

Impact Assessment



Assessment of: Closure of the Mobile Libraries and the alternative offers in place.

Service: Communities

Head of Service: Simon Kitchen

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Assessment carried out by (job title): Kathryn Blake, Commissioning and Programme Assistant

1. Description of project / service / activity / policy under review

Devon County Council commissions Libraries Unlimited to operate four mobile libraries. They have a set of current routes of 374 stops working on a four-week rotation covering Devon. These stops include a variety of local community buildings, including churches, village halls and schools, with an average of 5 visitors per stop for 2022. Most locations are timetabled to have one stop every four weeks, generally lasting 30 minutes. Mobile libraries can offer limited service due to their size, with a small book collection and limited access compared to the broader range in static libraries or services online.

2. Reason for change / review

Devon County Council has agreed to spend more on priority services, particularly to the most vulnerable and to meet growing demand; therefore, savings must be made elsewhere across the Council. Libraries have seen a decline in real-term funding for many years; there are cost pressures around the delivery of mobile libraries, staff costs, insurance and other costs, including fuel. The mobile library service cost in 2022/23 is £211,683.

Three of the four vans used to run the mobile library service are fifteen years old, and the other is around nine. Collectively, they spent about 670 hours off the road last year, with 45% due to issues with the vans, including breakdown and maintenance. Vehicle issues and repairs have accounted for 98% of the reason they have been off the road for the first two months of 2023. As a result, the vans are no longer reliable or provide what could be considered as a good level of service.

As all of the vans are ageing, replacement costs were investigated in 2022 and cost approx. £145,000 for a smaller vehicle, while a larger vehicle would start at £195,000. Because of this and the ongoing running cost, Devon County Council can no longer afford to replace the ageing vans and therefore propose to close this service before the vans give up and the service becomes more unpredictable and unreliable. A further update on purchase and leasing costs is available in the Cabinet paper for 8 November 2023. Other options regarding sponsorship and alternative funding models have been researched and considered.

Additional Data

Indicator	2012-2013	2022	% Change
Active users	5546	3080	-44%
Visits	55,793	14,872	-73.34%
Loans	161,317	51,130	-68.3%

2023 data	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
Active Users/Borrowers	3061	3071	2840	2820	2791	2759	2794	2862	2865
Loans/Issues	3351	4497	5296	4560	4522	3549	4545	4438	4266

The service has seen a large decline in active users, visits, and physical loans in the past 10 years. The pandemic did influence mobile library visits and loans in 2020 and 2021, however in 2022 the statistics showed an increase in these areas back to similar levels seen in 2019. Active users have seen a rise since 2019 of 3%. The latest for July – September 2023 shows the number of active users to have fallen to below 3000.

3. Aims / objectives, limitations and options going forwards (summary)

The mobile libraries primarily serve older and more vulnerable people in generally rural communities. There are some younger children (and their parents) who also access the service. The aim of any required mitigations is to provide other services as alternatives to mobile libraries, which means anyone wanting to access a library service will still be able to do so. The consultation looked at gathering opinions on the following 4 options:

Local Library - There are 50 libraries across Devon, providing access to where people live, shop and work. Libraries in the city of Exeter and towns across the county offer various services, including free Wi-Fi and internet access, events, and community activities as well as space to meet and connect with others. Some also offer meeting rooms for hire, support for business start-ups and Workspaces. Nearly 85% of mobile library customers are within 10 miles or less, 40% are 5 miles or less and 15% are less than three miles of our 20 largest libraries.

Digital – 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 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 do not have the confidence or knowledge to access. .

Good Neighbours - 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.

Home Library Service – 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 option below has been built from the consultation response as well as starting conversations with community spaces and organisations.

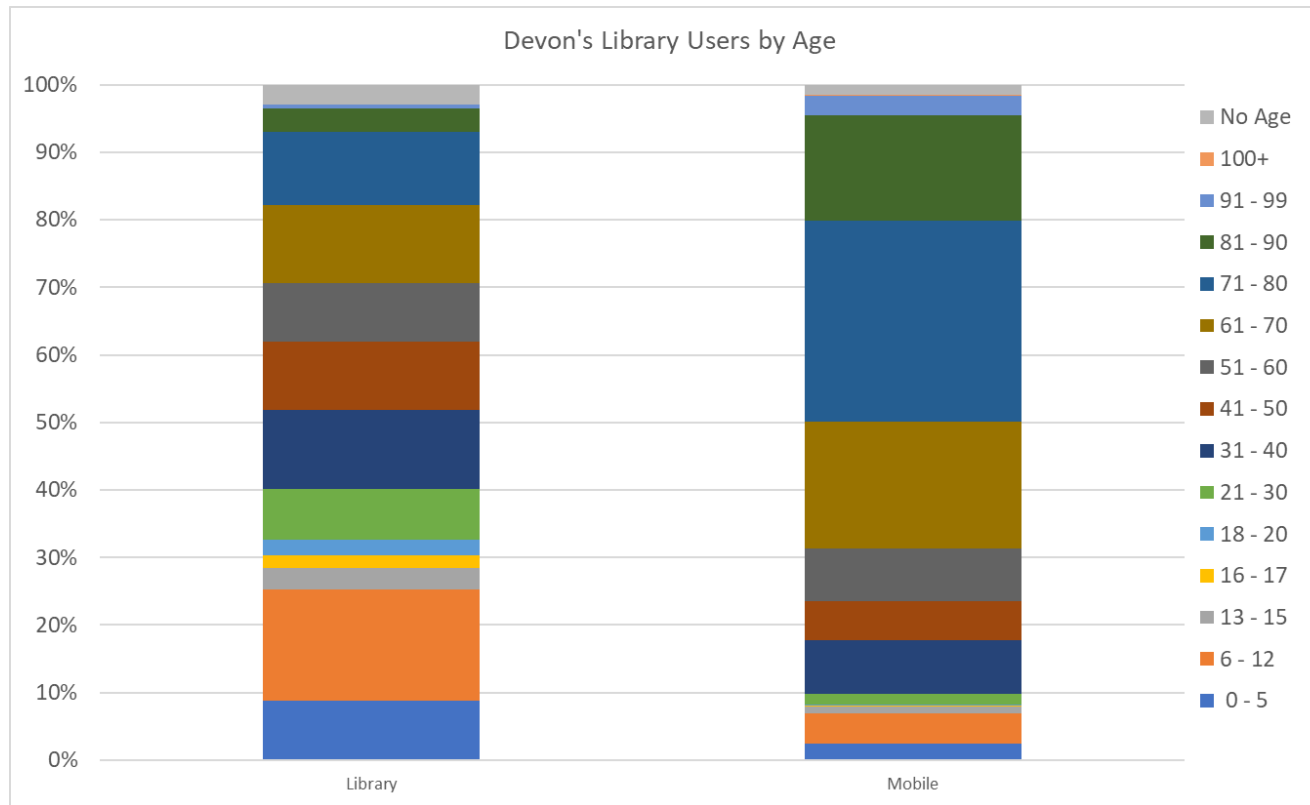
Rural Community Support – Look into working with organisations who already run buildings, social activities, and clubs in rural communities. Many have existing book swap provision in parish & community halls where there is no current Mobile Library stop. This has more potential for

more people to access books and other activities locally on a more regular basis than a mobile library could provide. This offer would start with prioritising the communities where there is most demand from the mobile library. This offer would also extend to working with the rural schools that the mobile library serves as well as build relationships with local pre-schools and toddler groups.

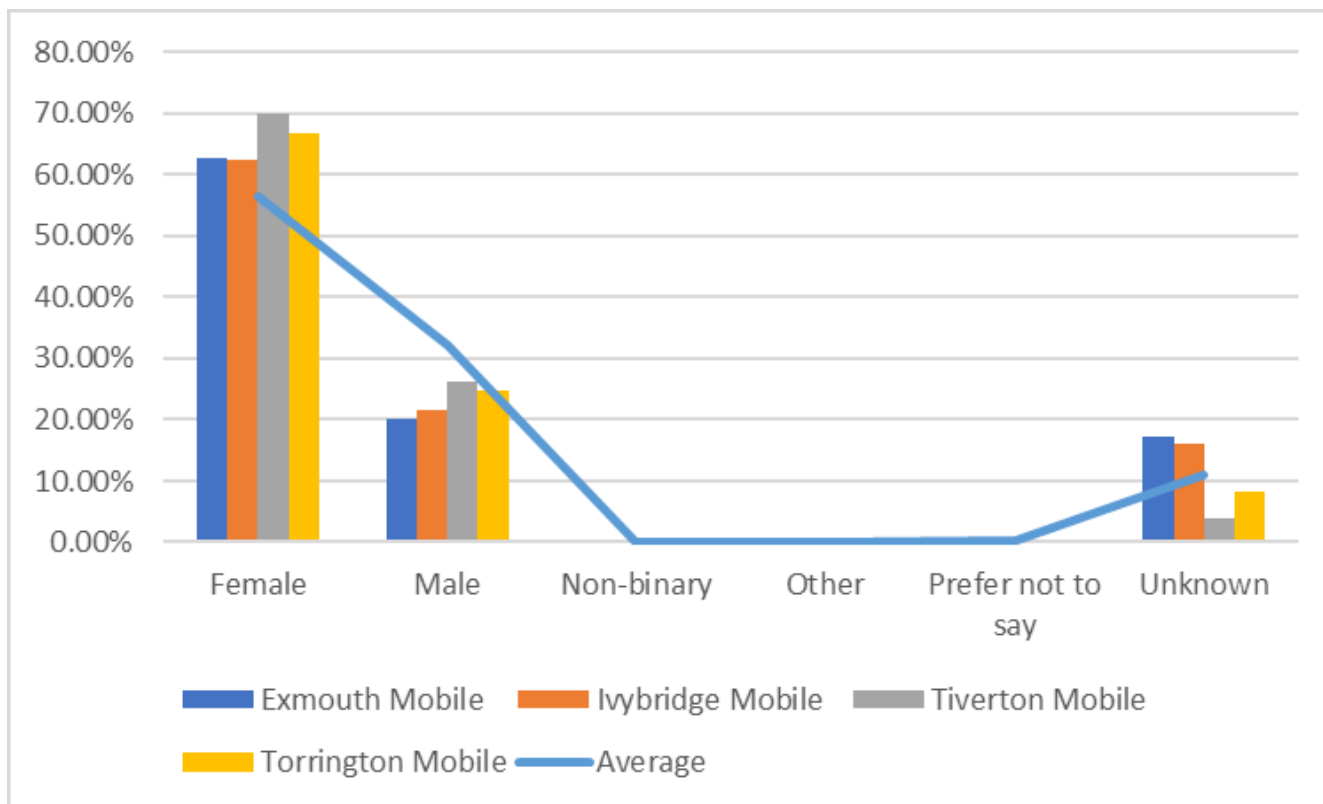
4. People affected, diversity profile and analysis of needs

Closure of the mobile libraries does have the potential to impact on three primary groups; staff working within Libraries Unlimited; active users of services identified and wider community members, who may use the services infrequently, or will do so in the future. The profile of mobile libraries users and the available demographic data is shown below.

Age - This graph shows the age profile of mobile library customers (and compared to other libraries in Devon and Torbay). It demonstrates for the Mobiles that over 80% are aged 41+ and 70% are aged 61+.



Gender – This graph shows the gender (where disclosed) of active users of the Mobile Libraries. There is generally lower than average use by males and higher than average females. Tiverton Mobile in particular has 70% of its customers that identify as female compared to an average of libraries in Devon of 57%. This was echoed in the consultation with a 72% of the feedback coming from Females.



Ethnicity – There is very limited data collection regarding ethnicity for Mobile Library customers. Across the four libraries the average non-completed data is 98.2% of customers. Of those where ethnicity has been recorded, 98.88% identify as white.

Disability – There are less than five (combined across the four mobile libraries) active users registered as “concessionary”. This may in part be due to longer loan periods and free reservations being standard service offer for Mobile Library customers, thereby negating the “benefits” of being registered as concessionary. The consultation feedback showed just over a third (34%) considered themselves to have a disability, with 13% saying that their day-to-day activities are considerably limited.

The Mobile Libraries do not have any registered Good Neighbours or Home Library Service customers. These are more likely to be associated with library buildings where stock levels are higher and for some the Mobile Library itself is providing the same service – almost coming to the doorstep. However, the data does show that there was one visit to the Torrington Mobile Library by a Good Neighbour in the last six months

Access to other library services – The motivations for using the Mobile Library service are varied and individual. The service covers a wide rural geographic area which may make it harder for some users to access a library building if they do not have their own transportation and rely on public transport.

A proportion of Mobile Library customers use library buildings. Statistical approximations for those proportions is demonstrated below. This is calculated based on the minimum data (age, gender, postcode) of those with a mobile library card that did cross reference with another library card. The reasonable approximation is based on the proportion of those who had provided all pieces of data and then cross-referenced. The highest calculation is those where the user hasn't provided their age, gender, or postcode, but the data that has been provided has been cross-referenced.

	Minimum % of mobile users likely to have a second library card	A reasonable approximation of % of mobile users to hold another library card	The highest % of mobile users likely to hold another library card
Exmouth Mobile	20%	40%	63%
Ivybridge Mobile	19%	24%	41%
Tiverton Mobile	18%	24%	42%
Torrington Mobile	17%	19%	29%

4. Stakeholders, their interest and potential impacts

The core stakeholders are Devon County Council and Libraries Unlimited.

Libraries Unlimited as the Council's operator of Library Services.

As mobile libraries are a community asset, the wider community need to be considered in any plans of potential closure.

5. Additional research used to inform this assessment

ONS Internet survey - [Internet users, UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/people-population/internet-users)

6. Description of consultation process and outcomes

A Consultation was launched on 31st March 2023 aimed at current mobile library users. This was based 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 every library building. The consultation ran for eight weeks allowing the library van to complete two four weekly routes. The questionnaire was on 'Have your say' as well as printed and large print copies in all mobile and static libraries.

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 highlighting why the service is considered essential by users are:

- *it's easy access to books*
- *location convenience*
- *lack of access to cars/public transport.*
- social aspect as last service in some rural locations
- unable to access books any other way

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'.

79% said they do not visit a library building with the main reasons being 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 averagely get 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.

85% said they do not access any of the digital services. 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.

If the mobile service no longer ran, 53% said they would or could not use the library service at all. 28% said they would use the library service less. 21% said they would use a static local library. 8% said they would use a community run library and 6% said they would access the digital services. 8% said they would use the Home Library service and 1.5% said they would use the Good Neighbours scheme. Some comments expressed concern and worry over relying on volunteers and the viability of these options. A key theme mentioned was the need for users retaining 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

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 serving running. Other ideas mentioned include 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. Equality analysis

Giving Due Regard to Equality and Human Rights

The local authority must consider how people will be affected by the service, policy or practice. In so doing we must give due regard to the need to: eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

Where relevant, we must take into account the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, sexual orientation, race, and religion and belief. This means considering how people with different needs get the different services they require and are not disadvantaged, and facilities are available to them on an equal basis in order to meet their needs; advancing equality of opportunity by recognising the disadvantages to which protected groups are subject and considering how they can be overcome.

We also need to ensure that human rights are protected. In particular, that people have:

- A reasonable level of choice in where and how they live their life and interact with others (this is an aspect of the human right to 'private and family life').
- An appropriate level of care which results in dignity and respect (the protection to a private and family life, protection from torture and the freedom of thought, belief and religion within the Human Rights Act and elimination of discrimination and the promotion of good relations under the Equality Act 2010).
- A right to life (ensuring that nothing we do results in unlawful or unnecessary/avoidable death).
- The Equality Act 2010 and other relevant legislation does not prevent the Council from taking difficult decisions which result in service reductions or closures for example, it does however require the Council to ensure that such decisions are:
 - Informed and properly considered with a rigorous, conscious approach and open mind, taking due regard of the effects on the protected characteristics and the general duty to eliminate discrimination, advance equality and foster good relations.
 - Proportionate (negative impacts are proportionate to the aims of the policy decision)
 - Fair
 - Necessary
 - Reasonable, and
 - Those affected have been adequately consulted.

Characteristics	Potential or actual issues for this group. [Please refer to the Diversity Guide and See RED]	How will the project / service / policy / activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> eliminate or reduce the potential for direct or indirect discrimination, harassment or disadvantage, where necessary. advance equality (meet needs / ensure access, encourage participation, make adjustments for disabled people, 'close gaps'). foster good relations between groups (tackled prejudice and promoted understanding), if relevant? <p>In what way do you consider any negative consequences to be reasonable and proportionate in order to achieve a legitimate aim?</p> <p>Are you complying with the DCC Equality Policy?</p>
All residents (include generic equality provisions)	Mobile libraries are a community asset and free to access and therefore there will be an impact on the users of this service and wider community who wouldn't be able to access this service anymore if it was no longer available.	<p>Closure of this service will likely impact those in more rural settings and disproportionately is likely to include older people. This can be mitigated through existing alternatives for borrowing and access books/learning. Some users would still access Static Libraries and the Good Neighbours and Home Library Service will be offered as an alternative.</p> <p>A rural community support offer may provide mitigation in the areas with the highest visit numbers to mobile library.</p>
Age	<p>Most mobile library customers are over 41 with a large proportion over the age of 61. Closure of mobile libraries would have a disproportionate impact on older community members.</p> <p>Mobile libraries have and do stop at local primary schools. Data from 2022 shows some of these stops are considerably more popular</p>	<p>It cannot be presumed that an older age means reduced ability to travel. Local libraries can provide more services such as events and community activities as well as a space to meet and connect with others. This could benefit this age group who can be particularly vulnerable to loneliness. With the distance from mobile library stops to static libraries, there may be more reliance on public transport which may not be convenient to all.</p> <p>There also cannot be assumptions on the use of digital technology as a result of older age. However, the ONS Internet Users survey found in 2020 that those over 75 are still much less likely to be recent internet users as those aged 16-44, although this has been steadily increasing. For those</p>

	<p>than town/village locations.</p>	<p>who wish to access these services, digital sessions can take place to help people learn how to use the library's borrowing apps. The consultation showed this would be a limited option for the few.</p> <p>Mitigation through seeking a boost of volunteers for the Home Library Service which will give access to a wider selection of books and large print and often have time to chat and interact. This will be alongside the Good Neighbour offer to the immediate vicinity of the customer base. A rural community support offer will provide mitigation to somewhere with an ongoing community library or look at creating a new service in certain locations.</p> <p>Young people are users of mobile libraries and there is higher amount of interaction at two of these specific stops, for primary age children. It is clear from the data that more young people are likely to be users of static local libraries, however, the consultation showed that this will not be possible for all children. Children attending school will have access to books and wider materials, including the opportunity to access on-line resources at school. Some pre-school children access community activities, nurseries and play groups where books may be available. Children with access to the internet at home could access on-line materials. In line with the mitigations outlined, further relationships will be formed with rural schools the mobile library supports as well rural pre-schools and toddler groups, so that further support can be provided and create better access to books.</p>
<p>Disability (incl. sensory, mobility, mental health, learning disability, neurodiversity, long term ill health) and carers of disabled people</p>	<p>Over a third (34%) considered themselves to have a disability, with 13% saying that their day-to-day activities are limited a lot.</p> <p>However, increasing the travel requirements to reach a library is</p>	<p>Supporting vulnerable residents through the Home Library Service provided to those who have a physical or mental disability preventing them being able to visit a library without support, would mitigate some of the negative impacts identified. If this option is pursued, it would be important to communicate the Home Library Service widely in order for the full extent of the mitigation to be realised.</p> <p>Additional funding is being made available to support the recruitment and</p>

	likely to have a greater impact on those members of those communities with disabilities, particularly affecting their mobility, if they then must travel further to access services.	co-ordination of more volunteers to be able to provide more people the access to these resources. All our active mobile library members will be contacted 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. The proposed end of the service has been extended to allow these conversations to happen.
Culture and ethnicity: nationality/national origin, ethnic origin/race, skin colour, religion and belief	There is a lack of data regarding ethnicity of library customers and therefore inferences that the vast majority identify as White should be treated with suitable caution. The data that is available shows there are no anticipated positive or negative impacts on this protected characteristic.	No specific mitigation.
Sex, gender and gender identity (including men, women, non-binary and transgender people), and pregnancy and maternity (including women's right to breastfeed)	More women than average use the mobile libraries. The data indicated these are generally older women. Where women are more likely to be primary carers their library usage may be taking place around other commitments. Removal of the potential convenience of the mobile libraries may therefore have a negative impact of removing a manageable library opportunity.	Promotion of online resources for those who may struggle to reach a static library and have access to a device. If this is not possible, promotion of the Home Library Service and Good Neighbour offer. Further investment into the rural support offer will help mitigate some consequences.
Sexual orientation and marriage/civil partnership	Data not collected on this characteristic. Cannot identify if	No specific mitigation.

	there are any positive or negative impacts.	
Other relevant socio-economic factors such as family size/single people/lone parents, income/deprivation, housing, education and skills, literacy, sub-cultures, 'digital exclusion', access to transport options, rural/urban	<p>The four mobiles cover a wide rural geographical area and does include some areas of deprivation (most notably North Devon and Torridge).</p> <p>The rural location of some users may make it harder to access a static library if they do not have their own transportation and rely on public transport.</p>	<p>Those is rural communities may become more isolated without the mobile library. A Rural Support Community offer will help to mitigate some of the disadvantages from the removal of this service. The extra funding for volunteers will support those who are more vulnerable and rurally isolated help access library services through the Home Library Service and Good Neighbour.</p> <p>Additional funding is being made available for community work and development and groups may wish to seek funding to address specific and local barriers to access or to improve local connection or inequality.</p>

8. Human rights considerations:

Not applicable

9. Supporting independence, wellbeing and resilience. Give consideration to the groups listed above and how they may have different needs:

Promotion of online resources with additional help and training will help to keep independence of those who may struggle to reach a static library. Promoting mobile library users to return to their local library if they can, gives access to events, community activities and meeting new people. The Community Offer will also provide the potential for some new community library spaces that will help retain independence and help create more local connections.

Members of the community who may struggle to access static libraries have other alternatives like the Home Library Service and Good neighbour which will be bolstered through more volunteers will aid them in still having access to the same resources they did with mobile

libraries. Conversations will take part with mobile library users that will aim to promote other services and groups they could also attend to help their wellbeing and independence.

Additional funding is being made available for community work and development and groups may wish to seek funding to address specific and local barriers to access or to improve local connection or inequality.

10. Environmental analysis

An impact assessment should give due regard to the following activities in order to ensure we meet a range of environmental legal duties. The policy or practice does not require the identification of environmental impacts using this Impact Assessment process because it is subject to (please mark X in the relevant box below and proceed to the 4c, otherwise complete the environmental analysis table):

Devon County Council's Environmental Review Process	N/A
Planning Permission	N/A
Environmental Impact Assessment	N/A
Strategic Environmental Assessment	N/A

	Describe any actual or potential negative consequences. (Consider how to mitigate against these).	Describe any actual or potential neutral or positive outcomes. (Consider how to improve as far as possible).
Reduce, reuse, recycle and compost:	Not applicable	
Conserve and enhance wildlife:	Not applicable	
Safeguard the distinctive characteristics, features and special qualities of Devon's landscape:	Not applicable	
Conserve and enhance Devon's cultural and historic heritage:	Not applicable	
Minimise greenhouse gas emissions:	Closure of the Mobile Library Service, which currently uses old diesel vehicles would reduce the emissions of particulate matter from the vehicles. And although diesel emits less CO2 than petrol engines, it does still contribute towards CO2 pollution.	This could have a positive consequence, but this may be offset by more individual car journeys to reach library services in other towns. Encourage use of public transport where appropriate or combining with other trips. Also, use of Good Neighbour or Home Library Service where eligible could reduce number of journeys.
Minimise pollution (including air, land, water, light and noise):	Closure of the Mobile Library Service, as above, given pollution from the diesel engines of the vehicles.	This could have a positive consequence, which could be offset if more people travel in their own cars to reach library services elsewhere. Encourage use of public transport or combining with other trips. Also, use of Good Neighbour or Home Library Service where eligible could reduce number of journeys.

Contribute to reducing water consumption:	The closure would reduce overall water consumption by the vehicles.	A positive only if the vehicles were not repurposed and reused. An immediate positive consequence, which would be negated if the vehicles were reused.
Ensure resilience to the future effects of climate change (warmer, wetter winters; drier, hotter summers; more intense storms; and rising sea level):	Not applicable	
Other (please state below):		

11. Economic analysis

	Describe any actual or potential negative consequences. (Consider how to mitigate against these).	Describe any actual or potential neutral or positive outcomes. (Consider how to improve as far as possible).
Impact on knowledge and skills:	Free access to information, signposting to support, and opportunities for learning is provided by mobile libraries. These will all be negatively impacted upon by a removal of these services.	Promotion of local static libraries and online material will give more access to mobile users.
Impact on employment levels:	Pending the outcome of any public and staff consultations, roles could be made redundant as a result of any changes. Each mobile library has one full time position (plus relief staff) and this will be a significant impact to them, although the negative impact on employment levels in the community is minimal.	An appropriate consultation process has undertaken with all affected staff run by Libraries Unlimited. All redeployment opportunities within Libraries Unlimited for staff will be considered to try to find alternative roles for staff whose roles are being made redundant. Support will be available to any staff given notice of redundancy to apply for alternative roles either within or outside of the organisation, such as reasonable time off for interviews and support with CV's. Staff will also have access to a variety of online training courses.
Impact on local business:	N/A	N/A

12. Describe and linkages or conflicts between social, environmental and economic impacts (Combined Impacts):

N/A

13. How will the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the relevant area be improved through what is being proposed? And how, in conducting the process of procurement, might that improvement be secured?

There are limited specific benefits for the communities impacted who wish to only access a mobile library. However, the mitigations and promotion of alternative offers outlined, alongside further investment in community groups and libraries may go some way in extending access to books, connection and positive interaction for many people and communities.

14. How will impacts and actions be monitored?

Iteration of this document will continue once a decision has been made at Cabinet with the aspiration that the community support offer will be further developed.

A project would be established to deliver the implementation of any change agreed by Cabinet, which would include the monitoring and evaluation of mitigating responses and investment proposed.