Proposed change to the provision of Northamptonshire Libraries and Information Services

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

Our three most common FAQ's

Closing larger libraries so staff could work in smaller libraries

While this option allows for less staff to work across more venues this does not enable the service to reduce property and running costs, which is where savings need to be made.

Use Section 106 monies to support libraries

Section 106 funding is a developer contribution to mitigate the impact of their development. The aim is to provide for extension and improvements to local services to accommodate the increase in population brought in by the development. NCC's policy is to apply to developers for contributions to local services, including libraries. The funding may only be used for the purpose outlined in the agreement with the developer. The allocation of the funding would not be dependent on who is running the library service, so the funding could pass to a community group if they can demonstrate appropriate use of the funds and can also demonstrate that occupiers of the new housing are largely making use of the local library facilities and not travelling to another, larger library. Capital schemes which would be covered are those which extend the capacity of the library to serve the additional population and would include the purchase of equipment, stock or furniture and would also cover alterations or extensions to the building to provide more flexible or income generating space. It does not cover purchase of the existing building or ongoing running costs including staffing. NCC retains the overall responsibility for ensuring that s106 is allocated correctly and in line with the relevant legislation. Any failure to do so could require repayment (plus interest) to the developer.

NCC are looking to use s106 monies where it is available.

Statutory / Non Statutory Libraries

To meet the statutory requirement as set out in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 a library must provide "a comprehensive and efficient" service to include printed material for information and lending and access to information through a range of

media and this must be based on local need. NCC have assessed local need and identified where we need to keep libraries as part of the statutory offer to provide a comprehensive and efficient service. Therefore there are one of the following proposals for each library:

- Statutory Library, retained and managed by NCC. This means NCC would continue to run the library as it is today.
- Statutory Library, community managed, providing a Library Access Point. This means it forms part of the statutory provision, and should the group be unable to continue, NCC would step in and manage the library. The offers within this library would be dependent on the group, however we anticipate that most of the services would continue as normal, such as Blue Badge and Bus Passes, and the library would have access to the countywide book stock.
- Non-Statutory Library, community managed, Library Access Point. This means it would not form part of the statutory provision, and should the group be unable to continue, the library may close. The offers within this library would be dependent on the group, however we anticipate that most of the services would continue as normal, such as Blue Badge and Bus Passes, and the library would have access to the countywide book stock, and would be no different to the statutory provision.
- Non-Statutory, community managed, Library Access Point Lite. This would be a self-service model where the public can borrow books and return them, using the self-service machines; they are likely to be located in smaller venues where there are very few volunteers, should the group be unable to continue, the library would close.

FAQ's from the previous consultation

The following responses were provided via the cabinet feedback report for the previous consultation events held in 2018. Please note: Some responses have been updated to reflect more recent developments

Alternative models of delivery – private sector

Some respondents to the consultation felt that a private sector solution should be sought.

However since the demise of Carillion, there are no public libraries in the UK run by a for-profit company. In 1998 John Laing began to run Hounslow libraries and the contract was taken over by Carillion in 2013. The 3 library services that were currently delivered by the private sector were all delivered by Carillion and are now looking at coming back in house and other alternative methods of delivery.

Service efficiency

A very strong theme came out of the consultation responses suggesting that the existing service could operate more efficiently. Service efficiency drove the previous library strategy (2011) which prevented the closure of 8 libraries in Northamptonshire. As a result of the 2011 consultation suggestions a number of efficiencies were made. National CIPFA data for 2016/17 suggests Northamptonshire is already the most cost effective library service in the country, and spend significantly less overall than any other library service.

Further details of the efficiencies can be found in the previous cabinet paper: Feb_18_Cabinet_paper

Increase the number of volunteers

The 2011 strategy set out to recruit 1600 volunteers to support library staff. We have managed to maintain circa 850 volunteers annually to support local libraries. However, these volunteers require managing which can be staff intensive. We actively recruit where more volunteers can add value but this will not save money as staffing is already minimal.

Raising fines

Northamptonshire libraries already charges comparatively higher charges compared to bordering counties. For example, adult fines are 9p higher than Milton Keynes and Cambridgeshire and 17p more than Warwickshire. Raising fines further would deter users from accessing the service and is unlikely to lead to an increase in income.

Increase digital offer

We are continually developing our digital offer but this can be cost prohibitive. We have invested significantly in e-lending platforms and regularly review the market to ensure best value and service for our customers. All our libraries use self-service technology to ensure efficiency of staffing. Digital resources can be more sustainable in the long term and part of our role is to increase digital confidence and skills in our customers to enable this channel shift. By offering assisted digital support for online bus pass and blue badge applications, libraries have enabled NCC to channel shift these costly transactions.

Increase income generation

The service continues to exploit any avenues to generate new income streams. Additionally Section 106 money has also been identified per area/library and this

investment will be offered for improvements in line with the Section 106 regulations where possible.

Better stock management

By exploiting new technology and working with a regional consortium and our suppliers, we have realised efficiencies in the stock procurement process. This has enabled us to remove our in-house cataloguing, procurement and system teams. The introduction of dynamic stock rotation enabled us to reduce a costly delivery process. The adult library user survey 2016 showed a 1% increase in stock satisfaction by customers.

Reduce staffing levels

Since the library strategy (2011) there have been a number of staffing restructures to realise savings. These focused largely on management and back office support where efficiencies could be made. We operate on minimal front-line staffing within health and safety guidelines and it is no longer possible to reduce staffing further without closing libraries. Northamptonshire libraries are already the cheapest service to run.

Greater use of space

Where possible libraries collocate with other services to help reduce property costs for the council, these include borough and district councils. Hireable meeting spaces have been created where possible in libraries to generate revenue and this currently counts for 11% of our income. NCC property services continue to work with us to look for opportunities to reduce costs.

Review running costs

As stated in the library review document, we have made over £300,000 of savings since the library service review (2011). We continue to exploit technology to achieve efficiencies where possible but the largest proportion of costs to the service are for staffing. As stated, we operate on minimal front-line staffing within health and safety guidelines and it is no longer possible to reduce staffing further without closing libraries. Northamptonshire libraries are already the cheapest service to run. The data indicates that Northamptonshire has the lowest funding levels for library services in counties in England both in actual funding and in funding per 1000 head of population. Despite this, it achieves the average levels of library service visits of all the counties. Given it achieves the same levels of visits but has the lowest levels of funding, it ranks as the most cost effective library service in the country.

Close larger libraries and keep the smaller ones

64.9% of library users utilise the 8 largest libraries. These properties also offer the best opportunities to generate sustainable income. The smaller libraries do not have the infrastructure locally or within the buildings to support the amount of customers, stock, events, customer parking and public transport access that it would need to be able to provide in order to support the extensive increase in customers that the closure of a larger library would require. Though maintaining smaller libraries would enable those in more rural locations to access local services, it would not be practical to close the larger facilities.

Reducing Opening hours and some extension of opening hours

The 3 options all propose a reduction in opening hours for the remaining council run libraries. These are based on usage figures with reductions made at least popular times. Many people suggested removing Sunday opening as these are quieter times in libraries and this is already part of the proposals. Prior to the library strategy (2011) the service had made large cuts to its opening hours and this had a significant effect on usage and lending. Evening opening has not proved popular or cost effective however, a community library model would have more flexibility to offer this if it met local needs. We are exploring extended unstaffed opening hours in libraries where this is feasible. Reducing opening hours would not deliver any property savings.

Charging for book borrowing/ subscription service

Statutory public libraries are prohibited from making charges for the lending of printed material as per the Public Libraries Act 1964. The library service already uses paid subscriptions for a number of other income generation streams including services to choirs and orchestras and the school's library service.

Divert money from education budget to pay for libraries

Education funding is ring-fenced and cannot be used to provide library services to the community.

Go back to basics

The Libraryplus services were introduced as part of the 2011 library strategy to future proof the library service by adding value to the facilities in the community and hence preventing the 8 proposed library closures. By delivering more local services through libraries the council was able to achieve significant savings elsewhere including assistance for blue badge and bus pass applications. It makes financial sense to exploit existing library buildings and staffing to deliver a hub of services from a single

location. We operate on minimal front-line staffing within health and safety guidelines and it is no longer possible to reduce staffing further without closing libraries Northamptonshire libraries are already the cheapest service to run. According to the 2016 adult public library user survey, only 50% of library customers use libraries to borrow books. If libraries solely delivered book lending it would be a very expensive service benefitting 50% less citizens.

Partner with businesses/ commercial sponsorship

There have been multiple attempts since 2011 at securing partnerships or sponsorship for individual libraries with limited success. With the community managed model, there would be significant opportunity for a community group to partner with a business to ensure the sustainability of a community managed library.

Parish/ town/ district and borough councils stepping in to take over

Many respondents suggested that there were other infrastructures which may be well placed to take over the running of libraries. Under the proposals in Option1 for community management of libraries, this would be possible.

Partnership delivery through schools

One of the libraries was formerly delivered from Caroline Chisholm School as part of a Private Finance Initiative. The county council withdrew from this initiative as it was not cost effective but customer feedback also indicated that the location within the school made access difficult. We are open to the suggestion of schools running a community library.

Fraudulent users and lost stock

There were very many respondents who believed there to be many fraudulent or duplicate users of the library service and that the presumed lost stock as a result of this practice would be costing the service money. There is no data or evidence to support this. There have been some previous occasions where some customers have abused the DVD hire system. These were identified quickly and dealt with locally and we have put measures in place to minimise this.

Consider unstaffed libraries

The service are currently trialling unstaffed times in Moulton library but this is largely due to the great working relationship that has been developed with other businesses within the purpose built building. Not all libraries would have the security in place to provide this and there can be an initial outlay for securing retail and DVD stock so that it can be locked down when unstaffed. As per the adult library survey 2016, only 50%

of customers would benefit from this as the other 50% require staff engagement. CCTV and insurance changes may also be required.

There is a nationally available system called Openplus which allows unstaffed access to libraries. It is expensive to set up and relies largely on new IT which may not be compatible with the current systems. It has been proven to have difficulties with homeless sleeping within the libraries and other issues such as criminal damage and theft of property. Some customers do not feel safe in these buildings without the presence of staff. One Council is currently being sued due to an attack in the library whilst unstaffed. Representatives from the service have visited Peterborough who are using the Openplus system and having considered the costs and benefits of this have determined it is not cost effective in the current circumstances.

Invest in remaining libraries to improve them

The library service has had minimum opportunity to make wide reaching improvements to the library environments from revenue funding, but has made local small scale improvements where this has been necessary. Whilst revenue funding has been used to carry out essential repairs and maintenance, Section 106 monies have been used where possible to enhance the library provision. Capital funding has been used to fund the IT infrastructure upgrades necessary to maintain the computer networks in the libraries.

NCC are currently looking at options to invest in the remaining libraries to improve usage, access and income generation opportunities.

Extend loan time of books

Some respondents suggested that it would be preferable to extend the loan times on books to prevent having to travel to a library, especially in light of proposed changes to public transport. Library customers may renew their book if they wish to keep it for longer and the service has made it easy to renew books either online, by phone, or in person at any library irrespective of where they book was borrowed.

Review libraries on an individual basis

Some respondents felt strongly that libraries should be reviewed on a case by case basis, particularly where they felt that such an approach may be advantageous for their own preferred library. In preparing the library service review document and in the subsequent analysis undertaken through the Equalities Impact Assessments, libraries have been considered individually. However it is important that the Council take a strategic approach to the provision of library services in the county, and this requires looking at the service in the round as opposed to libraries on a case by case basis.

Northamptonshire County Council

The new review has taken more of an individual approach in developing proposals.

Relocate from expensive buildings

It is true to say that some of the library buildings are expensive to operate from, particularly those in Corby Cube, Weston Favell Centre and Towcester Forum. However there are operational and customer benefits from being in these buildings. Less staff are needed due to the sites being shared with other services and the associated provision of security and premises staff. Library staff are able to concentrate more fully on serving customers. These spaces offer a much better customer experience especially since they are co-located with another district and borough services. There would be significant costs in extracting from the current lease arrangements and the full costs of relocating are likely to prohibitive. Although the property costs are expensive in these libraries, these are among the busiest libraries in the county.

NCC are currently looking at ways to reduce costs in some of the more expensive buildings.

Spend less on books

Books and other physical media are part of the statutory offer in libraries. The service has taken care to invest appropriately in new stock. Without this the quality of provision would decline and there would be a reduction in customer choice, the ability to offer reading promotions and provide books clubs. In recent years, some of the book fund has been diverted from physical stock to investing in digital stock.

Develop the Children's Centre Services further in libraries

The current Children's Centre Services offer in libraries is provided under contract from Public Health. The response in the consultation with regards to the Children's Centre Services offer in libraries was significant and the strength of feeling with regards to the potential reduction in services was clear.

A further Children's Centre Service consultation was run in 2018 and the feedback from this is also being taken into account in the new proposals.

FAQ's on the model from the previous consultation

The following responses were provided via the cabinet feedback report for the previous consultation model proposals

Not feasible for communities where there is no parish council

There are four libraries in the county that are not in parished areas. These are Kingsthorpe, Far Cotton, St James and Abington. This removes the ability for precepting in these areas if that is how other parishes choose to proceed. NCC are working with local communities to identify possible solutions for these libraries.

Lack of volunteers/ skillset of volunteers

Many respondents were not sure that the requisite number of volunteers would be recruited to enable sufficient staffing of the library. Further concerns were raised about the skill set of volunteers. Information has been provided to community groups who expressed an initial interest in community management which includes a comprehensive guide to volunteering in a community library. This provides examples of a wide range of roles that require a varied skillset suitable for all levels of confidence. The Option 1 model includes support in the recruitment and training of volunteers.
The service has a vast experience of working with volunteers demonstrates that there are a variety of skill sets available (currently we have 44 different roles.) Not all volunteers have all of these skills, but many can be developed over time and with increased confidence. Indeed, many of the current library staff started as volunteers in a library. A range of skills will be required from gardening through to IT although the skills needed to manage a library on a day to day basis are largely based around customer service – listening to what the customer wants and doing your best to provide it. Customers use libraries for very many reasons, not least of which is social contact which is something that volunteers can provide in abundance.

Update: NCC will provide training and support to all community groups.

A vehicle/ organisation/ collective to make it happen

Respondents correctly identified that there would need to be an organisation through which the community library could be established. Respondents were concerned that this would take time and significant support to establish.

Need for employed staff/ librarians

Over the years the role of the professional librarian has changed significantly and developments in technology have meant that the professional staff can be refocussed. Although the service maintains a very small core of professional librarians who manage stock, information and enquiry services none of the front-line staff are required to have this qualification. However, there is comprehensive training provided and the library service train the front-line staff to a high level of customer enquiry skills. Community managed offer to communities includes access to the same level of

training for volunteers in community libraries as for those front-line staff employed by the library service. With book selection provided as part of the community managed library offer, there should be no requirement for librarians in community managed libraries.

Long term survival of the community model

Respondents were often concerned that the community managed library model might not be sustainable over the longer term. However there are more than 500 volunteer libraries across the country. There were less than ten in 2010 and now they're more than 10% of the total. Volunteer libraries are now a generally accepted part of the provision in more than half (81 of 151) library services in England, with the older ones (notably in Buckinghamshire) being over ten years old.

Support for the library property

There was significant feedback provided on the need for support in respect of the property considerations that groups undertaking community library management might have to pick up. The research evidence base on community managed libraries indicates that support for property matters is a condition for success. NCC will work with community groups to enable them to understand the property issues that will need to be included within their Business Case

Equality of access to Community Managed libraries

There were some concerns expressed that groups running community managed libraries might not allow full access to libraries and might be discriminatory in their approach.

In the proposed model, a Service Level Agreement will be developed to specifically include a provision requiring the community organisation to operate and manage the Community Managed Library for the benefit of the Community and of all such other members of the public as may wish to make use of it. Any community libraries found to be discriminating outside of the library bylaws, would be in breach of the Service Level Agreement with NCC. We will be delivering mandatory equality training to all those operating within Community Managed libraries.

Further Considerations:

Bus Passes and Blue Badge Applications

In the consultation, people told us very clearly about how the proposals would impact on those who depend on libraries for their Bus Passes or their Blue Badge applications. By definition, these are those people who are likely to have reduced

capacity to travel to a larger library to receive these services. Whilst the model is assisted self-serve, the eligibility criteria indicate that those who are completing these applications are those more likely to need support in completing online applications.
In the proposed community managed library scheme, Blue Badges and Bus Passes would remain services offered by retained libraries and community managed libraries who off the LAP model.

FAQ's received prior to this consultation (Dec 18 – Feb 19)

Will TUPE regulations apply to the Community Managed Libraries?

No, TUPE transfer regulations will not apply to the proposals. If the Community groups wish to employ people within the organisation, this will need to be completed independently on their terms and conditions, TUPE regulations are not applicable in this proposal. It is our intention that all NCC staff will remain NCC staff and employed at an NCC site.