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Rural library services in England: exploring recent changes and possible futures

Report to DEFRA and Arts Council England

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Executive Summary

In recent years, public library services have undergone – and continue to undergo – a huge amount of change. That change has been felt across library services, but due to their limited size and lower footfall, rural libraries have been placed under particular pressure and have gone through some of the most radical changes in the way they are operated.

Commissioned by Defra and Arts Council England. Following the 2013 reports *Envisioning the Library of the Future* and *Community libraries: Learning from Experience*¹, this research explores what the experience has been – and could be in future – for rural libraries specifically.

The research comprised:

- A rapid evidence assessment (REA), which reviewed 30 of the most recent documents relevant to rural libraries in England.
- Initial scoping interviews with library service officers and other local stakeholders
- A programme of eight workshops – one in each of the case study areas – to explore the nature of local service changes, the challenges and opportunities those changes had resulted in, and the learning their local experience had generated.
- Draw-down days for each case study area to help them explore and test out new approaches in their area.

A final workshop took place at the Library of Birmingham, bringing together participants from across the case study sites to share their ideas and experiences.

Whilst many of the trends impacting on rural libraries are also evident more widely in library services, they are also specific challenges – and opportunities – based on their rurality.

- Rural areas necessarily have smaller and less dense populations. This is important because it means that rural libraries have less potential to generate high footfall, compared to their urban counterparts. This in turn limits the level of investment and support that rural libraries receive in an era of constrained resources.
- Not only are rural populations smaller, they are also older, with the ageing population more exaggerated in rural areas.
- The rural context is also different because of the relative scarcity of services and facilities, compared to urban areas, and by implication, the greater distance residents will need to travel to reach services elsewhere.
- Nationally, access to broadband continues to improve, but it is rural communities which are more likely to currently experience a limited service. Ofcom research published in May 2013 estimated that whilst standard broadband was available to 95% of households in England, that figure was 80% in rural areas.
- Rates of civic participation are higher in rural areas. Efforts to involve local people in shaping and delivering local services and activities may therefore have a greater likelihood of success.

The precise nature and extent of recent changes varies across our case study sample, but there are common themes. The marked increase in community involvement in the running of rural libraries is clearly a headline change witnessed in the last three to four years. Around 300 community libraries are known to exist in England at present. Some of these are truly independent of their local authorities, with book stock and support systems entirely self-sourced, although these only account for around 5% of the total. The vast majority can be categorised as either community-managed or community-supported, with access to varying degrees of

¹ Community Libraries - Learning from Experience: Guiding Principles for Local Authorities, 2013, ACE and LGA; Envisioning the Library of the Future, 2012-13, ACE

Where communities have become more directly involved in supporting or managing their rural libraries, they *can* evolve into more effective, positive and well-used venues than their predecessors.

continuing council support – usually including advice and expertise, and retaining connectivity to the library management system and book stock.

That commitment to support community libraries has frequently been resource-intensive for councils.

Community activity has usually (though not always) been forged in reaction to the threat of losing a library building. Across our case study areas we saw how challenges related to that backstory persist, but we also saw many more examples of good, productive relationships emerging between councils and community groups. Moreover, the most proactive groups have gone beyond ‘saving’ their libraries, and are extending the functions of those buildings / services and expanding the role that they play in their communities. These innovations are inspired by a need to generate income, a desire to establish their library at the heart of the community and, often, a combination of both.

In considering the potential future roles for rural libraries, stakeholder workshops in the case study areas highlighted several main themes. These discussions emphasised the need to recognise and invest in the wider socio-economic impacts of library services – from building social networks in communities to improving education, employment and health outcomes. Workshop participants reflected that the most successful, sustainable rural libraries will contribute to a wide range of local outcomes and, in so doing, should be well-positioned to attract

resources and generate income from an equally wide range of sources (e.g. from public health, adult education and employment support). This will demand better capturing of data on the usage and benefits of libraries beyond traditional measures such as book issues – which workshop participants agreed underestimated the value of role their libraries played.

One of the positive messages from this research is that through the efforts of committed library staff and community groups, many rural libraries are already expanding their functions, raising their profile and increasing their value to local populations. Across our case study sample, we saw examples of how the skills, energy and creativity of some individuals – paid staff and volunteers – are taking rural libraries in new directions, with more diverse offers and an increased sense of ownership by local residents.

Where next?

In rural communities, we believe it will be more prudent to co-design library services with other services to secure economies of scope, rather than looking to economies of scale.² This would help to generate incentives rather than disincentives towards seeing library service changes as part of service transformation in the round. This reflects the fact that there are fewer services and facilities in rural areas than in towns and cities, and that rural libraries therefore have the potential to serve very different – and widely varying – functions in their communities. This could involve supporting social interaction and building social capital, supporting education, employment and enterprise, and forging mutually beneficial relationships with existing venues and facilities such as parish councils, village halls, shops and post-offices. These are developments we are already seeing in our case study areas.

Where communities have become more directly involved in supporting or managing their rural libraries, they *can* evolve into more effective, positive and well-used venues than their predecessors. This can involve the nurturing of a

² See Glossary for explanation of economies of scale and economies of scope

library's role in supporting social interaction, strengthening community ties, hosting events and activities to appeal to a wider range of people and creating space for clubs and societies to flourish.

In other cases, however, library friends groups might save a branch but bring with them very limited perceptions about what that facility will offer. As such, library service managers are sometimes concerned about the inability of some of their community libraries to live up to what should be expected of a local library from the point of view of standards / consistency of service and inclusivity.

Digital technology is helping to overcome some of the challenges of physical access to library services experienced by rural dwellers, and may demand investment to facilitate innovation. We will need more creative ways to either get individuals to library services or vice versa in future – and creative ways to sustain

those approaches. Where people living in rural communities are isolated (through income, infirmity or geographical remoteness), the provision of good quality library services will sometimes require more than a digital response. More innovative use of mobile services – in conjunction with static libraries or other venues (schools, village halls etc.) is an area that needs to be explored.

The level and nature of support provided to rural libraries in future will depend on the outcomes those services and venues are able to contribute to. These may be far-removed from the traditional function of a library, yet hugely valuable to a community (and to public agencies seeking to reduce demand on their services). Local authorities need to think strategically about how rural library assets (buildings, people, volunteers, trust capital) can support delivery of other services, and seek to establish more robust outcome measures that reflect that.

1. Introduction

Background to the research

9.3 million people live in England's rural communities, amounting to 17.6% of the population. The provision of public library services in those communities varies widely and, in the last three years, has undergone significant change. That change is being driven partly by new trends in technology and society, and also, more controversially, by the need for local authorities to make savings on an unprecedented scale.

Commissioned by Defra and Arts Council England following the 2013 reports *Envisioning the Library of the Future* and *Community libraries: Learning from Experience*³, this research explores what the experience has been – and could be in future – for rural libraries specifically. In particular, this work aims to help understand, add to existing knowledge, and provide learning points on the following:

- the issues, challenges and opportunities for rural areas arising from changes to library services;
- good practice and shared learning on how to shape library services in rural areas to meet local need;
- the possible future role of statutory and non-statutory libraries in rural areas in the light of the *Envisioning the library of the future* research project undertaken by the Arts Council in 2012/13.⁴

Envisioning the Library of the Future highlighted eight core themes.⁵ These were themes which workshop participants defined themselves, through the 'open space' workshop format:

- Funding, volunteers and partnerships
- Digital society and e-books
- Children, young people and literacy
- Communicating the brand, the core offer and national consistency
- Building new audiences, new users, and using data
- Social purpose and making the political case
- Libraries and rural communities
- Skills, leadership and innovation.

These all have relevance to rural settings, and resonate with both the changes that some rural library services have been experiencing and the challenges they continue to face. The focus of this work has been to look at these themes through a specifically rural lens, and to consider whether and how a rural context alters the nature of the challenges and potential responses.

Methodology

Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA)

The purpose of this initial study was to capture key messages from recent and relevant documents, in order to inform our awareness and understanding of lines of enquiry to be pursued through the research that followed. As such, it did not set out to consider the full range of arguments, ideas and possibilities relating to library services in rural areas, but rather to summarise recent evidence as it has been presented to date.

³ Community Libraries - Learning from Experience: Guiding Principles for Local Authorities, 2013, ACE and LGA

⁴ www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/supporting-libraries/library-of-the-future

⁵ Envisioning the library of the future: Phase 1 and 2 full report, Arts Council England, 2013

17.6%

The percentage of England's population living in rural areas.

The REA reviewed thirty documents. In all but two cases, they are UK-focused and all but five were published since 2010. This short review drew together messages from those documents under five key lines of inquiry: the opportunities for library services in rural areas; the challenges and issues facing library services in rural areas and the barriers to the further development and the sustainability of initiatives in rural areas; what new and alternative models are most suitable to rural areas; and the impact of change upon rural communities and stakeholders perceptions about the future direction of their libraries.

Whilst not all of these documents are specifically rural-focused, most referenced rural areas or rural issues within wider bodies of material.

Selection of eight case study areas

A long list of local authorities – all covering rural populations – was invited to take part in the research. A sample of eight was then selected from those willing to participate:

- Buckinghamshire
- Cumbria
- Devon
- North Yorkshire
- Suffolk
- Surrey
- Wakefield
- Warwickshire

The research team is very grateful to the library service staff, volunteers and other stakeholders who supported our work in these areas and attended our workshop events. The eight represent a range of areas in terms of:

- Geography

- Rural typology (the types of rural communities they comprise)
- Local issues and challenges
- Library service models being applied
- The extent to which services have experienced change in the last 2-3 years

Round One workshops

Some initial scoping interviews with library service officers and other local stakeholders enabled us to shape a programme of workshops – one in each of the eight areas – to explore the nature of service changes in those areas, the challenges and opportunities those changes had resulted in, and the learning their local experience had generated. The workshops varied in size and scale, depending on the specific issues being focused on (sometimes tightly defined, sometimes more wide-ranging). In most cases where community groups were involved in supporting rural libraries in some way, members of those groups took part in the workshops, as did representatives of other local organisations, such as business forums and social enterprises.

There is a major role for rural library services as places which utilise, unlock and build social capital.

Draw-down support for areas

Following the first round workshops, case study areas were able to draw-down up to two days of support from the project to help them explore and test out new approaches in their area. This included undertaking additional research and facilitating further workshop sessions on specific themes.

- Devon: a workshop was arranged to engage with community organisations to provide input, ideas and challenge as the county's Library Strategy was taking

shape. This focused in particular on community transport and new uses for digital. A second workshop focused on community capacity building in relation to libraries.

- Suffolk: additional research gathered UK and international examples of activity to engage young people in libraries. This was presented at a Suffolk Libraries Board meeting as the basis for a discussion about potential local action to raise youth participation in library services.
- Wakefield: additional research gathered good practice about consultation, particularly in relation to consulting on mobile library routes.
- Warwickshire: additional research explored the importance of understanding, monitoring and demonstrating the social impact of rural libraries beyond core service delivery metrics.

Round Two workshop

A final workshop took place at the Library of Birmingham, bringing together participants from across the case study sites to share their learning and their ideas. The themes explored in this workshop were based on the discussions at the eight local workshops, and asked participants to reflect on their experiences of:

- Undertaking consultation and engagement
- Growing volunteering and helping staff and volunteers to work well together
- Linking up with other organisations (public or private) to run or host rural library services, or to share a building
- Generating income
- Serving very remote / sparsely populated communities
- During the second part of the event, again based on the core themes that had emerged during the research in the eight areas, participants were asked to focus on the following aspects of potential futures for rural libraries:



One of Suffolk's mobile libraries

- How libraries can help to tackle rural isolation
- How library services can reach out into rural communities – physically or virtually
- How libraries can support rural economies and enterprise
- How we can involve (and benefit) more young people in rural libraries
- How we can get the right balance between locally-driven variety in what rural libraries offer, and consistency across a council area
- How libraries can get recognition (and funding) for broader social and economic impacts

This report

- This report pulls together the main messages that have emerged through the

research. Rather than repeat earlier work, it aims to focus on the rural-specific nature of service changes, and the results of those changes which are particular to – or at least more pronounced in – rural communities. Likewise when it discusses the potential futures for libraries as highlighted at our workshop events, it is with the rural dimension in mind. Finally, that focus is re-emphasised in the concluding section, which makes the case that rural library services are and will be increasingly different to their urban counterparts, and that regarding them as such can provide positive routes to sustaining them into the future.

- Section 2 sets the scene, exploring what makes the rural context different – (throughout the course of the project, the Steering Group has continued to emphasise the need for this work to remain ‘rural-specific’)
- Section 3 describes the main service changes in case study areas in the last two to three years, and Section 4 sets out the impacts that workshop participants felt those changes were having in their areas.
- Section 4, outlines the main learning , as highlighted in the workshops – including lessons about public engagement, development of volunteering and routes to income generation.
- Section 5 explores stakeholders’ views on the potential future roles for rural libraries.
- Section 6 presents a series of conclusions from the research team and proposes some ways forward.
- Limitations of the approach

Our response to the brief outlined a research project built on qualitative data in eight local authority areas. The views and experiences discussed in this report, therefore, were generated primarily through stakeholder discussions at a series of workshops (eight in the case study areas and one national event). In order to understand the scale and relative importance of the challenges, opportunities

and potential ways forward, further quantitative work would be needed. This could usefully include a large-scale survey of service heads, library staff, volunteers and local service users.

The views and experiences discussed in this report were generated primarily through stakeholder discussions at a series of workshops held in eight local authority areas

2. What makes rural areas different and what challenges and opportunities does this present for rural libraries?

Many of the trends impacting on rural libraries are also evident more widely in library services. The experience of decreasing footfall and declining book issues, for instance, are trends that can be observed nationwide in different settings. In recent years, CIPFA⁶ has reported declining library usage in England year on year. In the 12 months to March 2013, there were 238.9m visits to libraries in England – a fall of 6.7% on the previous year, and down from 279.7m visits five years ago. Research by the Carnegie UK Trust found that there was little difference in UK residents' likelihood of using libraries based on whether they were urban or rural dwellers.⁷

Similarly, constrained local authority finances are impacting on library services budgets in urban and rural areas. Earlier in the year, the Government confirmed that total spending in 2015/16, 2016/17

and 2017/18 will continue to fall in real terms at the same rate as during the Spending Review 2010. The LGA reports that local government currently faces a funding gap of around £15 billion in 2019-20.⁸ CIPFA statistics suggest a 12.3% reduction in net expenditure on libraries between 2009/10 and 2012/13.

There are some forces, drivers and trends which are more evident and more acutely felt in rural areas, however, and these are the focus of this study.

2.1 Population size and density

Rural areas necessarily have smaller and less dense populations. This is important because it means that rural libraries have less potential to generate high footfall, compared to their urban counterparts.

This in turn limits the level of investment and support that rural libraries receive in an era of constrained resources.

Challenges and opportunities

Many urban libraries have been maintained, extended and improved in recent years, even as public sector budget cuts have impacted on aspects of those services. This is evident in high profile city centre libraries (such as Birmingham), which are in many cases being reinvented as media and cultural centres, through to more limited examples of the same process in the main population centres of counties like Devon. In library services as in many other service areas, historic norms of distributing resources across many physical assets are being reconsidered, with a preference for 'fewer larger sites'. This is evident in the concentration and improvement at major facilities whilst financial support is withdrawn from smaller, more limited facilities.

Other challenges clearly flow from local authority budget reductions, necessitating the development of plans for service reconfiguration. At present, when that directly impacts rural libraries, it usually

6 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy

7 A new chapter: public library services in the 21st century, Carnegie UK trust, 2012

8 Overview of the LGA's Spending Round Submission, LGA, April 2013

14%

The percentage of rural dwellers aged 16 to 29 – compared to 20% in urban areas.

means community organisations hosting and/or co-delivering library services as part of another facility or set of activities.

2.2 The pace of demographic change

Not only are rural populations smaller, they are also different in their demographic shape, with a higher proportion of older people. Whilst an ageing population is a nationwide trend, it is more exaggerated in rural areas, where the outward migration of young people compounds the issue. Statistics from 2010 indicate that the most marked difference between rural and urban populations is at the 16 to 29 age group – which makes up just 14% of the rural population, compared to 20% in urban areas. At a more detailed level settlements in sparse areas tend to have the highest proportions of their populations amongst the older age groups.⁹

Challenges and opportunities

This more rapid ageing of rural communities compounds resourcing challenges for public services, and as the *Envisioning the Library of the Future* report identifies, may lead constrained public resources to be concentrated on services which help address those pressures most effectively. This may result in other services (such as libraries) being seen as a lower funding priority by comparison.¹⁰

There are opportunities, however, if rural libraries are able to establish and articulate their role in helping to improve outcomes (and reduce demand in other parts of the system) – particularly, though by no means exclusively, for older people. For instance, if a local library is able to support efforts to improve the health or to reduce isolation and loneliness of older residents, they should be the beneficiaries of investment to achieve those outcomes.

There will be opportunities to address issues affecting other sections of local populations as well. Where ‘technology poverty’ is identified as an issue undermining children’s access to learning in rural schools, young people’s access to jobs or small business growth, for instance, local libraries in those areas could work with schools, education and training providers as well as business forums to support those agendas.

In the context of increasing expectations of community involvement in rural libraries, an older demographic could also be seen as an opportunity in terms of its ability to commit time and energy to sustain aspects of a local library service. Across our case study areas, retired people were disproportionately represented amongst the friends and community groups which had developed to support their libraries. As stakeholders told us, however, this can itself raise challenges if it means a relatively narrow profile of individuals planning and running services which should appeal to and engage a much wider range of local people. It could also impact the extent to which rural libraries are able / willing to engage with the digital agenda in future.

2.3 Lower presence of services and facilities

The rural context is also different because of the relative scarcity of services and facilities and, by implication, the greater distance residents will need to travel to reach services elsewhere. In urban areas, a library is more likely to sit alongside other public and private sector venues with their own range of facilities – secondary schools, further education and higher education colleges; leisure centres; theatres and cinemas; medical centres;

⁹ Statistical digest of rural England, 2012, p9

10 Envisioning the Library of the Future, 2012/13, Arts Council England, p17-18

council offices; community buildings; and commercial premises such as shops and offices. Rural areas, by contrast, have far fewer public buildings and private enterprises.

An Opening Hours Review in Northern Ireland, part of a 2012 Rural Impact Assessment, reported that the costs associated with public transport and the fact that public transport routes and timetables often make it impossible for those without access to a car to access the next nearest library, especially in the evenings.¹¹

Challenges and opportunities

This mix of local public service infrastructure and transport may present challenges for rural library services in terms of more limited scope for co-location of services with other organisations – simply because there are likely to be fewer locally-based organisations to cooperate with and fewer appropriate buildings to share.

However, that relative scarcity of other services and facilities can also present significant opportunities, as it expands the range of useful (and even essential) functions that a rural library can aspire to provide, thereby aiding its sustainability. This could see rural libraries becoming more wide-ranging in their scope than is common among their urban counterparts, reflecting the wider service gaps in rural areas. Public health, adult education and employment support services are amongst those often keen to deliver their work in community settings – and who may be interested in rural libraries as prospective venues.

2.4 Broadband coverage

Nationally, access to broadband continues to improve, but it is rural communities which are more likely to currently experience a limited service.

Broadband Delivery UK is continuing to make significant progress in the roll out of superfast broadband as part of the Government's aim for 95 per cent of UK premises to have access to a

superfast service by 2017. Ofcom research published in May 2013 estimated that whilst standard broadband was available to 95% of households in England, that figure was 80% in rural areas, meaning that one in five rural households are unable to access standard broadband. The difference in urban and rural provision is more marked in relation to superfast broadband: 71% have access in urban areas, compared to 19 % in rural areas.

Ofcom research shows that average speeds in rural areas are increasing at a faster rate than elsewhere (by 69% since May 2012 and 141% since May 2011), but that the gap between average download speeds in urban and rural areas has nonetheless widened from 9.5Mbit/s in May 2011 to 16.5Mbit/s in May 2013. This, Ofcom reports, is due to the lower availability of superfast broadband services in rural areas compared to urban areas, and because ADSL broadband speeds are also generally slower in rural areas due to the average line between the home and the nearest telephone exchange being longer than in urban areas. While the gap between average urban and rural speeds is likely to widen in the short term, Ofcom expects that it will begin to decline over time, as the availability of superfast broadband increases in rural areas.

Challenges and opportunities

As highlighted by the *Envisioning* report, this means that the digital technology which is generating new approaches to service improvement and cost effectiveness in library provision may not be universally available to rural service users.¹² This may put a brake on developing digitally-driven approaches to delivering library services which may be more cost effective, responsive and fit for purpose in the modern context.

An opportunity comes where a static or mobile library is able to provide a better online experience than is otherwise available in a local area, as this may enable the library to perform a valuable role as a network hub for local people – home workers who rely on fast internet access, for instance, or in

¹¹ Opening Hours Review – Rural Impact Assessment, 2012, Libraries Northern Ireland

¹² Envisioning the Library of the Future, 2012/13, Arts Council England

54%

The rate of civic engagement in rural England, compared to 45% in urban areas

the evenings for young people who want to be online for study or socialising. Equally, there may be merit in exploring the potential for ‘whitespace’ trials, following the work led by rural libraries in the United States, to test alternative approaches to conventional next-generation broadband roll-out and installation.¹³

2.5 A culture of civic participation

Rural residents by no means have the monopoly on being active in the lives of their communities – many urban areas can boast a wealth of citizen-led activity. It is true, however, that by most measures, a culture of volunteering and non-state activity is comparatively more evident in rural areas.¹⁴

- There are higher numbers of voluntary organisations per head of population in rural than in urban England;
- There are higher rates of civic engagement in rural England (with 54% of rural residents participating socially, attending events or helping out) compared to urban England (where 45% of urban residents participate);
- Of the 10,000 plus village halls in rural England, 90% are charities run by local volunteer trustees;
- There are c.9,000 parish and town councils in (mostly rural) England, served by 80,000 plus volunteer elected councillors. Whilst

not wholly confined to rural communities, these neighbourhood-level councils are predominantly in rural and semi-rural areas.

Challenges and opportunities

With so many local authorities reducing their spending on libraries, the pressure is on rural communities in particular to come forward and maintain those services themselves, to varying extents. That so many rural communities already have a culture of involvement and collaboration is clearly valuable in enabling them to meet those new challenges in relation to libraries.

There is a danger that, particularly in relatively small communities, increasing demands on the resources and good will of individuals may not always be met. If libraries become more reliant on volunteer effort, will there be enough volunteers to go round? The picture will vary from place to place, but the message from our eight case study areas was that insufficient numbers of volunteers was generally not a problem they had faced – in fact community-supported libraries sometimes found themselves with more volunteers than there were shifts to be worked or jobs to be done.



Children’s drumming session at a library in Suffolk

¹³ ‘Whitespace’ refers to underutilized portions of the radio frequency spectrum. These can be used to accommodate wifi, and as such, offer new approaches to securing rural connectivity. See www.giglibraries.net

¹⁴ The Rural Big Society, 2011, Respublica / The Commission for Rural Communities

If libraries become more reliant on volunteer effort, will there be enough volunteers to go round? The picture will vary from place to place, but the message from our eight case study areas was that insufficient numbers of volunteers was generally not a problem they had faced

Within our eight areas, however, there were some libraries originally identified for transfer to communities where groups had not been willing / able to maintain a library. Where councils had committed not to make closures, those libraries remained within the council service whilst other solutions were explored. When that scenario was faced in some other areas, libraries which could not garner local volunteer effort to sustain them closed.

Also variable from library to library is the profile of that volunteer effort. Across our eight case study sites, we heard about the way in which young residents, lower income residents and those seeking to gain confidence or skills for paid work were active in library volunteering. Nonetheless, it was evident that the majority of volunteers engaged in community-supported libraries in our case study areas were retired people. In some cases, both officers and other volunteers were concerned about the direction of travel in specific library branches where that ‘culture of civic participation’ appeared narrow and even ‘cliquey’, making it difficult to encourage others to join in – and ultimately impacting on those libraries’ ability to serve a wider community and broaden the libraries’ role.

Moreover, even if people are willing to support the running of local library service, and even if that group of supporters reflect the local population, ‘in

principle’ challenges will persist. For instance, where a town or parish council takes on a funding role, residents may claim they are being unfairly burdened with a ‘double taxation’ – paying towards the library service through their council tax and paying additionally for their own branch through their town/parish council precept.

It is clear that rural libraries face specific challenges and opportunities which are distinct from those in urban areas, or at least more pronounced. The research in our eight case study areas went on to explore how recent changes to library services reflected those challenges and opportunities, or sought to respond to them.

3. Recent changes to rural library services in our eight case study areas

The need for local authorities to make cost savings has been by far the biggest driver for changes to rural library services in the last five years. As a consequence of that need for savings, changes to library services have been implemented – to a greater or lesser extent – in all our case study areas. This section looks at the main areas of change, including the reduction and rationalisation of mobile library services, reductions in paid staffing and opening hours in static library services, the growth of community libraries, and the co-location of libraries and other services.

3.1 Reduction and rationalisation in mobile library services

Reviews of mobile library services have resulted in:

- reductions in frequency and coverage of those services (e.g. from fortnightly to monthly visits or the removal of some stops where usage was lowest);
- reorganising of routes
- investment in better equipped / more flexible vehicles;
- the ceasing of some mobile services entirely;
- investment in technology-driven solutions.

In Cumbria, three mobile libraries serve 1,700 regular users of which circa 400 (just under a

quarter) exclusively use the mobile service. Approximately 220 stops are serviced for short periods every 4-6 weeks. In 2011, the mobile service was reduced from six vehicles to three, and mobile service overall has been reduced by 50% since 2010, primarily as a result of budget pressures.

In Surrey, where historically there have been few static libraries in rural areas, the library service was delivered through a mobile and a housebound service run by the Women's Royal Voluntary Service (WRVS) out of the county's static libraries. These included drop-offs at care homes. Following reductions over several years, most recently a review of the mobile service (by then costing £400,000 annually) saw it being withdrawn entirely. The service was replaced by free transport to the nearest static library for those who needed it, and home visits from a housebound service, using volunteers, or e-readers. The offer to people in care homes, meanwhile, is being considered and may reshape into something which encompasses 'reminiscence work', reflecting the different need of those in residential care.

In Wakefield, a public consultation about library services found that:

- awareness of what the mobile library service offered was relatively low
- those who were aware of the service valued it
- low-income groups benefit from the service because it allows them to avoid transport costs associated with accessing static libraries
- the service should seek to coordinate its stops with other social activities, e.g. school drop-off times.

Wakefield Council's plan for its newly-combined mobile and home library service was to move from a total of six staff – an administrative post, a home library service driver, one HGV vehicle and one slightly smaller mobile library, each of which had to be staffed by two people, running a total of 53 routes over three separate four-week cycles – to three staff operating two smaller hybrid (mobile and home library service combined) vehicles serving the same number of service users over 28

Wakefield's new, smaller mobile library vehicles are able to serve places that the older, larger vehicles could not reach, as well as providing internet access

routes on a simpler and more efficient three-weekly cycle. The new routes were partly expected to serve areas where static libraries had been closed.

To deliver the plan, the Council de-commissioned the two large vehicles that had previously been used to deliver the mobile library service – the vehicles were inappropriate for accessing rural communities with relatively narrow lanes and were reaching the end of their useful lives. To replace the two old vehicles, the Council bought a second-hand smaller vehicle from neighbouring Kirklees Council (for £13,000) to test the new way of working, and subsequently commissioned a bespoke vehicle with space for 800 books (for £56,000).

The new mobile libraries are configured so that stock can be removed from the vehicles more easily. This means stock can be taken into local venues or be accessed inside the vehicle. It also means that stock may be

removed in order to allow the mobile library to provide a small meeting space. The new vehicles also have Internet access and offer Wi-Fi. None of this was possible with the old vehicles.

The impact on different user groups of changes in the mobile and home library service was discussed at the Wakefield stakeholder workshop.

Participants reported that:

- the mobile library service is serving the same number of users (between 750 and 800) with one-third of the staff¹⁵ and with reduced running costs

¹⁵ At the time of workshop only two of the three posts in the combined mobile and home delivery service had been filled.

- combining the home library service with the mobile library service has helped reduce overall costs with no reduction in the quantity or quality of the service
- the new, smaller vehicles are able to serve places that the older, larger vehicles could not reach
- the new vehicles have internet access for users, potentially increasing users' ability to access information and services online
- the new vehicles are more flexible than their predecessors, including the ability to act as small meeting spaces if required.

3.2 Reductions in paid staffing and changes in opening hours in static library services

As discussed earlier in this report, smaller libraries have necessarily been more at risk of closure than larger, better equipped libraries, and this in turn has meant rural libraries being put at greater risk than those located in town centres. A series of impacts follow from this: it is in rural areas where communities have been asked to come forward to support the continuation of their local service; and so it is rural areas where volunteer effort has become more important in enabling some form of library service to continue. It could be argued that reductions in council staffing of libraries should not necessarily require volunteer effort to plug the gap – pursuit of community enterprise models could provide alternative options for sustaining those services¹⁶ – but local authorities have not taken this route to date. This is in spite of the existence of successful social and community enterprises in many rural areas.¹⁷

Across our eight case study areas, staff hours (including but not restricted to rural branches) had been reduced by the council since 2010. In Devon,

¹⁶ Examples include: Fresh Horizons in Huddersfield: <http://www.freshhorizons.org.uk/> Eco Communities in Lewisham: <http://eecocom.org.uk/> and Alt Valley Community Trust in Croxteth: <http://communiiversity.co.uk/> Further information about Enabling Enterprise in Libraries can be accessed via <http://locality.org.uk/news/enabling-enterprise-libraries-research-report/>

¹⁷ For further information, visit: <http://www.plunkett.co.uk/> and <http://www.locality.org.uk/>

Community enterprise models could provide alternative options for sustaining rural library services, but local authorities have not taken this route to date. This is in spite of the existence of successful social and community enterprises in many rural areas

to date, all libraries have remained council-run, and the reduction in staff hours has been a major element of realising cost savings. In other areas where there are examples of community-supported or community-managed libraries, opening hours have variously been reduced under volunteer involvement, maintained or even increased.

At branches where there have been increases in opening, this has either been because volunteers have been able to extend them, or because of co-location with other services (such as a district or parish council or tourist information centre) – and sometimes a combination of both. In North Yorkshire, for instance, Richmondshire District Council's relocation of its customer services office to Leyburn Library – plus support from volunteers recruited by the town council – saw an increase in opening hours from 19 to 40 per week in 2012. Other rural libraries, such as Ingleton and Bentham, saw their opening hours increase in 2012 through addition parish council and volunteer staffing.¹⁸

3.3 Co-location of library services

The *Envisioning the Library of the Future* report discussed the trend towards colocation of library and other services. In rural areas, this is taking different forms:

- Other services / organisations moving into an existing library building;
- An existing library service relocating into the premises of another organisation;
- A small-scale library links or book drop service operating from an existing venue such as a village hall or a pub.

Our eight case study sites provided some examples of all these in variations.

In Warwickshire, community-managed libraries often work with parish councils and other local partners within shared buildings to attract more customers and offer a wider range of services such as CAB advice. Dunchurch Parish Council rents office space within the village's community library, providing an important source of income.

Cumbria's library links – of which there are currently nine – are located in non-library venues such as community centres and even village shops. They hold a small collection of primarily fiction books, alongside a self-issue machine linked to the Library Management System. These allow for longer opening and more accessible services than the mobile provision. They are supported by volunteers, or staff from local businesses and community organisations. Volunteer presence to support users is regarded as a success factor in engaging and attracting users although not apparent in all. Cumbria's ten book drops, first established in 2011, have seen as extension of book lending from community venues. Operating on a smaller scale to the library links, these have no self-service machine, are entirely volunteer-operated, and only hold a stock of around 150 books at a time.

These are similar to Surrey's community links libraries, which are small book collections housed in non-library buildings, such as a village hall or parish council building. These are areas which have not previously had a library service, but where local people have come forward to initiate a scheme based around book borrowing. Two have been supported to date, in the rural locations of Shere and Beare Green, with three other communities expressing interest in following.

¹⁸ Library services case studies: New Look, No Shush! Delivering library services in North Yorkshire, Rural services network, 2012

3.4 New roles for communities in managing and supporting rural libraries

Volunteers have been involved in their local libraries for many years, supporting professional librarians by undertaking specific tasks, and by supporting service users with specific activities (e.g. using IT equipment, family history research and looking for jobs online).

The growth of community libraries – in a range of areas and particularly in rural areas – is expanding

the volume and nature of that volunteer input. In July 2012, in the region of 170 community libraries were identified across England, spread across more than one in three local authority areas. They were present in every region of England and in authorities run by all of the main political parties, as well as in urban and rural areas. Since then, a further 130 community libraries have been

confirmed, taking the total to around 300 – and around 50-60 more were known to be in the pipeline in March 2014.¹⁹ The majority of these are located in rural areas, and at the beginning of 2014 they appeared in seven of our eight case study areas – most coming into existence in the last three years.

The ‘community library’ label is not always clearly defined or understood, and different language is being used in different areas. In its 2013 research for ACE and the LGA, Locality identified the following types of community library.

Using this typology, Wakefield’s community libraries can best be categorised as independent. Most other examples of community libraries in our case study areas fall under the heading of co-produced, being either community-managed or community-supported. This reflects the wider picture across England.

INDEPENDENT (NON- STATUTORY)	ASSET-OWNING	Independent community library, owns its own premises, sometimes after asset transfer from local authority
	NON-ASSET OWNING	Independent community library, with no long term lease or freehold on its premises
CO- PRODUCED	COMMUNITY- MANAGED	These are community-led and largely community delivered, rarely with paid staff, but often with some form of ongoing Council support and often still part of the public library network
	COMMUNITY- SUPPORTED	These are Council-led and funded, usually with paid professional staff, but given significant support by volunteers
COMMISSIONED COMMUNITY		These are commissioned and fully funded by the council but delivered by a not-for-private profit community, social enterprise or mutual organisation, either existing or newly created.
		Councils might commission i) individual libraries or ii) the whole library service

¹⁹ Community Libraries - Learning from Experience: Guiding Principles for Local Authorities, 2013, ACE and LGA; and Public Libraries News: List of UK volunteer-run libraries (online)

300

The number of community libraries identified across England - an increase from the 170 identified in July 2012

As a service wholly commissioned by the council and managing all the county's libraries, Suffolk is unique within the sample and sits squarely under the 'commissioned community' heading. Some other authorities in the sample could be said to 'commission' their community libraries where they have formal agreements about service provision and the responsibilities of both the council and the community group – North Yorkshire being one example – but these are nonetheless best described as community-managed or supported.

Independent libraries

In Wakefield, the invest-to-save budget included a 'community-managed libraries grant scheme' – which offered communities taking over branches identified for closure a one-off payment of £12,500. Five community-managed libraries had been formed at the beginning of 2014; with one further community library anticipated, and all are located in rural areas. These libraries are no longer part of the council's statutory provision, and volunteer groups running them do not have access to library service book stock or the council's library management system.

Community-managed libraries

In Buckinghamshire, following consultation and subsequent negotiations with communities since 2010, 14 community partnership libraries have come into being. Primarily in rural areas, these libraries are managed and staffed by local community organisations.

In North Yorkshire, a consultation on proposed changes to the library service was undertaken in 2011. Following that process, the county's 22 'tier

two' and 'tier three' libraries (i.e. medium-sized and smallest libraries) became the subject of negotiations with local communities about how those facilities could be sustained. Nine of these are now staffed wholly by volunteers and could be described as community-managed.

In Warwickshire, the library service was part-way through a major transformation programme when, in early 2011, budget cuts were announced. Sixteen libraries were designated as 'no longer sustainable in their present form' and as a result, local communities were encouraged to work with the Council to find ways of keeping them open. In the process of rationalisation, the busier libraries have been retained (predominantly urban). 14 community-managed libraries were established between January and June 2012, mainly in rural areas.

In Cumbria, fourteen library links have developed since 2007, supported by volunteers or staff from local businesses and other organisations. All include a self-issue machine, making services more accessible than mobile library services to those areas. In addition, ten 'book drops' have been set up since 2011. These are limited book collections (around 150 books at any one time), checked out on mass to volunteers at the host venue – these are not dedicated library buildings.

In Buckinghamshire, North Yorkshire and Warwickshire, community-managed libraries remain part of the county's library network, supported in terms of book stock and in their links into the Library Management System. Cumbria's library links and book drops have professional support and books from the county book stock, but only the library links have access to the library management system (via self-service machines).

Community-supported libraries

In addition to its community-managed libraries, Buckinghamshire also has examples of community-supported libraries, such as Wilmslow, where the local authority retains management of the building and a reduced staff presence, whilst a friends group recruits volunteers to keep the library open for longer and, as elsewhere, to fundraise. North Yorkshire also has several examples of



Leyburn Library volunteers, North Yorkshire

community-supported libraries where library staff retain a presence.

In Surrey in 2011, plans were agreed within the council whereby the running of ten smaller libraries would be taken on by local people as 'community partnered libraries'. Volunteers would staff these libraries whilst the council retained responsibility for book stock, equipment and buildings. In February 2012, however, against a backdrop of political and public challenge, a judicial review held up these plans. In July 2012, the proposal for ten Community Partnered Libraries (CPLs) was given the go ahead by the Council's Cabinet – these were to be in Bagshot, Bramley, Byfleet, Ewell Court, Lingfield, New Haw, Stoneleigh, Tattenhams, Virginia Water and Warlingham. At this stage, 300 volunteers were trained to take up roles in the CPLs.

Four of the ten areas are rural, and one of these four – Warlingham – is up and running on the new CPL model, with the other three due to follow. Under the CPL model, an existing static library is provided with a support team to manage the ICT, the building and the book stock, and staffing and development is taken on by volunteers (this can be through a parish council, but not ordinarily). Currently, CPLs visits from the support team once a week.

Commissioned community libraries: the whole library service as a community-owned mutual

Suffolk County Council has taken a markedly different route to the other seven areas in our research, spinning-out their whole service into an industrial provident society (IPS) which is contracted to deliver library services across the county.

Suffolk County Council ran a consultation process around libraries in 2011. Different models for running the service were considered, including a social enterprise model, and Suffolk Libraries Industrial Provident Society (IPS) was set up in August 2012:

- Suffolk Libraries IPS delivers the service, including employment and management of staff, management of the bookstock and IT.
- The council maintains ownership of the library buildings, the county-wide book stock, and IT equipment

Registered in February 2012 and operating the county's libraries from August of that year, Suffolk Libraries has the legal status of an industrial provident society (IPS) and describes itself as a community-owned (as opposed to staff-owned) mutual. The purpose of the Society is to:

- promote and enable reading, learning and the sharing of knowledge through free access to book borrowing, electronic and other information services;
- make other educational, cultural and entertainment materials available for hire;
- encourage access to informal adult learning, skills training and employment opportunities;
- facilitate activities to improve well-being;
- provide welcoming accessible environments where social inclusion and community development can safely prosper in response to changing demographic, socio-economic and educational needs of the people in the area of benefit;

- build partnerships of shared interest between public, private and voluntary sectors at the heart of communities.

All Suffolk's libraries continue to be staffed by professional librarians, and are supported by a central corporate function on HR, IT and other administrative issues. The governance sits with a central board of lay members and a friends group / community group attached to each branch.

There are currently 41 local friends / community groups across the county's libraries which together make up the membership of the IPS. These groups organise events and activities at their libraries, and fundraise for additional equipment and facilities. In some cases, as has been seen in other areas, volunteers have extended library opening hours. In Thurston, where the library orchestrates a lot of social activity, money is being raised in various ways to purchase e-book readers. In Aldeburgh, adult education sessions have raised enough money to enable a disabled toilet to be installed in the library building.

Stakeholders at the Suffolk workshop reported that it was now quicker and easier to implement new ideas than it had been under the County Council, and that this was helping to make local branches more responsive to service users. A customer survey of 1,500 library users in late 2013 asked respondents if they had noticed any difference in the library service over the past year. Just over half (54%) said it was about the same and over a third (39%) said it had got better, compared to 7% who felt it had got worse.

3.5 New roles for rural libraries in their communities

Some rural libraries have housed a broad range of activities for many years, with meeting rooms used by local groups, cultural events (such as talks and exhibitions) organised, along with special events for young children and older people, for instance. Just as historically there was a mixed picture, so too following changes to services there are significant differences between the functions that rural libraries are offering and the roles they are playing locally.

Evidence from the eight case study areas suggests that the involvement of community groups in running rural libraries is leading to a diversification of activity within libraries, due to:

- Friends groups bringing a wider range of skills and interests to bear on the library's activities and events, and a larger pool of people to organise them, than previously;
- Friends groups having greater freedom in the way they use their library buildings;
- Increased imperative for income to be generated by creative use of library space – e.g. café, meeting and rehearsal space for local organisations; private parties, sales space for local craft-makers etc.

The more proactive volunteer groups are changing not only the way their library buildings are used, but are taking the library 'out' in new ways. Examples of this are libraries building stronger links with their local schools and community groups, and organising events outside the library (such as cultural visits) under the library 'brand'.

In Cumbria and Surrey, library links and book drops are playing an important role in terms of social interaction. In both counties, council officers have supported the set up of these facilities, working with communities and taking an asset based approach to build on what already exists in terms of the venue and the volunteers. Cumbria's book drops have been particularly successful where they have been linked to broader community exchange events. The book drop provides a focus for a range of community activity in a rural area, supported by active community groups. At the Penton Book Drop, for instance, members of the community come together through pre-existing event, soup and cake are provided by local volunteers, and people come to sell things or offer services on rotation (sometimes linked to other public services). It provides a focussed time and place for social interaction, of which books are a part.

Also in Cumbria, community involvement has helped to lever in additional resources, such as lottery funding for the refurbishment and rebuilding of community facilities. A local group has raised over £8,000 to refurbish space in the centre which

has led on to other community projects – an example of how the energy and motivation linked to library groups is being seen to have a catalytic effect on local community activity more widely.

There can be negative impacts on the role and functions of rural libraries as a result of new models, however. In some of the case study areas, officers and volunteers talked about local

groups which were more resistant to extending their library's role, and most interested in preserving a narrowly-focused, traditional library experience of the kind which is generally in decline.

Rural library services are, then, experiencing significant and ongoing change. The most contentious aspects of that change have seen library branches threatened with closure due to budget pressures. Various campaigns, processes and negotiations have led to the growth of new models of community involvement in libraries. Through workshop events in our case study areas, we went on to explore what stakeholders thought could be learnt from those experiences of change – the challenges they had faced, the factors that enabled change and the responses they found helpful.

4. Learning from the case study sites: approaches to service change

The previous chapter reviewed stakeholder views and case study evidence on the impact of changes in rural library services. This chapter looks at stakeholder views and case study evidence on how to implement successful changes in rural library services. The case study research highlighted the following themes as of particular importance in managing change in rural library services:

- Public consultation, engagement and communication
- Developing volunteering
- Partnerships
- Income generation
- Provision in remote areas

These issues were discussed at a workshop attended by representatives from each of the eight case study areas. The issues are discussed in turn below: first by defining the challenge/s; then by looking at enabling factors and responses in case study areas; and finally with examples of activity and lessons from case study areas.

4.1 Public consultation, engagement and communication

Challenges

- Misunderstanding the scale and scope of the changes to be made
- Inadequate levels of information about options for the future
- Lack of trust between the local authority and communities
- Failure to apply the lessons learned from previous consultations
- Inconsistent messages coming from different parts of the local authority (and/or community)
- Rushed consultation – leaving communities with too little time to respond to consultations on options and/or requests for volunteers.

Enablers and responses

- Identify the parameters of the consultation – consult on how to change services rather than whether or not change is necessary, if current arrangements are unsustainable
- Take legal advice on the scope and nature of the consultation that is to be undertaken prior to designing the consultation and engagement process
- Use specialists to design and analyse surveys – to ensure evidence is independently and rigorously interpreted
- Coordinate consultations on a number of services where possible – in order to minimise the risk of consultation fatigue in communities and to maximise the opportunities for coordinated responses from service providers and communities, e.g. on transport, library opening times and mobile library routes
- Engage significant/influential local groups, e.g. parish councils, in the change process, in addition to any programme of public meetings
- Provide development support to communities, e.g. on developing business plans or funding bids, to communities/user

groups, where services will be operated by volunteers in future

- Devise a communications strategy that takes account of different communication channels that may be used by the local authority and/or service users and community groups.

Examples from case studies

North Yorkshire indicated that for communication and engagement to be effective local authorities should have a vision for libraries that takes account of their community as well as their corporate role and that the vision should be based on a shared goal to maintain library services. The experience in North Yorkshire also indicated that it was important to provide detailed information on the proposals for change as early as possible, set out what might be lost without change, highlight the opportunities and possibilities arising from proposals for change and avoid mixed messages during the consultation process – in order to avoid confusion and delay.

Wakefield highlighted that consultations should be informed by data on usage patterns, not be rushed or hurried, provide opportunities for communities to respond and make suggestions for how the service should be changed, take account of the needs of different user groups both in how they should be consulted and in the services they want, and consider static, mobile and home library services in the round, not as separate services.

4.2 Developing volunteering

Challenges

- Long-established cultures and ways of working, e.g. direct delivery by the local authority rather than co-production between local authority and communities
- Public and services users attitudes to volunteering in the context of job cuts
- Attracting volunteers from a range of backgrounds

Enablers and responses

Essential enablers of change in rural library services were identified as:

- Users' passion for maintaining the library service
- An established sense of community and a strong culture of participation and volunteering
- An established network of organisations, e.g. local community and voluntary sector umbrella body, on which to draw
- A community with a wide range of skills and experience that can be tapped in order to help develop the library service

Responses that helped local authorities and communities to deliver change included steps to:

- Distinguish the roles of paid staff and volunteers
- Develop a variety of volunteer roles to attract a wide range of volunteers
- Recruit volunteers to clearly defined roles
- Provide training and support for volunteers
- Develop a network of mentors and people to provide peer support to volunteer groups
- Ensure paid staff in the library service have the skills necessary to engage communities and develop and support volunteers
- Establish and maintain a rota of volunteers with the necessary skills and familiarity with roles
- Building relationships with colleges and community groups who provide routes to attracting a diverse range of volunteers where this is an issue
- Plan for the future with ongoing recruitment of volunteers, e.g. with plans to recruit and train young people as volunteers.

Examples from case studies

Cumbria identified the need to create opportunities for communities involved in library provision to



Glemsford Library Friends, Suffolk

network, e.g. through events / workshops to share ideas.

Devon indicated it is important to understand what motivates people to volunteer in order to appeal to potential volunteers. It also noted word-of-mouth and social networks were powerful tools for recruiting volunteers and indicated that the social aspects of volunteering should not be underestimated.

North Yorkshire highlighted the following lessons for community groups seeking to recruit and develop volunteers:

- Understand volunteers' motivations and try to match them to the roles available
- Manage volunteers' expectations of what volunteering entails
- Maintain an operating manual for volunteers to refer to when dealing with enquiries etc.
- Tap volunteers' local knowledge to provide an enhanced service to users
- Schedule time for training as well as time for volunteers to work in the library
- Consider recruiting new volunteers with different interests and motivations as the library's activities change/expand over time

- Recognise a need to engage teenagers – perhaps by working with youth clubs or offering targeted events or groups related to particular genres or topics.

4.3 Partnership

Challenges

- Lack of coordination between public sector service providers and directorates within a single authority – leaving the potential for greater connectivity between services untapped and opportunities for finding joined-up solutions missed;
- Lack of trust between potential partners – including the local authority and parish councils or communities more widely;
- Increased competition between community groups for volunteers, donations and groups willing to pay for facilities;
- Rarely, but in some instances, rivalry between groups who want to take on responsibility for community libraries

Enablers and responses

The case study areas highlighted a number of enablers to partnership development; including:

- Communities' commitment to maintaining library services
- Culture of partnership working
- Experience of successful partnership working in the community
- Local authority commitment to co-production as a model of service delivery.

The case studies also provided examples of successful responses to challenges associated with partnership working; including:

- Development support provided to community groups interested in operating community libraries
- Transparent negotiations between local authority and communities with regard to the operation of community libraries

- Clarity over organisations' roles in the delivery of library services
- Regular review of activities carried out in partnership, in order to identify problems/areas for improvement and learn lessons that can be transferred to others.

Examples from case studies

Cumbria identified ongoing engagement with elected members and communities to develop area-based planning for service delivery by exploring the role that libraries can play in more integrated, place-based service delivery.

Devon identified the need for health and wellbeing activities to be located in rural libraries to extend partnership working, along with collaboration with faith groups and organisations to share facilities and/or coordinate activities, and development of friends groups.

Warwickshire highlighted new partnerships that had enabled new services to be delivered from libraries (and generate income), including:

- Police enquiries have been handled in some libraries under contract from the police authority, often where rural police stations have been closed
- Warwickshire direct, advice and information services regarding a broad range of council services, have been delivered from libraries; including administration of blue badges and concessionary travel permits
- Co-location or sharing with other service providers (e.g. fire service, CAB, museum and gallery, tourist information, early years centre, parish councils)
- NHS, books on prescription (supported by £61k set-up funding by NHS)
- Heritage and culture commissions.

4.4 Income generation

Challenges

- Unequal levels of resources, enterprise

and fund-raising skills available in different communities

- Different levels of competition for local donations and spending in different communities
- Potential for the focus on provision of library services to be lost in efforts to generate income by diversifying activities
- Making the case for a parish precept to contribute to the operation of a local library – given different points-of-view within local communities and concerns over 'double taxation' for provision of a service.

Enablers and responses

Enablers identified in case study areas included:

- Availability of other sources of funding, e.g. lottery funds, and grants from charities and foundations, not available to local authorities
- Volunteers with access to a wide range of life and business experiences who are able to identify opportunities to generate income and utilise buildings and facilities more efficiently
- Having library buildings which can be used to host a range of other services and activities

Specific responses in case study areas included:

- Subletting to other users as a means of generating income
- Delivering commissioned services – over and above book-lending services – for a fee
- Making the case for an increase in the parish precept to help cover the costs of running the local library
- Direct trading, e.g. sales of books, food and drink, crafts and art, and taking a commission on sales
- Hosting events and charging for attendance
- Organising activities for a range of different

user groups and charging attendees

- Using volunteers' personal networks to improve turnouts to income-generating events
- Applications for grants to establish community managed libraries and/or develop buildings and facilities to make it easier to use the building to generate income, e.g. via venue hire.

Examples from case studies

North Yorkshire highlighted the following lessons for communities seeking to raise funds for local libraries:

- make explicit requests for donations to help sustain the library
- charge for services and events but price them to fit the community's ability to pay
- appreciate that, in order to be sustainable in the long term, the library will have to extend the services it offers, thereby sharing costs and/or generating income.

As noted above, partnership working in Warwickshire helped generate income, including a £61,000 NHS grant to establish a books-on-prescription service. That figure will by no means be achievable in all areas, but it does indicate the value of looking to partners for additional sources of funding where library services are able to support the outcomes that matter to those organisations.

4.5 Provision in remote areas

Challenges

- Making the most of opportunities associated with new digital infrastructure
- Enabling older users of the library service to make the most of digital opportunities
- Coordinating changes in the provision of public (and community) transport in rural areas with changes in rural library services
- Developing alternative transport/delivery solutions to meet users' needs

Enablers and responses

- Linking library services with services providing support for older people in particular, and wellbeing services more widely
- Transforming mobile library services so that vehicles have greater flexibility and have technology that can provide Wi-Fi and Internet access to enable users to access other services online
- Linking library services to other public services or rural businesses, e.g. book drops timed to coincide with other social activities, such as lunch clubs, and locating 'library links'-style facilities in pubs and shops, where these are present and no other appropriate venues exist
- Extending online library services which can be accessed virtually

Examples from case studies

Cumbria highlighted the use of Library Links – providing library services via other community buildings and facilities (e.g. local shops and community centres) and Book Drops that allow books to be checked out to community venues that don't have a self-service machine but have a manual check-in system. Similar arrangements operate in North Yorkshire.

E-library services are expanding nationwide, and where broadband coverage is present, are providing new ways for people in remote areas to access library services. Of the eight case study sites, six enable members to download free e-books. In 2012, Surrey County Council digitised one of its libraries, allowing people to experience being in a branch – looking around 360 degree views, zooming in on shelves and browsing for a book. Once 'inside' people can sign up to the library and reserve books, DVDs or CDs.

5. Potential future roles for rural libraries

The previous chapter looked at the different ways rural library services have changed, the challenges they faced when making their transitions and the strategies and tactics they used to overcome them. In this section, we focus on issues that workshops in our case study areas highlighted as opportunities and challenges for the future.

Envisioning the library of the future set out four priorities:

- Place the library as the hub of the community
- Make the most of digital technology and creative media
- Ensure that libraries are resilient and sustainable
- Deliver the right skills for those who work in libraries.

The issues highlighted by the research in our eight case study areas expand on and re-frame these priorities for a rural context as:

- Tackling rural isolation
- Serving remote and sparsely populated areas
- Supporting rural economies and enterprise

- Engaging a wide range of local populations, notably young people
- Striking the right balance between locally-driven variation and consistency of library services across a whole local authority area
- Recognising and investing in the wider socio-economic impacts of library services.

Each of these issues is discussed in turn below. The discussions draw on findings from consultations and workshops involving stakeholders in each of the case study areas, and a national workshop involving stakeholders from each of the eight case study sites. Each subsection looks at the issue, potential responses and examples of work or planned activity in case study sites.

5.1 Tackling rural isolation

The issue

Individuals, such as older people living alone, may have only limited personal interactions during any given day or week. This isolation can adversely affect physical and mental wellbeing with negative consequences for the individual, their communities, and care and health service providers. In the context of funding cuts to local services, such as meals on wheels, there is a risk that more people may feel isolated in coming years. Library services – whether through static libraries or via mobile and home-delivery services may be able to help alleviate this social isolation.

Responses

Rural library services can:

- recognise that they play an important role in reducing social isolation
 - through the volunteering opportunities they provide and that give people the opportunity to increase social interaction
 - through the services they offer to users, e.g. events, talks and clubs
- work with health and social care workers, and others, to identify individuals (and

communities) at risk of social isolation and seek to offer opportunities for social engagement

- link services, e.g. mobile library services, with extra-care housing and residential homes
- join up with other public services, such as the police and health and social care workers, to address issues of mental and physical well-being, as part of wider outreach efforts
- operate (or work with) befriending schemes that help to break social isolation and can provide personalised library services.

Examples from case study sites

Warwickshire operates a volunteer-based home visit service for house-bound users.

Buckinghamshire has learned that its local libraries help to tackle social isolation via the volunteering opportunities they offer and the befriending service they operate. Cumbria's Library Link and Book Drop Schemes help to reduce social isolation as well as provide better access to the library service to those living in remote areas.

Cumbria's Library Link and Book Drop Schemes help to reduce social isolation as well as provide better access to the library service to those living in remote areas.

5.2 Serving remote and sparsely populated communities

The issue

Reductions in local authority budgets have led to reviews of the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of local public services. Sparsely populated and remote communities have often faced cuts to services because they are seen to have high unit costs; this applies to library services but not only to library services. Further cuts to local authority budgets are planned over the next three years, implying further reductions in the provision of a range of public services to remote and sparsely populated areas. The challenge for rural library services is to understand where they might fit in the new landscape of public service provision – given their role as hubs of volunteering, access to ICT, and wider social and civic activities and networks. The challenge is encapsulated in the question: should we take people to the service or take the service to the people?



Nicholforest Exchange Bookdrop, Cumbria

Responses

Rural library services can:

- promote library services in order to raise awareness and increase take-up of services
- help connect remote communities to digital services via libraries and library outlets

Local library services can provide information services to assist local businesses and business start-ups; and they can also act as the conduit for a range of other business support services.

support “digitally excluded” people to access public (and other) services digitally

- ensure library opening hours and public transport services are aligned to enable access via public transport from remote villages
- use community door-to-door transport to take people to town centres in order to access libraries and other (public, private and voluntary) services
- review mobile and home delivery services to ensure
 - vehicles are fit for purpose (i.e. can operate on the roads that serve remote communities)
 - vehicles can provide internet links via satellite
 - routes are designed to deploy limited staff resources to maximum efficiency
- consult local communities in a coordinated manner so that
 - the re-configuration of local services is discussed openly and holistically, and joins up with other community activities and groups
 - the potential number of (and roles for) volunteers in delivering local services is fully understood in the community
- work alongside other facilities and services, such as shops, pubs and community centres to deliver a range of services (on a temporary or permanent basis)

- develop the branch (or mobile library) space as a social hub in partnership with other spaces/venues
- offer online ordering and book drop-off points
- liaise with delivery services, e.g. from supermarkets, to deliver and collect library books
- involve school children/school buses to deliver books to villages
- build (or tap into existing) good-neighbour schemes in order to support personal book selection and delivery alongside other support services.

Examples from case study sites

Wakefield Council merged its mobile library and home delivery service and re-designed routes in order to use staff-time more efficiently. The combined service serves the same number of users with half the staff hours. The library service in Wakefield also replaced large HGV vehicles with smaller, more flexible vehicles with internet access that are more able to serve more remote communities. In Devon the mobile library service has been re-focused to serve the most remote rural locations – reducing the fleet from 11 to 4 vehicles.

In Surrey the mobile library service has been withdrawn and has been replaced by free transport to the nearest static library for those who need it; along with home visits from volunteers and increased use of e-readers. Libraries in Surrey are also considering how to market library services effectively.

5.3 Supporting rural economies and enterprise

The issue

Rural areas need vibrant economies in order to be sustainable. Local businesses and entrepreneurs can require a range of services to grow their businesses. Local library services can provide information services to assist local businesses and business start-ups; and they can also act as the

conduit for a range of other business support services. Furthermore, branches can attract visitors that increase footfall in local high streets; thereby assisting local retailers. Unemployed people require internet access to carry out job searches and libraries can provide access to the ICT services that they need. Libraries can also provide the space for benefits and job search services and training to assist unemployed people to find work.

Responses

Rural library services can:

- host services and functions such as...
 - business advice and networking, in the absence of local Business Link-type support services
 - bank advisors to give on-the-spot advice to businesses on business plan preparation etc.
 - surgeries on tax, HR, social media, and health and safety etc.
 - advice on preparing CVs and job applications
- provide previously ‘lost services’ e.g. post office or aspects of post office service (e.g. parcel collection & drop off), village shop, café etc.
- act as a networking hub and ‘digital bridgehead’ for homeworkers in areas of poor broadband access
- showcase local small businesses (e.g. home crafters, artists etc.)
- provide local outlets for credit unions
- share space with benefit advisors
- engage in the development of local strategies to promote economic development – and gain recognition for their role.

Examples from case study sites

Devon is part of the Enterprising Libraries Project, which will comprise three strands of work including the development of a hack-maker space that allows creative people to meet and collaborate in a

rural library. Library managers are hopeful that this initiative could unlock a different sort of relationship with other stakeholders outside the council, and/or highlight ways in which rural libraries might generate income through supporting local enterprise.

In February, the Post Office approved Suffolk Libraries’ application to provide a post office facility within Stradbrook Library, following the closure of the village’s post office in 2012. The new facility will provide 150 recognised postal service functions including foreign currency, handling parcels and cash withdrawals. The library manager will take on joint-responsibility for the post office, and if the facility is successful, more staff may be taken on to help staff it.

5.4 Engaging young people

The issue

Library services tend to be used by older patrons or young families but often teenagers do not utilise rural libraries. This is a problem if we believe, as a principle, that libraries should serve the full spectrum of their local populations. It is also a missed opportunity where young people need to gain better access to skills and opportunities otherwise not available on their doorstep – and which libraries could support. For the benefit of young people themselves, therefore, as well as in the interests of the diversity, vibrancy and sustainability of services, rural libraries need to take steps to ensure young people do not become disengaged from the service.

Responses

Rural library services can:

- organise regular youth evenings including creative/cultural activities;
- work with local youth services to co-ordinate events and activities (and identify and comply with regulatory requirements);
- involve young people in planning activities, running events, and fundraising for the library;
- provide free Wi-Fi, so that children who do not have Wi-Fi at home regularly use the



Rural libraries need to take steps to ensure young people do not become disengaged from the service.

library;

- seek to employ young staff and/or staff with a positive attitude to working with young people at times when young people are known to/are likely to use the library;
- increase e-lending, e-books, and e-readers, in order to meet young people's expectations of a modern service
- offer opportunities for apprentices and young volunteers e.g. Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme
- provide opportunities for young people to help older people develop ICT skills – promoting intergenerational activity, building social capital, assisting older people access services and offering young people volunteering opportunities.

Examples from case study sites

Devon provides free internet access to its users. Some libraries in North Yorkshire have run successful music-themed evening events for young people. Libraries in Surrey plan to have discussions with local colleges in order to identify work-experience and volunteering opportunities for young people.

5.5 Striking the right balance between locally-driven variation and consistency of library services across a whole local authority area

The issue

Community libraries – acting as community hubs responding to community requirements and the need to generate income – operate a diverse mix of activities and services. Furthermore – as local authorities re-configure local services in response to budget reductions – those operating local community libraries are likely to be approached to incorporate other local services into their operations. Thus, it is likely that over time different local libraries operating within the same local library service will offer different services – some related to library services and others related to the facility's role as a wider social hub for the community. The challenge for library services which provide some sort of support to community managed branches is agreeing which aspects of the service should be core and consistent, and which variable – then ensuring that the core service provided at those branches meets agreed standards.

Responses

Rural library services can:

- define client/commissioner and provider roles clearly in order to avoid confusion
- enshrine service standards in a service level agreement/memorandum of understanding/contract based on
 - a “core” library offer
 - promoting activities that lead to community benefit
- define arrangements for access to the library management system (LMS)
- specify the advice, guidance, and support available to community-managed libraries and how, when and where it can be accessed

- enable local groups to put their own stamp on local libraries by supporting responses to local initiatives
- support steering group members and volunteers to enable them to operate in an effective and inclusive way.

Examples from case study sites

North Yorkshire County Council has established service level agreements with its community-managed libraries. The agreements set out the County's expectations of each local library (e.g. in terms of opening hours, activities etc.) and the nature and extent of support that staff from the County's library service will provide. As part of the arrangements for community managed libraries, the County anticipates and encourages those managing local libraries to diversify their activities in order to share overheads and running costs and generate income. The County plans to discuss how a wider range of local services might work more effectively with community-managed libraries as part of consultations on its budget for the next 3 years.

Suffolk's new governance arrangements have led to a more diverse range of activities and events taking place in libraries – encouraged by enabled staff and proactive community/friends groups. Libraries staff and volunteers at the Suffolk workshop felt that the greater involvement of local groups in their libraries has helped identify local need and interests more fully than in the past; this has led to a greater focus on outreach into communities.

5.6 Recognising and investing in the wider social impacts of library services

The issue

Community-managed libraries in rural areas need to generate income from the additional services and activities they provide, in order to be financially sustainable. To do this they need to understand the value of what they do and identify potential sources of income (and other non-cash resources) that read across to the same. For instance, adult

education centres are often interested in delivering classes in a range of local venues, including libraries. Further education staff may also be able to set up informal ‘learning circles’ and learning clubs based in rural libraries, where people get together to pursue an interest without a formal teacher.

Responses

Rural library services can:

- make links to other public services and build partnerships where costs can be shared and/or income generated
- identify where libraries can contribute to the outcomes sought by other public services and work to deliver them e.g. health, adult education, employment and skills
- charge other public services (and others) for use of their space, expertise etc.
- collect data which reflects the wider role libraries can play in promoting individual and community wellbeing in order to build an evidence base that demonstrates the wider social benefits they provide but require financial support to maintain
- bring elected members’ views of libraries up to date so that budget decisions on the service are not taken in isolation from the wider picture of local service delivery and community wellbeing
- operate support networks of community managed libraries in order to enable the sharing of information, experience and ideas for achieving social impact and generating income.

Examples from case study sites

Warwickshire County Council is working to understand the social impacts libraries have, how to measure them, and how to generate income from them.

Findings and Recommendations

We have seen through the course of this research that library services in rural areas – as elsewhere – are under pressure. The nature of that pressure, the way it is experienced and responses to it are in some key ways quite distinctive from what can be seen in urban areas. In this final section, we consider the key areas of learning from the research and suggest some next steps for policy makers and local stakeholders to explore.

Sustaining and enhancing rural libraries will continue to be challenging, especially with less public money, and what works in one place won't necessarily work elsewhere. There are positive approaches which library services and local people can take, however, to help libraries in their areas to remain visible, viable and vital – often in new ways – and which in turn will help those communities to continue accessing as broad a range of services and activities as possible.

Under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, local authorities have a statutory duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service taking into account local needs and within available resources. Against a backdrop of unprecedented financial challenges, local authorities have often interpreted that duty in a way that points them towards seeking *economies of scale* and that is clearly problematic for rural communities where populations are invariably smaller and sparser.

We propose that in rural communities, it is more helpful to seek, encourage and co-design library services with other services to secure *economies of scope*.²⁰ We believe this demands a more holistic, cross-thematic and asset-based approach to community involvement (as currently supported by DCLG's Our Place programme). This would help to generate incentives rather than disincentives towards seeing library service changes as part of public service transformation in the round. In contrast, what we have often seen to date are reviews and consultations which look at library services in isolation, and mirroring that, local 'save our library' campaigns which – in response to that threat – re-enforce a tightly-framed focus on the library building or service in isolation from its wider context.

Moreover, local authorities need to make sure they are thinking strategically about how they can use their staffing, information, technology and collections to best meet the needs of the rural communities they serve. This may lead to them to provide services in a host of different ways that don't necessarily start from the premise of preserving conventional static libraries or mobiles – and which, in particular, move beyond the tendency to consider static and mobile provision in isolation of each other.

Innovation, flexibility and transformation of rural library services will be important elements in preventing a further widening of inequalities of access, potentially to a wide range of services and the resulting outcomes they support. Moreover, radical transformation of mobile library provision, integration with existing community infrastructure (shops, pubs, post offices), and co-design with local communities should all be pro-actively explored, as they are more likely to enable improved access when compared with conventional consolidation strategies alone.

²⁰ See Glossary for explanation of economies of scale and economies of scope

6.1 Role and purpose

The rural libraries of the future will look very different to traditional expectations – and may look very different to each other – but will still be places where local people meet, learn, read, exchange ideas and connect with the wider world.

We are seeing increasing diversity and diversification in the role that rural libraries play in their communities, often as a result of citizen involvement and increased flexibility (and increased financial imperatives) for staff and volunteers to extend their library's offer. Thus whilst we may see urban libraries of the future 'going deeper' in terms of their offer – as centres of learning, information and cultural experience – we may see rural libraries 'going wider', providing aspects of those traditional library functions alongside a greater emphasis on social interaction, outreach for a range of public services and supporting the vitality of rural communities in a myriad of ways.

There is a major role for rural library services as places which utilise, unlock and build social capital – not least, with their potential to be underpinned by locally rooted out-reach. This will in part be evident in the urban libraries of the future, but the need (and thus the potential value) of social functions in rural libraries will overall be much greater, due to the comparative lack of communal facilities beyond urban and suburban areas.

The role of libraries in supporting local economies and enterprise can be more direct and more practical in rural settings, where there is greater potential for symbiotic and value-adding relationships to develop between library services and local small enterprise. Increasingly there are examples of rural library services being accessed via /sharing space with / helping sustain footfall to local businesses such as pubs, shops and post

offices. More could be done, however, to explore/exploit the business development potential of rural libraries in future and, in turn, be used to attract for example European Union / Local Enterprise Partnership funding²¹. Supporting enterprise through generating creative activity (i.e. maker-spaces) is predominantly an urban library phenomenon at present, but more innovative use of mobile services – or in conjunction with static libraries or other venues (schools, village halls etc.) could take that movement into rural settings as well.

Recent interpretation of the requirement in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to assess local needs and consult communities, whilst fitting in a strict sense, has frequently served to exacerbate a 'deficit model' as a starting point for community libraries being established. In other words, councils appeal to communities to step forward to prevent their libraries from failing – to help sort out the problem of their local library's future. This negative introduction to dialogue with communities has led to confrontation, campaigning, ill-feeling and a 'needs must' attitude amongst many who have stepped-up to the plate to save libraries. The examples in this report show how many community libraries are overcoming those uneasy origins, co-creating popular venues and services often with some council support, but in some cases relationships remain difficult and the social value of some community libraries in question.

We need more positive approaches to involving communities in rethinking the future of their rural libraries and library services. Looking elsewhere, such as NESTA's Rethinking Parks programme, we can see interesting and engaging 'challenge' processes being established to encourage and incentivise people to come forward with fresh and radical ideas. These approaches often gather contributions via user-friendly web platforms, and allow for the provision of enterprise development support and/or access to tailored risk and investment capital for those ideas judged to have the most potential. Looking ahead, more could be done to explore these and other

²¹ See Glossary for explanation of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)



An IT volunteer working with a resident, North Yorkshire

approaches to community engagement / involvement.

Local authorities need to think strategically about how rural library assets (buildings, people, volunteers, trust capital) can support delivery of other services, and seek to establish more robust outcome measures for the diverse range of social outcomes, because we know that the loss of a rural library impacts on more than library services alone. This means that looking ahead, decisions about library buildings and services need to engage with a broad base of service providers as well as communities and elected members. Changes to the provision of youth services, public health and adult education, for instance, could all have implications for the value of role of rural libraries (buildings and mobile provision) in the areas most affected.

Critically, the emphasis in the rural setting should be on achieving what we call economies of scope rather than economies of scale. Rural library services have potentially strong relationships with social services and adult education, amongst many others. Closer working across departments, alongside communities and other providers, is required to maximise efficiencies as well as opportunities. Rural libraries provide a natural centre for rural civic hubs, and could provide a focus for the transformation of local services. Local authorities need to work with

communities to co-design value added solutions to rural issues in the context of libraries.

6.2 Resident involvement

Where communities have become more directly involved in supporting or managing their rural libraries, they can evolve into more effective, positive and well-used venues than their predecessors. This can involve the nurturing of a library's role in supporting social interaction, strengthening community ties, hosting events and activities to appeal to a wider range of people and creating space for clubs and societies to flourish.

Greater resident involvement is in many instances adding value to what rural libraries are able to provide in their communities. That is not to say that they are 'out performing' professional library staff and providing *better library services* in the traditional sense; rather they are adding value by expanding the roles and functions their libraries play, and in some cases very visibly putting that facility at the heart of a community where previously it might have appeared more peripheral. The character of this added value is, by its nature, varied and dependent upon a number of factors, including: the interests and capacity of the community groups which develop; the level of support provided by the local authority; and the opportunities offered by inherited library buildings. Benefits can include:

- Extending the opening hours of rural libraries
- Enabling more flexibility and local responsiveness in the way that services are run

- Augmenting the time available to talk to customers and offer help / advice
- Increasing the sense of community ownership of a local library
- Levering in new resources to improve specific aspects of the building or service (e.g. funding new facilities which was not made available under local authority control)

In other cases, however, library friends groups save a branch but bring with them very limited perceptions about what that facility will offer. As such, library service managers are sometimes concerned about the inability of some of their community libraries to live up to what should be expected of a local library from the point of view of standards / consistency of service. Attracting a broad range of people to use, develop and support the delivery of library services is important if the public service ethos of libraries is to be retained. It is also important because passive approaches to community solutions are likely to result in a distorted demographic of volunteers and users in terms of age (and, possibly, other factors). Negative consequences of greater community involvement can include:

- Retrenchment to a more narrow or ‘traditional’ library offer at a time when other libraries are extending and modernizing their offer
- Reduced expertise available to service users
- Reduced manpower to organize and staff services
- Reduced sense of inclusivity

6.3 Access

We will need more creative ways to either get individuals to library services or vice versa in future – and creative ways to sustain those approaches. Where people living in rural communities are isolated (through income, infirmity or geographical remoteness), the provision of good quality library services will sometimes require more

than a digital response. Traditional efficiencies are already being sought by officers in our case study areas in a variety of ways, but rural library service providers could also consider the potential to exploit *economies of scope* where other public and private sector services are being delivered direct to rural communities (for example, linked to rural community transport or meals on wheels provision) as per the BiblioServicebus in The Netherlands²².

- Alternatively, it may be worthwhile exploring the potential to develop ‘pick up and drop off’ schemes with private car users on either a collaborative consumption basis or council tax incentivised basis. **It is interesting that whilst many local authorities have been progressing community-supported and community-managed static rural libraries, similar responses to sustaining forms of mobile provision have rarely been explored.**

Digital technology is helping to overcome some of the challenges of physical access to library services experienced by rural dwellers, and may demand investment to facilitate innovation, particularly if a two-tier service isn’t to emerge from the growth in rural community-led libraries.

- For example, it may be worthwhile exploring the potential to replicate innovative mobile provision akin to the ‘mobile library fablab’ in FryskLab in The Netherlands.²³
- Crucially, however, there is real value in exploring if/how a combination of alternative mobile and digital services can enhance the rural library service offer in future.
- Finally, it could also be worthwhile Government championing a rural White Space pilot - as per the Gigabit Libraries

²² <http://www.biblioServicebus.nl/wat.php>

²³ <http://mozillarian.org/2014/03/17/frysklab-europe-s-first-mobile-library-fablab-brings-digital-fabrication-to-rural-areas/>

Network elsewhere²⁴ - to hasten introduction of super-fast connectivity and digital library services in rural locations.

6.4 Future support

The level and nature of support provided to rural libraries in future will depend on the outcomes those services and venues are able to contribute to. These may be far-removed from the traditional function of a library, yet hugely valuable to a community (and to public agencies seeking to reduce demand on their services).

Significant amounts of local authority time and energy can be absorbed supporting a small number of community libraries, and some library authorities are now in the position of having committed to support new community libraries with (albeit reduced) public resources, whilst arguably having less control over the shape those services take. The greater involvement of communities in running rural libraries implies an upfront investment as well as ongoing support costs for local authorities, then, and future rounds of cuts are likely to impact on the level of support they can continue to provide to those communities.

That being the case, councils should challenge themselves to rethink what sort of support they most need to offer to community libraries – existing or new – in order to enable the development of creative, resilient, sustainable rural libraries. For the most part, enterprise support has so far been the missing piece of the jigsaw, overlooked in favour of an emphasis predominantly on volunteer-led models which rely on continued council input topped up by small-scale income generation and

fundraising. Re-focusing our attention on community enterprise models – and investing in the provision of advice and support from relevant and experienced bodies as well as to stimulate innovative start-ups and prototyping activity – could give more of our rural libraries the healthy, happy future their communities want.

In this way we can move away from the idea that libraries are failing, or that they have to be 'defended/saved,' to one where they become invigorated and attract investment and support because they are part of what makes rural communities tick.

²⁴ <http://giglibraries.net/>

Glossary

Economies of Scale: where reductions in the unit cost result from increasing the *scale of production / provision*. In the context of public services, providing a service to large numbers of people out of one facility is often considered more cost effective, per head of population, than delivering that service from many smaller facilities.

Economies of Scope: where reductions in the unit cost result from *diversification of production / provision*. In the context of public services, providing a greater range of services from an existing pool of resources (e.g. a set of existing skills and knowledge, or an existing physical asset) will be more cost effective, per head of population, than using those fixed resources to deliver just one service. For further information about diseconomies of scale and economies of scope, see: <http://locality.org.uk/news/diseconomies-scale-save-16bn/>

‘Hack-’ or ‘maker-space’: a communal space where people with common or converging interests can meet to socialise, create and collaborate on a range of ideas. These informal, collaborative spaces often include use of technology and digital media as well as other tools to support creative industry. For further information about library-hack-makerspaces, see: <http://www.commonlibraries.cc/>

Local Enterprise Partnerships: Partnerships between local authorities and businesses that decide where the priorities should be for investment in roads, buildings and facilities in the area, helping to drive economic growth and job creation. There are currently 39 local enterprise partnerships in the UK.

Open Policy Making: Open Policy Making is a new model of civil service reform focusing on transparency, shared power, and direct access to ministers. It is designed to increase collaboration in policy making and public services, accessing expertise from a wider range of people.

Open Public Services: The government’s reform programme for public services, designed to make services accessible to everyone in the UK. The policy was first outlined in a 2011 Government White Paper ‘Open Public Services’ and aims to increase the choice and control of service users, allow local decision making and grant a range of providers opportunities for service provision. For further information about the government’s programme of reform, see:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/open-public-services>

Rural libraries: library buildings located in and mobile libraries serving rural areas, as encompassed by DEFRA definitions of ‘rural’ (rural town and fringe, rural village and rural hamlet classifications). For further information, see
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/rural-urban-definition>

Technical Annex

Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA)

- We undertook a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) following a robust and transparent methodology in line with Government Social Research standards. The scope was agreed with the project steering group:
- Its purpose was to capture key messages from recent and relevant documents, in order to inform our awareness and understanding of lines of enquiry to be pursued through the research that would follow. As such, the aim was not to consider the full range of arguments, ideas and possibilities relating to library services in rural areas, but rather to summarise recent evidence as it has been presented to date. The evidence reviewed included national reports and articles, alongside local review and consultation documents
- from councils which cover rural communities. The local-level material in particular was designed to be illustrative of issues and models being explored and experienced in rural areas, and does not claim to be comprehensive.
- The REA sought to draw on a wide range of sources including formal publications and ‘grey’ literature, established sources and emerging evidence. Search terms were agreed with the steering group, as was the timeframe – searches would disregard documents published prior to 2008.
- Initial searches yielded around forty documents. These were listed and categorised by type, with comments included alongside each title. Based on the time allocated for this aspect of the work, a limit of up to 30 review documents was set. Input from the steering group enabled the original long list to be reduced to 30.

REA Bibliography

TITLE	DATE	SOURCE/ORGANISATION THAT PRODUCED DOCUMENT
Taking Stock: the future of our library service	2008	UNISON
A local Inquiry into the Public Library Service Provided by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council	2009	DCMS
Foundations for the Future: 20 years of library redevelopment in Cambridgeshire	2010	
Rural Services Survey	2010	Wales Rural Observatory
The modernisation review of public libraries	2010	DCMS

What do the Public Want from Libraries?	2010	MLA
What do the Public Want from Libraries? A practitioner guide	2010	MLA
Evaluation of Libraries for Life	2011	Welsh Government
Get Involved: Developing Libraries for the Future in Buckinghamshire	2011	Buckinghamshire CC
Review of Library Services	2011	Suffolk CC
Library services case studies	2012	Rural services Network
Mobile Library Service Strategy: Rural Impact Assessment	2012	Libraries Northern Ireland
Opening Hours Review: Rural Impact Assessment	2012	Libraries Northern Ireland
A new chapter: public library services in the 21st century	2012	Carnegie UK trust
Community Libraries - Learning from Experience: Guiding Principles for Local Authorities	2013	ACE and LGA
Market Research	2013	US Association for Rural and Small Libraries
Rural Libraries: Approaches for Sustainable Service	2013	Library Boards Association of Nova Scotia
Bradford Metropolitan District Council library Service Review	2010	Bradford MDC
Envisioning the Library of the Future	2012/13	Arts Council England
Suite of Documents - Lincolnshire Libraries Consultation	2013	Lincs County Council
A Better Form of Business: Community-owned village shops	2013	plunkett foundation
Barriers to education, employment and training for young people in rural areas	2012	The Commission for Rural Communities
Media Literacy Audit - Report on UK children's media literacy	2008	Ofcom
Average UK broadband speed continues to rise	2013	Ofcom

Later Life in Rural England	2013	Age UK
Rural broadband: reframing the debate		Plunkett foundation / Carnegie UK
Mind the Gap: Digital England – a rural perspective	2007	Commission for Rural Communities
Rural Innovation	2007	NESTA
Bringing hyperlocal media to rural norfolk: the challenges	2013	NESTA
Stimulating economic growth in rural areas	2013	Defra
Rural development programme for England	2012	Defra
Community Libraries in England and Wales - December 2012	2013	Locality
Geographical availability of services	2012	Defra

Case study area selection criteria

The project team and steering group together produced a long list of potential case study areas comprising substantial rural populations and including areas where it was known that a range of approaches had been taken to implementing change around rural library services. Library services located in those areas were contacted and invited to express an interest in taking part in the research – the final decision would be made by the steering group and project team based on the need to include a wide-cross section in terms of:

- Geography
- Rural typology (the types of rural communities they comprise)
- Local issues and challenges
- Library service models being applied
- The extent to which services have experienced change in the last 2-3 years

Application of this selection criteria, along with the practical consideration of areas' willingness to participate, resulted in eight areas being confirmed as case study sites.

Case study research and draw-down time

The intention was to undertake a programme of action research which enabled 'learning through doing' for the case study areas, with the OPM/Locality team supporting sites to identify areas of action, to progress those actions and reflect on and share the learning from their experiences. In practice, pressure on project timescales did not allow sufficient time for case study areas to progress new 'real work' during the life of the programme, and thus the focus was on what sites had already learnt through recent experiences. Where sites made use of the draw-down support, this enabled the project team to support the exploration and development of ideas and actions focused on issues of specific local relevance.

Round One Workshop: example agenda

Workshop agendas were tailored by facilitators for each area, but all were based on the following half day format:

TIME	SESSION	WHO
9:30	<i>Arrival and coffee</i>	
10.00	Welcome and introductions About the project The local picture The focus of today's session Does this resonate? Anything you'd add?	<i>Facilitator</i>
10:30	Introduce focus agreed with area [mobile libraries / community involvement / IPS model etc] How have library services changed for rural communities in recent years and how has this been felt? What impact has this had – positive and negative? How do you know?	<i>Group discussions at tables</i>
11:00	From the desk review: issues effecting rural areas	<i>Facilitator</i>
11:15	Take 2 – 3 of these issues and discuss: What is the extent to which rural library services currently help to address this issue and how?	<i>Group discussions at tables</i>
12:00	<i>Coffee break</i>	
12:15	Discuss how rural library services locally could do more to address this issue	<i>Group discussions at tables</i>
13:00	Review of the morning and committing to next steps	<i>Facilitator</i>
13:30	<i>Close for lunch</i>	

Round Two Workshop: agenda

This event was held at the Library of Birmingham in February 2014, and brought together representatives from across the eight case study areas.

TIME	SESSION	WHO
10:30	<i>Arrival and coffee</i>	
11.00	Welcome and introductions	<i>Rob</i>
11:15	Headlines from our eight areas	<i>Rob, Anton, Scott</i>
11:45	Practice share session one: Reflecting on experience	<i>Scott</i>
	Group discussions exploring sites' different approaches to and experiences of change so far – from running consultation and engagement to working with volunteers. <i>Topics generated from round one workshops. One topic per table, participants have free choice, and change halfway through.</i>	
13:00	<i>Lunch and chance for networking</i>	
13:45	Headline feedback from practice share session one	<i>Anton</i>
14:00	Practice share session two: Potential futures	<i>Rob</i>
	Group discussions about possible futures for rural library services and factors informing change. Discussion themes will reflect some of those identified in the earlier workshops, moving on from 'what' and 'why' to practical exploration of <i>how</i> progress can be made.	
15:15	Closing plenary and reflections	<i>Rob</i>
15:45	<i>Finish</i>	