

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC
Wednesday 8 November 2023

1. QUESTION FROM JOHN LAWLOR (ATTENDANCE VIA TEAMS)
Re: Mobile Library – Obtaining Reading and Social Contact.

I live in a rural community in North West Devon, Halwill. We have many elderly residents who cannot drive nor are able to access the internet. The mobile library is a social lifeline for them. They can obtain reading material and as a community we are able ensure they are safe and well. I wish to ask the Cabinet how they intend to ensure that these residents are able to obtain reading material and receive social contact if the mobile library service is closed?

Although there is a library in nearby Holsworthy, bus travel is not an option since DCC decided to reduce the previous frequent service to now only one bus only every three hours. A return journey will now take nearly four hours.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

The current services are only accessed by a small percentage of the local community. The stops are for a short period of time and are not an efficient use of resources. The proposal ensures that readers in our local communities will not be disadvantaged in any way. It is about looking to do things differently, without impacting on the quality of the service. With the potential for doing things better.

There are several alternatives that existing mobile library members can choose from including those that support our most vulnerable users such as the Home Library Service using a network of volunteers and the Good Neighbour scheme that enable family and friends to pick up and return books on their behalf. We are also exploring existing community facilities and libraries, and the potential to further develop and network groups and buildings with interested communities.

The nearest static library to Halwill is Holsworthy and both these services can be accessed by contacting the nearest library.

2. QUESTION FROM KATIE SANDFORD (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)

Re: Spending on Library Services

Devon County Council says it wants to remove the mobile library service in order to spend the money on children's services in towns and cities, but why does DCC believe that means that children in rural areas should have their service taken away in order to benefit those in towns and cities?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

It is not the intention to remove services from young people and children in rural communities. We are proposing to deliver the service differently. We are developing better relationships with local schools in order to access books and reading and already provide exciting opportunities for children to access books through the Summer Reading Challenge and all year-round Secret Book Quest. This will have a greater impact and wider access to all children in the community. The current service has a low take up due to limited time and days of access. Many young people now access digital services to access books and reading as well and I am proud of the fact our reader numbers for children's issues is a higher proportion of borrowing than ever before.

3. QUESTION FROM Cheryl Cottle-Hunkin (IN ATTENDANCE) Re: Mobile Library Statements

In 2022, Councillor Roger Croad, Devon County Council's Cabinet Member responsible for libraries, is publicly quoted as saying "Mobile libraries are a lifeline to rural communities, and they give residents, particularly the elderly and vulnerable, access to vital services." What has changed?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

The existing mobile vehicles are old, expensive to maintain, hard on the environment and at time difficult to navigate on our rural networks. In addition to this use of the service is low. Whilst the vehicles have given great service to many over their lifetime, they are expensive to replace and our direction of travel, informed by emerging national strategies such as "Unleashing Rural Communities" is to deliver services closer to where people live utilising local community buildings and volunteers. This will have a greater impact on the community and provide a service which is more widely available. Although the delivery method would change, our commitment to people who live in our rural communities including children, elderly and vulnerable in our County and their continued access to books from our fantastic library services, remains.

4. QUESTION FROM PAUL MOORE (ATTENDANCE VIA TEAMS) Re: Pioneer for using Mobile Library as Multi-Purpose Vehicle

I lived in Devon for over 40 years, and it's mainly made up of rural communities. These communities have over the years had more and more services taken away or moved so far away that for some people it means a whole day is taken up to do one trip which can mean using a variety of transport to achieve this and extremely exhausting. The mobile library service

is in many cases considered a lifeline and means of learning and communication from the very young to the elderly. Whilst I appreciate you authorities have budget constraints, could Devon consider being a pioneer in the Southwest for using the mobile library as a multi-purpose vehicle by providing several services within it?

I sincerely hope this invaluable service will be kept.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

There are several alternatives that existing mobile library members can choose from including those that support our most vulnerable users such as the Home Library Service using a network of volunteers and the Good Neighbour scheme that enable family and friends to pick up and return books on their behalf. We are also exploring existing community facilities and libraries, and the potential to further develop and network groups and buildings with interested communities.

The existing library fleet would need to be replaced in order to provide any reliable and sustainable rural response. The existing mobile library service is not cost effect and is now accessed by less than 3000 people in Devon. The delivery of services to rural communities is in decline across most sectors. If the Council decides to continue its service it could seek to engage with other partners, however it would not be appropriate to provide services which are not a statutory duty or priority for the Council.

5. QUESTION FROM ANGELINA BAKER (IN ATTENDANCE)

Re: Usage of Mobile Library

I would like to ask the Cabinet why they are comparing figures from 2013 when there were 8 vans to today's usage figures when there are only 4 vans, to prove a decline in usage. When the true figures show that usage is on the rise, this year's figures show that the Torrington Mobile Library user figures have risen from 858 in January to 956 in August.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

The presentation of figures from 2013 were to show the relative size of the service in 2013 and also a historical background to the service. More recent data shows us that Countywide the numbers of active users of the Mobile Libraries has fallen. In January 2023 there were 3061 Active members compared with 2862 In August 2023.

Since 2017 the numbers of stops have also reduced by 10% where the policy of removing stops with fewer than 4 regular visits has been regularly implemented. The overall trend even excluding the 2013 figures and taking into account the period on the Pandemic is of fewer active members making use of the service. The update and use of the service is low, and the proposal is to deliver the service differently which allows great access and use of the library service for the whole community.

We have also provided where available, more detailed data through Freedom of Information requests.

**6. QUESTION FROM WILL MATHEWS ((ATTENDANCE TBC)
Re: Mobile Library and Freedom of Choice.**

Does the council recognise that removing the mobile library service and trying to substitute it with a Good Neighbour or Home Library Scheme is removing freedom of choice and removing independence for those who need it most, including our young people for whom it is a great skill to learn at an early age?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

There are several alternatives that existing mobile library members can choose from including those that support our most vulnerable users such as the Home Library Service using a network of volunteers and the Good Neighbour scheme that enable family and friends to pick up and return books on their behalf. Users can reserve and order specific books on-line. We are exploring existing community facilities and libraries, and the potential to further develop and network groups and buildings with interested communities to deliver the service differently and allow access for the whole community. These services are alongside the Council's 50 static libraries. The Council continues to offer significant choice and access to library users in Devon.

**7. QUESTION FROM AMY ANDERSON (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)
Re: Library Strategy**

Does Devon County Council have a library strategy and if not, do they feel they should have one in place before making drastic measures such as removing the mobile library service?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Devon County Council has a statutory duty relating to the provision of libraries and whilst we eagerly await the government's promised Public Libraries Strategy in 2024, we have taken into account not just the Council's own Strategic Plan based on principles of a strong and sustainable council, but also the 'Unleashing Rural Opportunities' paper published by the government earlier this year. In this paper which mentions Libraries in the context of a wider rural offer:

Unleashing Rural Communities – Published by the Government in June 2023

"Thriving communities' 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.”

8. QUESTION FROM ALAN HUNKIN (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)

Re: Usage of Mobile Library for other Services

Don't you think it would be a good idea if you used the mobile libraries to provide other services in our rural areas, I understand they've started doing this in some other counties. I hate driving anywhere and it would be good to have more services in the village even if it's just once a month on the library van.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

The existing library fleet would need to be replaced in order to provide any reliable and sustainable rural response. The existing library service is not cost effective and is now accessed by less than 3000 people in Devon. The delivery of services to rural communities is in decline across most sectors. If the Council decides to continue its service it could seek to engage with other partners, however it would not be appropriate to provide services which are not a statutory duty or priority for the Council.

9. QUESTION FROM CLAIRE RICHARDS ((ATTENDANCE TBC))

Re: Marketing of Devon Library Service

I would like to ask Council, as regards online presence, why when the static libraries are regularly marketed on social media, the Devon Mobile Library Service is not marketed anywhere online or on social media, and why it is also impossible to find any terms of service or services offered for the Devon Library Mobile Service on the Libraries Unlimited website?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

All library services are listed and details available online by following this link: [home - Devon \(devonlibraries.org.uk\)](https://www.devonlibraries.org.uk) for services relating to Devon. It includes details on each of the mobile libraries, where and when they stop and for how long. Each mobile library also has its own Facebook page run by Libraries Unlimited and provides service updates on social media.

Libraries Unlimited are a separate organisation to the Council and have their own internet presence giving details of the charity and the wider services it provides.

10. QUESTION FROM ROGER ALLEN (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)

Re: Change of Policy on Stops on Mobile Library Service

Many of the stops that have been abolished are in hamlets which are on the route to other local areas. If a decision is made to find a way to keep the mobile libraries running, will the council consider changing the policy of removing stops of fewer than 5 people, and add stops to rural areas for those who would like to use it?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

It is important that we continue to provide services that are cost-effective and provide value for money to the whole community, unfortunately our vehicles are becoming more and more costly to maintain and the significant investment required in replacing the aging fleet is prohibitive. We have put forward alternatives that are cheaper but deliver the service different to benefit a wider section of the community and will give members more choice in how they access library services.

11. QUESTION FROM CHRIS WHEATLEY (IN ATTENDANCE)

Re: Community Libraries

Torrige District Council asked for details months ago regarding DCC proposals for mobile library services to be replaced with a voluntary scheme with no details?

Torrige District Council fully support the mobile library services including two motions and a recorded vote.

County Cllr Andrew Saywell has been going around telling people that when the mobile library service closes down, he will help create community libraries here there and everywhere. What are the details of these proposals please and how will they run? Cllr Croad simply said at Libraries Unlimited would "chip-in".

What does that mean? Details please.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

The Cabinet paper for the meeting on 8 November provides additional information on both its existing services and plans to work with communities around supporting local facilities and groups. Many existing community facilities already provide access to books and other services. It is proposed that sessions are put together across Devon to share ideas across existing groups and community providers. The Council will make available funding for small grants to develop provision in local communities. The Council will want to listen and learn from communities around how facilities could evolve and if there is further appetite to network. The current services are used by a very small percentage of the community and the proposals and work with local communities are aimed to provide greater access for the whole community.

12. QUESTION FROM STEVEN BURY (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)

Re: Alternative Provision if Mobile Library is Closed.

The Community Libraries Council proposes to set up an alternative to the Mobile Library Service, as the Mobile Service does 376 stops.

So, suppose the Mobile Library Service is shut down. If that is the case, I have to ask, will there be digital access of broadband, volunteers, rotation of the book stock for choice of books, ordering, the security of library books, to get the books to the proposed community libraries coming from?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

The Cabinet paper for the meeting on 8 November provides additional information on both its existing services and plans to work with communities around supporting local facilities and groups. Many existing community facilities already provide access to books and other services. It is proposed that sessions are put together across Devon to share ideas across existing groups and community providers. The Council will make available funding for small grants to develop provision. The Council will want to listen and learn from communities around how facilities could evolve and if there is further appetite to network. Many community facilities across Devon have access to broadband. How facilities will function will be for local communities and volunteers to determine, but the Council will support with outreach services in communities particularly with significant demand. The current services are used by a very small percentage of the community and the proposals and work with local communities are aimed to provide greater access for the whole community.

13. QUESTION FROM MARK WOODING (IN ATTENDANCE)

Re: Consideration of Running Hybrid Services

Has any consideration been given to running a hybrid-service that combines the mobile library with other services? For example, Banking services, Post office services, Pharmacy services, Basic healthcare services (including vaccinations) Pre and post-natal services, Internet technology training and advice for older residents, Job seeker services, Counselling services.

It may even be possible (given the banks' desire to close branches) that a hybrid mobile banking and library service would be revenue positive.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

The existing library fleet would need to be replaced in order to provide any reliable and sustainable rural response. The existing library service is not cost effective and is now accessed by less than 3000 people in Devon.

Many of the partners that you have mentioned are rationalising spends and staffing. The delivery of services to rural communities is in decline across most sectors. If the Council decides to continue its service it could seek to engage

with other partners, however it would not be appropriate to provide services which are not a statutory duty or priority for the Council as this is outside our remit of a public authority.

14. QUESTION FROM HELEN WAYLAND-SMITH (ATTENDANCE TBC))
Re: Grant Funding from Government for Vehicle Replacement

It was heart-warming to see the cross-party support from councillors on the scrutiny committee, with members from all parties (Labour, Green, Lib Dem and Conservative) voting in support of finding a way to keep the hugely important mobile library service running. As a possible funding idea, will the County Council please contact Central Government and ask them to fund a one-off grant to enable the replacement of the ageing vehicles?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

We are not aware of any funding schemes available from Government for this purpose. If funding was available for the purchase of vehicles, this would not resolve the issue of the sustainable funding required to provide the service itself.

15. QUESTION FROM CLAIRE DAVEY-POTTS (ATTENDANCE tbc)
Re: Equality Impact Assessment

Are the council confident that their equality impact assessment is sufficient to comply with its equality duty as defined in the equality act of 2010? It can be difficult for some people to get into town to visit the library. The mobile library makes life so much easier for certain groups of people with protected characteristics to access books.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

The Impact assessment has been informed by the recent consultation, alongside further information and data, and we have highlighted what we consider the groups of people most likely to be impacted by changes in the service, and how these impacts can be reasonably mitigated. Cabinet will consider this assessment when considering the paper and its recommendations.

16. QUESTION FROM CHRISTINE BURY (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)
Re: Educational Levels and Disadvantaged Students

In a speech today by the Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, Leader of the Conservative Party said:

*"We have made three huge decisions to change the direction of our country. We will give Britain the infrastructure it needs to protect the long-term future of our NHS cut cancer deaths by a quarter **and create the best education system in the Western world to set our children up for the opportunities of the future.**"*

Today we set a course for our education system that will set our children up for the opportunities of the future. No more rip-off degrees; no more low aspiration; no more denigration of technical education. Just the best education system in the Western world."

How are you to achieve this if you take away books from disadvantaged children, students at school, home education, College and University students by axing valuable resources in rural Devon, like the Mobile Library? I believe some students do things online now.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Thank you for your comments. The Council considers that it will retain a comprehensive library service, irrespective of the decision the Cabinet makes regarding the Mobile library service.

17. QUESTION FROM BRIAN FURNESS (NOT IN ATTENDANCE) Re: Community Library and Levels of Service

It has been suggested that the mobile library service be replaced with a community library service, but no details of this have yet been forthcoming. I would like to ask the following question about this proposed service: -

The mobile library service stops in 396 communities and carries in excess of 2,000 books, including fiction and non-fiction, children's books, large print and audio books. How many community libraries will there be? Will they provide an equivalent range of books, particularly books for children and the visually impaired? And what provision will be made for the many users who do not have a car and cannot access the community library?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

The Cabinet paper for the meeting on 8 November provides additional information on both its existing services and plans to work with communities around supporting local facilities and groups. Many existing community facilities already provide access to books and other services. It is proposed that sessions are put together across Devon to share ideas across existing groups and community providers. The Council will make available funding for small grants to develop provision.

The Council will want to listen and learn from communities around how facilities could evolve and if there is further appetite to network. The Home Library Service and Good Neighbour scheme are able to ensure access to fiction and non-fiction, children's books, large print and audio books.

18. QUESTION FROM PAT BURR (NOT IN ATTENDANCE) Re: Saving the Mobile Library

I would ask the Council PLEASE to consider every possible way that our Mobile Library can be SAVED, not just now and for us-- but for the future in this vast rural area. The world would be a barren place without a book at your elbow. Thank you.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Thank you for your comments, which have been noted.

**19. QUESTION FROM JANET FURNESS (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)
Re: Range of Services that Mobile Libraries Could Provide.**

With regards to the proposed cessation of the mobile library service: The mobile no longer stops in the tiny hamlet where my pre-school children first enjoyed choosing books, together with our elderly neighbours, but I still remember the enjoyment and sense of community that it brought. Instead of stopping the service altogether has the council considered copying the example of other counties and extending the range of services offered, such as selling stamps and hearing aid batteries, providing advice leaflets and local information? All of these would be very useful to people in isolated communities with vanishingly few facilities.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

There are several alternatives that existing mobile library members can choose from including those that support our most vulnerable users such as the Home Library Service using a network of volunteers and the Good Neighbour scheme that enable family and friends to pick up and return books on their behalf. We are also exploring existing community facilities and libraries, and the potential to further develop and network groups and buildings with interested communities.

The existing library fleet would need to be replaced in order to provide any reliable and sustainable rural response. The existing library service is not cost effective and is now accessed by less than 3000 people in Devon. The delivery of services to rural communities is in decline across most sectors. If the Council decides to continue its service it could seek to engage with other partners, however it would not be appropriate to provide services which are not a statutory duty or priority for the Council.

**20. QUESTION FROM MARIA HENDERSON ((ATTENDANCE TBC))
Re: Concern over Closure of Mobile Libraries**

It beggars belief that the closure of this essential service to our rural community is even being considered.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Thank you for your comments, which have been noted.

21. QUESTION FROM MICHAEL SYMONS (ATTENDANCE tbc)
Re: Accessibility and Travel

I would like to ask the Cabinet, in the event of not being in a position to travel to a static library, how will disabled users and their families/children or carers be able to access the library service, how much of the current service will be available to them, and how far would they have to travel on average, if the Devon Mobile Library Service is shut down?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Prior to the start of the consultation on the proposal to decommission the Mobile Library Vehicles we created a first draft Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) which was published on our website. The purpose of which is to help identify and understand the impact of any changes to vulnerable groups of existing mobile library users. The EIA was updated following the consultation exercise using data and comments provided by respondents.

An updated EIA can be found by following this link: [Mobile Libraries Impact Assessment 202306.pdf](#) The EIA is also referenced in the cabinet paper with specific mention of the main demographic of respondents who 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.

Rural and social isolation was also highlighted through the consultation and have been considered in the ability of alternatives to provide continued access to the library service.

Alternative services provided in mitigation have been put forward that build on our existing models of support for vulnerable groups who have difficulty accessing mainstream library services. As a result of the consultation, we are also adding support from community-based libraries.

In recognition of the potential impact, pending Cabinet's decision provision of a one-off grant of £25,000 to Libraries Unlimited to use alongside their existing resources to enable vulnerable groups to continue accessing services. This will involve discussing options with users that best suit their needs. This may also include signposting or referral to other relevant organisations where appropriate for additional support. The grant will also be used to run a campaign to recruit additional volunteers to support the delivery of extra capacity for the Home Library and Good Neighbour services.

Our schools already provide access to books, and we recognise the importance of reading within many families and its impact on education, learning and personal development. We will work closely with our School Library Service and build on the excellent relationships Libraries Unlimited have with rural schools.

22. QUESTION FROM RAY AUVRAY (ATTENDANCE tbc)
Re: Government's "Unleashing Rural Opportunities" Strategy

How does the running down, and now the proposed closure of the Devon mobile library service support and contribute to the Government's "Unleashing Rural Opportunities" strategy in which there is explicit commitment to improving rural library services?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Devon County Council has a statutory duty relating to the provision of libraries and whilst we are eagerly the government's promised Public Libraries Strategy in 2024 we have taken into account 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 the government earlier this year. In this paper which mentions Libraries in the context of a wider rural offer:

Unleashing Rural Communities – Published by the Government in June 2023

"Thriving communities' 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."

Alongside maintaining our existing static libraries, and alternative services outlined within the Cabinet paper, the further development and networking of community facilities and libraries can extend access to books, reading and activities for people in rural communities.

23. QUESTION FROM GRAHAM BRIDGER (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)
Re: Enhanced Social Interaction and Mitigations

The mobile library service also provided an opportunity of enhanced social interaction and improved resilience in our rural community which takes place during the visit of the mobile library van e.g., by coffee morning or afternoon teas or simply meeting neighbours etc. What mitigations can DCC offer to replace these enhancements and supports to our remote rural communities if the mobile service were withdrawn?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

We know that people who use the mobile library value the service and the interaction it can provide. By developing better connections with existing community groups and assets we believe that people in rural areas would retain opportunity to continue to access library services at a local venue and engage more within the local community. We propose to allocate £15,000 from our Growing Communities Fund to support local communities with small grants specifically for this purpose.

24. QUESTION FROM CATHERINE BOWNESS (NOT IN ATTENDANCE) Re: Volunteers and Vulnerable People

When DCC proposed that the mobile library service ceased it was suggested that electronic services, volunteers or friendly neighbours could replace it. Please could you explain how a member of the mobile library who is an elderly, disabled council tax payer who loves reading but is scared of strangers including volunteers after being the victim of a doorstep scam, lacks any dexterity to deal with electronic devices and in addition lives in a mobile phone dead-spot with very poor broadband connections, no near neighbours and no public transport nearby will still be able to use the library service should the mobile van be taken off the road?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

In recognition of the potential impact, pending Cabinet's decision, additional provision of a one-off grant of £25,000 to Libraries Unlimited to use alongside their existing resources to enable vulnerable groups to continue accessing services. This will involve discussing options with users that best suit their needs. This may also include signposting or referral to other relevant organisations where appropriate for additional support. The grant will also be used to run a campaign to recruit additional volunteers to support the delivery of extra capacity for the Home Library and Good Neighbour services.

The Home library service and the good neighbour service arranged by the local library can help to build a trusted relationship with people using those services and where necessary signpost to other organisations who can help. These services were utilised during the pandemic in which many vulnerable people were shielded and very socially isolated. These services became a lifeline for many and have continued as a positive experience for people to access reading, alongside the regular interaction with people delivering the books.

25. QUESTION FROM JOHN SMITH (IN ATTENDANCE) Re: Scrutiny Committee Recommendations

Further to the Recommendation of the recent Scrutiny Meeting, will Council please guarantee that they will fully consider, investigate and cost any and all possible practical and economical means to maintain our vital mobile library service, so essential for the equality, education and social cohesion of our rural communities?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

We will of course fully consider the recommendations put forward by Scrutiny at the end of September, which included requests to investigate alternative funding models for both the purchase of vehicles and the sustainability of the service. We value this input and have asked for additional information in the report to Cabinet which responds to those recommendations.

**26. QUESTION FROM CLLR JOHN PATRINOS (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)
Re: Motion passed by North Devon DC ref Mobile Library Service**

When the decision on mobile libraries is being reconsidered will the Cabinet, please bear in mind that North Devon Council unanimously passed the motion below. It was voted for by councillors of all parties. We did this knowing the severe financial pressures you face, along with the rest of local government, so it wasn't done lightly. However, the impact would be so severe that every councillor in North Devon would like you to find a way to fund this vital service.

"The Mobile Library Service

This council recognises the huge importance of the mobile library service across the whole of North Devon. To help lift our communities out of poverty, deprivation, isolation and loneliness we should be increasing access to books, not removing them.

We request that Devon County Council rethinks their decision to close the service across Devon and seeks a way to replace the mobile library vans. We ask that DCC explores future possibilities of the mobile service which will further enhance lives for our rural communities."

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Thank you for your comments. The Council provide a vast range of library services to residents across North Devon.

Devon's libraries have recently been recognised as an exemplar by the Department for Education around its support to children and families in poverty in supporting to access food and other vital services across partners.

Within the Cabinet report, we have added additional information regarding the exploration of other funding sources and delivery. There are a range of community facilities and groups providing access to books and wider activities and the Council is keen to work with these groups to develop and network this offer.

**27. QUESTION FROM ROSE ARNO (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)
Re: Retrograde Step – Importance of Community Services.**

I was the librarian at Bideford library for 25 years and occasionally helped on the mobile service. Unfortunately, it seems that not only is this service threatened, but the mobile service to schools is also very limited. Everyone knows that the 'Books on Wheels' service to the housebound run by volunteers, though very worthy, cannot possibly replace the skills of a proper professional librarian.

Why I wonder has 1.7 million been spent on a 'new' library in Bideford while the mobile service is removed. Surely, we want people to be served in their own village community rather than bringing more cars into town, often driven by oldies like me who are no longer very safe. The current mobile fleet of vehicles could be replaced over time with electric, thus cutting down environmental damage.

It's a hugely backward step to take away a vital rural service and replace it with a costly new static building, a long way from many people in the rural hinterland. As far back as 1985 some library services were looking at outreach and community librarianship as the way forward so why has Devon not caught up?

The recently refurbished Appledore library could easily have been replaced by the mobile service at less fixed costs. This worked well for Westward Ho!

I hope you will be able some of these questions at the forthcoming meeting.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

The old library in Bideford was dilapidated and was difficult for young families and people with a physical disability to access. We were able to invest in one of the Council's existing buildings that now provides a home to both a new library and learning centre for the 19,000 residents of the Town to enjoy.

Thank you for your comments regarding the mobile fleet.

We remain committed to providing access to people in rural areas and have put forward transition funds and ringfenced grant funding for rural communities to support the use of buildings and volunteers to continue to access our fantastic library service.

**28. QUESTION FROM SUE SQUIRE (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)
Re: Representations from Horwood Lovacott & Newton Tracey Parish Council**

Horwood Lovacott and Newton Tracey Parish Council is fully supportive of the mobile library, the service which visits Lovacott on a monthly basis and is greatly appreciated by residents, and especially the children of the nearby Primary School. In fact, the timing of the visit is scheduled so that it is in school time to enable the children to participate in the experience of choosing a book from the van and gain experience of interaction and social skills with other people in this setting.

The service is well used and the Parish Council has received representations that it would be a sad day indeed if the service was withdrawn for a number of reasons:

1. People still like to hold a book in their hands and not everyone wants to use a Kindle or iPad, turning the pages with their finger.
2. Lovacott and the surrounding villages of Newton Tracey and Horwood are 4 miles away from Barnstaple and going to the nearest Library at Barnstaple would either mean a bus journey or using the car involving carbon emissions which we all know is bad for our environment.
3. It would mean more traffic on the road which is already busy.
4. Not all residents are fit enough to drive or use the bus and this local arrangement suits them perfectly and in using the mobile library, they have the opportunity to meet others where the visit turns out not only to choose a book but reduces isolation and loneliness when other people are met and conversations held, thus having a positive effect on their well being and mental health.

The Parish Council very much hope that these comments will be taken into account when making the decision of the future of the service on 8 November. We all know that money has to be saved but by cutting some services such as this, it would have a far reaching detrimental effect and would make Lovacott and indeed other small rural places that it visits, even more isolated with its residents feeling that the highest tier of local government has forgotten about them.

Its not just a library service, it is a social event and the importance of this cannot be overestimated. We ask that DCC explores ways to retain this vital service.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Thank you for your comments, which have been noted.

29. QUESTION FROM LAUREN BOWDEN (NOT IN ATTENDANCE / VIA TEAMS TBC)

Re: Educational Opportunities from Mobile Libraries

The mobile libraries are not just about novels and children's books, they also offer reference books and more educational opportunities which simply are not available at some of the community libraries that county councillors have referred to in local newsletters. Are members of the Cabinet aware that people are actually using the mobile libraries as a means to complete University degrees? Because they are.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Access to the extensive range of books and online material will still be available and can be reserved online or by contacting any of our libraries. We support a wide range of learning and improving literacy is a key aim for our Library services. We aim to continue providing support to all learners.

30. QUESTION FROM DAVID CLAYTON (ATTENDANCE TBC) Re: Promotion of the Mobile Library Service (Festivals and Events)

The County Council likes to talk about a decline in numbers in regard to mobile library use but very little, if any, promotion of the mobile library service has taken place in recent years. Has the Council considered promoting the mobile library service by using them at various events and festivals across the county?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

All the library services are listed and details available online by following this link: [home - Devon \(devonlibraries.org.uk\)](http://home-Devon(devonlibraries.org.uk)) for services relating to Devon. It includes details on each of the mobile libraries, where and when they stop and for how long. Each mobile library also has its own Facebook page run by Libraries Unlimited and provides service updates on social media.

Libraries Unlimited are a separate organisation to the Council and have their own internet presence giving details of the charity and the wider services it provides.

Depending on the decision the Cabinet makes, the Council could consider outreach at shows and festivals, but this would bring significant additional costs both in entry fees and in staff time.

31. QUESTION FROM RICHARD TOLLER (ATTENDANCE VIA TEAMS) Re: Funding from Arts Council England Opportunity

Is there the opportunity to seek funding from Arts Council England to help protect the mobile library service? If so, will the county council please apply for it and keep the service running. I am sure the strong campaign to save them would help bolster any future funding applications...

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

We do not believe there are any current funds available from the Arts Council specifically to support the purchase and running of Mobile Library vehicles. We have had recent dialogue with Arts Council colleagues. We will of course explore additional funding streams that are aimed at strengthening the offer to people in our rural areas to access library services and will work closely with our parish councils and voluntary organisation. The Arts Council already provide significant funding to Libraries Unlimited, which has Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation status.

**32. QUESTION FROM DAVE SHARRATT (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)
Re: Policy of Closing Stops (fewer than 5 People)**

Why does the Council have a policy of closing stops with fewer than 5 people when many hamlets and villages with small numbers of people are en-route to some bigger stops. A stop for even just 15mins on the way to another local area does not significantly increase cost and is of real benefit to the people who depend on it?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

It is essential that we make best use of the assets we have to be as efficient as possible in delivering services. Where a stop falls below the regular 5 visits, we monitor for a period of time to determine its long-term viability, before making any decision to remove the stop. People are choosing to access Library services in more ways now and this has been reflected not just in our static libraries' usage but also the mobile libraries data.

Whilst additional en-route stops do not increase the costs significantly this does have an impact on other stops where there has been more demand enabling mobiles to stop longer and more regularly in these places.

**33. QUESTION FROM HUGH WORMINGTON (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)
Re: Impact of New Housing on the Service – Increased Usage?**

New houses are being built across the region and villages are growing with new people moving in. Yet the Council keeps cutting the mobile library service and reducing the number of stops.

Has the Council considered that if they were to increase the number and frequency of stops and promote the service it is likely that we would see an increase in the number of mobile library users?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

With significant housing developments, the Council can receive funds for the expansion of civic facilities, which could include library buildings. We continue to explore these options. The number of people accessing the mobile library continues to decline, despite development across Devon in recent years. The fact remains that the existing fleet needs to be replaced, and the council needs

to explore more cost effective and sustainable options to deliver its services to rural communities.

**34. QUESTION FROM HOLLY GREENBERRY-PULLEN (ATTENDANCE TBC)
Re: Increased Usage by offering additional services.**

As the Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Torridge and West Devon, I'd like to ask the Cabinet (on 8th November) whether the mobile library service is being seriously discussed as an opportunity to increase usage by means of offering a lifesaving conduit for additional services, especially as many rural services are been closed and transport links removed or reduced isolating hard to reach individuals - many who are based in rural communities visited by the mobile library; so in other words has the thought of 'piggy backing' other services being sewn into the mobile library service been seriously researched, discussed considered and if not could it be – i.e. look at mobile CAB, digital support worker (e.g. bills, banking, and signposting for education and youth services as well as greater support for the elderly and those looking for access to employment services, even remote council contact - council tax payment, refuse collection issues etc perhaps even with a local GP facility 'tapping into dated location stops alongside the service) - piggy backing use of the mobile library.

NB Libraries Wales states the following highlighting some initial benefits of library usage - Devon could be a flagship and build on this. This should be recorded for use of the cabinet to overview:

The process starts with a home visit to meet the service user and talk about their reading choices and preferred formats. The Library will then lend out large print books and audio CDs, and Memory Bags are available for people affected by Dementia. User preferences are recorded in a customer profile for colleagues to choose and assemble appropriate items. These are then delivered to service users, and three weeks later collected and replaced with a new selection.

As well as providing reading materials, the service helps to alleviate loneliness and Isolation Service users are very appreciative of the service and look forward to their deliveries and chatting with the friendly drivers.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

The existing library fleet would need to be replaced in order to provide any reliable and sustainable rural response. The existing library service is not cost effect and is now accessed by less than 3000 people in Devon. The delivery of services to rural communities is in decline across most sectors. If the Council decides to continue its service it could seek to engage with other partners, however it would not be appropriate to provide services which are not a statutory duty or priority for the Council.

35. QUESTION FROM GRAHAM LOFTHOUSE (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)

Re: Further Research and No Steps Taken in the Interim.

If the Council decides to undertake more research in order to see how to keep the mobile library running, will they guarantee that there will be no irrevocable steps taken in the meantime.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

The mobile libraries proposal and the recommendations put forward by Scrutiny around presenting additional information will be considered by Cabinet when it meets on the 8th of November. We will not be making any changes to the Mobile Library service until the recommendations are considered by Cabinet.

**36. QUESTION FROM NICK BUTTERWORTH (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)
Re: Traditions Associated with Physical Books and Access Thereto**

I am a great enthusiast for the long-established tradition of parents reading bedtime stories to their children. Seemingly without even trying, it promotes early vocabulary and literacy as well as parent/child bonding. It provides a safe space daily for good things and sometimes, not-so-good-things, to be shared. And it's great fun! Unfortunately, there is a tendency for parents to think that a celebrity reading a story on a tablet or laptop, is valid alternative. It's very much not the case. You can't chat to an iPad.

Will the Council bear in mind, in considering the future of the Mobile Library Service, that children in rural places need access to actual, physical books? Will they also bear in mind that books are not cheap and the process of creating voracious young readers, with all its benefits, makes the provision of a library service to rural areas all the more vital? Would they acknowledge the fact that, although the current financially difficult times will ease in the future, it is far from likely that an axed mobile library service would be reinstated?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Thank you for your comments, which have been noted. The Council is committed to sustaining a comprehensive library offer, including access to physical books, for its users.

**37. QUESTION FROM CHRIS WEST (IN ATTENDANCE)
Re: Impact of Mobile Library on SEND Children and Young People.**

How does the council propose to meet the needs of SEND CYP and their families who will be unable to access library services owing to the fact that for many, leaving their home to use a mobile library in their known locality is difficult enough. The idea of traveling to large urban environments is not viable especially for CYP with autism and sensory processing disabilities associated with severe anxiety and trauma. The closure of mobile libraries could be seen as discriminatory without appropriate cost-effective alternatives being provided.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Prior to the start of the consultation on the proposal to decommission the Mobile Library Vehicles, the Council created a first draft Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) which was published on our website. The purpose of which is to help identify and understand the impact of any changes to vulnerable groups of existing mobile library users. The EIA was updated following the consultation exercise using data and comments provided by respondents.

Alternative services provided in mitigation have been put forward that build on our existing models of support for vulnerable groups including children with SEND who may have difficulty accessing mainstream library services. We will link with other service providers who support children with SEND.

In recognition of the potential impact, pending Cabinet's decision provision of a one-off grant of £25,000 to Libraries Unlimited to use alongside their existing resources to enable vulnerable groups of users to continue accessing services. This will involve discussing options with those families with SEND children and Young People who have been identified, that best suits their needs. This may also include signposting or referral to other relevant organisations where appropriate for additional support. The grant will also be used to run a campaign to recruit additional volunteers to support the delivery of extra capacity for the Home Library and Good Neighbour services.

Devon's schools already provide access to books, and we recognise the importance of reading within many families and its impact on education, learning and personal development. We will work closely with our School Library Service and build on the excellent relationship Libraries Unlimited have with rural schools.