

## Update on Libraries in Devon

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

### 1. Introduction

In 2016 the Council transferred the delivery of its library services to the newly formed mutual organisation Libraries Unlimited. The contract term is 5 years with an optional additional 5 years. We are currently in year 4 of the first 5-year period.

The Council's commitment to libraries, reflected in ongoing annual funding of around £6.4M, remains significant and at odds with library closures and substantial reductions seen in other parts of the country. The Council's 50 libraries across the County and 4 mobile library routes and approximately 450 stops continue to be delivered by paid staff. The Council remains committed to its shared six core purposes within Devon libraries:

- 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.

Since 2016, alongside core library delivery, a programme of divestment has been managed transferring many aspects of the infrastructure supporting the services to Libraries Unlimited. Responsibilities for HR, finance and buildings have been completed and the final elements of the extensive ICT infrastructure is scheduled to be completed by December 2019.

Libraries Unlimited have already delivered savings of £1.5 million for the Council immediately before and post divestment with a further £300,000 of reductions targeted over the next two years in line with the Council's wider financial pressures. To date savings have been achieved through Libraries Unlimited's ability to source alternative funding, and to trial new and innovative library services. In April 2018 Libraries Unlimited secured the contract to deliver Library Services in Torbay and became a National Portfolio Organisation with funding from Arts Council England.

Nationally, libraries continue to face significant challenges, not only to funding but with wider pressures and gaps in services as a result of austerity. Alongside this, libraries are having to consider and react to rapid digital developments, a drop-in footfall to high streets, and continually changing and evolving behaviours and demands from the general public.

The Council and Libraries Unlimited are committed to working closely together over the next year to develop a clear local and strategic understanding of these challenges and to develop responses and opportunities to ensure a vibrant and sustainable library offer for Devon, for the future.

### 2. Key Updates

As part of the regular commissioning arrangements, officers help to determine the Council's commissioning priorities which in turn informs the annual service plan produced by Libraries Unlimited. This year the Council has determined 3 overarching priorities:

- **Communities** – co-producing library services with local people ensuring maximum impact and involvement
- **Digital** – increasing digital access to services

- **Data** – improving insight and intelligence on how libraries are currently used and could potentially be used to inform service developments, cost effectiveness and increased access to services.

### **Service Development**

- We plan to trial a pop-up library to enhance the library opportunities for rural communities.
- Extend the provision of the Home Library and Good Neighbour schemes for people.
- Reviewing the Resource Fund

**Summer Reading Challenge** - The annual reading challenge is an important opportunity for young readers to enjoy books over the summer holidays as this is a period when many primary aged children drop back significantly in their literacy levels. Many children who take part will be entering a library for the first time. We are awaiting the results, but by the end of week 6 results showed:

- Children starting the Challenge: 12,163
- Children who have completed the Challenge: 3,732

Children will be able to complete the Challenge until Saturday 14th September, but at the same stage last year:

- Children who started the Challenge: 11,162
- Children who completed the Challenge (FINAL): 6,667
- At the end of week 6 last year 3,045 children had completed the Challenge

Therefore, with a couple of weeks still to go there has been a 9% increase on last year for the number of children participating, and results are on track to substantially increase the number of children completing the Challenge too.

Final figures will be available during the first week of October.

**Library buildings** - There continue to be a range of plans for Library Buildings refurbishment and development. Specific refurbishments are planned for the coming year at Axminster, Teignmouth and Kingsteignton. Work is ongoing through the libraries capital programme and there is additional fundraising support from friends' groups and other external funding opportunities.

In addition, the Council is working on proposals to co-locate the Library and LearnDevon in Bideford to create an information and learning Hub for the Town that will provide access to all the regular Library services alongside the extensive learning opportunities delivered by LearnDevon in the town.

**ICT** - Devon libraries information and communications technology (ICT) transition (from previous hosted DCC arrangements) is in its final stage. Over the coming months each of the libraries will be migrated to the new Libraries Unlimited ICT infrastructure. Each library will receive replacement desktops and public access pc's and connect to a new network. The public access pc's will also receive updated operating systems and newer versions of the internet browser which should go some way to improving speeds and reliability for users as well as increased levels of on-line security. The rollout is scheduled for completion in November and disruption at libraries will be minimised.

The replacement Library Management system is in place and whilst there were some initial issues, after some closer working with the system provider these have been resolved.

### **3. Performance Reporting**

When the contract was let, a set of KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) were set out and progress monitored on a quarterly basis though contract monitoring meetings between the commissioners and Libraries Unlimited.

Commissioners are now working towards an updated and richer set of performance metrics in order to better understand the ways libraries are being used today, through a new Performance Dataset. This will utilise the enhanced information available from the new Libraries Management System in addition to the current KPI data below.

By developing this new set of data, we aim to provide more detail on the performance and operation of individual libraries and understand more about the demographics of current and future library users. The Council is committed to having as much of the information as publicly accessible as possible through the use of open data and to enable better understanding and scrutiny of both the Council and Libraries Unlimited as the deliverer of services. The current draft of these proposed new datasets is available in Appendix A.

The current KPI data available is below.

Purpose	Indicator	2018/19	2017/18	Change
Offering a welcoming space to meet, socialise, learn, read and enjoy new experiences	Visits	2,577,791	2,743,157	-6.03%
Offering a welcoming space to meet, socialise, learn, read and enjoy new experiences	Active users	134,427	136,710	-1.67%
Promoting and encouraging a love of reading	Stock issues	2,469,482	2,655,430	-7.00%
Guiding and supporting people to explore and connect to the wider world	Computer and Wi-Fi hours	515,133	521,206	-1.17%
Inspiring people of all ages to learn, imagine, create, succeed and realise their potential	Events and activities	9,977	8,708	14.57%
Inspiring people of all ages to learn, imagine, create, succeed and realise their potential	Event attendance	182,730	137,981	32.43%
Inspiring people of all ages to learn, imagine, create, succeed and realise their potential	Volunteer hours	25,319	16,002.25	58.22%

- Overall, visits have fallen by 6% over the year compared to 2017/18.
- Exeter received 559,298 visits, down 2% on last year. Exeter accounts for 22% of visits to all libraries in Devon, with Barnstaple next at 8%. Overall our smallest libraries (Tier 5) are up 10% in visits. A significant contributor to this increase was at Topsham,

following the opening of its new building in July. Tier 5 libraries together account for only 7% of all visits.

- Active users are those who have interacted with a library service using their membership number within the last 12 months. Overall, active users were down by 2% at the end of the year compared to the end of the previous year. Again, Topsham has a significant increase of active users, growing by 49%.
- The figure for stock issues includes loans and renewals of physical stock items and digital downloads. The combined number of stock issues was down by 7% compared to last year. All areas of physical stock issue have seen a year-on-year decline. The most significant areas were in Adult Non-Fiction (down by 18%) and Adult Talking Books (down 16%).
- Digital downloads continue to increase. eBooks were up 25%, eMagazines 87% and eAudioBooks 58%. The eLibrary is second to Exeter library in terms of total number of issues, 205,036, for 2018/19. In the 1st quarter of 2019 eLibrary issues were up 71% on the same period last year.
- Combined hours for use of the public desktop computers and Wi-Fi were down by 1%. Use of public access PCs is down by 11% whilst Wi-Fi use is up by 5%. Wi-Fi usage was 335,321 hours last year, and PC usage 179,812 hours. Over 40% of the total Wi-Fi usage in Devon libraries occurs in Exeter Library.

#### **4. Libraries Unlimited Chief Executive**

In June this year a new Chief Executive was recruited to replace Ciara Eastell who left at Easter. Alex Kittow joined Libraries Unlimited from the Southmead Development Trust in Bristol, leading on a range of innovative and impactful delivery and community development projects. Alex is already working well with commissioners in line with the current service plan but has identified the planned ICT developments, the development of a new business plan, the continuing evolution of the culture and governance arrangements within Libraries Unlimited as being key priorities.

*“We are at an exciting time where we have proven the business model that a public service mutual works and brings in additional funding that creates significant added value. We now need to develop a longer-term business plan that continues to increase and diversify our impact and develop income streams that contribute to the core funding of library services as there is a significant risk that if funding remains static, or reduces further, painful choices may need to be considered. I am confident that with some agreements around the assets we can both plug the gap of continued small reductions in funding and increase the impact we make on individuals’ quality of life. I look forward to leading this charity and working with DCC as one of our partners to see libraries flourish for the good of our citizens”. Alex Kittow.*

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

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Nil

**Proposed performance and demand dataset**

<b>LIBRARY</b>	
Contracted opening hrs per week	Annual by library
Actual opening hours hrs per week	Quarterly by library
Unplanned closures in hours	Quarterly by library
Planned closures in hours	Quarterly by library
Library demographic breakdown for catchment	Quarterly by library
No. visits to the library	Quarterly by library
<b>Membership</b>	
No. Active members - 0-6mths	Requires system/policy changes
No Active members - 6-12mths	Requires system/policy changes
No. New members	Quarterly by library
No. dormant members 12+mths	Quarterly by library dependent on LMS
No. Archived members 24+ mths	Quarterly by library dependent on LMS
<b>RESOURCES</b>	
Stock Issues, Total (per library)	Quarterly by library
Stock Issues, Children Fiction (per library)	Quarterly by library
Stock Issues, Children Non Fiction (per library)	Quarterly by library
Stock Issues, Other (CDs, DVDs etc)	Quarterly by library
Stock Issues, digital library (eBooks, eMagazines and eAudiobook)	Quarterly by library

<b>PUBLIC ACCESS PC's \ WIFI</b>	
Number of public access pc's	Quarterly by library
Number of available public access pc's hrs per week	Quarterly by library
Public Access used No. of hours per week	Quarterly by library
Public access pc's utilisation %	Quarterly by library
No of public access sessions	Quarterly by library
Wifi session hours	Quarterly by library
<b>VOLUNTEERING</b>	
Number of operational service volunteer hrs	Quarterly by library
Number of friends/fundraising group hrs	Quarterly by library
<b>FINANCIAL .</b>	Under construction - a set of financial measures to gain a better understanding of the costs relating to the library network
Fees-Charges outstanding	Quarterly by library
Fees-Charges collected	Quarterly by library
<b>MOBILE LIBRARIES</b>	
Number of mobile library users	Quarterly by mobile library
Number of scheduled stops	Quarterly total
Number of stock issues per stop	Quarterly by stop
Number of user visits per stop	Quarterly by stop