



Libraries as community hubs: Case studies and learning

A report for Arts Council England
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Executive summary

This report presents findings from six case study areas of libraries in England that are co-located in community hubs. The aim was to explore different approaches and configurations; some of the opportunities and challenges that can occur for libraries through co-location with other services; and identify learning that might apply to other areas.

The research found that:

- The idea of a library being part of a community hub alongside other services is not a new one, but has gained increased traction in recent years
- Libraries are well placed to play a role in community hubs because of their existing position of trust within local communities, the contribution they make across a range of agendas, and their ethos of partnership working
- The arrangement of libraries and other services within community hubs varies considerably from place to place and is driven by local circumstances –success rests on reflecting and responding to local need
- Where libraries are co-located in community hubs, there are visible benefits for the library itself, other partners and services in the building and local residents
- Changing to a community hub model can generate natural concerns about the process, but these were outweighed in the case studies by the benefits, including the longer term sustainability of the library for the local community

1. Introduction

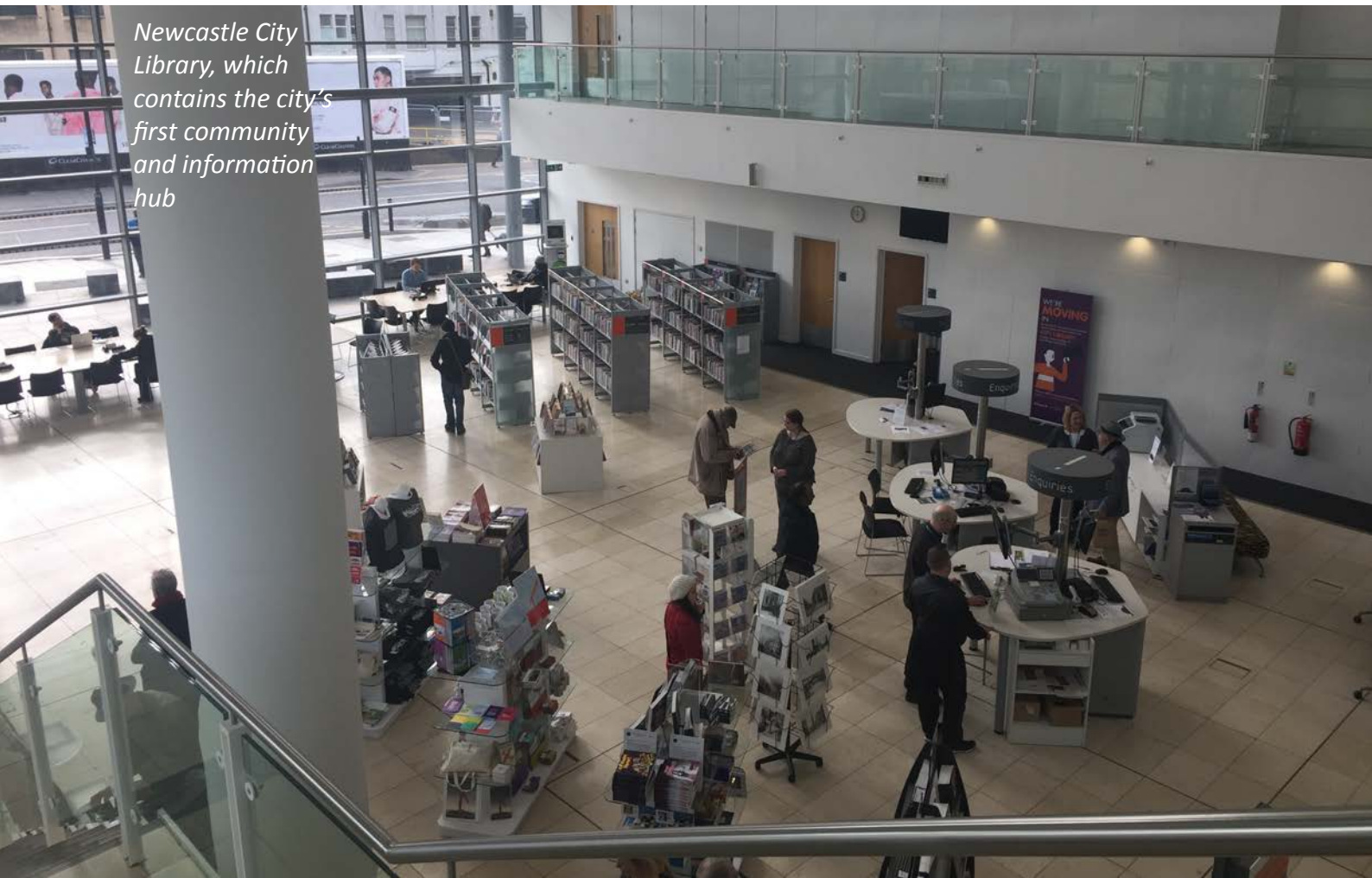
This research examines the role of libraries that are co-located alongside other services in community hubs. It was commissioned by Arts Council England to help build an evidence base of the contribution that libraries can make to different local and national policy priorities.

In this report, the focus is on how building based partnerships that involve libraries can support access to a range of different services close to where people live, help to foster other community activities, and maintain library services in local areas.

Through a case study approach, this report presents:

- An overview of the policy context around community hubs, the rationale for co-locating libraries with other services, and different approaches that can be taken
- Learning for the future when considering co-locating a library in a community hub
- Six case studies of co-located libraries, examining the local context, the activities and services on offer to local communities, views on the impact and benefits, and challenges encountered

Newcastle City Library, which contains the city's first community and information hub



2. Context

2.1 Community hubs

A broad definition of a community hub is a place that is a focal point for local activities, services, and facilities, accessible to the local community. They are multi-purpose and reflect local needs in terms of what they provide. Community hubs have an important social function bringing people together from a cross section of the community, addressing isolation, and being a safe space where anyone is welcome.

For the purposes of this research, there are two main models for community hubs that are particularly relevant when considering the role of libraries in these buildings:

- Community hubs with a public sector focus – run by a local authority, housing association or other public sector organisation, bringing together different services under one roof. A positive impact can be helping to encourage more integrated ways of working between diverse organisations and sectors¹
- Community hubs run by community organisations – with different projects, activities and services, often run with a high level of involvement from the local community.² The roots of community run hubs can be traced back to churches, mutual aid, friendly societies and the development of adult education, and ‘remain places where people can organise’³

These two types of community hub are not mutually exclusive – a public sector orientated hub can still have spaces for voluntary sector organisations to run services and provide activities; and similarly, many community run hubs have partnerships with their local authority.

The rationale for co-locating services in community hubs can include:

- Efficiency in the use of assets and reducing costs through bringing services together in one place
- Supporting a more local and devolved approach to service delivery linked to the localism and community rights agenda which prioritises decision-making powers moving from central government to individuals and communities
- Promoting community involvement and enabling communities to take action in their local area through providing physical spaces and the connections to start up new activities and services
- Providing services in a more accessible and seamless manner for residents, including making it easier to signpost to other sources of support⁴

1. For wider context, see: Dunleavy, P (2010) The Future of Joined up public services (2020 Public Services Trust)

2. Locality (2016) Community Hubs: How to set up, run, and sustain a community hub to transform local service provision

3. Smith, M. K. (2002). ‘Community centres and associations’, The encyclopaedia of informal education.

4. LGA/Cabinet Office (2017) Unlocking the value of public sector assets and LGA (2012) Local solutions for future local library services

Despite the apparent benefits, barriers to more ‘joined-up services’ in the public sector are often highlighted, especially within the context of shrinking budgets, and a tendency to want to protect distinct activities.⁵ Physical co-location of services has been identified as a factor that helps to overcome some of these tensions.⁶ In practice, integration might be experienced at different levels - ranging from a shared workforce across services, to physical co-location occupying separate spaces in the same building, with limited cross over in terms of working practice.

2.2 Libraries and co-location in community hubs

It is important to note that libraries can be seen as community hubs in their own right – providing a trusted, welcoming space where people can access information, support, try something new, and where inequalities in society might begin to be tackled. Libraries give ‘people a chance, a second chance, and even a third chance’.⁷ The role of libraries as an essential part of community life has been emphasised, with an ability to help foster a sense of place.⁸

The co-location of libraries with other services has been an increasing focus in recent policy documents and research in the library and local government sector (for example, the Libraries Taskforce, Carnegie Trust, Locality, the LGA). This approach is not a new one for libraries, particularly given the increased emphasis on their changing role, and the contribution they make to different agendas such as employment support, promoting healthy lifestyles, cultural access and more.

Opportunities can arise for libraries to co-locate with other services and share buildings and costs with community services, public sector organisations, private sector partners and the voluntary and community sector – particularly when the library might be in a location that is no longer suitable or too expensive to maintain or renovate.⁹ The value of this approach is that where libraries are part of community hubs, they can benefit from a more visible presence in locations where people are already going to access services. Depending on how the approach has developed, co-location can open up the potential to improve access for more vulnerable users, attract new users who might not have previously visited the library, and form partnerships and opportunities that are easier to sustain through proximity with other services.

5. Wilson et al (2015) *Joining up public services around local, citizen needs* Institute for Government

6. Ibid.

7. Carnegie Trust (2014) *Speaking volumes – the impact of libraries on wellbeing*

8. DCMS (2014) *Independent Library Report for England*

9. Libraries Taskforce (2016) *Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021*

The figure below summarises the physical spaces that can be involved where libraries are co-located in community hubs, the kinds of services provided, and what the partnership might involve. The starting point is that the library still occupies a designated space of some description, but that the organisation and configuration of services and partnerships involves many permeations. Locality have previously summarised different delivery models - any of these might apply to a library in a community hub:¹⁰

- Local authority run
- Co-produced libraries – either community managed, with some form of ongoing council support; community supported (for example, through volunteers) but still led and funded by the council; or commissioned and funded by the council but delivered by another organisation such as a charity, trust or social enterprise
- Independently run by the community or another organisation with no local authority support - asset and non-asset owning

Chelmsley Wood Library, Solihull



10. Locality (2013) Community libraries – learning from experience – summary briefing for local authorities (for ACE and LGA)

<p>Where? Physical spaces Community hubs involve buildings of different sizes, serving different geographical areas – neighbourhood; town/city level; or a rural area.</p>	<p>New building purpose built to accommodate the library and other services</p> <hr/> <p>Existing library building adapted from sole library use to multi-purpose – creating new spaces for other services</p> <hr/> <p>Library relocated to another building where existing services are already being delivered. Library is a tenant in the building alongside others.</p> <hr/> <p>Small community centres (neighbourhood level) where library occupies a small space in the building</p>
<p>How? Partnership approaches The library may have differing levels of prominence in the community hub building</p>	<p>The library itself is the main hub – facilitating partnerships for additional services in the library space (designated areas/pop up stands from different services; clubs and groups using spaces, exhibitions). Workforce separate.</p> <hr/> <p>The library is one building partner alongside others – council services, health services, children’s centre. Signpost to each other, answer queries but workforce still largely separate</p> <hr/> <p>Integration of services – with shared staff across library and other services</p>
<p>What? Activities and services The community hub might involve a mixture of different services/providers; or a clear theme/grouping of services/activities</p>	<p>Health and wellbeing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GP/health centre • Access to health and social care information and advice (public health, or VCS organisations) • Signposting to specialist services • Group activities for the community <hr/> <p>Employment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to jobs and employment support • Job Centre Plus • Skills development programmes/training • Flexible workspace/start up space • Enterprise hubs • IT access <hr/> <p>Children and young people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children’s centres/nursery • Career services • Reading groups and activities • Youth volunteering • Links to colleges/local uni <hr/> <p>Culture and leisure: Gyms Museums/art galleries/performances space</p> <hr/> <p>Other council services: Face to face counter services (benefits, parking, housing, signposting to other council services)</p> <hr/> <p>Other organisations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cafes • VCS organisations • Citizens Advice • Post Office • Police

Figure 1: Mapping the co-location options for libraries

Overview of the six case studies

3.1 Aims

As the previous section outlined, there are policy drivers that support the case for co-locating libraries with other services, and these have been covered in other research.

The primary aim of these six case studies is to illustrate some of the different approaches to the co-location of libraries in community hubs; the configuration of spaces; how arrangements between libraries and other services have developed; and what this means for those working in and using these buildings.

Case studies allow for a depth of investigation and understanding of what is happening in a particular context. However, they also have their limits in terms of drawing out more generalisable findings. As a result, when reading these case studies, it is worth considering that they provide a snapshot of what was happening 'on the ground' in a selection of library authorities in early 2017. The backdrop of ongoing local government cuts, falling levels of library usage particularly for book borrowing, and difficult decisions about the future of services cannot be glossed over.¹¹ The case studies hopefully provide stimulus for others in terms of reflecting on how libraries can adapt when facing an uncertain future, what might be possible through co-location, as well as some of the challenges encountered.

3.2 The case study areas

The selection process for the six case studies involved consultation with individuals working in the library sector, identifying examples through a document review, and liaising with Arts Council England. The aim was to achieve a balance of regions, rural and urban areas, different delivery models and library sizes. The case studies should not necessarily be seen as 'best practice' and for each theme that was chosen, there are numerous other examples of libraries from across England. However, in setting up the visits, we discussed with each local authority lead the extent to which their library met the following criteria:

- Co-location contributing to changes in footfall for all services in the building
- Evidence that the library and other services are engaging with a cross section of the local community
- The formation of new partnerships and opportunities for the library and other services.
- Co-location helping to secure the future of the library, or leading to significant improvements in the services being offered

We have deliberately not focussed on changes in usage patterns that might have arisen from co-location, as some arrangements were very recent, or involved a reduction in overall space, making a meaningful comparison with what came before hard. The case studies provide an overview of available data primarily to provide context around the different size of the libraries visited.

11. CIPFA annual survey figures, published December 2016

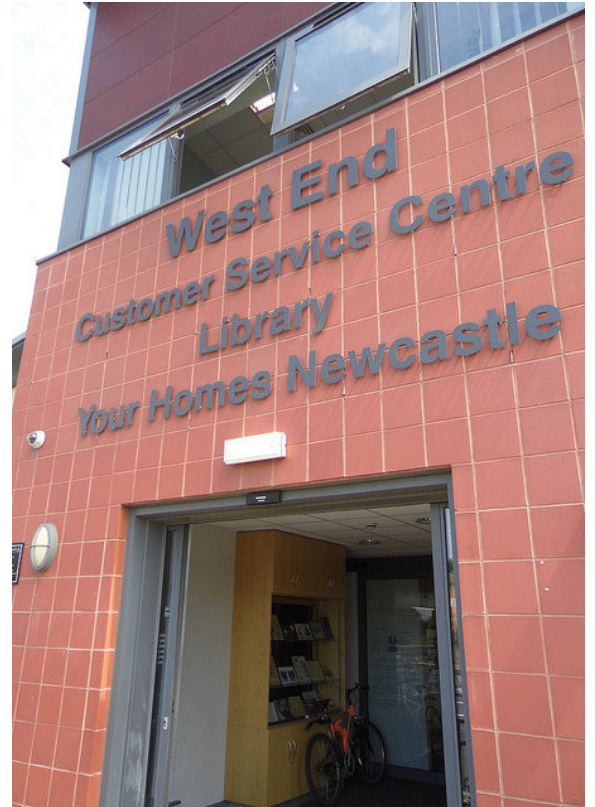
Library and area	Characteristics
The For All Healthy Living Centre, Weston-Super-Mare, South West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A local authority library in a building run by a social enterprise with a healthy living focus in the middle of an estate • A local authority review is taking place looking at co-locating libraries with children's centres.
The Curve, Slough, South East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New build 'iconic' cultural hub (including the library, museum, performance space, gallery) in the town centre as part of ongoing regeneration • Local authority run after library services were brought back in house • Other libraries in the area are seen as community hubs
West End library and Blakelaw library, Newcastle, North East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two contrasting models of co-location in two different neighbourhoods of Newcastle – one in a customer services hub, and the other run by a community centre • Wider local authority context of different partnership models to deliver libraries, and work underway to create a network of community information hubs
South Woodford Library and Gym, London Borough of Redbridge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leisure focus through co-location with a gym • Outsourced model to a trust • Council wide Leisure and Cultural strategy recognising value of community hubs
Gosforth Library Link and Dalton-in-Furness Library, Cumbria, North West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two different models within a rural area – one located in a community centre in a small town, and the other in a village hall run by volunteers • Large review of libraries in 2011 – with a strong emphasis on local area level solutions. Range of models in place to meet needs of a rural area
Chelmsley Wood library, Solihull, West Midlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Library includes co-location with a community advice hub and health hub in an urban neighbourhood area • Local authority run • Library service review due to report in 2017 on future strategic direction – strong emphasis on more hubs and partnership working

Table 1: The case study libraries

3.3 Methodology and limitations

The research involved visits to each of the libraries listed above, with a tour of the building, interviews with managers and staff in libraries and other services, and library and building users. In some cases follow up phone interviews were conducted with local authority staff at a more strategic level, and other local partners. In total, 88 people were engaged with as part of the research during March 2017. The research team also reviewed local policy documents for each local authority area.

Our engagement with library and building users was relatively fleeting, and as the Libraries Taskforce has acknowledged, more research on the evidence of impact of library service on individuals and local areas is an important area to focus on in the future. An omission from this study is seeking the views of people who do not currently engage with the libraries and/or community hub in question. This was beyond the scope and timeframe – but is another crucial element in understanding how co-located libraries might develop in the future.



West End Customer Service Centre and Library, Newcastle

4. Overall findings and recommendations

This section summarises the findings, learning and recommendations from across all six case studies. A full write up of each case study then follows.

4.1 Local authority contexts

The challenges that the six local authority areas face – and the way they articulated these challenges - were very similar across all places:

- It is accepted that the leadership role of councils in local places has shifted – to facilitators, convenors, and enablers, rather than directly delivering services in a traditional way. All were upfront in their plans and priorities about hard decisions needing to be made about the future of local services, and the importance of prioritising resources for the most vulnerable
- The need to consider alternative delivery models when transforming local public services to focus on best value and maximum impact – for example, through outsourcing, or stronger partnership working across sectors on shared area wide priorities
- An emphasis on the role of communities and residents in the co-production of local services – seeing residents as partners, building community leadership, and ensuring that local level solutions are developed and owned by communities.
- Making the most of digital opportunities – both in terms of councils operating in a smarter and more efficient way, and developing platforms that encourage residents to access services remotely

4.2 Library service reviews

Unsurprisingly, each of the six local authority areas had undertaken substantial reviews of their library services, and for some, these were either ongoing or entering a different phase. The development of community hubs featured in all of these reviews – either explicitly, or as part of an approach that emphasised area based working. Community hubs tended to be positioned as supporting council and area wide objectives, particularly around better value and use of assets, creating thriving neighbourhoods, and supporting an asset based approach in communities. For example:

- North Somerset Council's Community Access Review was looking at options in two phases for co-locating libraries and children's centres to create accessible community hubs
- Newcastle was embarking on consultation to develop a city wide network of community and information hubs, building on their range of existing partnership models
- Following a large review of the library service in 2011, Cumbria was working on an area basis with local communities to continue to identify options for smaller libraries through co-location in available buildings, such as community centres, village halls, and other public sector offices

Conscious decisions were being made in several of the case study sites not to consider outsourcing library services at this time. This was due to the potential risk of undermining integration with other council services and making co-located approaches harder to achieve in practice.

There was an overriding sense from our visits that whilst the current financial context continues to pose real challenges for library services, co-locating libraries in new or existing community hubs could be interpreted as a pragmatic development, ensuring that library provision is maintained. Where libraries take a leadership role within community hubs, they are also in a strong position to develop and strengthen partnerships.

Across the case studies, there was evidence of investment in libraries. In Redbridge, co-locating the library and the gym has improved library facilities and meant that profits from the gym could be reinvested into cultural services. The Curve in Slough is part of significant town centre regeneration with a landmark building that has completely transformed the library space from its previous home in an old 1970s building. In Weston-Super-Mare at the For All Health Living Centre (FAHLC), a small amount of investment in changing an access point is leading to the library being more connected to the children's centre already in the same building.

4.3 Key themes from the co-located library case studies

Building arrangements: There is no single way of approaching the organisation of a community hub (as Figure 1 on page 7 illustrates). The case study libraries had very little in common in terms of their size and characteristics – they ranged from small library service points in community centres (Dalton in Cumbria), to a large, new building with the library occupying multiple floors (The Curve in Slough). In some cases, the library occupied a separate space with its own entrance within the building (FAHLC, Weston-Super-Mare), or was clearly demarcated in an open plan setting (West End, Newcastle). At Chelmsley Wood in Solihull, the library space had been sub-divided to create hubs with a different focus (health, community advice, young people etc.).

Designated library space: Concerns have been expressed that co-locating a library with other services can lead to a loss of designated library space, put pressure on quiet study space, and undermine what is distinctive about a library's identity.¹² However, the case studies all demonstrated that it was possible to still have a space for a library within a multi-purpose building. In South Woodford, the two offers in the building – the gym and the library – retained their unique characteristics and appeal to different client bases through occupying separate spaces. In the two libraries we visited that were in community centres (Dalton and Blakelaw), the library and library service points were comparatively small, but were an integral part of the building. For example, in Dalton the library extended into the foyer of the community centre providing a space to sit.

12. Libraries Taskforce (2016) Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021

Developing co-location approaches: The development of libraries in community hubs can take place in a number of ways. For The Curve in Slough and West End in Newcastle, the buildings were planned with co-location in mind. In other cases, it was driven by an opportunity arising – for example, moving the library in Dalton to an already thriving community centre; or at the FAHLC where the opportunity to expand the library offer through Big Lottery funding was developed with the library service and supported by the building partners. At Chelmsley Wood, the community advice and health hub, and partnerships with other organisations were part of a council wide priority, but also taken forward by staff who were open to trying out new approaches and partnerships.

Services and activities being offered: Initially, our assumption was that the buildings visited for this research would have a co-location ‘theme’ in terms of the types of services and activities being offered to the local community. This was apparent in some cases – for example, The Curve is described as a cultural community hub, and the location of the library at the FAHLC does encourage a focus on health and wellbeing. In practice, the case studies were multi-purpose, and their offer cut across areas such as employment support and advice, adult learning and skills, culture, digital access, and providing community space. Each case study presents these in more detail.

Reinvigorating library offers: Interviewees in all the libraries were enthusiastic about the opportunities that co-location presented for the library offer within a community hub building. This could be a practical benefit such as extending library opening hours (even if unstaffed) when the building was open. Where new spaces had been created (The Curve and South Woodford), there was pride in new stock and an overall refresh. In Blakelaw, where the community centre wanted to be welcoming and open to children and young people, a new relationship had been fostered between the library and the local primary school, which involved making improvements to the children’s area at the same time. In Gosforth, where volunteers were running the Library Link, they were using this as an opportunity to set up a range of other community activities from the library that had previously been less of a priority for the branch.

Partnership working through co-location: Case study interviewees were encouraged to reflect on the opportunities co-location has created for the library. These ranged from:

- Running activities jointly – partnering with other organisations in the building to hold community activities, events and festivals
- Developing new partnerships/opportunities jointly – actively seeking organisations and partners not already in the building to run sessions, and provide information on a particular service
- Informal signposting between different services in the building and clear displays advertising other services available
- Different services largely operating separately but promoting each other’s work

Undeniably, some of the examples provided in the case studies are entirely possible in a standalone library. However, there was consensus that co-location could both act as a stimulus for more library-led initiatives, and also uncover natural synergies between

libraries and other services. In the majority of case studies partnership working was regarded as part of day-to-day operations, and physical proximity within the same building made it easier to facilitate opportunities to work together and link up events and activities. For example, at the FAHLC, the library had been a key partner in a community-led lantern parade and hosting workshops; and at Chelmsley Wood, library staff made direct referrals to the health hub, homelessness charity or community advice hub all located in the same space. Interviewees were positive about the opportunity to further develop opportunities through co-location – for example, working with other services to engage young people, or bringing in new partners such as Citizens Advice where specific needs had arisen.

Attracting new users: As outlined earlier, it is hard to draw firm conclusions about whether co-location leads to an increased number of library users. Most of the case studies reported in the interviews that there was no impact on book issues through co-location. However, the detailed case studies include some statistics where a comparison with the previous library site is available, and there were some positive trends in visit numbers. Interviewees in the case studies stressed that there were new users coming into the library as a result of being in a multipurpose building. For example, Chelmsley Wood benefits from being in a shopping centre, where people can drop in easily to the library and where the hubs in the space appeal to a broad range of customers with different needs. The Curve, with a town centre location, had attracted people in who wanted to explore the new building. It was generally felt that community hubs encouraged people to ‘do the rounds’ as building users rather than just visiting one service.

Staff roles: Co-location can result in job roles changing. For example, library assistants at West End in Newcastle undertake verification checks for those accessing customer services. At The Curve, library assistants also handle enquiries for other services in the building. In other locations, where there was less formal workforce integration, library staff still had to be able to respond to requests for information relating to other services. Many of the staff interviewed said they were proud to work in a community hub, and felt a high degree of satisfaction in having the tools at their disposal to provide a more direct response to queries. Others recognised that new skills and knowledge might be required, and whilst this could be challenging at first, it was seen as an opportunity for personal development. Some staff also spoke positively about the benefits of having more staff in the same building – in terms of being able to offer mutual support, and deal with more challenging situations together.

Responsiveness to local community: All of the case study sites emphasised that they were shaped by, and respond to community need, with one centre describing itself as a ‘people’s hub’. Where there had been changes or alterations in library provision, more formal local consultation had taken place to gather views on proposals and ensure that residents were aware of the options being considered. There were also ongoing conversations with the local community in the case studies. The FAHLC described how, with residents on their Board, the centre would always be driven by the local community. Chelmsley Wood’s youth hub was developed in response to feedback from local schools. The community run Library Link in Gosforth consists of volunteers from the local village, which meant they felt a high degree of responsibility to reflect local level needs.

The impact on users: It is not possible from this small selection of case studies to conclusively draw connections between the fact that a library is in a community hub and the likelihood of increased impact on people using the library and other services in the same building. However, the anecdotal evidence from the different people engaged as part of this research certainly suggests that there are many benefits for individuals. The aspects of libraries that are particularly valued – such as being open, inclusive, safe spaces, and providing much needed free IT for access to benefits, and job applications - were given a lot of prominence in the case study discussions, with co-location having a particular impact in the following ways:

- Through a wider range of services and activities, attracting a cross section of the community, ranging from children and families coming in for particular activities in the children’s library, young people using studying space, and older people reading newspapers
- Helping more vulnerable users to discreetly access other services, avoiding the need to for people to be sent elsewhere, and supporting self-help through the range of advice on offer
- A variety of different professionals being on hand to support those using IT – from customer service advisers, to more specialist employment provision

4.4 Challenges

Overall, there was very little negative feedback across the case studies about co-location. Where consultations had taken place on proposed changes, user feedback did involve initial concerns about a reduction in the library’s offer, and opposition to proposals where the library might be entirely self-serve. However, the people engaged with as part of this research felt that any compromises that had been made were far outweighed by the benefits of the long term viability of the library and the chance to work more creatively with other services.

The challenges that were discussed during the case study visits included:

Working out how to co-locate: Many of the case studies reflected on the challenges in the planning and set-up stage of moving towards co-location. This could involve needing to align policies for a building, rather than individual services, and reconcile different approaches – for example, over building management, opening hours, lettings policies to community groups, and health and safety. The importance of early discussions, negotiation and taking time to discuss and develop joint policies was emphasised.

Workforce adaptation: As outlined above, staff working in hubs where different services are co-located might be required to learn about what other services offer, or be trained to handle new situations such as safeguarding and child protection. This depends on the level of workforce integration being sought, but a few interviewees reflected that it was important to acknowledge that the change process could be unsettling, provide training and support, and also be clear about how much generalist knowledge staff are expected to have, whilst respecting their professional identities. In some locations, the importance

of staff continuity was emphasised in terms of being able to develop working relationships between services – where staff were temporary, or on a rota basis, this was more challenging to achieve.

Maximising benefits: Despite the benefits of increased footfall and movement between different services in community hubs, some interviewees felt that there was always more to be done to encourage promotion of each other’s services. This could be challenging when working with GPs in particular, given the different working patterns of their roles. In addition, where two services are quite distinct – such as the library and the gym – it could be more difficult to encourage cross usage.

Outreach and new partners: Despite the optimism that many case studies expressed about opportunities they would like to develop further, there were constraints on time and resources in making this a reality. Smaller libraries and community hubs are unlikely to be able to fund a specific outreach and development role, and with reduced staffing in place in some of the case study locations, the time to develop new partnerships could be limited. In addition, other public sector organisations and voluntary organisations are also facing financial constraints, which could make it hard to identify new, and sustainable partners who might want to co-locate.

Volunteer roles: Where volunteers were running a library, they could face challenges in maintaining and growing a volunteer base, and navigating the legalities of their operations. Volunteers were keen to emphasise that taking on the running of a library was difficult, and the challenge should not be underestimated. In particular, the support of library staff was still required. This echoes previous research about the importance of a staged development towards a community-run solution.¹³



Lego activities in the children’s library at The Curve, Slough

13. Locality (2013) Community libraries – learning from experience – summary briefing for local authorities (for ACE and LGA)

4.5 Learning for the future

The Libraries Taskforce has emphasised that co-location needs to be carefully designed to ensure that the library service is not overwhelmed by other services, and that the services are complementary. The case study findings support this, as well as highlighting the importance of ongoing local community consultation – either through representation on user groups, or trustee boards, or responding to feedback.

The different stakeholders interviewed were asked to provide recommendations for other libraries and services who might be moving towards co-location. These included:

Leadership:

“ At the heart of every hub - there’s people.”

User interview

- Political support and leadership for co-location as an approach is important – and a willingness to consult and engage residents on potentially controversial decisions
- Community run venues need a strong and supportive Board, with a good skills mix to see through changes
- Strong leadership at the community hub level – with an ability to bring different services together, and ensure that the community is fully engaged

For library services:

“ There are opportunities all around us. Where possible – get a library in there.”

Head of Service interview

- Look for opportunities for co-location in a range of places – for example, existing initiatives such as One Public Estate, and in regeneration or housing growth areas where there is a need for community venues and buildings
- Engage with existing strategic partners – for example, through talking to planners about opportunities through the Community Infrastructure Levy, or health partners who might be undertaking their own review of assets and be thinking about the more efficient use of public buildings
- Approach any co-location discussions openly and honestly to explain the rationale and the options – when a library is perceived as being under threat, there will be public concerns, and it is important to take time to listen to these and engage with the local community

For those involved in developing co-location approaches:

“ Not everything will work. At the end of the day, you listen to all the demands, and make sense of the noise.”

Partner interview

- Establish a project group that has the time to focus on developing and planning co-location – with a consistent set of individuals who can see the work through
- Resolve areas of disagreement as early as possible, be clear on who is responsible for what in the building, and in the run up focus on practical operational considerations
- Where a new building is involved, think about who will manage the overall space – with responsibility for facilities and health and safety
- Organise staff training and development ahead of moving, where staff from different services get to meet each other and understand each other’s roles

For staff in co-located buildings:

“ Try it before you dismiss it. There’s so much going on and you have to be willing to develop.”

Library staff interview

- Ensure that there are regular meetings in place for all users in the building. These partnership meetings can be the best way to find out what each service is working on, as well as ironing out operational issues. There should be partnership meetings for managers/ service leads, as well as for staff
- Recognise that some approaches might not be successful – partnership working can be messy, and the circumstances of partners might change, or a service might not be the right fit for the building
- Invite other partners in the building to library staff meetings – to help keep open lines of communication and ensure that the benefits of co-location are realised at an operational/frontline level
- Be open minded and willing to find out what is going on – through attending building meetings, but also through proactively engaging with other services to find out their plans and where joint opportunities might be possible
- Accept that roles do change – and embrace the variety that might come with roles in co-located buildings

5. Conclusion

As this overall summary has highlighted, no co-location arrangement in a community hub is the same. The findings indicate that it can be challenging to embed and resource the ongoing development of more 'joined-up' working, but also that co-location can also open up opportunities across different service areas and positive changes in working practices.

The six case studies that follow include libraries that have formal public sector partnerships, to a community run library attached to a village hall, and include examples serving remote rural villages, urban neighbourhoods and town centres. This variety has made it challenging to pull out commonalities, and as a result we have retained a level of detail in each case study so that anyone interested in understanding what might be possible can engage with the journey that each area went on in terms of co-locating libraries.

6. Case studies

The library at the For All Healthy Living Centre, Weston-Super-Mare North Somerset Council

1. Introduction

The For All Healthy Living Centre (FAHLC) is located in the middle of an estate in Weston-Super-Mare. The Centre is run by a social enterprise and includes a North Somerset Council (NSC) library. This case study was selected as an example of a library being located in a purpose built centre with a healthy living theme.



2. The local context

North Somerset: Key facts and figures

- Unitary authority with urban and rural areas
- Population: 202, 566
- IMD ranking: 121/326

2.1. Local priorities

“ A great place to live where people, businesses and communities flourish.”¹⁴

North Somerset is characterised as a prosperous place, with below average unemployment, good health outcomes and strategically placed near large cities. The corporate plan focuses on a small number of priorities where the council wants ‘to achieve a real shift – in ambition, profile or performance’. These are ‘prosperity and opportunity’, ‘health and wellbeing’ and ‘quality places’.

2.2. The library service and the Community Access Review

The library service in North Somerset:

- 13 libraries (12 static, 1 mobile) run by the local authority
- 52.5 FTE library staff and 270 volunteers
- Library visits: 4,120 per 1,000 population
- Active borrowers: 128 per 1,000 population
- 95% of loan and book issues are self

A major Community Access Review of buildings and services run by NSC started in 2016, focussing on 14 children’s centres and 12 libraries.¹⁴ This supports area wide priorities for quality places with communities empowered to provide their own solutions, and the transformation programme towards a ‘modern, innovative, and accessible council’.

Outsourcing to a trust model had been rejected given the size of the service, and North Somerset’s membership of the Libraries West consortium. This approach

would also risk undermining the move towards more integrated service delivery.¹⁷

Within this context, the aim of the Community Access Review is to make sure that buildings and services are fit for purpose, in the right places and are cost effective. Co-location of libraries has already happened in some locations – for example, the central library in Weston-Super-Mare is in the town hall, alongside customer services, housing benefit services and the police.

“ We have services, and we want to continue to provide them, but we need to co-locate to save money.”

Library staff interview

The review has been clearly framed as retaining and improving services but in a reduced number of buildings, drawing on the synergies that already exist between libraries and children’s centres in terms of the trusted spaces they provide for the local community.¹⁸ It is due to be completed by March 2019 and will deliver £500,000 of savings by 2018/19. NSC overall has £10.4m of savings identified for 2017/18.

14. North Somerset Corporate Plan 2015-19

15. Figures from 2011 census; CIPFA 2015-16; and NSC briefing

16. Community Access Review website

17. CAR Review June 2016 Cabinet paper

18. CAR Review June 2016 and Dec 2016 Cabinet papers

The main components of the review include:

- Libraries and children's centres will be co-located where possible to reduce overheads
- Co-located hubs will be accessible, welcoming spaces, offering a range of activities, and with other organisations using the building. NSC defines a community hub as 'use of our buildings and facilities by a wide range of community groups'¹⁹
- A move to integrated working and staffing structures with staff in co-located centres knowledgeable about both functions
- Enhanced digital access for local communities – self-service and support to develop digital skills
- Maximising income generation through rent from partners and reviews of fees and charges

“As a result, at the end of this three-year programme some services will look different. There will be more co-located libraries and children's centres and closer working with partners such as the police and health colleagues.”²⁰

Recognising that each locality has different needs, consultation took place on the first phase of proposals in 2016 in locations where there was the potential to explore alternative models and property options. This was underpinned by a comprehensive review of current usage patterns.²¹ Resident feedback acknowledged the need to change in order to retain services, and supported designing new approaches in localities.

The first phase resulted in a range of outcomes: extending opening hours through self-service key pad access in seven sites; co-locating libraries and children's centres in three sites; service reviews in buildings where libraries and children's centres would not be moving (this includes the case study library at the FAHLC); and one transfer of a library to the local community.²² As part of the review, there will be £820,000 of investment in property, IT and access funded from capital receipts from buildings that will be sold.

19. Weston South CAR Review information pack

20. Community Access Review website

21. Usage and Locality information to support the CAR review

22. CAR Review December 2016 Cabinet paper

3. The library at the For All Healthy Living Centrew



The FAHLC from the outside - the building was designed to accommodate the different partners who have been involved from the outset.

The FAHLC is located in Weston South ward which is one of the 2% most deprived wards in England. 44% of households are social rented, and a third of households with children do not have any adults in employment.²³ The building is located in the middle of an estate, opposite a row of shops, a housing association information hub, and credit union.

3.1 The development of the Centre and the library

The FAHLC opened in 2005. Prior to being developed, there was a church and a collection of pre-fab buildings on an adjacent site. The main partners – NSC, the NHS, the Church and a local community association - came together to develop a new approach to improve cohesion between services and the local community.

Initial capital funding of £2.65m was provided by the National Lottery, partners listed above, Sure Start and the Town Council.²⁴ The Council owned the site, and was the brokering agency through the construction period, but a social enterprise was established - the For All Healthy Living Company – to client manage the build and bring the co-located agencies together. It now manages the centre, the GP practice and runs other services through grants and commissions. The overall FAHLC mission is to reinvest in the health and wellbeing of the local community.²⁵

There was strong community involvement, with the approach being driven by local preferences:

“ We didn’t set out at the start what we might be able to achieve. Working in communities like this – it’s the nature of the people working there who control success and otherwise.”

Building partner interview

Initially library services were delivered through a small collection located in the reception, and a mobile library. However, this was poorly used, and the library service felt more could be done in the area. A successful bid was made to the Big Lottery Community Libraries Fund in 2007. This was led by NSC, but with full support of the FAHLC and its management. A decision was made to locate the library in an open courtyard area in the middle of the building. The library opened in 2009.

23. www.n-somerset.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Weston-super-Mare-South-ward-profile.pdf

24. LGA/IDEA report on the Centre, 2007

25. FAHLC Vision statement

“ There were a lot of conversations at a high level around how to go from nothing to a proper library space. There was a lot of debate about whether it was the right location, but the courtyard wasn't being used much, so consensus did emerge quickly and it was an easy win.”

Local authority staff interview



The library at the FAHLC is located in the middle of the building in a dedicated space and is immediately obvious upon entry.

3.2 Services provided in the library and the FAHLC

Key facts and figures about the library at the FAHLC

- Active borrowers – 871
- Visits – 40, 244
- Running costs for the library – £89, 549²⁶
- Stock – 5,700
- Opening hours (term time): Mon-Fri 9.30am-5pm; Sat 9.30am-noon
- Staff – single staffed in the morning, double staff in the afternoon by two library assistants. Managed by a supervisor who works across different services

Main activities and services provided by the library

- 1 self service machine
- 8 public computers and free wifi; printing and photocopying
- Council Connect services – order and pick up green waste bags and compost bins; tickets for cultural venues; issue leisure keys; support to apply for travelcard and disabled parking permits.
- Activities – Bookstart, Summer Reading Challenge, Books on Prescription, Photography group, drop in advice session on anti social behaviour, computer club, adult colouring club, Rhyme Times

3.3 Services and activities in the building as a whole:

- Locality Health Centre – GP services, nurse-led clinics
- Community Café (not for profit)
- Children's Centre
- A Church
- Other council workers – including family intervention workers, social workers and health trainers
- Charity shop, foodbank, clothes bank
- Allotment group
- Lunch club
- Meeting space and community hall – including activities such as seated exercise, local councillor and MP surgery, Brownies, bingo, self-defence classes, Narcotics Anonymous



The main entrance at the FAHLC with the library straight in front, the GP to the right, and the community café to the left.

3.4 Usage

The FAHLC is well used – largely due to the community café, and the location of the GP – a service that most local people will need to access at some point. The central location on the estate makes it a focal point for the community:

“ This is an insular estate, and it is cut off from the main part of town. People on this estate gravitate towards this point for help and information. It helps that everything is in one place.”

Building partner interview

“ Lots of things start and end here. It’s a place to meet... no one asks you a question when you come in the door.”

Building user interview

The Council Connect service in the FAHLC library was the first ‘gateway’ service to be introduced in North Somerset and is seen as a core part of the centre. It makes it easier for people to obtain council

information, or receive support to navigate services without going into the centre of town.

“ The staff are great. Especially if you want to know something – they’ll find things out for you.”

Building user interview



A large display of council information in the library.

4. Co-location in practice

4.1 Governance, workforce and working together

The library is a tenant in the building, and NSC pays rent to the FAHLC. There is a Service Level Agreement in place for heating, lighting and cleaning. NSC covers library facilities, stock and staffing, and security cover when the library is open outside of centre opening times.

The FAHLC has a Board which consists of the main partners, and local residents who ensure that there is a strong community voice in how the centre is being run.

“ It’s asset based. We fit in around what the community wants.”

Board member interview

Partner meetings take place regularly at a strategic level. Integration of staff (for example, across the reception and library desk) has been looked at in the past, although this was not pursued. Each service has its own staff team, although there are regular meetings for all staff working in the building.

“ There are meetings every fortnight and we send a representative. It’s about knowing what is going on here, and being part of it.”

Library staff

4.2 The relationship between the library and other services

During the case study visit, there were several examples provided of how the library works directly with other services in the Centre, and through facilitating opportunities. These included:

- **Weston Works** – a community organisation funded by Alliance Homes and NSC which supports local people to find work, volunteering, learning opportunities and develop digital skills. Weston Works send their customers to the library to use the computers (forming a regular computer club), and the library refers people to Weston Works who might need help looking for work. In addition, Weston Works hosts specific events in the library
- **Our Neighbourhood** – Alliance Homes funds this asset based community development project, and community networkers have engaged the library in some of their activities. For example, in the build up to a lantern parade organised as part of the project, the library ran a lantern making workshop as one of the settings supporting the community to get involved
- **A photography club** is hosted in the library on a weekly basis. The club was struggling to find a suitable space for its tuition, and the library is ideal as it reflects the club’s learning focus, whilst bringing people into the library

“ There is a clear function and purpose to this space that is different from the rest of the centre. We couldn’t do what we do in the café.”

Partner staff interview

In addition, interviewees spoke about many of the informal partnerships and opportunities that arise through the strong sharing ethos that exists between services at the FAHLC. These included:

- GPs referring patients to the Books on Prescription service
- Family support workers or social workers bringing children, families and older people who they are working with into the library
- The library being able to promote activities happening in the building and vice versa:

“ Our activities are better supported as there are more people around. We support the centre too – we make sure we’re open when they have events, even if it’s out of hours. It’s a partnership.”

Library staff interview

- Library staff having people to turn to from other services for more specialist advice and support based on customer enquiries:

“ Standalone libraries don’t have that, it would take you longer to find things out.”

Library staff interview



Craft activities in the library

5. Next steps

5.1 The FAHLC library and the Community Access Review

The case study library was included in the first phase of the Community Access Review, and proposals for the library and children’s centre at the FAHLC, along with another local children’s centre were consulted on. These included options to potentially relocate all services in one or other of the two sites. Despite a low level of engagement, the preference was for retaining a library at the FAHLC – which was also in keeping with the Lottery funding requirements. The outcome includes £20,000 of investment in both sites – part of which will cover opening up access between the children’s centre and library at the FAHLC.

In addition, the Council will be working with the FAHLC to explore reducing overheads. NSC do not regard the library at the FAHLC as a ‘typical’ library, and it is a costly service. Due to the importance placed on face to face contact, a decision has also been made not to introduce more self service elements.

At the time of the visit in early 2017, the changes had been agreed, and were in the process of being implemented. There was support for improving the links between the children’s centre and library, especially given the former’s relatively hidden location in the centre.

“ It will open up new skills and knowledge for us as staff. It will be nice to see more about what the children’s centre do... and they’ll be able to bring groups out to use the library space... children will grow up knowing what the library is.”

Library staff member

Staffing changes are also underway for the library service, which will mean 9-10 FTE redundancies. In co-located sites, the intention is for management teams and operational staff to be shared, whilst still retaining distinct professional disciplines (librarians and family support workers). The original CAR review indicated that ‘over time there may be an integrated workforce’ and highlighted training opportunities – for example, if library staff wished to undertake an NVQ in childcare.²⁷

5.2 Future areas of development

It was clear that the FAHLC and its library was not an ‘end product’, and that it would evolve in close communication with the community, and encourage new users into the building and library. Suggestions included:

- Engage with more parents given the numbers of unaccompanied children coming in
- Run more reader development activities such as bookgroups
- Expand the centre with a new partnership with the social housing provider
- Bring in the Citizens Advice given the numbers of local people relying on the foodbank
- Refresh both the FAHLC website and library website – make it more reflective of the local community
- Develop more adult activities in the library – for example, dementia groups

6. Challenges and learning

Interviewees highlighted the value of having sustainable partners involved in the FAHLC that share common goals. The stability of the centre was largely attributed to the presence of large public sector partners (NHS, NSC), and the community association that had originally been involved had struggled financially.

The clear leadership and governance structure from the FAHLC was also seen as a major contributing factor to the successful operation of the centre. This provided a positive framework for staff at all levels with joint policies developed and agreed, and a commitment to engaging across services over activities happening in the centre. Some interviewees noted that with staff changing, some of the informal learning and sharing between partners could be lost – and ongoing communication was crucial.

There was recognition that it could be harder to engage with the GPs in the centre due to their patterns of working, and many interviewees were keen to make more of the possible benefits of having health services in the same building – for example, through a stronger social prescribing approach.

Whilst staff were positive about the opportunities for the library to be involved in more activities, the single staffing structure in the mornings could also pose as a barrier for expanding this work.

27. CAR review June 2016 Cabinet paper

Links

- www.n-somerset.gov.uk/services/for-all-healthy-living-centre-library
- www.forallhlc.org/index.php

Photo credits: Renaisi, the FAHLC, North Somerset libraries

The Curve, Slough

1. Introduction

The Curve opened in Slough town centre in September 2016. It brings together a number of cultural offers under one roof in an iconic new building which is central to the wider town centre regeneration. This case study was chosen as an example of a new library, forming a cultural hub for an entire town.

2. Local context

Slough: Key facts and figures

- Unitary authority urban
- Population: 145,734
- IMD ranking: 200/326²⁸

2.1 Slough's area wide priorities

“ At the heart of everything we do are the people of Slough... It's the communities that together give Slough its identity.”²⁹

Slough's area wide priority is 'growing a place of opportunity and ambition'. One of the Five Year Plan's five outcomes includes ensuring that Slough is a place where people choose to live, work and visit, and attracting, retaining and growing business and investment to provide jobs and opportunities for residents.³⁰ Slough is on a journey of change focussing on commercial development, leisure, infrastructure projects, neighbourhood level regeneration and housing. Council strategies highlight the good relations amongst Slough's different communities, but recognise that there are inequalities across the area, and higher than the national average number of young people.³¹



Slough Five Year Plan front cover

28. ONS mid year estimates 2016 and IMD 2015

29. Slough Five Year plan 2017-2021 refresh

30. Slough Five Year plan

31. Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy – Slough Wellbeing Board refresh 2016

2.2 Slough library service context

The library service in Slough:

- 7 libraries run by the Council
- 33.7 FTE library staff; 186 volunteers (includes Summer Reading Challenge Young Volunteers, Duke of Edinburgh students, and 1-2 volunteers at each library supporting the home library service or providing a meet and greet service)
- Library visits: 3,740 per 1,000 population
- Active borrowers: 133 per 1,000 population³⁴

Slough has seen a 66.8% reduction in its support from government from £39.8m in 2013/14 to £13.2m in 2017/18.³² Over £12m of savings have been identified for the year ahead. The Council's public service delivery priorities are for a more integrated 'one council' approach; working in partnership; and a greater use of technology.³³ The library service in Slough has undergone a number of changes across the service, moving towards developing community hubs in different locations.

In 2009, a new five year library strategy was approved, supporting the then Sustainable Community Strategy ambitions to improve access to information and learning opportunities, and contribute to wellbeing and employment. This diagnosed the problem with the existing Slough library offer - visit costs were high, opening hours were restrictive, customer experiences were poor and the town centre library was in decline.

The plan aimed to transform services into 'vibrant places, reaching out to communities, places where everyone can feel welcome and comfortable'.³⁵ The review recognised the links libraries had to other services (for example, adult learning providers, community organisations), and the success of two existing approaches where libraries were in venues that could act as a catalyst for community activities and provide a first point of access for council enquiries. The review was seen as a move from a traditional book based model to 'putting libraries at the heart of multi-functional community hubs'.

The library service was outsourced to Essex County Council on a five year contract in 2011. At the time, this was highlighted as a model of best practice, and the first time a local authority had contracted with another to provide library services.³⁶ Costs per visits were reduced, there was a 65% take up of self-service amongst users, opening hours improved, and a staff restructure resulted in more of an emphasis on customer service. The service was brought back in house after five years:

“ There was the option for another three years. But as we were doing more shared and joint working, it made sense to bring it back in house. It did what it had to do – and we had a more cost effective and streamlined services – but the time was right to move back in.”

Local authority staff interview

32. Efficiency plan 2016-2020

33. Slough Five Year plan 2017-2021 refresh

34. CIPFA 2015-16

35. Libraries Strategy – 2011 update paper

36. Libraries Strategic Partnership report, 2010



The Curve from the outside

Since the 2009 review, three satellite libraries were developed in community venues, two of which are within children centres. A new library formed part of a flagship community hub in Britwell which includes adult learning, a family contact service and community space as well as ‘MyCouncil’ services – a contract delivered through Arvato Customer Service Centres to provide a front of house and call centre service for a number of, but not all, service areas of the council.

The area wide approach is now for a library offer to be integrated with community and neighbourhood services rather than any reduction in libraries overall. This fits in with council wide priorities to look at shared assets, and how to continue to ensure services work closely together.

3. The Curve

3.1 Developing The Curve as a cultural community hub

The development of The Curve both predates and has taken place alongside the changes to the library service outlined above. The vision for The Curve is intrinsically linked to the Council’s priorities for town centre regeneration – making it an attractive, safe and vibrant place with a strong cultural offer. The origins of The Curve scheme can be traced back to 2007 and the town centre vision of a ‘hive of commerce, leisure, living and learning’.³⁷ The scheme featured in the Heart of Slough masterplan – a £450m regeneration scheme,³⁸ and Slough’s cultural strategy emphasised a town centre focus for the arts.³⁹

37. Proud to be Slough – Sustainable Community Strategy

38. Heart of Slough masterplan – review of progress, Cabinet Paper, 2014

39. The Cultural Offer in Slough 2010-15

A consultation on the plans for a new central library and cultural centre took place in late 2010 with focus groups, workshops, and space for members of the public to post their ideas. The vision put forward was:

“ The new centre is designed to be a place where the whole community in Slough can come together... it will be a catalyst for local people to feel involved in their local community, find out more about themselves and engage with one another in a creative and open environment.”⁴⁰

Feedback was supportive, and included an emphasis on the need for a place for all the community, with a mix of serious and fun elements for learning.

Slough Urban Renewal is a jointly owned development company between the Council and Morgan Sindall Investments Ltd that enables council regeneration and commercial policy and was responsible for building The Curve.⁴¹ The new build cost £22m and was funded by the Council. The intention is to develop a cultural quarter around the opening of The Curve, and the old library site opposite is being developed into two hotels, bar and restaurants.⁴² In the 2017 Council’s Five Year Plan refresh, The Curve is highlighted as a key successful outcome.⁴³ The building has been nominated for the 2017 regional LABC Building Excellence Awards in the Best Public Building category.



40. New Library and Cultural Centre Consultation report to scrutiny panel 2011

41. www.slough-thinkingforward.co.uk/about/

42. Centre of Slough Strategy 2015

43. Slough Five Year plan 2017-2021 refresh

3.2 The library at The Curve

The Curve replaced a 1970s library that was located opposite. There was a considerable lead up to The Curve opening which was an opportunity for building partners to work together to agree an approach, develop specific service needs, and plan for the transition to a new building. This was led by the Assistant Director at the time, and the libraries service manager for Slough. The library was well placed in the project development as the biggest occupier of space in the building. The decisions on what should be located there were influenced by discussions with the group, budgets, councillors and the possible use of space in the building.

As the scheme progressed consideration was given to additional services being located in the building. One of these was the Register Service which meant losing a couple of rooms to accommodate office space. On balance it was felt that this brought another section of the community into the facility which contributed to The Curve's potential.

Planning meetings took place on a monthly basis, and more regularly near the time of opening. For the library, this meant focussing on staffing, stock, layout and storage, and providing training for staff where there was an opportunity to learn what each of the services in The Curve did.

“ It's a mature team and customer expectations about going to a counter were quite traditional too. We provided lots of practical training to allay fears, giving as much information as possible on what was coming.”

Library staff interview

3.3 Inside The Curve

What is provided at The Curve:

- A library
- A café run by Groundwork South
- The Slough Museum Trust in eight pods spread over 3 floors tracking the Slough story
- A multi purpose performance venue for 280 people, 180 raked seating, 220 for performances
- Community learning and skills service – offering beginner qualifications, workshops, courses and job clubs
- Exhibition space
- The Register office for Slough
- Meeting rooms to be hired
- Computer suite
- 35 PCs - 4 of which are children's
- Children's library and activity space



The ground floor is a large open space with attractive new book displays, a reception area, the skills service reception and café.

The building also hosts:

- Local consultations, for example on the Heathrow proposed expansion
- Talks, events, choirs, poetry in the open ground floor space
- Physical activity sessions
- Partnerships with the Credit Union, Family Information Service, Slough CVS Carers' Support Service, and local foster carers
- One off events and stands – for example, health and wellbeing, workshops for National Carers' Week, conferences
- An annual pantomime

The library is open 6 days a week until 7pm on some days. It has 63,000 books. Alongside a children's library, quieter study spaces, free wi-fi and computer terminals, the library puts on:



Lego on display in The Curve

- Author talks and lectures
- Family history sessions
- Writing courses and reading groups
- Colouring for adults
- Children's music and story time, craft activities, LEGO club, until recently a computer coding club and a Saturday club
- A new baby group run by NHS Berkshire.

4. Co-location in practice

4.1 Governance, workforce and working together

The Council is the corporate landlord of The Curve building, and it is managed by a facilities team. In the past, the library service has managed its own buildings in Slough. However, in line with the Council's corporate landlord policy it was felt to be appropriate for facilities staff to take responsibility for the building management at The Curve - for example, room bookings, Health and Safety, First Aid and security.

The Curve has its own development team which work across the different areas in the building, with facilities staff, and external partners. These include the Town Centre Partnership, the Creative People and Places project⁴⁴, the Cultural Education Partnership, and businesses. The Curve also benefits from a standalone website where all of the different partners and activities feature.

There are a number of meetings in place to ensure that everyone works together – including fortnightly meetings with leads from each area, operational meetings, and monthly staff meetings – meaning “at each level people get together.”

There is a reception desk on the ground floor of The Curve for the library. However, staff on the desk field enquiries about the learning service, museum, venue and bookings. The learning team has a desk nearby, and also cover general enquiries.

“ It’s not obvious that the reception is a library one. We had to make sure staff were briefed to answer questions.... There is a shift to work more flexibly across services.”

Library staff interview

4.2 Opportunities arising from The Curve

In the first six months of its opening, interviewees provided many examples of how the different services in The Curve worked together, and the opportunities it had opened up. These included:



The community learning and skills service on the ground floor of The Curve

- **The learning and skills service and the library** – library staff mentioned that they could refer people to the learning service if they noticed a particular need – for example, not being able to use a computer. The library had included a display of text books used on the courses next to the learning service information desk
- **Library membership** – the learning and skills service, and Register Office encourage their users to join the library. The Register Office works with the library to put information in birth packs
- **The library has been able to expand its range of activities** – through a partnership with the LEGO Foundation, getting more children involved in craft activities and music and story time. Staff had received training in how to improve how they run these sessions
 - “ At the old one, craft activities were a bit of an afterthought. Here there is an enthusiastic audience and host arts sessions for different age groups.”

Library staff interview
- **Benefitting from joint opportunities** for events using the building as a platform – for example, doing a pop up planetarium, a balloon show with The Curve Development Team, and when the pantomime was on at The Curve, the library put on storytimes on the same theme. Computer screens with rotating content advertise what is on in the whole building
- **The Curve acts as a focal point for the HOME Slough CPP work** – making it easier to develop a variety of events on the same day – for example, the SPARK winter festival which combined children’s book promotions, storytelling, exhibitions, and events in the same building



The Curve venue

- **A refresh for the library** – before moving to The Curve, the library reviewed its stock and acquired new stock for The Curve

“ We didn’t want to open in this building with dirty books on the shelves.”

Library staff interview
- **Opportunities for engagement with young people** – The Curve Development Team are working with a group of young inspectors to give feedback on the building, and set up Young Curve to support 30 young people to become volunteers

“ I like The Curve. There were no young people in the old library. I feel I care about this place – it’s new and updated.”

Young person user
- **Opening up new partnerships** – with voluntary organisations who want to have stands and temporary use of space in The Curve
- **The Museum having a presence** with the pods exploring different themes that help to represent the culture of Slough (The Museum was previously hosted in one room in the old library)
- **Providing remote working space for other council staff** such as education advisers, and the wider community learning team:

“ If you’re a social worker, don’t waste time driving three miles away to your base, come and work here between meetings.”

Partner staff interview

4.3 The impact of The Curve

The impact of The Curve was apparent on staff, the community, and wider council agendas. Staff talked about their pride in working in the building, the value of interacting with many different people, and learning a lot of new skills.

“ This project was before the spending cuts started. It’s a once in a lifetime opportunity and I feel very privileged to work here... we’re against the trends of negativity.”

Library staff interview

“ Now we’re The Curve team. We’re a jack of all trades. It’s a new system of working.”

Library staff interview

Interviewees felt that The Curve fulfilled its purpose as a multi services hub in the centre, helping with the revitalisation of the town centre. It was noted that The Curve felt like a ‘shared experience’, bringing the community together in different ways – from teenagers studying in quieter spaces, older people reading newspapers and using the computers, to children and families using the children’s library.

“ People sit chair by chair next to each other. I’m so happy to see all members of the community using it.”

Partner staff interview

“ There is a nice mixture. There is a real cross section of people coming in for different reasons, all to the same building.”

Building user

The fact that The Curve is a new building, with a light, modern environment inevitably attracts visitors out of curiosity.

“ It still feels unreal. The old building was so shabby. This has a WOW factor. From day one, all ages were flooding in. Slough needed this.”

Partner staff interview

All services noted that people come into the building for one purpose and discover other things at The Curve due to the open nature of the space.

Issues and visits in the library increased by 200% in the first few months compared to the old library, but this has now plateaued for issues. However, the library has continued to benefit from increased footfall, and the children’s library was cited as being the most popular draw.

5. Next steps

5.1 Initial challenges

The Curve is a new building, and inevitably there have been challenges in the early days. These included:

- **Workforce** – while it is clear that The Curve team staff have the same goals and objectives, there are still some barriers to working together as one team. It was recognised that staff will have limits to what they know about another service, and may not be able to answer everything. There was an emphasis on needing to find a balance – for example, retaining the benefits that could come with specialist roles, whilst breaking down a ‘it’s not my job’ culture
- **Compromise** – the building is mainly known for the library. This has been more challenging for some other services – for example, the learning service benefits from a town centre location, but now has fewer classrooms, and shares rooms with other services

- **Aligning policies and balancing different needs** – it has taken time to align different policies. Through discussion with facilities management staff and other teams based at The Curve, common standards of behaviour for the public accessing the building have been agreed. This is formalised through an agreed Code of Conduct and staff training across teams has been implemented to support staff in managing this. Signage around the building emphasises acceptable behaviour standards, with a zero tolerance approach of any abusive behaviour. This has enabled a much more conducive environment to be established
- **Managing the space** – the building was described as ‘complex’ to manage. There have been complaints from some users in the quieter spaces on the upper floor about noise. When the ground floor space is being used for events, and the library is closed, it can be hard to prevent people from walking up through the different floors due to the integrated nature of the building
- **Anti social behaviour** – in the early days, The Curve had challenges with young people coming in, and had to ban a few individuals. A lot of homeless people also use the building which can be challenging for the Register Office in particular with wedding parties needing to walk through open spaces in the building to reach the ceremony room
- **Library layout** - there were complaints at first about the way the books were arranged and the difficulty of reaching books on the lower levels. The library responded to feedback and rearranged some of the shelves to make signposting clearer
- **Programme development** – this team was not fully in place at the beginning, which led to a delay in getting the programming side of The Curve fully up and running. In addition, the venue space requires a technician in order to be fully operational. The team is currently exploring links with an arts centre in a neighbouring borough to overcome this challenge



A library bookcase and sign at The Curve

5.2 Future areas of development

Many of the areas that those involved in The Curve would like to develop in the future are linked to some of the early challenges encountered, for example, developing The Curve artistic offer, using different spaces (the garden, and Plaza at the back of The Curve), and putting on activities and performances that are not normally on offer in Slough.

“ There are no other theatres in Slough. We need to put on more entertainment and attract people in. That’s the expectation from the community too.”

Partner staff interview

In addition:

- Some staff were interested in working with the homeless using the building and offering signposting to support services
- Building on the early VCS partners, The Curve wants to offer more support to organisations that fit in with council wide priorities – and are developing a policy and protocol for this to guide decision making
- Library staff were keen to develop more for adults, and developing closer links between events and the book stock to encourage borrowing
- There was also a desire to promote more local services through leaflets so that people know that The Curve is a place they can come to for a whole range of local information

Whilst it was generally felt that all services were benefitting from co-location more could be done to help cross fertilise the links – for example, opening up family history opportunities in the library linked to the Register office’s citizenship ceremonies. Staff felt that they were learning about services naturally, which made it easier to cross promote.

“ We’re opening up those connections. It’s taken until now for the practical things to settle down. Now it’s about looking forward.”

Library staff interview

A more formal service redesign is also due to take place – across The Curve and other libraries in Slough – to try and encourage a more seamless approach between library services and an arts and cultural offer. This also involves exploring how the Council can further integrate the community and satellite library offer to reflect the learning from experiences at The Curve.

Links

- www.thecurveslough.com
- www.slough.gov.uk/libraries

Photo credits: The Curve and Renaisi

Two different models of community hubs

Newcastle City Council

1. Introduction

Newcastle City Council is in the process of developing a network of community and information hubs. This case study focussed on that journey, and involved visiting two different libraries – West End where a library is co-located with council customer services and Your Homes Newcastle (YHN); and Blakelaw where the library is located in a community centre.⁴⁵ The intention was to explore the different ways that the idea of a community hub can be interpreted – one is a public sector led hub, and the other is community run.

2. The local context

Newcastle: Key facts and figures

- Unitary authority, urban;
- Population: 280, 177⁴⁶
- IMD ranking: 30/326



Let's Talk Newcastle logo

2.1 Area wide and local authority priorities

Newcastle City Council's priorities are focussed on creating a 'fair, progressive and equal city'.⁴⁷ Underpinning this vision is the need to radically change the way that the Council delivers services. The Council's Corporate Plan sets out the scale of the transformation required within the context of a £221m budget cut between 2010-16, and an estimated £70m of savings required over the next three years.

“ There are fewer resources, and there are new and better ways to provide services to local people. We must use the resources we have wisely... we are here to make a difference, not just to make ends meet.”⁴⁸

45. Your Homes Newcastle is the Arms Length Management Organisation for the council's social housing stock

46. Figures from 2011 census and IMD 2015

47. Newcastle Corporate Plan and Decent Neighbourhoods dashboard

48. Ibid.

Examples of what this means in practice include:

- Adapting the role of the Council to one of a ‘co-ordinator and facilitator’
- Working in partnership with organisations and residents to ‘share knowledge, capacity and resources’ to tackle big issues
- Making more services digital by choice
- Helping people to take greater control of their local areas and the services that matter to them
- Transferring council assets and buildings to ‘people who can make good use of them’

2.2 Developments in Newcastle’s library service

The library service in Newcastle:

- 13 libraries across the customer services and library network
- 75.6 FTE library staff and 20 volunteers
- Library visits: 4,890 per 1,000 population
- Active borrowers: 267 per 1,000 population⁴⁹

There have been a number of changes in Newcastle’s library services, moving towards the current proposals for community and information hubs. The main developments since 2009 highlight the constantly shifting nature of the environment that libraries are operating in, and include:

- **Building a new city library** – providing a flagship building, which has been well received across the city. A number of other services have co-located with the city library since its opening - Connexions, a skills hub, Citizens Advice Newcastle, and most recently customer services and YHN⁵⁰



The Central City Library atrium – the library is entirely self-service and is open 7 days a week

- **A wide ranging review of libraries in 2013** which proposed a network of core libraries maintained by the Council; community run libraries; partnership funded libraries in partner buildings; and a universal home delivery and online service. At the time, this involved proposing to close seven libraries – but new partners stepped forward meaning only one library was closed

“ This was a critical year in terms of moving into partnership. We thought initially we could only afford two libraries – when that became real, partners came forward and wanted to work with us.”

Local authority staff interview

- This resulted in the **current library network** in Newcastle:
 - Eight core libraries funded by the Council
 - Five partnership funded libraries – with YHN, Newcastle College, and a community partnership. Newcastle staff still work in the partnership funded libraries meaning that there is access to central stock and support

49. CIPFA 2015-16 figures

50. 2010 presentation on Newcastle libraries and regeneration

- Four community run libraries – by volunteers, and with a parish council, and not linked to the council’s library network
- In 2014, the Council had been considering how to continue the partnership model, but was finding that the financial situation of potential partners was increasingly challenging. At this point, the ambition to create a network of community and information hubs across the city began to develop with self-service and digital services, information, support, and advice from the council, other public services, the voluntary sector, community and business partners. These ‘one stop shops’ would be community spaces, reflecting ‘the traditional public library ethos of help, space, security, neutrality, excellent customer service and expert advice/mediation’.⁵¹ They would also provide an opportunity to mitigate some of the consequences of the inevitable reductions in funding for city wide information and advice services.

“ We’re talking about community and information hubs that have a link to the council, and locally will reflect how we support different communities.”

Local authority staff interview

2.3 The role of libraries in community and information hubs

Newcastle has firmly positioned the library service in terms of the contribution it can make to area wide priorities and

the council’s transformation agenda.

This means securing a future for the library service, whilst also increasing coherence between different services. The considerations that needed to be taken into account included:

- It is no longer feasible to rely on building based drop in and face to face service provision – the hubs will support residents to help themselves through digital and self-serve approaches, and act as an entry point to a city wide partnership of information, advice and support – mitigating the reduction in VCS information and advice.

“ The amount of information out there with fake news, Brexit, NHS Choices means there’s never been a more important time for us. We’ll help you get the answer from the correct source.”

Local authority staff interview

- The focus on universal library and customer services, digital, and partner services, means council help will be targeted where need is greatest – for example, for housing, benefits, employment and crisis level support.
- Whilst leisure services have been transferred to a trust (with parks possibly set to follow to a council created charitable trust), this was not an option for the library service, due to the link with council customer services. Budget constraints mean the alternative to co-location would be to reduce the size of the library network. The proposed approach means continuing to work in partnership with other organisations and using ‘every penny wisely’.⁵²

51. Newcastle Council Budget 2016-17 and Community hubs report

52. Newcastle Council Budget 2017-18

- Supporting a community development approach to ensure that hubs are shaped by and are responsive to local community needs. The Council was clear that it does not want to only interact with residents in city centre locations – and instead maintain a community presence across the city.
- Given Newcastle’s emphasis on economic growth, community hubs have the potential to enhance this – for example, supporting local people to start businesses, or acquiring digital skills. The hubs could act as a catalyst for wider community based change.

“Community hubs are easily accessible buildings which can deliver joined up services, provide information and support from the council and relevant partners); support local growth; respond to the diverse needs of residents; are customised for the needs of local communities.”⁵³

The Community Information Hubs project is expected to deliver savings of £1m by 2019/20. Funding is being sought from the overall Change Programme within the Council as well as externally from One Public Estate and DCLG’s Communities Fund.⁵⁴ A programme of mapping different service offers, engagement with elected members and council colleagues, partner organisations and the wider community are planned over the remainder of 2017. The hubs model is expected to be implemented in 2019-20.

2.4 Challenges for Newcastle

Interviewees reflected on a number of challenges with Newcastle’s approach:

- **A large and complicated project:** There are many dependencies that need to be taken into account, including aligning with other ‘change’ programme strands; changes existing partners might be making around IAG; and wider IAG support services city wide. There is a board in place to oversee the project with partner representatives – with three main workstreams (hubs, digital and contact centres) to primarily work out practical and operational issues.
- **Securing partners:** The approach means proactively identifying partners to help reduce core costs (for example, JCP, CCGs and health, CVS organisations) at a time when those organisations face their own budget constraints.

“We might have to look at commercial opportunities in order to retain other services. That will mean difficult decisions, or sacrificing some things to keep that frontline service.”
Local authority staff interview
- **Links to volunteering:** Volunteers in Newcastle libraries are comparatively few, and the Council is keen to consider opportunities to expand this within the overall volunteering policy that is in place.
- **Managing expectations:** The Council is also clear it will require a shift in expectations of what the Council can provide from both staff and users – this has posed challenges for some which is explored further in the West End case study below

53. Community hubs report 2016-17 budget

54. Information from internal transformation paper



West End Library interior – the library occupies one half of the ground floor space

3. Newcastle case study libraries: West End Library and Customer Service Centre

3.1 Overview

West End Library and Customer Service Centre is located in Elswick ward. It was described as being a multicultural area of the city, with high levels of poverty and vulnerabilities amongst the local population, particularly with many new arrivals to the UK. Unemployment is at 9% and 39.7% of children in the ward live in low income families. A 2015 residents survey indicated that 56% feel a strong sense of belonging to their local area, and just under half feel they can influence decisions locally.⁵⁵

Key facts and figures about the library

- Visits – the old West End library averaged 5-6,000 visitors a month. When the new centre opened, monthly visits to both services were nearer 23-24,000. These numbers have fallen again since the opening hours reduced in 2016.
- Issues – 38,658 in 2008/09 down to 18,115 in 2015/16⁵⁶
- Opening hours: Library: 10am-6pm Mon; 10am-2pm Weds; 10am-5pm Friday; 10am-2pm Sat. Closed Tues, Thurs, Sun
- Customer Service Centre: 10am-6pm Mon; 10am-2pm Weds; 10am-5pm Friday. Closed Tues, Thurs, Sat, Sun
- 41.2% in the ward used the library in last 3 months with a 76.8% satisfaction rate⁵⁷

55. Elswick ward profile

56. Newcastle libraries open data sets

57. 2015 Newcastle residents survey – Elswick ward profile

Main activities and services provided by the library

- 24 free computer terminals, internet, wi-fi, printing and photocopying.
- 2 self issue desks and an enquiry desk
- Activities – internet taster sessions, storytime sessions in term time, weekly work club, visits from local schools and nursery, Summer Reading Challenge, one off local reading events
- Sofa area with newspapers, magazines and 50p hot drinks
- JCP terminal
- Hosts West Newcastle Picture History Collection – with volunteers present every Monday

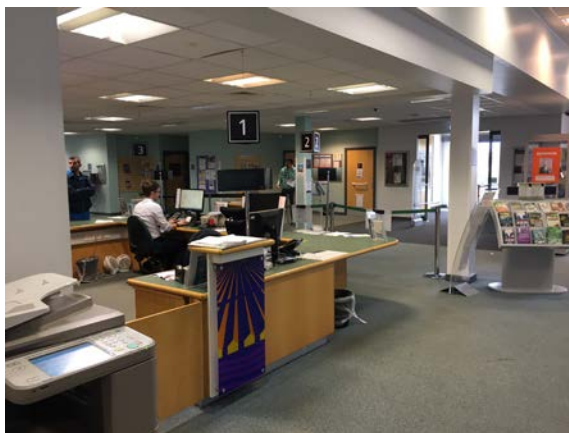
Other services and activities in the building:

- Council Customer Services open three days a week – access to over 90 different council services including council tax and housing benefit advice
- Your Homes Newcastle housing office
- Community space to hire

3.2 The development of the library at West End

The West End library and customer services centre opened in 2008 as a purpose-built facility. The library was previously located in a Carnegie building nearby, but moved to the new centre following the creation of a network of customer service centres by the Council.

The Council owns the centre, and the library, customer services centre, private interview rooms (for YHN and council customer services) and the community room are on the ground floor, with offices for YHN on the second floor. Customers wanting to access customer services need to queue and wait for a ticket at the front desk, but the library is open access. There



Reception area - the customer services desk is immediately in front of you upon entering the building. The library is on one side, and the customer services waiting area on the other.

are two days a week when YHN are the only occupants in the building, and cover the frontline customer service desk.

The building was frequently described as ‘multipurpose’, and was designed as a public services facility. This means it feels quite different from standalone libraries:

“ When customers come in, it does feel official. That’s the difference. People are there because they are often in desperate need. You lose some of that friendly, inclusive feel – however good the staff are.”

Staff interview

3.3 Co-location in practice

Usage

Many interviewees felt that the main draw to the West End centre is customer services, the computers in the library, with borrowing books being a distant third. This was not seen as a negative given the demographics and needs in the local community.

However, whilst the building was seen as being busy, those working there were less certain as to whether the library benefited from the increased footfall, beyond computer use. There was a sense that many people using customer services would sit and wait for their appointment, but not go into the library – potentially due to a fear of missing their place in the queue.

“ I think people round here aren’t normally library customers. The customer services side is busier.”
Staff interview



Computer terminals at West End library

Working together

Frontline customer services and library staff were integrated in 2014, with library assistants trained to undertake some customer service functions, and customer service officers supporting more challenging library customers, and working on library events. Supervisors work across library and customer services.

Building partnership meetings at West End take place on a six weekly basis to discuss any building related issues, health and safety and customer service challenges. There is also regular communication in between, and on a day-to-day level, there are close working relationships between the library, customer services and YHN – which ultimately help to improve the experience customers have in the building. For example:

- Customers who need help with online forms are referred over to the library IT terminals for help
- Staff in the library perform verification checks on claimant forms to help cut down the customer service queues
- When customers in the library disclose a problem with their housing, or benefits, library staff can discreetly talk to YHN and ask them to come and offer more specialist advice.

An example was provided of how this works in practice with people who have recently arrived in the UK:

“ We don’t ask intrusive questions. We give them access to the computers so they can contact their relatives back at home. They can see the housing officer here, who can also put them back in touch with us to fill in the forms online. Between the three of us – the council, YHN and the library – we can take someone who’s arrived here with nothing, and make sure they’re not passed from pillar to post and things are done for them.”

Library staff interview

Many library staff at West End were positive about the changes it had meant for their roles.

“ We cross between the two. We wouldn’t have been allowed to do that before, but now it’s more about customer service we can spend time with people. It’s more fluid. I never know what will come in.”
Library staff interview

Staff interviewed described how they receive extra support through working in partnership, and that this had developed naturally over time – through addressing common complaints about the building, and sharing the load when more challenging situations occur.

“ You’re not on your own anymore. Before, with only 2 members of staff, if something kicked off, we’d have to deal with it. Now, we press an alarm, and everyone comes down. There’s much better security and we do have challenging behaviour at times.”
Library staff interview

Future areas of development

- **Bring more partners into the centre** that are suitable for the area – for example, Citizens Advice, the police, life long learning, a Post Office – provided they could contribute to building costs. There is a potential opportunity to do this if benefit adviser rooms are taken out when Universal Credit is implemented. However, sustainability of partners was emphasised – as previous 1-2-1 JCP and CAB services had been cut.
- **Provide more community rooms** to encourage local groups into the building who might want ad hoc space. At the moment, the community room is well used, but is also booked out by the Council for training.
- **Developing the digital offer in the library** – particularly for elderly people and disabled people as library assistants had noticed they were spending an increasing amount of time supporting this
- **Offering more courses** for people with English as an additional language

3.4 Challenges

Opening hours: In 2016, there was a reduction of opening hours in libraries and customer services centres. This meant that West End now has two days a week where YHN are in the building and council customer services and the library are not. This change has taken a while to embed, with customers having to be advised to return on days when council staff were present. It also means that customers cannot use the library computers or self serve options on those two days. Staff reflected that West End has suffered from these changes due to the high reliance on help and a point of contact.

As part of the community hubs project, the Council is looking at how to reconcile opening hours, and options in libraries where other council staff in the building could help when library staff were not present. However, these are still ongoing in discussion with staff and unions.

Workforce: Despite the positive views about changing roles from some staff, it had been a difficult process integrating the workforce, and this was very much seen as a work still in progress. Changing mindsets could be hard, as well as introducing changes at a time when overall staffing numbers were restricted. This could make it difficult to fully deploy the staff who had been trained in both library and customer services. The overall community hubs project intends to ‘integrate front end delivery staff across NCC and YHN, even if organisational integration is not possible.’

Operational issues: Some challenges did emerge on how to reconcile two different approaches within one building. For example, having chairs at enquiry points so people can sit and talk (a library preference), against a need to see a large number of customers when the centre is open. Partners in the building could also find it hard to get issues resolved – for example, over parking, and a flea infestation.

4. Newcastle case study libraries: Blakelaw Community Centre

4.1 Overview

Blakelaw library is in the Blakelaw Centre, and is now run by the Blakelaw Ward Community Partnership (BWCP) – a local community organisation. Blakelaw ward is a suburban area – with a 5.8% unemployment rate, and 35.4% of children in low income families. There is a strong sense of belonging to the local area – with 71% of residents reporting this in the Council’s 2015 survey.⁵⁸



The reception desk at Blakelaw has clear signs to other services including the library.

Main activities and services provided by the library:

- 8 computer terminals, printing, photocopier, scanner
- 1 self service point and enquiry point for library staff
- Study space
- Small children’s area with bean bags, a large ‘throne’ and displays
- Community and local information
- Activities: coffee and conversation, children’s events, visits from the local primary school

Services and activities in the building as a whole:

- Main services: a Post Office, pre-school, café, party supply shop, hall and meeting room space
- Activities: weekly fitness class, Slimming World, Bingo, Credit Union, dance academy
- Children and Young People: - youth clubs for juniors and seniors, Success For All academic support programme, Keyfund – supporting young people to create their own project, plus other sessions.



The Blakelaw library

4.2 The library at Blakelaw

Key facts and figures about the library:

- Visits – 24,778 in 2008/09 increasing to 27,758 in 15/16
- Issues – 11,626 2008/09 down to 2,896 2015/16⁵⁹
- Opening hours: Mon-Fri 8am-2pm for self service. Open with a librarian – 2pm-5.30pm/6pm Mon-Fri.
- 33.6% ward residents used the library in last 3 months with a 66.5% satisfaction rate⁶⁰

The Blakelaw library was built by the Council in the 1990s as part of an Education Action Zone. Additional funding enabled a community centre to be built around the library.

In 2013, in the context of the libraries review, and devolving power to a more local level, the Blakelaw Ward Community Partnership was set up with strong elected member support, to look at how to preserve the building, and transfer the asset to the community. Any decisions around the future of Blakelaw library were delayed to allow time to consider the community run option.

The building is now on a long lease to the BWCP who run the building, and the library. BWCP have another site in addition to the Blakelaw Centre and it is run by an Executive Manager with support from a staff team of 14 that work with young people, in the Post Office, the café, and managing use of the space.

59. Newcastle libraries open data sets

60. 2015 Newcastle residents survey - Blakelaw ward profile

“ Before, children weren’t welcome in the centre or the library. There was no youth provision. It was mainly used by a bingo group three nights a week. Now we have an average of 3500 visits per week. It became a hub unintentionally. We listened to residents, partners, schools, recruited a youth worker... and tried to do things for the right reasons.”

Blakelaw staff interview

locate a Post Office in the building. The BWCP made the case to the Post Office to transfer the service to the Centre, and it is the first model of its kind in the country where profits go back into the charity.

The café is run by a local member of the community, offering affordable food, and has grown in popularity since this change at the end of last year.

4.4. Co-location in practice

Partnership working in the Blakelaw Community Centre

The Centre was described as going from ‘strength to strength’ over the past few years with partnerships forming quite organically, such as the opportunity to

“ We’ve got the right people in place – from the school, the community, good support from the police.”

Blakelaw staff interview

The Blakelaw Centre as a whole was described as being well used by the community, and fulfilling an important social function.

The Blakelaw Centre is on one floor, and the café is the most obvious presence as you enter the building.



“ We have tricky families at the school. I see them in here, having lunch, catching up with people – it feels that it is their community place.”

Teacher

“ You can have the worst day of your life at home, come here, and just sit down and talk. There’s always something going on.”

Building user

The success of the Centre was partially attributed to the flexibility that being community run allows. The BWCP are able to work with the community on their own terms, rather than being constrained by council procedures.

“ I’m not sure we’d have had a Post Office or a shop here if it had still been council run. People say you can’t do that. We say ‘we can’.”

Blakelaw staff interview

Benefits it has brought the library

The BWCP pay the Council to provide a librarian in the Blakelaw library on weekday afternoons. This means that the library is still on the Newcastle libraries network and can access stock. The library is seen as an integral part of the Blakelaw Centre, and when changes were being considered there was a clear message that the library must remain open. However, at the time, the space was more of an information service for adults.

“ It looked like an information centre... if someone came in with kids who needed some extra engagement, there was nothing there.”

Blakelaw staff interview

The main things that have changed for the library are:

- **Increasing use of the library** in the mornings, with people coming in and asking for help. BWCP recently got agreement to leave the computers on in the morning when the library is unstaffed so local residents can still access the terminals
- **Developing the children’s offer in the library.** YHN funding helped the BWCP to give the library a facelift – with bright colours and bean bags in a small children’s area. Children often come into the library without their parents.
 - “ They know they can sit here. It’s safe. They know everyone in the building.”
Building user
- **A partnership with the local primary school** – with classes coming into the library for storytelling, and the Centre has worked with the school to provide books tailored to topics being covered in lessons.
 - “ We can assume that kids are not interested in books, but it’s that they haven’t had a chance to use them. They come here and listen to stories, and they love it – they come back and tell everyone where they’ve been... here they get access to books, and they’re not going to be quizzed about it. They can enjoy the space and being here.”
Teacher

The library does not bring any income to the Blakelaw Centre, but is partly covered by the Post Office. However, this is outweighed by the value of working with children:

- “ The kids are the main users. We worked hard last year to think of ways to get them in. Since the work with the primary school, we’ve seen kids coming in with their parents getting books out.”
Blakelaw staff interview

Future areas of development

- Changing the name of the BWCP to the Newcastle Community Asset Trust reflecting the fact that there are now multiple centres being run
- Becoming a UK Online Centre – which will soon be complete. This will help in terms of having someone in the building that people can ask for help with IT skills and access
- Developing more community involvement through a community focus group which will link to the Board to advise on how the Centre is developing, and how it can be improved
- Developing more intergenerational work and ensuring that the Centre caters for all people in the local area.
- Bringing in potential new partners – such as health drop in advice

4.5 Challenges encountered – Blakelaw

The main challenges that were encountered at Blakelaw were in the early stages of the BWCP and ensuring the governance was robust. There was too much local authority representation, and the balance needed to be more towards the community.

The relationship can be challenging at times with the local authority over the library – particularly as staff rotate, so do not always get to know the Centre and its ethos. It is not a traditional library, and there can be a lot of noise from children using the space – this is encouraged, but it was recognised that it might pose challenges for some users.



Noticeboard at Blakelaw

Links

- Newcastle Libraries: www.newcastle.gov.uk/leisure-libraries-and-tourism/libraries/branch-libraries-and-opening-hours
- West End Library: www.newcastle.gov.uk/leisure-libraries-and-tourism/libraries/branch-libraries-and-opening-hours/west-end-library
- Blakelaw Ward Community Partnership: <http://loveblakelaw.com/>
- Libraries taskforce blog: <https://librariestaskforce.blog.gov.uk/2015/12/04/visits-to-libraries-in-newcastle-york-and-stafford/>
- Citizens Advice blog: <https://wearecitizensadvice.org.uk/charities-dont-need-a-traditional-space-to-deliver-a-great-service-d0988b184877>

Photo credits: Renaisi, Newcastle City Council Flickr page, Blakelaw Ward Community Partnership

South Woodford library and gym

London Borough of Redbridge

1. Introduction

The South Woodford library and gym in the London Borough of Redbridge was selected as an example of service integration based around a leisure offer with a library and gym in the same building. It is an outsourced model, with parks, culture and leisure services in the borough run by a charitable trust - Vision Redbridge Culture and Leisure.

2. Local context

Redbridge: Key facts and figures

- London Borough
- Population: 278,970
- IMD ranking: 138/326

2.1 Vision's role in Redbridge

Vision was established in 2007 by Redbridge Council to manage and deliver the borough's leisure and sport facilities. This decision was driven by difficulties with the Council's leisure management, which at the time was through a private contractor. In 2011, Vision's portfolio expanded to the borough's cultural offer, including the management of the library service, heritage, arts and parks and open spaces, with the Council's music and drama services recently added.

Redbridge Council has been required to find savings of around £125m since 2011, of which £30.3m will fall over the next five years. This involves being a leaner organisation, and Vision is part of this overall picture, viewed by the Council as a model of best practice.⁶¹ Any profits Vision generates are invested back into the service, or to reduce the management fee paid by the Council to the Trust. To date, the library service in Redbridge has achieved efficiency savings totalling over £1.5m while maintaining existing library coverage and upgrading the library service, with a high level of book issues for a London borough.

The library service in Redbridge:

- 14 libraries (13 static, 1 mobile) run by Vision
- 96.5 FTE library staff and 332 volunteers
- Library visits: 5,625 per 1,000 population
- Active borrowers: 150 per 1,000 population⁶²
- Founding member of the London Library Consortium with 18 other boroughs

61. Redbridge Leisure and Cultural Strategy Cabinet Paper

62. Statistics from CIPFA 2015-16.

While day-to-day management of the library service is carried out exclusively by Vision, the charity still has a close relationship with the Council, with three councillors sitting on its board. Vision works with the local authority as its client on a number of levels:

- Jointly communicating on overall improvements to libraries in the borough
- Advising on decisions that the Council might be making - for example, setting fees and charges, the future library service strategy and configuration, and how leisure and culture services contribute to the Borough's regeneration
- More regular client meetings, where progress against key objectives and performance indicators are reviewed, and any joint operational issues discussed

The outsourcing model is viewed as providing greater operational freedom.

“ We have much greater autonomy and flexibility but also the decision making and the empowerment is pushed much further down the organisation so people at a local level are more empowered to control the day-to-day operation of services.”

Library manager

2.2 Redbridge's wider Leisure and Cultural Strategy

Like other London boroughs, Redbridge's population is set to grow considerably. The borough also has a high proportion of under 16s, and a diverse community.

A Redbridge Corporate Plan priority is to improve the quality of life and civic pride amongst residents and communities, and to involve residents where there are tough decisions to be made on existing services.

“ We understand that we are going to have to do things differently to meet the pressures we face... We will work with partners to understand what residents are facing and how services should be targeted to meet their needs.”⁶³

This approach was evident in the Council's 2015 review and development of a new Leisure and Cultural Strategy which involved a three month engagement period on how to protect and enhance the leisure and culture offer in the future.⁶⁴ The strategy was upfront about the need to continue to develop alternative models through external grants, income generation and shared outcomes (for example, with public health and children's services). Feedback from residents and partners included valuing facilities that were local to them, but that there were some real (and perceived) barriers to engagement with more to be done to ensure residents have equal access.

“ We recognise that the leisure and culture services help to bring communities together, improve physical and mental wellbeing and so we want to ensure access to these essential services for future generations.”⁶⁵

The strategy sets the strategic direction for leisure and culture services, and is therefore the overall framework for Vision's operations in the borough. The intended outcomes include:

63. Redbridge Council Corporate Strategy

64 Redbridge Leisure and Cultural Strategy

65. Ibid.

- **Healthy Minds, Healthy Bodies** - a commitment to improving mental and physical health through encouraging active lifestyles and volunteering, close to where people live
- **Strong Place and Identity** - including co-locating services in community hubs
- **Empowering communities** - ongoing work with local residents to draw on their skills and experience to support how services are delivered in the future

3. South Woodford Library and Gym

3.1 Overview

The South Woodford library and gym is located in Church End ward, a comparatively affluent area which is in the 30% least deprived wards in England. The building is on a main road, a short walk

from South Woodford High Street and tube station, and is located next to a NHS health centre. Redbridge Council own the building which is leased to Vision.

Main activities and services provided at South Woodford library and gym

- 4 self service machines for book circulation, PC booking and printing
- 2 banks of public computers and free wifi; printing and photocopying
- Quiet study space
- Support to apply for a range of Council services, including disabled parking permits, concessionary transport, school admissions
- Activities in the library – reading groups, stay and plays, pre-school activities with local children’s centre
- 40 station gym with machines, free weights and circuit series. Studio with gym classes

South Woodford Library and gym exterior



Key facts and figures about the library and gym

- Stock – 37,500
- Running costs – before refurbishment - £200,000
- Opening hours for the library and the gym: 6am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat-Sun
- Staff – building manager, 3-4 library staff, 1-2 gym professionals

3.2 The development of South Woodford library and gym

In 2014, Vision evaluated their savings and efficiency options - an annual process which is part of their agreement with Redbridge Council. A gap in leisure provision was identified in South Woodford where the well-used library was in need of refurbishment. By co-locating the library with a gym through the conversion of underutilised back office space, Vision aimed to increase opening hours, revitalise the existing library space, increase the number of study spaces and subsidise the running of the library.

“ The concept here was for the gym income to subsidise the library running costs to eventually make this a cost-neutral site.”

Library manager

To finance the development, £600k was provided by Redbridge Council and the anticipated annual surplus of £150k would pay back the Council’s capital investment in four years.⁶⁶ The provision of a gym would help to reduce the management fee paid to Vision through business development initiatives rather than service reductions, with a target of £200k set by the Council for 2015/16. Co-location also aligned with the Council’s overall strategy of reviewing assets to provide a broader range of services for better value.

There was a three week consultation with South Woodford library users in 2014. 425 customers responded and 132 comments/emails were received. Concerns raised included: soundproofing, increased traffic, reduction in overall size of the library and pressure on meeting and study space. However, the majority (89%) of comments were positive.

In order to accommodate the gym space, the library was refurbished, and moved to a single floor with level access whereas previously it had been split across three. The library reopened in January 2015 with the gym occupying the former children’s library downstairs. A new children’s library was relocated to the rear of the library in the former office space.

“ There’s a core programme that we offer across our libraries but we also then tailor the provision and services to meet the needs of that local community.”

Library manager

66. South Woodford Library and Leisure Developments: Cabinet Paper, July 2014



The children's library at South Woodford which was previously an under used staff area

In the Council's two year review of the corporate strategy, the co-location of South Woodford Library with the gym was highlighted as a particular achievement under the transformation theme – 'ensuring the long term viability of both services to the community'.⁶⁷

3.3 Usage

In 13/14 prior to redevelopment, the library had 166,000 visitors a year, and book issues of 125,000.⁶⁸ This is now 210,000 visits per year and book issues have remained stable. There are an additional 37,000 gym uses per year. From interviews with library staff and members of the public, younger children and students were reported to

be popular user groups of the library. The increased study spaces are in high demand in the run up to exams.

Since co-location, it has been important to emphasise that there is still a dedicated library and a purpose built gym available, with a clear distinction between the two – the co-location does not disrupt the library space itself. Staff have noticed that customers do access both services, although it was also felt that many gym users were solely coming to the building for the gym. However, non-traditional gym users have been using the gym, with the co-location arrangement being a motivating factor:

“ We get a lot of older people using the gym...for the first time.”

Library staff

“ They felt comfortable coming here to join in a class or exercise regularly as well because it does have a different feel to it.”

Library manager

4. Co-location in practice

4.1 The relationship between the library and the gym

There is a single Vision manager for the library and gym and users have the same card for both services. The workforce is largely integrated and is seen as one team, but there is still some demarcation of roles. In addition to their duties in the library, library staff manage all 'front of house' duties such as gym queries, memberships and payment. Fitness professionals lead the classes that are on offer in the gym/studio.

67. Review of Corporate Strategy, 2016

68. South Woodford Library and Leisure Developments: Cabinet Paper, July 2014



The gym is accessed through the main library entrance

“ We were very keen that when we were doing the design of this building we didn’t want it to be two separate parts of the building – we didn’t want a separate counter in the gym, or separate staffing teams – we wanted it so that you had to come into the library and that staff would be trained to work across both gym and library duties.”

Library manager

The library is the dominant service in the building, but it is also clear upon approach that there is a gym in the same location. Library staff reported that healthy living books are prominently placed near the library entrance to help establish that the two services are intrinsically linked, with the gym accessed through the main library entrance. Library customers are signposted to the exercise opportunities in the gym by staff.

“ The idea was that when you walk in here it was going to be a seamless service.”

Library manager

4.2 The main benefits of co-location

Additional income: The income generated from gym memberships subsidises the library meaning that a valued service is retained in the local community.

“ Having the cultural facilities, many of which are subsidised, along with the sport and leisure facilities, which generate a financial surplus, we are able to be much more flexible in terms of how that money is re-invested and invest in services which may not receive any funding. South Woodford is an example of that.”

Library manager



The entrance to the library displaying health and wellbeing books

Refurbishment: The library has been revitalised - there is a new children's library and increased study spaces in a modern and bright library which was made possible through the gym development.

“ The old children's library was really uninspiring it felt like you were going into a deep underground subway...we managed to turn those negative feelings around.”

Library manager

Increased opening hours: opening hours have increased from 40 to 100 hours a week for the library. Self-serve has also helped to reduce costs.

A focal point in the local area: the building was seen as a key part of the local community in South Woodford, and a space for people to come together. Volunteers are also involved in helping users apply for disability badges, and as part of a Prince's Trust programme. The library has also seen increasing use from community groups.

“ It has a nice feel, almost like a community centre.”

Library staff



Study space at South Woodford library

Partnerships: Through the gym, there is an exercise referral scheme with local GPs offered as a separate service. GPs can be sent data from the exercise machines to confirm whether their patients are exercising regularly.

4.3 Future areas of development

Library staff and users at South Woodford library and gym provided suggestions on how they would like to see the library develop:

- South Woodford Library becoming the borough's flagship library for health and wellbeing
- More study space
- More computers for customers who do not have access to a computer at home
- A coffee machine for customers

5. Challenges and learning

In developing the leisure offer of South Woodford library and gym, some challenges arose around the additional skills which staff require in handling gym queries, and a training programme for new staff was

adapted to provide staff with both sales and library skills. However, this has now led to difficulties in staff retention, with some staff using the broad range of skills acquired at South Woodford to pursue other employment opportunities.

As outlined earlier, another challenge has been increasing the engagement of users between both services, encouraging library users to access the gym and vice versa. There have also been difficulties in engaging residents of a local housing estate and the pupils of a local school, although in the school's case this is partly due to the provision of a school library by Vision.

5.1 Next steps

In line with Redbridge's Leisure and Cultural Strategy the focus for the borough is to continue to deliver adaptable facilities that meet community needs, protecting the quality of the library offer. Opportunities and challenges include embedding the cultural offer in the Council's regeneration aspirations for the borough alongside the ongoing financial pressures and changes in library usage trends.



The opening of the new South Woodford library and gym

Links

www.vision-rcl.org.uk/swood_home.html
www.redbridge.gov.uk/libraries/library-locations-and-opening-times/

Photo credits: Renaisi and Vision RCL

Cumbria County Council

1. Introduction

Cumbria has a large number of libraries that involve a variety of partnership models to meet the needs of a rural county with very remote areas. This case study focussed on Cumbria's area based working and developing locally led approaches with communities. It involved visiting two library service points – Dalton, where a library had recently moved into an established community centre; and Gosforth, where the library is part of a village hall building, run by local volunteers.

2. The local context

Cumbria: Key facts and figures

- County council, rural area
- Population: 499,900
- IMD ranking: 86/152

Cumbria's public services transformation is underpinned by several principles including area based working.⁷¹ This involves working with local communities and the third sector to enable them to shape, own and run services that reflect their distinctive rural (and urban) needs – 'the Council does not have the resources to provide all services in the same way in every community in the county'.

2.1 Area wide and local authority priorities

“ Cumbria's 500,000 residents live in a county of contrasts. The popular national perception is synonymous with the Lake District and rural idyll. The truth is a much more complex mix of communities, lifestyles and priorities.⁶⁹

The Council's vision for Cumbria is 'for the people of Cumbria to benefit from sustainable economic growth, and an enhanced quality of life'. There are obvious challenges that are present in rural communities in terms of access to services and addressing isolation, and Cumbria also has a rising older population. Since 2011, there has been a reduction in Cumbria's spending budget of £198m, with a need for a further £51.5m between 2017-20.⁷⁰

The library service in Cumbria:

- 37 libraries, 14 book drops and 17 library links (where a library service is provided in different venues)
- 171 FTE library staff; 310 volunteers
- Library visits: 3270 per 1,000 population
- Active borrowers: 194 per 1,000 population⁷²

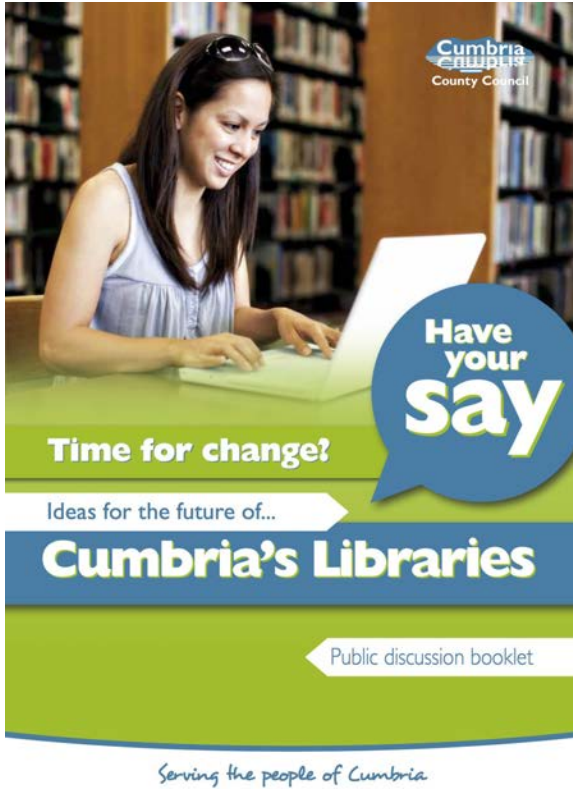
In 2011, a consultation on the future of Cumbria's library service took place. This recognised the contribution that libraries could make to Cumbria's Community Strategy in terms of challenging poverty, providing support to the vulnerable and improving life chances, but that the service needed to modernise, and look

69. Cumbria's Council Plan

70. Cumbria's 2017 Budget

71. Cumbria Local area plans

72. CIPFA 2014-15 statistics



that it was important for designated library spaces to be maintained in these buildings.

Contribution to area wide priorities

At the time of the review, only 20% of Cumbria's population used a library regularly. However, the Council was clear that they were not going down the route of large scale reductions. At the end of the review, the Council outlined the need to work on an area by area basis with local communities and councillors to identify changes. This would involve 'developing and nurturing' a number of projects and ideas' to modernise the service, and also help address resident concerns about whether the new approaches would work. Further local consultation and engagement on local area proposals then followed.

This approach aligns with the Council's focus on developing locally based service hubs in key locations, enabling access to a range of core council services.

“ It was a conscious decision that we needed that locality focus on anything we do... there are so many communities. Even in one district, towns will have no affiliation with each other at all. Having those local conversations with frequent library users really helped us understand their needs.”

Local authority staff interview

The review also indicated that residents supported the idea of 24/7 virtual libraries, but as an addition to library services rather than replacing them. This contributes to the Council's digital strategy to encourage residents to use online services in a more convenient way.⁷⁴

Cumbria's library consultation

at alternative delivery models – 'to be fit for the future providing you with the right services in the right places.'⁷³

The feedback from the consultation indicated that libraries were valued for their proximity in many rural communities, offering more than just books. There was an indication that many library users would not migrate to use larger libraries further away. Respondents also wanted to see libraries doing more local outreach; improving computer access; a review of opening hours; and more promotion of services on offer.

Residents recognised the benefits of locations with shared services, to save money and safeguard other resources, but

73. Libraries Review Consultation website

74. Cumbria Council Digital Strategy

The principles of transformation for Cumbria also apply to the workforce – with a key role for Council staff in supporting local people to have their say on local services, working in partnership, and reducing management layers and inter-departmental boundaries. For library service staff, this meant the creation of six area managers responsible for community services (including libraries), and community services officers, who have more flexibility to work with communities and deliver specific projects. The aim was to integrate different services, and enable more local level use of knowledge and experience.

“ The restructure was big, and it is taking time to bed in. But we are seeing the benefits. We can work in each of our areas as we need to.”

Local authority staff interview

3. Cumbria case study libraries: Dalton

3.1 Overview

Dalton is a small town in the Barrow area with a population of 7,827 (of which, 1,447 are over 65). The library has been located in the community centre, run by a trust - the Dalton Community Association (DCA), since last year. The wider Barrow area is the most deprived in Cumbria.



Dalton Drill Hall from the outside and the reception area

3.2 The role of the DCA and the development of the community centre

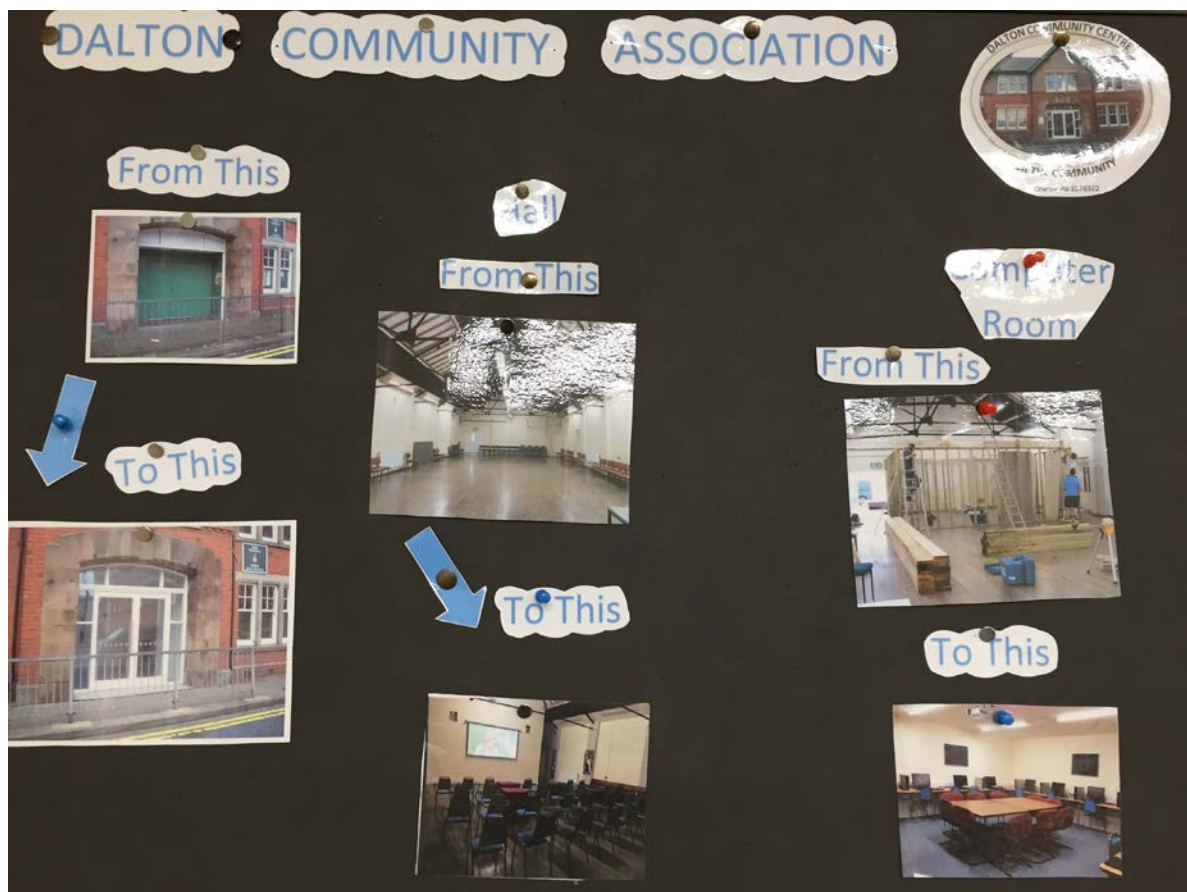
The community centre is in an old drill hall. Nine years ago the trustees found themselves at a crossroads – to sell the building, or develop a new vision. The building had become dilapidated, and use of the building was irregular with no proper charging policy in place. With a strong trustee board, a five year plan was developed, the asset was transferred to the DCA, and over £400k was raised from a wide range of local, regional and national partners from different sectors. The transformation involved sorting out heating and insulation; refurbishing the hall, meeting rooms and kitchen; and developing an IT hub.

The building now offers a range of activities and services including:

- The library
- A pre-school nursery (which was an original tenant, but now occupies a separate space)
- A youth zone and space for the local cadets
- The local police base
- An IT room
- Voluntary organisations running programmes – including Age UK Respectability, Alzheimer’s Society
- A film club, adult education classes, a photography group, and dance classes.
- One off events – such as craft fairs, parties and funerals

At the end of 2016, the trustees reported that 4500 people had been through the

Before and after display at the DCA



centre in one month, with 60 different groups using the building.

“It’s the hub of the community. It’s gone from nothing to a bubbling place. And it’s continuing to grow...”

DCA interview

3.3 Locating the library at the community centre



The library area at the DCA

The library in Dalton used to be located across the road in an old Carnegie building. There were significant maintenance and running costs associated with the property, and the space was too large for the number of books on offer. Talking to the DCA was an obvious solution, as there was an existing community hub in place, and the costs of running and staffing a separate building could be significantly reduced. Supporting the transformation of the DCA building was viewed as being more pragmatic than developing a separate service in the vicinity which risked splitting the audience. It was also clear from conversations with local library users and members that a library should be maintained in Dalton.

Meetings and discussions started between the Council and the DCA, which involved building on an initial concept of having a room for the library, understanding which spaces in the building were available, and what the costs would be for both parties. Using the foyer for the library (as well as a separate room) was agreed which helped in terms of creating a welcoming entrance to the library.

“It had to be a two way conversation with everyone working to make it viable. It might be very different in another community – with the same principles, but depending on what the community wants, what is on offer and available.”

Local authority staff interview

A community services officer in Cumbria Council was given the remit to get to know people using the old library, understand their needs and help with the transition.

“We had to tell people what was going to happen. People weren’t happy, but they did get on board with the move. We knew it would be smaller, but we wanted to retain the important things.”

Local authority staff interview

3.4 The impact of the library

The community centre is open 9am-7pm Mon-Fri and the library is open for self-serve during this period, with a member of staff present once a week, and other members of staff dropping in on occasion to support the service. The room includes two laptops donated to the DCA by the Council, and lots of information about the Cumbria wide library service. The library runs a reading group for adults, and recently put on its first author event. Interviewees were very positive about library.

“Communities can feel battered when things go. To maintain something, meeting local needs, sends a big message to communities. It’s ours and it’s valued. It’s a cracking addition to the building.”
DCA interview

“We were concerned when the old library closed as it had so much character. But it has been much better here than we thought – largely due to the people.”
Library user

3.5 Working together

As the library is predominantly a self-serve one, it has to work closely with the DCA to ensure access is maintained, but also to support each other’s events. When it is open, library users ask the DCA staff members questions – but this was not seen as a problem. The library and DCA had just bid successfully for funding for monthly coffee and advice sessions (from a police fund).

“From our point of view, there’s so much enthusiasm and passion in the DCA. We’re lucky to have been able to tap into that.”
Library staff interview

Anecdotally, people felt that footfall in the building had increased because of the library, and there was a bigger mix of people coming into the centre – where they would then notice the large range of other services and activities taking place.

3.6 Future areas of development

- For the DCA, a key priority is encouraging more people through the door, showing them first hand how much the building has improved since being renovated. This includes charities that run advice services, where it might be beneficial for local people to have access nearer to their homes, rather than travelling to Barrow. They also want to continue to improve their hiring spaces, processes and bookings
- The DCA plans to set up a users forum for those in the building
- The library intends to develop more coffee mornings, class visits, craft groups and events to reach more diverse audiences

3.7 Challenges

Very few challenges were identified in the relocation of the library to the community centre. It did take longer than expected to negotiate, but this was felt to be important in terms of getting a shared vision between the Council and the DCA. This meant establishing key principles, and then ironing out basic operational issues – for example, with the library publicising opening hours, ensuring that the DCA could guarantee that the building would be open. The willingness to change and adapt helped to find common ground, and overcome obstacles.

The fact that there was a strong foundation to build on was one of the key factors identified for success as there was an established partnership all committed to making the relocation work and a high sense of ownership over the project. There was also dedicated time put in to get to know the local community and build trust and respect – learning from other projects in Cumbria that had not gone so smoothly.

It was also considered vital to have library staff presence at least once a week given the risk of losing more vulnerable library users – and this involved moving away from the initial self-service only idea.

“ Putting someone here one morning a week has made a world of differences. Listening to what was needed was crucial for us, and I think the hybrid model is a good one.”

Local authority interview

4. Cumbria case study libraries: Gosforth Library Link

4.1 Overview

Gosforth is a small village of 961 people (328 of whom are over 65). It is located on the edge of the Lake District National Park, and has a shop, bakery, café and pubs, as well as local schools and churches. The Post Office and bank recently closed. The library service point is a Library Link model run by local volunteers, with Council support.

4.2 How the approach developed

The Library Link is located in a 17th century building which also consists of the village hall (who own the building). Changing Gosforth Library to a Library Link (where Cumbria, in this instance, used the same



Gosforth Library Link

building) was proposed following a county council review of resources. There was a strong interest in the village in not losing the library, and meetings were held involving residents, the parish council and the village hall to look at how to maintain the library, and whether it could be volunteer led.

“ Lots of people wanted it to continue. We had lost the Post Office and the bank, and it felt like the library was something we could do something about... We set up meetings, and 15 people had put their names on a volunteer list – but we didn’t know what it meant at the time.”

Volunteer interview

The volunteers then met to discuss practical issues such as how long the library could be open for with the number of volunteers that had come forward.

The library shut in March 2016, and opened again at the end of May 2016. The library is open three times a week, for 7 hours in total – which is similar to its previous opening hours. There have also been many book donations since the library changed to being volunteer run as the stock had been depleted.

“ We started with wanting continuity. Keeping books going was important – as it did look a bit sad when we first took over. But donations have really taken off.”
Volunteer interview

The main things that the library offers are:

- 1500 books, 800 donated books
- Wi-fi and a donated laptop
- Tourist information and walking leaflets
- Hearing aid batteries and stamps
- Local artist displays and greeting cards
- Coffee mornings to raise money for different charities, and author events
- Local consultations – for example, the National Grid scheme

4.3 Usage

The Library Link had 195 active members (in the last 12 months) and 20 new members since May 2016. There have been 1908 book issues recorded over the last year. There are 10-12 core customers every time the library is open. This was seen as being a good level compared to other libraries in Cumbria of a similar size.

The village hall has an active association who hire out the space for local activities such as bowling, pilates, table top sales, and shows. The Library Link and hall are both seen as an integral part of the community, but the library also has to make sure that there is not too much overlap.

The issues desk at Gosforth Library Link



“ We don’t want to tread on their toes so we try not to do too much that is in their sphere of revenue raising.”

Volunteer interview

The Library Link is seen as a tenant/user group of the building, which means that a library volunteer attends six committee meetings a year. The Parish Council budget pays the £1064 in library rent to the village hall, and the Library Link is responsible for maintenance when this might be required.

“ The village hall committee are supportive and help. We’re sorting out what will happen if there are big maintenance bills – but if we go and rattle people’s cages, they will help.”

Volunteer interview

4.4 The role of volunteers

There are currently around 17 volunteers of different ages who are involved with the Library Link – although some of these are ‘on paper’ only. One volunteer has taken on a coordinating role, and looking at financial issues. Other volunteers primarily man the issue desk, or give their time organising extra events and activities. The impact on volunteers themselves was clear:

“ We enjoy it – you meet different people in the community. We’re open to ideas for what the community wants – we’ve got that connection.”

Volunteer interview

The volunteers felt that their current success in keeping the Library Link open was partly due to the fact that they had a service to take over, with the financial support of the Parish Council. They could then focus on improving what was on offer, and developing new activities:



Leaflets on display at Gosforth Library Link



Volunteers at Gosforth Library Link

“ Making it more of a usable venue, that people want to come into, and stay around. If it had been a commercial arrangement, I’m not sure we’d exist.”

Volunteer interview

4.5 Relationship with Cumbria County Council

During the period the library was closed, the Council removed a large number of books and the computers, but also provided training for volunteers in using the library website, and the online resources. The volunteers do not have access to the library management system, and the cost of having a self-issue machine was too prohibitive – so volunteers manually record book issues and forward to the main library where statistical information is updated. The Library Link has access to county wide stock, and once a week, the library transport service collects and drops off books. There are no request fees or overdue book fines.

In the initial stages of Gosforth being run by volunteers, a community services officer from the Council visited frequently and engaged with the volunteers closely. Visits still take place every three weeks, and the officer also attends committee meetings with the volunteers.

Training is ongoing, and as new developments take place – such as Borrowbox and Ziptales - the volunteers will be updated.

“ It’s running well and there’s a good relationship. We need to update them on what is going on – it would be wrong not to. It works for their benefit, and the benefit of the community. We’re not going to drift away and leave them on their own.”

Library staff interview

“ They may have pulled out library services, but they have been so helpful. We still have that regular contact.”

Volunteer interview

The Council was also keen to allow the volunteers space to develop their own plans, whilst making sure they knew about what services Cumbria is offering - for example, around reader development.

4.6 Future areas of development

- The Library Link is looking to develop more **fundraising** – through coffee mornings, asking local firms and shops to help out. A specific flyer has been developed targeting local businesses to give talks, send representatives to monthly meetings, and provide special offers
- **Maintaining the volunteer base** - Gosforth was seen as benefitting from having a lot of retired people with a strong interest in the library which does help to provide stability. Given the opening hours it could be harder for working age people to get involved. The Library Link is keen to recruit 3-4 more active volunteers – so there is a bigger pool to cover opening times, especially during holiday periods
- **New users** - the volunteers recognise that whilst they have had more people join the Library Link since it re-opened, being community led has not necessarily altered usage

“ It’s the same people using it as before as they are used to it.”

Volunteer interview

There have been leaflet drops in the local area, and through new activities

such as an Easter Egg hunt, a lego club, and working with the local nursery, the library is hoping to expand its customer base

- **More activities** - a knitting group is also planned, as well as more author events for adult library users. The volunteers intend to display further local information in the Library Link.
- “ We have a long list of things from our last meeting. We’re working through them! The amount of time we’re open does restrict us. There are also still some people who don’t know it’s open again.”
- **Training** - some volunteers were also keen to have more training in library skills from the Council as it was an area that interested them and had motivated them to volunteer in the first place

Volunteer interview

4.7 Challenges encountered - for volunteers

Whilst the volunteers have had a lot of successes since opening, they would prefer to still have a professional library employee at Gosforth. Some were keen to emphasise that community run libraries are not an ‘ideal solution’ and do depend on a lot of effort to ensure the service could be maintained in a consistent way.

The volunteers described that they are aware that they are operating in a legal vacuum. They do not have a legal status as an organisation, and make it clear that the events they put on such as coffee mornings, are for fundraising, rather than charging. In the early stages, they had to work out what level of structure they wanted.

“ We have no set of rules or structures. We had to work out what we do and what we don’t do. Do we need to be vetted? Do we need an overarching document saying how we will run the place?”

Volunteer interview

This has meant making decisions as they arise – for example, on where to put donated books, and which leaflets can be on display. Consensus has been easy so far, but they also recognised that as a group, they could have different ideas. Their positive way of working together was also attributed to the calm and consensual manner of the volunteer who has a coordinating role.

The Council is also keen to record book issues at Gosforth Library Link more accurately as they are reliant on slips being filled in with the necessary information.

5. Next steps for Cumbria

Alongside the two case study examples, the library service in Cumbria has a range of different partnership models. Some libraries are community run, book drops have replaced some of the mobile library services, libraries have moved into different buildings (for example, schools, churches, shops), and new public sector hubs have been created where the opportunity has arisen. There has been investment in main libraries, and the six main libraries have different organisations located there that the library service works with. The focus on area based working and looking at available assets is set to continue:

“ Whatever services look like in the future we need to be able to work in localities with partners... we are looking at buildings and how we share space better. We’ve had historical buildings, and the needs might have changed. We have to find the right place in that community.”

Local authority staff interview

Links

- Cumbria libraries: www.cumbria.gov.uk/libraries/default.asp
- Dalton Community Association: www.daltoncommunityassociation.co.uk/
- Gosforth Library Link: www.facebook.com/Gosforth-Library-Link-917235811711126
- Taskforce blog about Cumbria: <https://librariestaskforce.blog.gov.uk/2017/02/02/reshaping-the-delivery-model-in-cumbria/>
- <https://librariestaskforce.blog.gov.uk/2016/09/02/keeping-libraries-relevant-and-enhancing-community-wellbeing/>

Photo credits: Renaisi and Dalton Town Council

Chelmsley Wood Library

Solihull

1. Introduction

Chelmsley Wood Library is located on the second floor of a shopping centre in a residential neighbourhood. It is run by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) and was selected as a case study as the library provides a range of services for the local community as an information hub.

2. The local context

Solihull: Key facts and figures

- Metropolitan borough with urban and rural areas
- Population: 206,674
- IMD ranking: 77/326⁷⁵

“ ‘Solihull is a place of contrasts. It is repeatedly rated as one of the best places to live in the UK... However, the headline masks some challenges, none more so than the persistent inequality gaps which are stubbornly difficult to shift.’⁷⁶

2.1 Solihull area wide priorities

There are four area wide priorities underpinning the Council’s vision for Solihull: improving health and wellbeing, building stronger communities, managed growth and delivering value. Whilst libraries and community hubs are not explicitly mentioned in this document, one of the outcomes includes inclusive communities where everyone has access to local services and amenities. Programmes of work under the Stronger Communities theme include a strengths-based approach in communities – ‘people are not the passive recipients of

services, they have an active role to play in creating better outcomes for themselves and for others.’⁷⁷

The 2017 Council Plan outlines the pride that Solihull has in maintaining the level of services that residents expect. However, the Council is ‘acutely aware that the time has come to be honest with our citizens and ourselves about what needs to give or be done in a very different way.’ The Council is developing a new business operating model to help guide where services should be prioritised involving ‘informed, open and honest dialogue with our citizens about the potential impact.’⁷⁸

2.2 Developments in Solihull’s library service

The library service in Solihull:

- 13 libraries (plus 1 mobile, a homes library service and a library access point) run by the local authority. The mobile library outsourced to Warwickshire County Council
- 65 FTE library staff; 155 volunteers
- Library visits: 3,584 per 1,000 population
- Active borrowers: 125 per 1,000 population⁷⁹

75. 2011 Census; IMD 2015

76. Solihull Council Plan - 2017

77. Solihull’s Building Stronger Communities Priorities

78. Solihull Council Plan - 2017

79. CIPFA 2015-16 figures

In 2014, a Libraries Task and Finish Group was set up by a Council scrutiny panel. The aim was to explore the future potential opportunities for the borough's ten community libraries, engaging with relevant stakeholders, and undertaking visits to Solihull libraries. The Task and Finish Group made a number of recommendations which formed the basis of a Library Service Transformation Action Plan in mid 2015. This recognised the progress being made towards partnership working in several of Solihull's libraries (including at Chelmsley Wood) and emphasised the co-location of services where possible.

In 2015/16, the Library Service became part of the Managed Growth and Communities Directorate. This was an opportunity to demonstrate the contribution that libraries could make to Solihull's overall Stronger Communities work. As part of the Library Service Transformation Action Plan, Information and Guidance (IAG) hubs were established or further embedded in three libraries to 'offer seamless integrate customer services'. Health hubs were also launched in two libraries and the refurbishment of the Core started - a co-located service in the town centre, which includes a wider customer service officer, including a library.⁸⁰

“ Libraries as natural community hubs positioned in the centre of communities can facilitate, support and enable people to become active and healthy residents, by signposting and referring people to a wealth of services and agencies under one roof.”⁸¹

In 2016, a wide-ranging public consultation Your Library Your Say took place, as recommended by the Transformation Action Plan. The consultation was intended to feed into the strategic development of Solihull's library service over the next 5 years, ensuring libraries in Solihull better meet customer and community needs, and that the service is able to deploy resources efficiently and effectively. The consultation involved a survey and engagement events to reach underrepresented groups. Key themes which emerged included: the benefits of a community hub approach particularly for rural areas; interest in volunteering opportunities; and the need for more understanding of the full range of library services available.

The medium term financial strategy approved in March 2016 set out £21m of savings plans over three years.⁸² The library service review is expected to deliver £100k savings by 19/20.⁸³

3. Chelmsley Wood Library Case Study

3.1 Overview

Chelmsley Wood library is located in Chelmsley Wood ward - a relatively deprived area, with six LSOAs in the most 10% deprived in England.⁸⁴ As of March 2017, the rate of unemployment claimants was high at 6.4% - above the borough average of 1.9%. Chelmsley Wood shopping centre houses the library, shops, a Sure Start Children's Centre and a Solihull Connect Walk-in Centre for Council services.

80. Libraries and Arts Update report to Cabinet – Jan 2016

81. Libraries and Arts Update report to Cabinet – Jan 2016

82. Solihull Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016-19

83. 2017/18 Budget – savings proposals

84. Ward profile



Chelmsley Wood library is located on the second floor of a shopping centre.

“ It’s a major community space in this area. I think all the libraries in Solihull are.”

Library manager

Key facts and figures about the library

- Active borrowers – 2,738
- Visits – 86,003
- Stock – 35,333⁸⁵
- Opening hours: Monday and Thursday 9.30am-7pm, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday 9.30am-5pm
- Staff – 2 library managers (job share), 3 members of library staff, 1 fab lab supervisor, library children’s services manager

Main activities and services provided at Chelmsley Wood by the library and partners

- 2 self service machines
- 28 public computers and free wifi; printing and photocopying
- Fab lab – 4 week course on 3D printing, coding and scanning aimed at young people who are NEET
- Youth hub – a space at the rear of the library
- Archways Academies – work with students who have been excluded from school on a one-to-one basis in the library
- Library activities – writers club, Story and Rhyme, Job Shop, craft group, ICT courses

- **Community Advice Hub** – run by AgeUK and providing a range of advice and support for issues including benefits, caring and health; open Mon-Thurs 9.30am-2.30pm, with a telephone line for customers to use on a Friday to access advice from the hub team based at the Core
- **Health hub** – in partnership with Public Health involving health activities; blood pressure and BMI machines
- **ReCom** – local charity which provides IT support
- **Midland Heart** – homelessness outreach

identified a gap in local partnership work and signposting which was leading to a doubling of services, and an experience for users which was not meeting the Council's 'Lives Not Services' principles.⁸⁶ An interim report in September 2014 found that the new hub model had been positively received, and by centralising information, client access and referrals were more efficient.

A Community Advice Hub was formally launched at Chelmsley Wood in June 2015. In its first year of operation the hub supported 2,516 people with 5,021 issues and made 819 referrals to specialist services.⁸⁷ It provides individual advice and step-by-step support with issues such as benefits applications.

3.2 The development of the library, Community Advice Hub and health hub

The Community Advice Hub in Chelmsley Wood Library was a pilot in July 2014 in response to an audit of local information, advice, advocacy and support which

AgeUK manage the hub on behalf of the Council and Solihull CCG and were part of the original group of organisations running the hub with DIAL and Citizens Advice.

Inside the library



86. Information, Advice, Advocacy and Support re-design update – March 2015

87. Council magazine

AgeUK now brings together a range of organisations through the hub including: Midland Heart, BID Services, Action for Blind People, Solihull Carers Centre, Act on Dementia, Solihull Action through Advocacy, and Independent Advocacy. The Community Advice Hub is part of Solihull Together for better lives, a partnership of local health and social care organisations in the borough working together to better integrate health and social care.

At the start of the pilot, the Community Advice Hub was a separate space in the library provided with desks and chairs. In order to provide extra privacy for confidential and potentially sensitive interviews, pods were later added in a room near the issue desk. Library staff refer and accompany customers to the Community Advice Hub for relevant queries and advice.



The Community Advice Hub at Chelmsley Wood which is integrated into the library space

A health hub was established in June 2015 by the library to help address the health gap between north and south Solihull. In addition to the popular blood pressure and BMI machines (provided by Public Health), health trainers (from Health Exchange) and practitioners operate from the health hub. Library staff facilitate health events involving taster sessions, and advice and support. A COPD group meets in the health hub running a knit and natter session.



The health hub is immediately on the right as you enter the library

“ [The] leadership team and councillors are very pro libraries...they’ve grown ours [Chelmsley Wood Library] by joining with other partners and agencies and making libraries a hub of the community with lots of community and resources.”
(Library manager)

4. Co-location in practice

4.1 Usage

The Community Advice Hub was reported to be very popular, with queues often forming to access the services. Partner organisations commented on the value of being located in an accessible community space, where customers can readily access specialist support:

“ [The library is an] open, friendly, convenient place to take your customers.”
Partner interview

“ People come in here anyway because it’s a neutral space so it benefits them [partner organisations] because they’ve got the footfall of people coming.”
Library staff



Information and opportunities from partners are clearly on display in the library

As the library is located in a shopping centre, many customers visit the library (and partner organisations) while shopping.

“ It’s not a stand-alone building for people to come into they’ll often pop in to do the shopping and then pop upstairs up here.”

Library manager

The library was also reported to be popular with customers using IT services, particularly young male jobseekers. ReCom are a local IT charity which provide IT support for jobseekers as well as a new tablet course for those aged 55+ at the library. Computer access was described as an issue in the local area:

“ There’s an assumption nowadays that everyone has a computer but that isn’t true in this community.”

Library manager

“ A lot of enquires are to do with computers and people come in to do job hunting.”

Library manager

4.2 The main benefits of co-location at Chelmsley Wood

Direct cross-referrals:

Library staff and the partner organisations operating out of the library space often liaise and work closely together, immediately referring customers to different forms of help available. For example:

- Library and Community Advice Hub staff work with health practitioners in the health hub and directly refer customers to the services offered there on a near daily basis
- Homeless customers are referred to Midland Heart who can support with food and emergency accommodation. The charity has increased their days in the library due to the benefits of being able directly refer their customers to other services in the library
- Customers with IT queries are referred to sessions offered by ReCom

“We’re an information service – we’ve got specialist information right on hand so we can refer people directly where they want.”

Library staff

The different organisations operating from Chelmsley Wood library do not share a workforce, or governance, but staff from the library and partner organisations emphasised the importance of personal and regular connections between frontline and strategic staff to ensure successful joint working:

“They’re not a separate entity within our building – they’re part of our team.”

Library manager

Wider provision of services:

The packaging of different spaces within the library as a Community Advice Hub, health hub and youth hub has enabled Chelmsley Wood Library to do more with less. The additional services provide holistic, tailored and in-depth support which is highly valued

by customers and is more than a core library offer.

“ [If the Community Advice Hub wasn’t here] I don’t know what avenue [I’d use]”.

Building user

The openness of library management to trialling new initiatives and partnerships has been very beneficial, ranging from the Community Advice Hub pilot and the set-up of the health hub to letting partners such as ReCom and Midland Heart, who initially approached library staff, into the library. The development of the youth hub followed a consultation with local schools where young people requested a space to ‘hang out’.

Library staff capacity:

The range of services delivered by partner organisations can help to free up library resource to focus on developing other areas of engagement such as the youth hub and children’s activities. Customers also

Fab Lab at Chelmsley Wood which offers courses aimed at NEET young people



reported valuing the assistance and support they receive from library staff.

“ A lot of our time is taken up with IT enquires...it's [ReCom's IT services] taken the pressure off frontline staff.”

Library manager

4.3 Challenges

In developing the Community Advice Hub there were some initial challenges around integrating staff from different partners into the day-to-day operation of the library. For example, housekeeping issues such as toilet and IT access presented a problem at the start of the pilot but have now been resolved. Initially library staff were unsure of the Community Advice Hub staffs' roles and expertise so invited them to a library staff meeting to explain their offer.

For both the library and the Community Advice Hub advertising the range of services and activities available remains a challenge. Due to the library's location on the second floor of a shopping centre, the full range of services offered is not always clear to customers and advertising via social media may not reach those without computer access. The Community Advice Hub has had some success in attracting customers through word-of-mouth and this method of advertising was reported to be particularly effective for Midland Heart in reaching homeless clients.

It was also reported that customers were comparatively reluctant to volunteer at the Community Advice Hub due to the sensitivity of the support offered in a close-knit community.

4.4 Future areas of development

The Library Service Transformation Action Plan has led to a relaunch of the library volunteer offer to provide clearly defined roles. For Chelmsley Wood library this means that specific volunteer positions with ReCom (who operate at the library) will be advertised.

Library managers, library staff, partner organisations and building users shared their suggestions for the future development of the library at Chelmsley Wood, continuing the current partnership work with the aim of the library being a community space for a range of users:

- Provide storage space for partnership organisations – for example, blankets for homeless outreach activities
- Develop the library's physical accessibility by reviewing current access via stairs and lifts
- Develop range of partners operating from the library – for example, organisations wanting to work with the Community Advice Hub
- Increase opening hours of the Community Advice Hub – some customers have enquires on Saturdays when the Community Advice Hub is closed
- Refresh the library's computer stock
- Expand the library's technological offer for young people
- Bring the community in further – for example, through social activities for young people

4.5 Next steps

As of Spring 2017, recommendations for changes from the Your Library Your Say consultation are being drawn up, before being presented to elected members.⁸⁸ This is likely to include further recommendations on developing community hubs in the borough through co-location to add value to the library offer and allow opening hours to be maintained or extended. This will depend on local need - the focus at Chelmsley Wood has been primarily on financial inclusion and health, whereas the need for other community hubs in Solihull is to have council services available all in one place.

Links

- www.solihull.gov.uk/Resident/Libraries/Find-a-library/chelmsleywoodlibrary
- www.forallhlc.org/index.php
- www.ageuk.org.uk/solihull/services-for-you/community-advice-hubs/

Photo credits: Renaisi

88. Briefing note –Libraries Consultation – Report to Cabinet, Jan 2017

A large, bold, white serif letter 'R' is positioned in the upper left quadrant of the page. The background is a solid purple color with several white lines radiating from a central point in the lower right, creating a starburst or web-like pattern.

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