelming support for merging the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) with the library to save money.

Almost nine-in-ten respondents to the face-to-face survey from Holmfirth indicated that they supported the possible merger of the TIC and library and more than half (53%) gave a score of 10 out of 10 indicating that they fully support this proposal. While this figure was slightly lower amongst Holmfirth respondents to the self-completion survey (who are predominantly library users) at 71%, it is clear that there is support for this merger in the local area.

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