

Proposals for the Mobile Library Service Report of the Head of Communities

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

1) Recommendations

That the Cabinet be asked to:

- (a) Give due consideration to the recommendations of the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee of 28 September 2023.
- (b) Consider the additional information provided within this report following the decision to cease the mobile library service at Cabinet on 12 July 2023.
- (c) Approve the recommended Option 4 –
 - To decommission the Mobile Library vehicles and provide £25K transition support for vulnerable users.
 - To extend the decommissioning period to end of February 2024.
 - To provide an additional funding stream of £15k for community groups and parish councils to apply for small grants to facilitate local community library developments.
 - To create a support resource for community libraries signposting best practice.
 - To provide clustered networking events for parishes/community libraries to network.

2) Background / Introduction

Cabinet previously considered this matter at its meeting in July 2023, following extensive consultation regarding proposed options for the mobile library service in Devon. A range of evidence was provided alongside recommendations, and as a result Cabinet decided at that point to decommission the service, together with the implementation plans including expansion of a range of mitigating measures.

Following the Council's call-in procedure being invoked, the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee further discussed this matter at its meeting in September and provided a series of recommendations for Cabinet's consideration. These recommendations were that Cabinet:

- (a) reconsiders the decision to decommission the mobile library vehicles and looks again at continuing to provide the mobile library service;
- (b) gets precise figures on leasing vehicles to review opportunities to continue to provide a cost-effective service;
- (c) looks into opportunities to reduce cost of delivery including commercial sponsorship opportunities on vehicles, crowdfunding and or support from Parish Councils and community groups;
- (d) develops alternative library provision before taking the decision to remove services;
- (e) reports findings back to this committee.

This report and its appendix provide this additional information for the Cabinet to consider, alongside further context and information. The accompanying Impact Assessment has been reviewed and updated.

3) Proposals

The related consultation and these proposals regarding the future of the mobile library service in Devon, should be considered against the Council's wider and [comprehensive library offer](#).

The Council's shared aspirations for Devon (with Libraries Unlimited as its commissioned provider) include:

- Promoting and encouraging a love of reading.
- Providing free access to information to help people in their everyday lives.
- Inspiring people of all ages to learn, imagine, create, succeed, and realise their potential.
- Enabling everyone to explore and connect to the wider world.
- Offering welcoming spaces.
- Supporting the health and wellbeing of individuals and local communities.

For over 100 years libraries have formed an important part of the fabric of many of Devon's towns and village communities. In recent years, despite reductions in government funding and changes in traditional library usage, the Council has bucked the national trend in maintaining a significant fixed library network of over 50 libraries across the County, to meet its duties in providing a comprehensive service for residents.

In recent years, working closely with Libraries Unlimited and local communities and partners, Devon's libraries have transformed the library offer to include IT; Wi-Fi and printing facilities; a comprehensive and free digital offer of books; magazines and other resources; increased access and borrowing from children and young people through a dedicated and bespoke offer; and providing a gateway to creative opportunities, wellbeing, and support services with partners. Increasingly Devon's fixed libraries offer a welcoming and [warm environment](#).

The Council maintains its significant commitment to libraries and further developing its offer, working alongside communities.

Devon County Council has a statutory duty relating to the provision of libraries and whilst eagerly awaiting the government's *Public Libraries Strategy* in 2024, officers have considered not just the Council's Strategic Plan based on principles of a strong and sustainable council, but also the '*Unleashing Rural Opportunities*' paper published by Government earlier this year. This paper outlines libraries in the context of a wider rural offer:

"Rural areas are rich in the communal spirit and strong social networks which contribute enormously to the unique joy of rural life. Community hubs such as village halls and public libraries play a vital role in sustaining these networks, and the pandemic demonstrated their adaptability and resilience. We have seen innovation in rural libraries provision, like Suffolk and Devon's library services being spun out from the council and run as public sector mutuals, allowing them to take a more entrepreneurial approach. We will continue to support these hubs to offer a range of activities and volunteer-led support services to meet local needs and bring people together, including through targeted funds and sharing best practice."

"...Publish a new public libraries strategy for England in 2024, which will cover how we can improve library service and provision including in rural areas. This will be informed by Baroness Sanderson's upcoming review, expected in Summer 2023, which will cover library provision in rural areas including digital inclusion, home library services and the use of partnerships to boost access."

The financial challenges across the public sector are well documented as are the Council's own financial risks. The need for transformation, for finding more effective and efficient ways of delivering support and services to residents, and to make reductions in the Council's spending, remain. Inflationary pressures on the libraries budget have been severe as with other library authorities across the country and this continues to provide challenges to delivery of high-quality services, when investment does not stretch as far.

The current mobile library fleet is close to becoming obsolete, given the age of the vehicles, and measured by the time that vehicles are increasingly taken off the road for repairs and maintenance. This is placing additional costs on service delivery and results in an increasingly unreliable and patchy experience for residents.

The inevitable significant investment required for new/replacement vehicles is simply not available from the Council's existing budget either through capital outlay or leasing; and that is aside from maintaining a sustainable budget in order to deliver the service itself.

The Council has welcomed the various submissions from members of the public through the consultation and subsequent correspondence regarding the value they place on the existing mobile library service.

However, in light of the Council's existing comprehensive offer, the stark position of the current fleet and its impact on service delivery, and an active user base of now 2862 users in September 2023 down from 3,061 users in January 2023 across Devon, the Cabinet must consider the sustainability and cost effectiveness of the mobile library service in Devon. 70% of mobile stops are now serving an average of less than 5 people (data from

July to September 2023), This is in the context of a 44% reduction of Active Users, a 73% reduction in customer visits and a 68% reduction in book issues over the last 10 years.

The combined annual running costs of the 4 Mobile libraries is £217,000 which if the vehicles were decommissioned, would be a saving to the Council and would enable future investment being targeted towards more sustainable and cost-effective service delivery.

The implementation costs of decommissioning for Libraries Unlimited would be for potential redundancies estimated to be a maximum of £63k including strain costs of the Mobile Library Assistants. Libraries Unlimited are engaging with staff pending the decision on the future of the service. We are working closely with Libraries Unlimited to ensure the Council's liabilities are minimised through redeployment opportunities within the service.

This paper outlines a number of alternative models of delivery, alongside the Council's fixed libraries, which include the Home Library and Good Neighbours services and growing digital resources. These are well established in Devon and common delivery routes in many other counties. In addition, in Devon we have a growing network of community-based buildings that can support access to reading, information and wider social and community activities. The Council has welcomed this development as a way of supporting its strategic priorities and objectives around libraries. These alternative models are outlined further in Section 4.

With targeted interventions to existing mobile users identified as needing help to access reading and wider support, the range of alternative provision not only provides mitigation in the event of the Cabinet deciding to close the mobile library service but has the potential to increase and enhance access to the library service in rural communities.

Informed by the consultation, feedback from active members and our Impact Assessment, the alternatives outlined provide users ongoing access and choice to library services to people with disabilities, families with young children, people who feel socially isolated and people with other vulnerabilities. Outreach and support to active members to access alternatives services is described in more detail in section 4.

4) Alternative methods of service delivery

This section provides a description of the various alternative library services available, alongside an outline of further developments planned should a decision be made to discontinue the mobile service. Drawing on the earlier consultation and Impact Assessment, the paper describes how offers can be accessed by different groups of users impacted, giving them a wider choice of services best suited to their needs.

Additional funding is being made available to support the recruitment and co-ordination of more volunteers to enable people with disabilities, with no access to transportation or other barriers to access these alternatives. We will contact all our active mobile library members to offer access to the most appropriate and suitable alternatives and where necessary provide signposting to other organisations for any additional services. The most vulnerable will be contacted by telephone by the nearest local branch library.

Alternative 1 – Nearest Library building

Devon has an extensive network of 50 static libraries and analysis of the mobile library stops in proximity to one of the existing libraries, showed that nearly 85% were within 10 miles or less, 40% were 5 miles or less and 15% were less than 3 miles of our 20 largest libraries.

Response to the consultation indicated that 21% of current mobile library users had visited a static library in the past year. The static libraries are a great option to experience a wider range of books, activities and support in buildings that are accessible and welcoming.

Alternative 2 – Home Library Service – Accessed by contacting nearest library.

Delivers books to people unable to get to the library because of health, mobility, or caring responsibilities. Existing users are predominantly older and more isolated. Volunteers will order items from the library, collect, and then transport to the customer for contactless doorstep delivery if necessary. Supported by library staff, dedicated volunteers can also choose and deliver books to your home, including large print and audiobooks, free of charge. This is an established service in Devon and across much of the UK.

The expansion of this offer will be funded through the proposed £25k funding primarily to support recruitment and co-ordination of additional volunteers.

Alternative 3 – Good Neighbours – Accessed by contacting nearest library.

Like the Home Library Service but as an alternative to volunteers this is a membership for friends, neighbours and family wishing to choose and deliver books to people not able to get to the library. Good Neighbours membership has various benefits ensuring library services are available to all, arranged through the local library. This is an established service in Devon and across much of the UK.

Alternative 4 – Digital Resources

There is an extensive on-line catalogue of audiobooks, e-books and e-magazines available to all library members and we have seen use of this grow significantly, year on year. Libraries Unlimited can facilitate access to digital publications through 1-2-1 digital education support available through the local library for those members who wish to utilise this service but may not have the confidence or knowledge to access currently.

Alternative 5 – Rural Community Support – A library outreach offer

Officers have held productive and positive discussions regarding future development and network opportunities with organisations who already run buildings, social activities, and clubs in rural communities. Many have existing book swap provision in parish & community halls where there is no current Mobile Library stop. The recent audit of village halls in Devon conducted by Devon Communities Together has provided further valuable insight.

Mobile library data collected for the 3 months in July, August and September showed that 70% of stops had an average of 5 user visits or less, 20% of stops had between 6-10 visits

and 10% had 15 visits or above. Alternative community provision has huge potential for more people to access books and other activities locally on a more regular basis, as an alternative to a monthly mobile library visit.

We would look to prioritise support to communities where there is most demand and develop this offer for our more rural communities. Where there are predominantly young children and families, we will develop further relationships with local schools, pre-schools, and toddler groups.

Libraries also offer support to reading groups who regularly meet socially in a range of settings and the local library can generate suggested book lists.

Where there are larger groups of members at specific stops in rural areas, we will look to a local community-based library outlet offer initially to:

- Place reservations online using Devon Libraries website
- Pick-up at a local community location
- Provide an extended loan period similar to mobile library card benefits
- 2 or 4 week drop-off \ pick up by volunteers
- Utilise community hall, village hall, town or parish council office and local volunteers.

In the future the council will develop pilots that provide an enhanced rural offer to include:

- Stock supplied for browsing and local transaction using the library app on-site device for self service
- Place reservations on-line and pick up\drop off locally
- On-site issues\return technology
- Utilise community hall, village hall, town or parish council offices and local volunteers
- Utilise locally provided Wi-Fi \ internet.

The Council, working with partners, will facilitate local conversations to explore the further development of these offers and will produce guidance and best practice examples and support for groups to consider. The development of community libraries was cited by respondents to the consultation as a means of accessing library services in the future.

5) Options for the service

5.1 Option 1 – Decommission the Mobile Library vehicles. There are viable alternatives currently available to using mobile vehicles including library buildings, digital, home library scheme and good neighbour scheme. The Council would also develop a community library support scheme for rural areas that will in many circumstances mitigate the mobile visits. There would be a capital return for the vehicles estimated at £18,000. The Council would work closely with Libraries Unlimited regarding future investment in rural outreach library services.

5.2 Option 2 – Decommission the Mobile Library vehicles from 31 December 2023 and provide £25K transition support for vulnerable users to continue to access alternative library provision. The Council would provide funding to help with the transition to other existing and new library services to ensure that the most vulnerable members of the mobile library community continue to access services they value. There would be a capital return for the vehicles estimated at £18,000.

5.3 Option 3 – Replace the 4 mobile libraries with new vehicles. There would be upfront capital investment of between £600-800k to purchase the vehicles and would expect the running costs to be lower with more efficient and smaller mobiles. This option would be investing heavily in the service now and continuing in its current format. With numbers of active members, stock issues and visits at some stops gradually reducing, and the prohibitive costs of purchasing or leasing vehicles, we have discounted this option in favour of a wider rural access offer.

5.4 Option 4 – Decommission the Mobile Library vehicles and provide £25K transition support to transfer vulnerable users to access alternative library provision. There would be a capital return for the vehicles estimated at £18,000. In addition, expand the delivery of alternative delivery models outlined in Section 4.

Extend the decommissioning period to the end of February 2024 in order to provide additional opportunity and support to users and interested communities to explore alternative options as outlined within Section 4. The Council would provide funding to help with the transition to other existing and new library services to ensure that the most vulnerable members of the mobile library community continue to access services they value via a combination of options outlined in section 4.

Provide an additional funding stream of £15k from the Growing Communities Fund budget in order for community groups and parish councils to apply for small grants to facilitate local community library developments. This fund would launch in January 2024.

Create a support resource for community libraries signposting best practice, development advice, ideas around funding and commercial opportunities. This will be available in December 2023.

Provide clustered networking events in for parishes/community libraries to network to share best practice, experiences and hear from library and community development advocates. These events would be delivered from December 2023.

This is the recommended option for Cabinet to consider.

6) Consultation

As described in the report to Cabinet in July 2023 the learning from the consultation in the spring of 2023 is outlined below.

A consultation was launched on 31st March aimed at current mobile library users on a proposal, within the context of the financial challenges that Devon County Council currently faces, to end the current mobile library service delivered by Libraries Unlimited, and instead to seek and develop further alternative arrangements to ensure that people can continue to access and engage with their local library or library service.

Mobile library customers were advised of this consultation through email, social media and promotional materials in the mobile vans and in every library building. The consultation ran for eight weeks allowing the library van to complete two four weekly routes.

Overall, 1197 consultation responses were received from individuals, households and one school. Letters and emails were also received from individuals and on behalf of groups and town councils. 95% of respondents said they or a family member use the mobile library, with 93% using it every month or as often as it comes to their stop or village.

The main demographic of respondents are older, with 79% over the age of 65 and 44% being 75 or older and primarily female (72%). Just over a third (34%) considered themselves to have a disability, with 13% saying that their day-to-day activities are limited a lot. Consultation feedback showed how valuable the service is to its users, averaging 4.46 out of 5 in importance.

Some of the key themes highlighted why the service is considered essential by users included: - *it's easy access to books - location convenience - lack of access to cars/public transport*. The mobile library allows users to take out more books than at a static library with longer return times, no fines and no charges to reserve a book. These were all seen as a significant benefit and very important given the rural locations served by the mobile library.

The service was often described as one of the last services in rural villages and therefore has become a place to meet, socialise and catch up with neighbours and the librarians. The social aspect was mentioned in 18% of respondents' comments. For some that said they are isolated or unable to get out of the house much, the social aspect of the service is the only time they get to talk to people. It was also mentioned that having access to books was a lifeline to help combat isolation and loneliness, concluding that this has benefited their mental health.

A few responses were received from children; however, as under 18, this data was not captured on the consultation. It must be noted that children are an important demographic of the mobile library user, as 9% of respondents mentioned children or grandchildren's access to books and reading when describing how essential the service was to them. Children were also reflected in the most popular stop mentioned in the consultation, Witheridge (5%), where the van visits the local primary schools. Another primary school responded on behalf of their reception class, mentioning the service was a 'lifeline for rural schools and future literacy.'

The consultation questions wanted to unearth if any users also used other services that Libraries Unlimited offer. 21% of respondents said they had recently visited a static library building, and 21% said they would do so if the mobile library service ceased. The main reason for not using a static library was not having access to a car or public transport to get there, with 34% of responses mentioning this. This was also one of the primary pieces of feedback given in the free text box, as well as parking, fuel cost and time it would take to travel to a library building.

Considering the primary age demographic, 27% mentioned they would have difficulty carrying heavy books home, particularly the number of books they would get on average from the mobile library. 16% mentioned they could not access a static library due to health conditions or disability, and 10% said they did not have time due to caring responsibilities. The digital library service has been accessed less than a static library, with only 15% of respondents saying they currently use it. Some said they had received audiobooks from the mobile library.

Half of the respondents said they prefer a physical book, and 28% said they do not have access to a computer or are not confident with using a computer or device. Many said this was not an option due to bad connectivity in their rural location and 6% said they would continue to access the digital library if the mobile library service ceased. Over half (53%) felt like the mobile library service is their only way of accessing library services in Devon and said they would or could not use the library service at all if the service stopped. A further 28% said they would use the library service less.

Some comments expressed concern and worry over relying on volunteers, and the viability of the Home Library Service, but 8% said they would use this option and 1.5% said they would use the Good Neighbours scheme. A key theme mentioned was the need for users retaining greater independence than these alternatives provided, which is valued through the mobile service, and a small number were not keen on the idea of books being chosen on their behalf. 8% said they would visit a community library not run by Devon County Council instead. At the end of the consultation, consultees were provided an opportunity to offer other ideas on how they would like to engage with library services. 515 comments were made, with a majority of respondents wanting to keep the mobile library service running.

Other ideas mentioned included paying a small fee to access the service, extending borrowing times and providing/helping run small libraries in community facilities and providing better parking at static libraries. This section was also used for general comments where there was a primary feeling of sadness, disappointment, anger and further isolation over the potential ceasing of this service and the reduction of other services, including public transport in rural villages. Concerns were also made around the environmental impact of ceasing this service, meaning more cars will be on the road to visit static libraries.

7) Strategic Plan <https://www.devon.gov.uk/strategic-plan>

The recommended proposal, alongside a commitment for further investment in community based support and ongoing significant investment in the wider Library service, maintains the Council's commitment to its Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025.

8) Financial Considerations

It will require capital investment of £600k-800k to replace the mobile library fleet. There is no capital allocation in the Corporate Capital programme and if option 3 was preferred, an application would need to be made to the Corporate Programme Group for allocation of funding. Following decommissioning, the vehicles could be auctioned at an estimated value of £18,000.

The combined annual running costs of the 4 Mobile libraries is £217,000 which if the vehicles are decommissioned, will be a saving to the Council.

The Council proposes a £25k one-off funding for expanding and developing alternatives funded through an existing revenue budget. The implementation costs for Libraries Unlimited would be for potential redundancies estimated to be a maximum of £63k including strain costs of the Mobile Library Assistants. We are working closely with Libraries

Unlimited to ensure the Council's liabilities are minimised through redeployment opportunities within the service.

In addition, £15k will be made available from the Council's existing Growing Communities Fund budget to enable small grants to community groups to facilitate rural community support of library outreach.

9) Legal Considerations

The Council has a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide comprehensive and efficient library service. The Mobile Library service falls within this duty. The Council considers that with its existing library offer, the alternatives proposed, alongside development of further community library support, the Council will continue to meet its statutory obligations.

10) Environmental Impact

This proposal will not significantly affect factors relating to climate change. There will be a reduction in direct emissions and fossil fuels from the aging diesel vehicles in the event of any of decommissioning. There is likely to be an increase in car journeys where users will access a library building, however these journeys are will often be multi-purpose.

11) Equality Considerations

Where relevant, in coming to a decision, the Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Equality Duty requires decision makers to give due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

In relation to the protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership (for employment), pregnancy and maternity, race/ethnicity, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation).

A decision maker may also consider other relevant factors such as caring responsibilities, rural isolation or socio-economic disadvantage. In progressing this particular scheme / proposal, an Impact Assessment has been prepared which has been circulated separately to Cabinet Members and also is available on the Council's website at <https://www.devon.gov.uk/impact/mobile-libraries-closures/>.

The key points have been included in section 4 of this report. Members will need to consider the Impact Assessment for the purposes of this item / meeting.

12) Risk Management Considerations

This policy/proposal has been assessed and all necessary safeguards or action have been taken / included to safeguard the Council's position. These are outlined within the related Impact Assessment and in the Council's consideration of its consultation. Risks regarding alternative provision are low, given that these relate to existing service.

Simon Kitchen

Head of Communities

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Public Health, Communities and Equality: Councillor Roger Croad

Local Government Act 1972: List of background papers

Nil

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Appendix 1 to SC/23/05

Responses to the recommendations from the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee of 28 September 2023

(a) Reconsiders the decision to decommission the mobile library vehicles and looks again at continuing to provide the mobile library service.

The options and recommendations have been reviewed and updated and included in the main body of the report for consideration by Cabinet.

(b) Gets precise figures on leasing vehicles to review opportunities to continue to provide a cost-effective service.

A new library vehicle has been specified and is smaller than the current design. The Council has been quoted £159,250 (as of October 2023) to purchase outright and required funding would be subject to a bid to the Capital Programme Group. To replace the current fleet of 4 vehicles the total cost would be £637,000.

Lease hire costs to replace 4 mobiles are detailed below based on 36-month term £5,111.24 per vehicle and for a 60-month term £3,330.54 per month per vehicle.

Term	Monthly cost	Annual Cost	Total Cost
36 Months	£20,444.96	£245,339.52	£736,018.56
60 Months	£13,322.16	£159,865.92	£799,329.60

The quotation above for lease hire would have an impact on existing revenue budgets. The vehicles would not be owned by the Council during the term of lease. At the end of the lease term the vehicles could be purchased at a market value cost.

(c) Looks into opportunities to reduce cost of delivery including commercial sponsorship opportunities on vehicles, crowdfunding and or support from Parish Councils and community groups.

The sponsorship of vehicles in the public sector is an increasingly common means of generating income for organisations including Councils. Some Local Authorities publish a list of sponsorship opportunities for their fixed assets and vehicles, such as refuse lorries and maintenance vans. For example, East Riding Council bin lorries can be 'sponsored' for up to £3k per annum, to include a company logo.

Advertising on buses can generate greater income, but this will depend on the reach and route of vehicles, with more lucrative opportunities where companies can be assured that messages are exposed to thousands of people, in major conurbations. Companies including Stagecoach, use external marketing companies to facilitate commercial opportunities. In London (with access to international marketing campaigns) the average income from a bus advert (4M x 2M) is around £2.5k per month, but opportunities will start for a few hundred pounds per month.

For several years Libraries Unlimited have published their own sponsorship opportunities and these are available [Corporate Partnerships - Libraries Unlimited](#). Most Corporate contributions have come via in kind support including warm bank donations, delivery of children's workshops etc. Previously no sponsorship for mobile libraries has been secured. Libraries Unlimited's charitable status has meant that some funding and commercial opportunities are open to them, rather than a traditional Council run service. As a result, significant alternative funding has benefitted Devon's libraries and communities, notably Arts Council England.

Commercial sponsorship opportunities, whilst generating helpful additional funding, would be very unlikely to generate enough income to purchase and sustain a vehicle and certainly to provide the revenue required for service delivery and a sustainable basis.

Crowdfunding (either through specific crowdfunding campaigns or through wider fundraising routes through communities and partners), can be successful, particularly in funding one-off purchases and capital investment. Crowdfunder UK state that the average donation through their platform is £50, though that is often in return for community shares or a related reward or offer in kind. Crowdfunding does require significant marketing and co-ordination from participants and therefore carries additional overhead as well as fees to platform providers.

In 2020 'crowdfunding' of £35,000 was utilised to purchase and refurbish a second-hand mobile library vehicle for Ivybridge and its related mobile route.

However, specifically the crowdfunded and public donations directly to the fund equated to only 8.8% of the total project cost, including the purchase of the van itself. DCC gave the highest contribution via the purchase of the vehicle and County Councillor grants. (Total contributions - DCC 43% / Libraries Unlimited Contribution (Premises and Reserves) 21% / Grants (including from DCC Councillors) 28% / JustGiving Online Donations 7.4% / Public donations through the Mobile Libraries 1.2% / Donr (on-line platform) - text donations 0.2%.

As with commercial opportunities, charitable donations are subject to a range of competing factors which make developing a sustainable funding solution challenging, particularly given current economic and inflationary pressures. According to the Charities Aid Foundation. Animal welfare is the most popular choice for donations with 27% of donors giving to this cause in the UK, followed by support for children or young people (24%) and medical research (22%). There is also a challenge of some people reluctant to fund/donate and sustain causes perceived as previously being funded by the state.

Whilst crowdfunding could support a one-off funding campaign, for perhaps a capital purchase, it is highly unlikely that crowdfunding could successfully fund a sustainable service model, particularly when the number of active users and ongoing potential funders remains comparatively low.

Town and Parish Councils already play a significant part in enriching the cultural life of people in Devon, with most already maintaining or developing resources and spaces which include access to books and many developing forms of community libraries. In addition, the recent audit in Devon conducted by Devon Communities Together shows that nearly 65% of parish/village halls have access to Wi-Fi.

There is an emerging network of 'community libraries' across Devon, from small informal bring and borrow schemes, to thriving and formal independent libraries, with regular stock updates and access to wider services.

The Council is engaging with some of these community groups and is wishing to pilot opportunities to network wider interested and suitable sites with the Council's library network, in order to offer access to stock, the library on-line offer and other council and government services.

The Council sees this development as further enhancing its shared strategic objectives in Devon:

- Promoting and encouraging a love of reading
- Providing free access to information to help people in their everyday lives
- Inspiring people of all ages to learn, imagine, create, succeed and realise their potential
- Enabling everyone to explore and connect to the wider world
- Offering welcoming spaces
- Supporting the health and wellbeing of individuals and local communities.

The Council has discussed with Devon Communities Together and Devon Association of Local Councils, the opportunity to work with town and parish councils, through clustered sessions to explore opportunities to map and where appropriate network local facilities, particularly where demand is high.

At the September Scrutiny meeting there were suggestions from Councillors that parishes may wish to consider local contributions or an increase in precepts in order to sustain a mobile library service across Devon. Data from NALC (National Association of Local Councils) outlines that the average Parish precept in England is £78.74. Across Devon's 426 Civil parishes this figure is broadly in line as an average but there are significant variables from £0 to around £150 in some urban areas.

Clearly, these matters are for individual councils to consider and review. There are a range of examples of precepts being maintained or increased in order to develop and improve static buildings and services in a community. However, it would be hard to develop an equitable funding model reliant on individual parish contributions, given the nature of a mobile service. Contributing parishes may only have a very small number of users, and the service would only visit that community once or perhaps twice a month. The issue of initial capital investment and ongoing maintenance would also need to be addressed.

Whilst there are opportunities for sponsorship, commercial activity, additional charitable donations and alternative funding models (most of which have been previously pursued), it is unlikely that any combination in the current context would generate and sustain the required funding to maintain the existing level of service delivery indefinitely; and to generate the initial outlay required to source and maintain a new fleet of vehicles required.

(d) Develops alternative library provision before taking the decision to remove services.

The alternatives outlined in the main body of the report describe the alternatives that are already part of the comprehensive Library offer.

The report put to Cabinet on 12th July put forward the proposal to decommission the vehicles by the end of the 2023. Cabinet is asked to consider a longer timescale for implementation of the end of February 2024, alongside additional mitigations.

There is the risk of any of the vehicles developing a significant fault that puts it off the road for an extended duration or that the repair is beyond economical repair. This may result in a route being required to finish earlier.

(e) Reports findings back to this committee.

There is not a meeting of the Committee before the Cabinet meeting on November 8. A copy of this report will be provided to the Chair of the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee on its publication.

Proposals for the Mobile Library Service - Final