

The Denby Dale Community Library acknowledges the serious financial situation of the Council and the difficult choices which have to be made. This submission is our contribution to this important consultation and we hope it will help inform the Council's thinking about how best to reconfigure our library service.

As a community supported library based in a new building owned and managed by a community trust, we believe we are well placed to comment. Thanks to the generosity of the Council, the Parish Council, the local community and a number of charitable trusts, we are now able to provide free premises to the Denby Dale library. We are also discovering the benefits of shared space as we start to provide new and enhanced services to our community.

We would have preferred to choose between options for the future of the organisation of the library service - these options based on full information and clear principles.

As the consultation plan does not make any of this explicit and the survey questionnaire does not allow us to do this, we set out and explain below what we believe should be included in the list of principles which should underlie the reconfiguration of our library service.

Overview: four principles of a reconfigured library service

1. Volunteers cannot RUN a library without help from a professional library service. We want all our libraries to be community supported, not community run. In order to be a library, there are some minimum criteria, which we explain below. In particular, the central purchasing, stock management and circulation of books across Kirklees is essential.
2. However, modern libraries are about more than books. A reconfigured service should meet educational, social and wellbeing needs of the community. Sharing premises and working in partnership with local charities, social enterprises and businesses should be the norm, both for service and efficiency reasons.
3. The reconfigured library service should allocate its reduced expenditure so as to be as fair as possible to all citizens in Kirklees. In making any decisions based on cost, the Council should also take into account costs (or savings) which are in Council budgets held elsewhere, in particular premises costs.
4. There should be recognition that libraries within the service have evolved differently since the previous reconfiguration. Each library has already made changes, many involving significant community investment, and these differences should be taken into account.

1.0 The role of volunteers and the support they need

1.1 ACCESS TO A PROFESSIONAL LIBRARY SERVICE

A volunteer run library, without access to a professional library service, will not survive as a library. At best it will be a book lending centre with a rapidly deteriorating book stock which is not renewed.

The support services needed by any group of volunteers helping to run a library must include:

- Purchasing, stock management, circulation and renewal of the book stock (including ebooks);
- Cataloguing, classification and recording of the book stock;
- Access to a library circulation management system to enable issues and returns;
- Access to the national interlibrary loans service to compensate for limitations in local book stock;
- Licensing of access to online and digital resources - e.g. Google Bookscholar, British Library catalogues, periodical indexes etc;
- Access to IT systems and hardware for public access and for use of the central library management system;
- Management of lending records and payments of authors' lending rights and digital rights;
- Training of volunteers in use of the library management system, self issue machines, public use of computers, organisation and shelving of book stock;
- Where necessary, police checks for volunteers working with children and vulnerable adults;
- Sharing in local, regional and national information and other campaigns - e.g. literacy campaigns, public health awareness programmes, advice services to reduce social and economic exclusion.

No small volunteer run library could hope to provide these and it would be ridiculous to try to duplicate them across a number of small libraries. Without these support services the community would not have a genuine, sustainable library service.

1.2 ACCESS TO PROFESSIONAL LIBRARY STAFF

It is our experience that many, or even most, volunteers are happy to help and be as self sufficient as possible, but also feel the need for ongoing support of professional library staff.

KMC surveys suggest that users also prefer their library to have both volunteers and professional library staff.

It will be essential to maintain a core of professional library staff in Kirklees. Some of these should be peripatetic to ensure that good standards are maintained in all libraries.

We acknowledge that a significant proportion of the library service budget is staff costs and that the required savings are unlikely to be made without reductions in this area. Volunteers, properly trained and supported, can provide front line customer service, and undertake specific tasks, but will inevitably not have the training or experience of professional staff.

In reconfiguring the service, there should be an emphasis on recruiting, training and supporting volunteers to do the basics, freeing up the professional staff to focus on value added activity. The training and support of professional library staff is also very important, so that they can adapt services to meet local needs.

We believe that a team of professional staff members dividing their time between several libraries supporting volunteers could be arranged.

Any member of staff allocated to work in a community library must be strongly supported by a central management team.

2.0 Sharing premises

We believe there are significant advantages to libraries sharing premises with other organisations. There is the simple measure of footfall, where all parties benefit from having access to customers coming in to any one service. Shared premises may involve shared community services, retail services, a café, meeting space, leisure or business activities. Each of these will bring in a range of customers, who may then use the other services.

Sharing of premises is particularly useful where customers are socially isolated as the opportunities for engaging with them and signposting them to services are improved.

3.0 Fairness

Unless the Council decides to target library services at particular groups and areas within the Borough (which should be an openly made decision) then all citizens should have a fair share of library resources available and accessible to them.

3.1 ACCESS

Travelling any distance to a library is not an option for many - for example a parent visiting a library with a child after collecting them from school - and so an over concentration of the service onto a central library should be avoided.

3.2 EXPENDITURE PER USER

The present distribution of libraries and expenditure on library staff per user appear to be an accident of history and are very uneven throughout the Borough.

When the full costs of a library service, including staff, back office services and all premises costs are combined it is probable that inequalities are even greater. A reconfigured service should aim to identify these inequalities and, as far as possible, reduce them.

4.0 Evolution of libraries since last reconfiguration

In parts of Kirklees great progress and savings have been made through the use of volunteers and alternative premises arrangements, but this has not been uniform throughout the Borough. This unevenness, some of it due to timing, some to capacity, should be taken into account in reconfiguring the service.

4.1 VOLUNTEERS

In many, but not all, existing libraries considerable staff savings have been made through the use of volunteers. A reconfigured service should recognise and incorporate the inequalities in the distribution of such community effort.

4.2 PROVISION AND MANAGEMENT OF LIBRARY PREMISES

A way should be found to take into account the expenditure and considerable community effort made by others, in providing alternative premises arrangements which ensure that there are no ongoing costs to the Council. Examples include the provision of space in shared community buildings and where a Parish Council has taken over the responsibility and costs of providing library space.

These substantial savings will not otherwise be credited to the library service budget even though these alternative provisions have been arranged explicitly to maintain a local library service.

The sharing of accommodation in community buildings has usually been able to increase access to the library service through longer opening hours while saving the Council substantial sums of money.

Summary of reconfiguration principles

1. Volunteers should be encouraged, supported and trained but no reconfigured service should rely on volunteers to run a library on their own; they must be supported by the library service.
2. Premises should be shared in order to enhance the service that is provided to the community.
3. The reconfiguration should be tested against a principle of fairness to all residents of Kirklees.
4. The reconfiguration should also be seen to take full account of the efforts and expenditure that some communities have already made, through the provision of premises and volunteers.

Stages of a possible reconfiguration of the library service

We are conscious of the considerable efforts made by members and officers of the Council to deal with the substantial cuts in funding and we appreciate that the questionnaire suggests that the Council is already considering sharing of premises and more extensive use of volunteers. However, we are also aware that it is often too easy to present criticism and principles and leave it to others to work up viable solutions.

With that in mind we present below the stages of a possible reconfiguration of the library service based on the four principles outlined above. In doing so we suggest that, if there is a need for any library closures, selection should result from these principles and a transparent process of applying them.

1. There will continue to be a need for a central library in Kirklees where some of the library services to users will be concentrated - for example a reference collection and local history. Transport and accessibility suggest that this should continue to be located in Huddersfield. However the share of present library expenditure on this central library is very high, partly as the building is listed, very expensive to run and is not well suited for purpose. Therefore consideration of the future of the Central Library Building in Huddersfield should be reopened.
2. Wherever possible all other libraries should be in premises shared with other community or Council services, in order to save costs and to introduce new users to libraries and other services.
3. ALL libraries in the new configuration, including the central library, should be supported by volunteers.
4. The fixed costs for providing the library service should be determined. These are the costs that will be essential no matter how many libraries are open and are broadly those covered in section 1.1 above. Taking this amount from the agreed library services budget gives the balance to be split across the various libraries, including the central library
5. The share of staff costs currently allocated to the central library looks disproportionate and should be reviewed.
6. The allocation of staff budget across the dispersed libraries is also inconsistent, with very different costs per library user. Once the central library staff costs have been set, the remaining staffing budget should be allocated to dispersed libraries in the Borough in proportion to the number of active users - the staff themselves being allocated to fixed locations and to peripatetic teams.

- except that -

7. There should be no reduction in the present staffing expenditure in cases where costs have already been completely, or very substantially, reduced from the Council's budget through community action.
8. Some libraries may then have to be selected for closure. Any such closure would be a result of applying the four principles set out at the start of this paper. We suggest that local communities should be given a window of opportunity to increase their number of volunteers and/or seek alternative premises and/or funding in order to maintain their local library.
9. Essential back office functions (as listed in 1.1 above on page 2) should then be available in full for the remaining libraries.

Alternative delivery models

We don't believe we have the information or expertise to make a judgement on the alternative delivery models. We did find, and would recommend as useful background reading, a review of the alternative models by Somerset Council – link below

<http://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/s5281/Appendix%201%20-%20review%20of%20alternative%20delivery%20models.pdf>

Given the possibility of economies of scale, we would also recommend expanding collaborative working with other local authorities; collective book purchasing is an obvious option which we believe is already happening, but there are likely to be.

Trustees of the Denby Dale Community Library

(excluding Graham Turner – although a Trustee of DDCL, because of a potential conflict of interests Graham did not take part in any of the discussions leading up to this paper and had no input into its conclusions and has no view on its content)

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