Impact Assessment

Devon County Council

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

Service: Communities

Head of Service: Simon Kitchen

Version / date of sign off by Head of Service: 30/03/2023

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 current route 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 online.

2. Reason for change / review

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

Three of the four vans used to run the mobile library service are 15 years old, and the other is around nine. Collectively, they spent about 670 hours off the road last year, with 45% due to van issues. 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 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.

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

The service has seen a large decline in active users, visits and physical loans in the past 10 years. The pandemic did have an effect on 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%.

3. Aims / objectives, limitations and options going forwards (summary)
The mobile libraries primarily serve older and more vulnerable communities. The aim 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 will look 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.

Digital – The broad range of eBooks, audiobooks, digital magazines and digital newspapers has become very popular in recent years – available 24 hours a day.

Good Neighbours - Membership for friends, neighbours and family wishing to choose and deliver books to people not able to get to the library.

Home Library Service – Delivers books to vulnerable and isolated customers who are unable to get to the library because of health, mobility, or caring responsibilities. Dedicated volunteers choose and deliver books, including large print and audiobooks, free of charge and often have time to chat.

It is recognised that there could be limitations to these services and may not be the best option for all; therefore, Devon County Council will be seeking the views of the service users to gain further insight into other alternatives that they would like to see.

Devon County Council is also aware of community run libraries across the County in community halls and public spaces which are not supported by DCC. These provide access to small stocks of books and other material and maybe a preferred option to some.

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+.

Devon's Library Users by Age
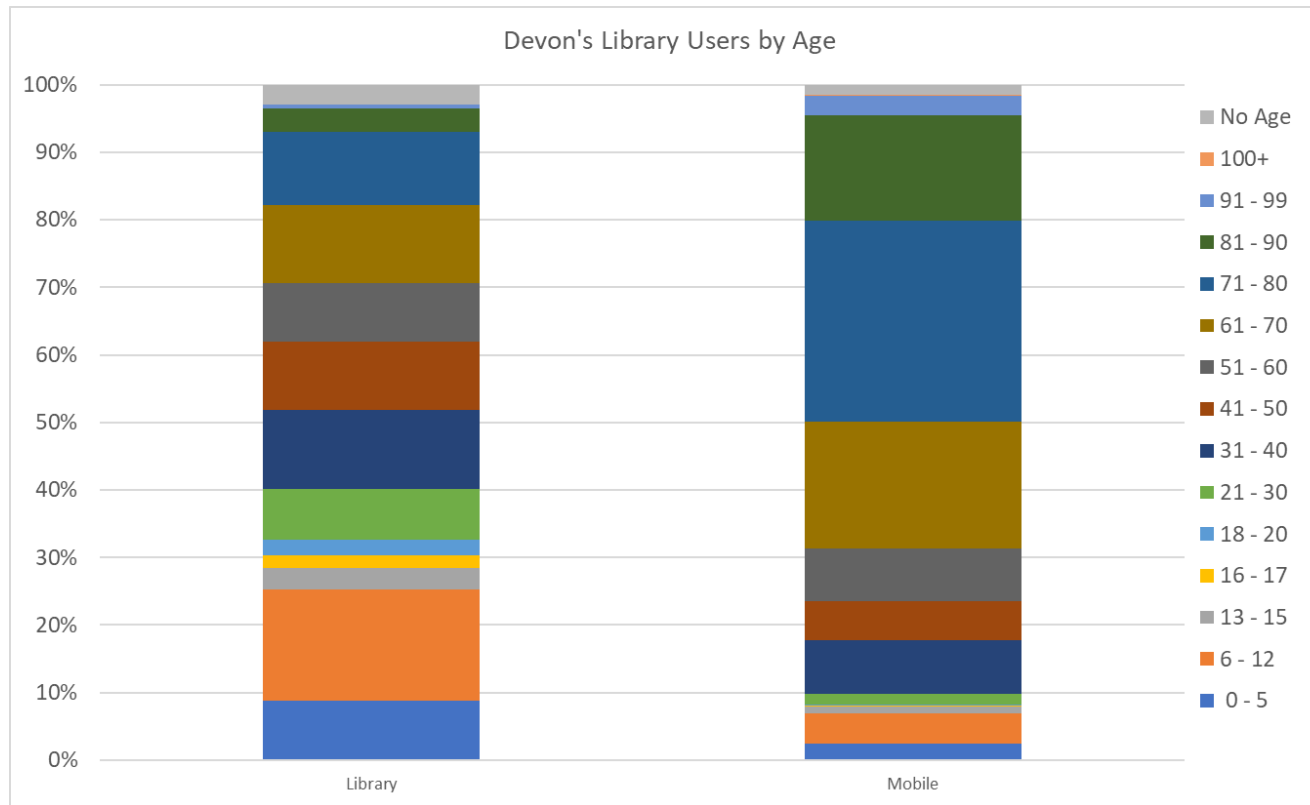
Gender – This graph shows the gender (where disclosed) of active users of the Mobile Libraries. There is generally lower than average use by males and higher than average females. Tiverton Mobile in particular has 70% of its customers that identify as female compared to an average of libraries in Devon of 57%.
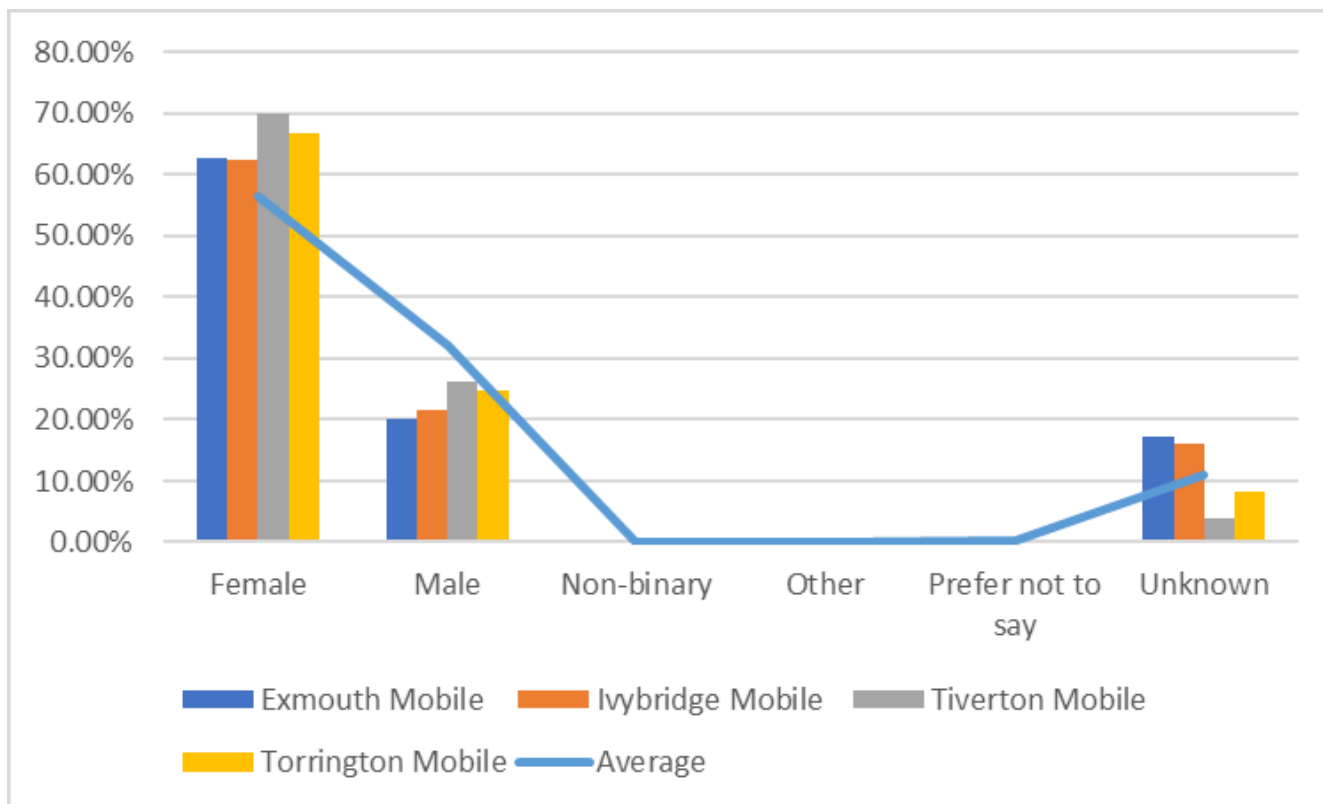
Ethnicity – There is very limited data collection regarding ethnicity for Mobile Library customers. Across the four libraries the average non-completed data is 98.2% of customers. Of those where ethnicity has been recorded, 98.88% identify as white.

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 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 Torridge 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 on the basis of: the minimum being those who's data (age, gender, postcode) did cross-reference, but obviously not all customers will have provided their age, gender and postcode; the reasonable approximation being based on the proportion of those who had provided all three pieces of data and then cross referenced; the highest being all those that didn't provide their age, gender or postcode being counted as having a second library card and added to those that 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)](#)

6. Description of consultation process and outcomes

Any proposed changes require statutory consultation. This will take place for 8 weeks, finishing on the 26th of May and primarily directed at mobile library users.

This target group will be informed directly by email if available, and advertisement in the mobile and static libraries. The consultation will be on the DCC Have Your Say site with a link to an online questionnaire. Paper and large print copies will be in the mobile and static libraries. Mobile libraries will complete their timetabled route twice in this time, providing sufficient time for users to be notified on the consultation and provide feedback.

The aim of this consultation is to ask service users to help us find ways to ensure that they can continue to have access to library serviced in the future.

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: • 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? In what way do you consider any negative consequences to be reasonable and proportionate in order to achieve a legitimate aim? Are you complying with the DCC Equality Policy?

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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.	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. Good Neighbours and the Home Library Service will be offered as an alternative.
Age	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. Mobile libraries have and do stop at local primary schools. Data from 2022 shows some of these stops are considerably more popular than town/village locations.	It cannot be presumed than 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. 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 who wish to access these services, digital sessions can take place to help

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		people learn how to use the library's borrowing apps. Mitigation through seeking a boost the Home Library Service which will give access to a wider selection of books and large print and often have time to chat as well as the Good Neighbour offer to the immediate vicinity of the customer base Young people are users of mobile libraries and there is higher amount of interaction at a couple of these specific spots for primary age children. It is clear from the data that more young people are likely to be users of static local libraries.
Disability (incl. sensory, mobility, mental health, learning disability, neurodiversity, long term ill health) and carers of disabled people	The data available on disability impact for library users is very limited and not sufficiently evidence based in order to make firm extrapolations about impact. However, increasing the travel requirements to reach a library is likely to have a greater impact on those members of those communities with disabilities, particularly affecting their mobility,	Supporting vulnerable residents through the home visit service provided to those who have a physical or mental impairment which prevents 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 widely the home visit service in order for the full extent of the mitigation to be realised. Staff of Libraries Unlimited can have more targeted conversations with individuals known to them and signpost appropriately on a case by case basis to find an appropriate alternative.

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	if they then must travel further to access services.	
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	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.

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	a negative impact of removing a manageable library opportunity.	
Sexual orientation and marriage/civil partnership	Data not collected on this characteristic. Cannot identify if there are any positive or negative impacts.	No specific mitigation.
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	The four mobiles cover a wide rural geographical area and does include some areas of deprivation (most notably North Devon and Torridge). 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.	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.

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.

Members of the community who may struggle to access static libraries have other alternatives like the Home Library Service and Good neighbour programme to aid them in still having access to the same resources they did with mobile libraries.

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 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 will be 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 but all who use the current service will still have the ability to have access to the resources of a library.

14. How will impacts and actions be monitored?

Captured through consultation and iteration of this document.