

## **UPDATE ON LIBRARY SERVICES WITHIN DEVON**

### **Report of the Chief Officer for Communities, Public Health, Environment & Prosperity**

#### **1. Background**

- 1.1 Devon County Council has a statutory duty, under the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act, to ensure the delivery of library services across Devon. Libraries Unlimited was established in April 2016 with the support of Devon County Council (DCC) to deliver its statutory duty and to ensure that libraries have the maximum positive impact on the lives of people within local communities.
- 1.2 Libraries Unlimited is a registered charity and is a public service mutual owned by its employees, Friends Groups and trustees. The Board of trustees ensures the organisation delivers its mission and purposes and sets the strategic direction for the organisation.
- 1.2 The decision to form Libraries Unlimited came following an extensive public consultation in 2014 which demonstrated that the people of Devon wanted all 50 libraries to remain open and run by paid staff.
- 1.3 In the first 2 years of operation, Libraries Unlimited has been able to maximise the benefits of being a registered charity and has been able to develop a more entrepreneurial and innovative approach to delivering library services. Savings targets of £1.5 million have been achieved by Libraries Unlimited in its first 2 years in line with the contract agreed with Devon County Council. All 50 libraries remain open and run by paid staff. In addition, Libraries Unlimited has been able to secure new sources of funding, and to trial new and innovative library services. In April 2018 Libraries Unlimited secured the contract to deliver Library Services in Torbay.
- 1.4 The decision to spin-out the library service from DCC was bold, as Libraries Unlimited is one of just four library public service mutuals in the country. Their mission, which was developed whilst the transition from an internal DCC service to becoming independent was underway, is to bring ideas, imagination, knowledge and creativity to people's lives and communities through six core purposes:
  - 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
  - Guiding and supporting people to explore and connect to the wider world
  - Offering a welcoming space to meet, socialise, learn, read and enjoy new experiences
  - Supporting the health and wellbeing of individuals and local communities.
- 1.5 During the first two years of operation, Libraries Unlimited has made significant achievements whilst also still undergoing considerable changes and transformation. It has been important for Libraries Unlimited to become independent of DCC for services such as HR, payroll, premises and ICT. Many of these functions are now provided by external suppliers; however there remains significant work to ensure that the ICT infrastructure for the library network is transitioned away from DCC. This is a significant and complex transformation programme and is key to providing a platform that enables Devon's libraries to deliver high quality library services in the future.

- 1.6 As a commissioned service, Libraries Unlimited senior managers meet regularly with DCC commissioners to review the performance of Devon's library service against contractual Key Performance Indicators. The meetings also provide opportunities to consider the way in which libraries can support broader community and DCC policy priorities. The contract with Libraries unlimited was a direct award for 5 years with the option of a further 5 years depending on the maturity of the marketplace.

## 2. Performance

### National context

- 2.1 Nationally, libraries continue to face significant challenges including budget reductions and austerity, an increasingly digital landscape, drop in footfall to high streets, and continually changing and evolving behaviours, trends and demands from the general public.
- 2.2 Overall, footfall to libraries has been in decline nationally for a number of years. The latest report from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting (CIPFA) Public Libraries statistics, shows a continuing decline in traditional public library use (both in visits and book issues) in England. However, despite the decline, libraries remain well used when compared to other forms of recreation, education or culture – there are more visits to libraries nationally than to the cinema and Premier League football matches combined.
- 2.3 Libraries across the country are changing and many local authorities are struggling to maintain their existing library network in its current form. Data compiled by the Library Taskforce from local authorities suggests that across England between April 2010 and July 2016, 252 libraries closed and 308 were transferred to being managed by volunteers within the local community (Source: <https://england.librarydata.uk>). In December of 2017 the Bookseller reported that 105 libraries had closed during 2016/17. (Source: <https://www.thebookseller.com/news/cipfa-library-figures-687596>). Our neighbours across the south west are adopting different models in response to local needs and finances.

### Devon

- 2.4 As detailed in the contract between DCC and Libraries Unlimited, the charity measures performance against a number of agreed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) reflecting the variety of services provided and the different ways that people engage with library services. The DCC commissioning team and portfolio holder are provided with regular performance reports. Libraries Unlimited is also working with the University of Exeter Business School and a number of other partners to understand the broader societal impact libraries have in relation to reducing social isolation; supporting positive health and wellbeing and improving children's educational attainment.
- 2.5 To embrace the societal shift to a more digital world, Devon's libraries have, over several years, diversified their offer to the public to provide more opportunities to sustain library usage across different demographic groups. As a charity, Libraries Unlimited have been able to secure additional funding to expand the range of services on offer, including 2 Fab Labs and Business and Intellectual Property Centres in Exeter and Barnstaple.
- 2.6 The 2017 CIPFA analysis shows that Devon Libraries are delivered at a lower cost than the average and receive a higher than average visitor count per 1,000 population, amongst its comparison group.
- 2.7 KPIs currently measured include library visits, active library users, issues of stock, computer and WiFi hours, the number of events and event attendance and volunteer hours.

## Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Purpose	Indicator	2017-18	2016-17	Change
Offering a welcoming space to meet, socialise, learn, read and enjoy new experiences	Visits	2,743,157	2,838,166	-3.35%
Offering a welcoming space to meet, socialise, learn, read and enjoy new experiences	Active users	136,710	114,720	+19.17%
Promoting and encouraging a love of reading	Stock issues	2,796,806	3,022,488	-7.47%
Guiding and supporting people to explore and connect to the wider world	Computer and Wi-Fi hours	532,393	525,941	+1.23%
Inspiring people of all ages to learn, imagine, create, succeed and realise their potential	Number of events and activities	16,732	14,823	+12.88%
	Event attendance	137,981	131,289	+4.85%
Inspiring people of all ages to learn, imagine, create, succeed and realise their potential	Volunteer hours	15,865	13,049	+21.58%

As detailed above, the library sector generally is continuing to see a decline in footfall and issues; however, with the introduction of new and more modern services we are seeing increases in usage of other areas. Total footfall in Devon in 2017/18 was 2.7 million visits. Though this was slightly down on the previous year's figure, it is in line with national trends.

- 2.8 Whilst Devon is not exempt from national trends and has the additional challenge of being one of the country's most rural counties with an ageing population, Libraries Unlimited, with the support of DCC, are developing new services that will appeal to a broader audience that meets local community needs. Through funding from Arts Council England (ACE) and investing in more digital services, we are seeing increased use of other library services, including digital services, events and activities and volunteer opportunities

### Digital services

Service	2017-18	2016-17	Change
eBook downloads	78,586	61,723	+27.32%
eAudiobook downloads	33,112	22,610	+46.45%
Digital magazine downloads	28,889	28,208	+2.41%

- 2.9 Libraries Unlimited recently commissioned the first customer survey undertaken in over 10 years to establish the views of both users and non-users of the library service. The results, drawn from 1500 respondents, show that 93% of library users are satisfied with the library services they receive. This includes 47% who said they are extremely satisfied and 31% very satisfied. The key drivers of satisfaction include customer service, good staff, the selection of books and ease of use.

Participants were asked to rate specific services in more detail:

- 89% of users said the range of services was good or above
- 93% rated staff knowledge and helpfulness as good or above.
- 90% of respondents rated the quality of services as good or above
- 88% rated the environment and ambience of our buildings as good or above
- 92% of participants rated the overall experience in our libraries as good or above
- The library service achieved a Net Promoters Score of 84 (an index ranging from -100 to 100 that measures the willingness of customers to recommend a company's products or services to others), this is higher than the national average of 77.9, the average for public services nationally (75.8) and the average for public services locally (75.4) \*source: Institute of Customer Service: UK Customer Satisfaction Index, July 2018.

### **Service Plan 2018/19**

- 2.10 An annual Service Plan is produced by Libraries Unlimited as part of its Commissioning Agreement and is agreed with DCC commissioners. The Service Plan details a range of activities that the charity plans to carry out throughout the year, each with clear measurement and outcomes to enable us to evaluate the success.
- 2.11 Key planned activities for 2018/19 include:
- Review of mobile library service
  - Delivery of ICT Strategy to ensure an independent and resilient ICT infrastructure for libraries in Devon
  - Planned capital developments – including progress on a new library in Bideford
  - Development of fundraising strategy to ensure the charity can have the greatest impact and reach, particularly to vulnerable groups
  - Compliance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) legislation
- 2.12 Work to implement the ICT strategy is ongoing and will remain a priority over the coming months. Considerable progress has been achieved to date in removing libraries from the DCC Wide Area Network. However, there remains a considerable amount of work to be delivered.
- 2.13 The full Service Plan can be found online: <https://librariesunlimited.org.uk/about/our-company/>
- 2.14 As a registered charity, Libraries Unlimited provides the Charity Commission with a detailed breakdown of annual accounts and reports, and following the Annual General Meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> September, the Annual Report for 2017/18 will be available. These documents can be found online at: <https://librariesunlimited.org.uk/about/our-company/>

### 3. Increasing impact and adding value

- 3.1 Libraries Unlimited has successfully secured additional funding to improve DCC's statutory library services. In 2017, a new FabLab and Business and Intellectual Property Centre were opened in Barnstaple Library, enhancing the opportunities available to local communities across North Devon. They also piloted new events and activities in libraries in North Devon and Torridge, funded via the Arts Council with the benefit of attracting new people and encouraging them to explore what libraries have to offer and reaching some of the most deprived wards in the county. Over the next four years, as one of just six new ACE library sector National Portfolio Organisations, Libraries Unlimited will be introducing even more art and cultural events and activities to Devon's libraries. All of these new services and facilities add value to DCC's library service by enhancing the core library offering.
- 3.2 National evidence<sup>1</sup> suggests that libraries have an important role to play in supporting wider health and wellbeing within local communities, reducing social isolation amongst people of all ages and providing an important point of contact for people from all backgrounds within local communities. For the past 5 years, the library service in Devon has developed an annual Active Life Active Mind programme to showcase the ways in which libraries can support individual wellbeing and this programme is set to develop further over the next 2 years as Libraries Unlimited seeks external funding and more partners to develop the programme still further.
- 3.2 In becoming an independent charity, Libraries Unlimited has been able to expand the reach and increase the impact of Devon Libraries. They have also been able to expand beyond boundaries into Torbay where they have taken on the running of the library service on behalf of Torbay Council. This has enabled them to share learning across the two library services, create a collaborative approach and increase the annual turnover to establish a more viable future for the charity.

### 4. Challenges

- 4.1 Whilst Libraries Unlimited is making good progress in securing additional sources of income, it is important to recognise that the library budget in Devon has been steadily declining for a number of years. In 2010, the library budget stood at approximately £10million. By 2014 it had reduced by £3million, and as part of the contract, Libraries Unlimited has been required to reduce the cost of the library service by a further £1.5million. This has been delivered by Libraries Unlimited in its first two years. The library service in Devon now costs 50% less – in real terms - than it did 10 years ago with the same number of static libraries and increased range of services on offer.
- 4.2 With significantly less money, the charity has had to make some difficult changes. This has included a review of the management team, restructures at one of the larger libraries and the removal of enhanced pay for weekend working. This has inevitably impacted on staff morale and resulted in a small number of redundancies.
- 4.3 As part of the transition, Libraries Unlimited, with the financial support of DCC, has had to invest in new IT systems, and whilst this will have a long-lasting positive impact on the future of services, it has not all been smooth and has added pressure to those working on the frontline. The scale of the transformation programme is considerable, and there remains significant work to do to ensure the systems function and operate smoothly and efficiently. DCC continues to work with Libraries Unlimited and all the ICT providers to resolve issues and secure a stable ICT platform.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/The%20health%20and%20wellbeing%20benefits%20of%20public%20libraries.pdf>

- 4.4 In 2014, Devon Libraries, whilst part of DCC, commissioned a new Library Management System (LMS) from Axiell, the company that developed the existing LMS in use across Devon's libraries and the leading provider of library systems. To move the entire network of DCC libraries to a new LMS and a new public facing website has required project management support from DCC and it has taken a considerable amount of time to ensure the new system was installed and functioning properly. The move to the new system happened in December 2017 and there have been continuing cases of 'downtime' which adds pressure to library staff and impacts on customer service and satisfaction. DCC have continued to provide ongoing support to support the resolution of outstanding issues. Work is still underway with the DCC commissioner and members of the Libraries Unlimited senior management team involved in ongoing discussion with the system provider to ensure they are improving the functionality and availability/speed of the system as a priority.

## **5. Conclusion**

- 5.1 The decision to create a new and independent organisation to deliver DCC's statutory library service was bold, and it was inevitable that it would present some challenges. The additional pressure of the changing societal landscape, a continued decline of book issues and library footfall nationally alongside years of budget reductions and cuts equally present their own challenges and issues.
- 5.2 The creation of a commissioned library service has, to date, avoided significant changes such as potential library closures and large-scale redundancies, whilst securing the level of savings required. This approach has ensured the continued operation of all 50 local libraries as well as the improvement of facilities and extension of services. It has provided the flexibility to secure additional sources of funding for the library service, such as substantial investment from Arts Council England. This additional funding enables Libraries Unlimited to expand the library offer and to support the organisation's overall financial provision.
- 5.3 It is important that the DCC commissioning team continue to measure and evaluate the library service performance to ensure the future of our libraries. We will continue to work closely with the team at Libraries Unlimited and, where appropriate, to support their work across Devon's communities. We would ask that members take the time to visit their local libraries to see for themselves the valuable services on offer.
- 5.4 Given the broader landscape for library services in the region and nationally, the move to a public service mutual for the delivery of library services in Devon is a significant achievement for DCC. Libraries Unlimited has achieved a high-profile national reputation and is widely regarded within the sector as a leading and progressive library service.

Dr Virginia Pearson  
Chief Officer for Communities, Public Health, Environment & Prosperity

### **Electoral Divisions: All**

Cabinet Member for Community, Public Health, Transportation and Environmental Services:  
Councillor Roger Croad

[Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers](#)

Contact for enquiries: Simon Kitchen, Head of Communities  
Room No. G63 County Hall, Exeter. EX2 4QD

Tel No: (01392) 383000