



Department
for Culture
Media & Sport

Independent Library Report for England

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Foreword

The public library service in England is at a crossroads.

For 150 years, library services have been run by local government, with oversight from central government. Libraries already deliver a wide range of facilities and services within local communities, and, given sharply reducing budgets, and changing needs, there are keen concerns about continuing to provide these vital functions.

Many local authorities are delivering impressive and comprehensive library services. Their delivery and management is innovative as well as excellent. The need now is to build on and extend those practices to benefit every library in the country.

Central government therefore commissioned me, with the help of my advisory panel – Sue Charteris, Janene Cox, Luke Johnson, Roly Keating, Caroline Michel, Stephen Page and Joanna Trollope – to investigate how the public library system could best work, in the future.

It has taken us seven months. We have visited large numbers of libraries, both urban and rural, discussed the issues and challenges facing libraries at length with local government, considered over 200 submissions of written evidence, and heard invited oral evidence from many of the above including distinguished bodies such as Arts Council England. All our evidence has been gathered with an acute awareness of the sustained and severe financial situation affecting everyone, the rapid pace of current change, and the imperative that no-one is left behind.

Two themes have emerged, consistently and dramatically. The first was that there have already been far too many library reviews in recent years which have come to nothing. The second was that not enough decision makers at national or local level appear sufficiently aware of the remarkable and vital value that a good library service can offer modern communities of every size and character.

Our conclusions are clear, concise and practical. We make three major recommendations:

1. The provision of a national digital resource for libraries, to be delivered in partnership with local authorities
2. The setting up of a task and finish force, led by local government, in partnership with other bodies involved in the library sector, to provide a strategic framework for England, and to help in implementing the following
3. The task force, to work with local authorities, to help them improve, revitalise and if necessary, change their local library service, while encouraging, appropriate to each library, increased community involvement

Libraries are, let us not forget, a golden thread throughout our lives.

Despite the growth in digital technologies, there is still a clear need and demand within communities for modern, safe, non-judgemental, flexible spaces, where citizens of all ages can mine the knowledge of the world for free, supported by the help and knowledge of the library workforce. This is particularly true for the most vulnerable in society who need support and guidance and to children and young people who benefit from engagement with libraries outside of the formal classroom environment.

The library does more than simply loan books. It underpins every community. It is not just a place for self-improvement, but the supplier of an infrastructure for life and learning, from babies to old age, offering support, help, education, and encouraging a love of reading. Whether you wish to apply for a job, or seek housing benefit, or understand your pension rights or the health solutions available to you, or learn to read, the library can assist.

In England, over a third of the population visits their local library. In the poorest areas, that figure rises to nearly a half. It is no wonder that communities feel so passionately about their libraries.

They are not only safe places for literacy and learning, they have also been the starting point of empowerment for many citizens who lack opportunities at home. And, in many cases, across the country, there are outstanding examples of libraries who benefit, and engage with, their local lives and communities.

This best practice needs to be shared further. A library's great strength – its localism – must not be allowed to become its weakness. More focussed effort is needed to help local government implement its desire to benefit its communities through the public library system.

What we would like to see is a re-invigoration of the library network. It starts with a marked increase and improvement in digital technology, rolling WiFi out to every library in the country. That WiFi connection should be delivered in a comfortable, retail-standard environment, with the usual amenities of coffee, sofas and toilets, and offer, in addition, such new services as would make the library a vibrant and attractive community hub.

A series of hubs would support individuals and communities to become more enterprising, more literate, and in consequence, more prosperous.

Libraries could and should play a major role in rectifying literacy standards. A re-energised library network would be a natural and established partner for every school, as well as being the provider of courses in both literacy and adult education. Local cultural organisations would find an equally natural ally in their library, every partnership increasing the sharing of knowledge and the growing of audiences.

The research for this report has resulted in a fervent belief among the panel members that the future of libraries as community hubs is essential for the well-being of the nation. At the moment, at least 20% of the population have no digital technology at home, and far more fail to understand how to make the most of what they do have.

The need to create digital literacy – and in an ideal world, digital fluency – is particularly helped by the professionalism and experience of the library workforce, who should be recognised for the significant role they play in modern society at present, and also be augmented by the recruitment and training of equally high calibre personnel for the future.

These two central ambitions need economic coherence for their fulfilment. In fact, coherence at a national level is needed throughout. As things currently stand, the present governance of the library network does not allow for either economies of scale or for genuine national strategic leadership.

In such a fragile financial environment as we have now, economies of scale across the country could have a huge and beneficial effect. And a national strategy could articulate what libraries are, and why they are a force for good for us all.

Libraries belong, after all, to every one of us. We have come across extraordinary cases of the transformative effect that a community has had on shaping a library to suit their particular needs. Their involvement has not affected the statutory authority of local authorities, but has rather, by suggesting new models of resources and expertise, helped to create a new dynamism in the way a library relates to its community.

We are not just intent upon refreshing the public library network. We want, also, to make better use of taxpayers' money. Many government departments have budgets already allocated to related services, so libraries become a natural fit for them. Central government, by investing in digital resources across the library network, could show that it understands how crucial the service is to both the welfare and the advancement of the nation.

We would like to see some greater consistencies in libraries, such as branding and signage, as well as the all-important provision of services. We would like to see sharing of digital networks. We would like to see future generations able to take the excellence and efficiency of the library service for granted, including, perhaps, the issuing of national library cards.

The whole point of the work of this panel has been to ensure that this vital service to our nation can adapt to changing environments and technologies and thrive on the progress that they bring. It will take time and dedication to bring the adjustments about, but we are optimistic that there is the commitment and energy there to keep the service developing and flourishing well into the future.

We are extremely grateful to all those involved for their useful insights and contributions. This report is for the government who commissioned it, but there is a great deal here for all those involved in, or appreciative of, the library sector, to think about and pursue. By working together we can have considerable influence in sustaining, and shaping the public library service of England.

William Sieghart & Panel — Independent Library Report

Actions

For central government

- To make available funding to enable local authorities to extend WiFi access, computer facilities and workforce training for all public libraries in England
- With local government, jointly establish a library taskforce, led by councils, in partnership with others interested in the sector: to provide leadership; to implement the recommendations and to help reinvigorate the public library service in England
- To have greater cross-government recognition and support for libraries
- To seek to secure changes in European and UK copyright law to enable the Public Lending Right to include remote e-loans in its next legislative term

For the taskforce

- To support the creation of a national digital library network
- To respond to the outcomes of the current e-lending pilots and continue to work with publishers, libraries and others to secure the adoption of the models supported by the pilots
- To encourage and develop the library workforce and especially new recruits and graduates
- To develop sector-led best practice guidelines to help local authorities when working with volunteers and community-led libraries

For local government

- **With central government, jointly establish a library taskforce, led by councils, in partnership with others interested in the sector: to provide leadership; to implement the recommendations and to help reinvigorate the public library service in England**
- **Through the taskforce, to develop a vigorous culture of mutual support among local authorities through the sharing of good practice/resources and to seize the opportunities for even greater collaboration**
- **Through the taskforce, to consider all available options for the delivery of their library service**
- **Through the taskforce, to encourage more community involvement in the management of libraries through a variety of models**

Digital library network

ACTIONS

Central government

To make available funding to enable local authorities to extend WiFi access, computer facilities and workforce training for all public libraries in England

Taskforce

To support the creation of a national digital library network

It is essential that all public libraries in England should be able to offer the public free access to WiFi, computer facilities and sufficient workforce training to support its use. This will allow them the freedom and flexibility to be responsive to the needs of their local communities in line with wider technological advances. It would also help libraries to innovate, to share or jointly adopt services more efficiently as well as giving them the opportunity to generate income from non-core services. WiFi will enable libraries to bid for income generating projects and to assist co-location of services.

Many people expect WiFi to be accessible at all times and the lack of its availability in some libraries has been a barrier to the public using its facilities especially amongst the younger generation. By not providing WiFi and high quality computer facilities, libraries often present a negative image of being old fashioned places that have little relevance in today's society.

Libraries offer more than just books, CDs and DVDs. They have become the portal to a whole range of material for education, entertainment, and self-improvement.

The investment of WiFi and improved computer facilities will allow libraries to develop new services, new audiences and enable local innovation. As a result people will get access to more resources, information and support.

It is important that central government provides the funding to enable local authorities to extend WiFi access, improved computer facilities and workforce training to demonstrate government's continuing support and commitment for libraries. Libraries are already facilitating access to a wide range of government services including education, welfare reform, business and economic growth and health care and this will dramatically grow as more services go online.

WiFi on its own will only go part of the way to solve these issues. Current fixed terminals do not offer enough flexibility for libraries to cope with changing demand. By providing computer facilities whether they are tablets, mobiles, laptops or other devices, libraries will be able to meet user needs and free up more space to facilitate a wider range of services. It will also encourage a wider demographic into the library. Equipment should be able to be used by everyone with assistive reading technologies and accessible keyboards where required.

The provision of WiFi and improved computer facilities could also allow for the creation of a national digital network for libraries. This can be viewed as the next phase of The People's Network which changed how libraries have been used since 2000. This digital network could include a single library platform and a national library card and catalogue.

There is also a need to develop and have access to high quality content to help inspire and encourage creativity, leisure and engagement across the digital world. This can build on the work from Library 21¹ which has begun to explore how, in a digital age, the public library space can be the most exciting place for readers, and give the public access to an unprecedented range of digital content.

¹ <http://www.theliteraryplatform.com/collective/library-21-research-and-feasibility-study/>

Public libraries are already moving beyond the confines of their buildings and a digital network can help support this especially in rural areas which may not currently have access to a library service. A digital network can help rural library services utilise, unlock and build their social capital to revitalise communal facilities.

The network will also allow libraries to be able to communicate with each other more effectively and to promote their services in a more unified way. Creating a digital network for libraries could bring about a socially inclusive 21st century model that is fit for purpose. A digital network can help reinvigorate the library offer, reach new customers, and increase the visibility of libraries in the community at large.

This emphasis on the digital should not take away the importance of physical stock. Libraries encourage literacy and learning in various forms including written and oral. A national digital network could allow for existing stock to be better sourced, shared and curated on a wider basis. The network could help with e-lending which is covered later in the report.

It would also give users access to reference, specialist collections and local archives as these become available on-line. It could allow libraries to build stronger links with The National Archives, the British Library, universities and other specialist libraries. It could also help to join up libraries across the globe to share information and new practices. This will give the public library service wider access to a greater wealth of material and allow them to connect with the wider world. It will enable the user to move seamlessly from national and international content through to relevant local content.

It is important that this national library network should be able to link up with other digital projects to help with compatibility and cohesion. The support of the Government Digital Service and their partners will be essential in this.

Library taskforce

ACTION

Central and local government

Jointly establish a library taskforce, led by councils, in partnership with others interested in the sector: to provide leadership; to implement the recommendations and to help reinvigorate the public library service in England

There should be a library taskforce to provide the necessary leadership and to help ensure that the actions detailed in this report are delivered. It is not envisaged that it would be practical or desirable to create a new body to deliver this. Instead it should be set up as a task and finish group which will jointly report to Ministers and the Local Government Association. This partnership will foster and promote a new and dynamic way of working for libraries.

This taskforce, which we provisionally call “Leadership for Libraries”, will be led by local government with the national technical expertise provided by amongst others:

- Arts Council England
- BBC
- British Library
- Central government including Government Digital Service

- Chartered Institute of Librarians and Information Professionals
- Local Government Association
- Society of Chief Librarians
- The Reading Agency

We recognise the positive contribution of the Arts Council England in supporting and developing libraries since they took over that role in October 2011. Their strategic development role within the sector will continue as part of the taskforce and it is hoped that libraries will continue to be supported to maximise the opportunities which Arts Council England funding streams present.

The taskforce will be the advocate for public libraries in England, including branding, promotion and the over-arching vision and narrative for the service which can then be delivered at local level – it is important that the public library service achieves greater and more coherent visibility of what it offers, and that its potential benefits are understood at national and local level to inform policy development.

Membership of the group will vary depending on the tasks involved and for certain actions it could help to have agreed representatives from library users and volunteers, third sector foundations, trade unions, publishers, authors and the library workforce to help provide experience and practical considerations.

This taskforce will take forward programmes to support the following objectives:

- To support the creation of a national digital library network
- To respond to the outcomes of the current e-lending pilots and continue to work with publishers, libraries and others to secure the adoption of the models supported by the pilots

- To encourage and develop the library workforce and especially new recruits and graduates
- To develop sector-led best practice guidelines to help local authorities when working with volunteers and community-led libraries

Roles and responsibilities will be assigned to each of the programmes with relevant organisations/individuals assigned to certain tasks that match their skills and interests. Other individuals and organisations can be invited onto programmes to give wider experience and perspectives.

Once established the taskforce will clearly set out its key deliverables to assess and measure its success against these. The aim is for it to run for three to four years with regular reporting to Ministers and the Local Government Association and other partners. There could be actions that might need to continue after this time under the remittance of a particular organisation or alternative governance model. The taskforce should also be open and transparent, for instance by publishing both its action plan and regular reports of progress against these.

The BBC welcomes and endorses the ambition in this report to ensure libraries remain a vital part of public life. In particular, they recognise the role digital technology can play in transforming public libraries and are resolved to help realise this potential. They have committed to joining the taskforce charged with looking in detail at what digital capability would most benefit libraries (be it training or technology) and, in particular, whether there is an opportunity to support libraries through a national digital infrastructure.

Wider government initiatives

ACTION

Central government

There should be greater cross government recognition and support for libraries

The government facilitates more than 650 transactional services for citizens and businesses, including vehicle tax renewals, passport applications, driving test bookings and voter registration, with more services becoming digital by default in the future. Going digital by default means creating services which are so straightforward and convenient that all those who can use digital services will choose to do so, while those who can't are not excluded.

The Cabinet Office's *Digital Inclusion Strategy*² sets out how it will help to reduce the number of people without basic digital skills and capabilities to enable total digital inclusion by 2020. One of the key actions is for government to identify where increasing digital capacity will improve wider policy outcomes. It also sets out that departments will raise awareness of their digital services so more people know about and use them, and look at ways to use incentives to encourage digital adoption.

Libraries already facilitate access to government services such as education, welfare reform, business and economic growth, health and well-being and many help to support a range of digital inclusion activities.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-digital-inclusion-strategy>

As part of the Get Online campaign, libraries have already enabled over 3 million people with access to online facilities and with appropriate investment and partnership there is huge potential for libraries to do more in the future. Libraries provide access to books, on-line resources, workforce training, support and space.

Some rural library services in particular have close relationships with social services and adult education, amongst others. Further joint working across departments, alongside communities and other providers, is required to maximise efficiencies and opportunities.

Members of the library workforce spend a large proportion of their time helping people with poor computer and internet literacy. An increase in online transactions will only make the library more relevant to the digitally excluded as the one place where they can access a whole range of facilities and support free of charge.

The future of libraries should be seen as all of Government's responsibility not just for the Department for Culture Media and Sport and the Department for Communities and Local Government. In my discussions with other departments they acknowledge that libraries already help to deliver their services in one central place. However more needs to be done to ensure that libraries get the appropriate recognition, support and publicity about their role and there could be a greater joining up of government initiatives at a strategic level to help libraries to be able to deliver them in a cohesive way to the local communities.

There should be a greater transparency and awareness of any funding or other support on offer that local authorities could benefit from. They also need to be aware that potential funding streams may be tied to certainty of service provision across all of England / the UK. This may require one bid to be made collectively on behalf of all authorities. Consideration needs to be given as to how this can be best achieved.

E-lending

ACTIONS

Central government

To seek to secure changes in European and UK copyright law to enable the Public Lending Right to include remote e-loans in its next legislative term

Taskforce

To respond to the outcomes of the current e-lending pilots and continue to work with publishers, libraries and others to secure the adoption of the models supported by the pilots

Digital technology is developing rapidly and will continue to have a major impact on the way information, culture and the written word is obtained and consumed. There has been a rapid growth in the loan of e-books and it is increasing though it is still small in comparison to the loan of traditional books. The most recent figures showed that issues of e-books for public libraries in England in 2012/13 were 803,085. This was an increase of 80.6% on the previous year.

The review of e-lending in 2012/13 helped ensure that libraries, users, authors and publishers could all benefit as the demand for this service grew. This provided advice on how best to achieve an e-lending model in public libraries in England to provide a strong modern offer to the public, whilst providing fair remuneration to publishers and authors and appropriate protections against copyright infringement.

In March 2014 the Society of Chief Librarians and the Publisher's Association, funded by the British Library Trust, commenced a 12 month pilot into e-lending in public libraries, working closely with four local authorities in England to carry out research into the impact of e-book lending in order to identify a suitable and sustainable model for all key partners. The findings are due in early 2015.

There is a role for the library taskforce to help develop an e-lending solution for libraries in England in close liaison with publishers and authors. There may also be future actions needed for including e-loans in the Public Lending Right. This is the right for authors and other rights holders to receive payment for the loans of their books by public libraries. Following our recommendations from the 2013 e-lending report³, the government amended legislation in July 2014 to extend the right to be paid for audio and e-books for on-site lending however more work needs to be done in this area.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-independent-review-of-e-lending-in-public-libraries-in-england>

Professional development

ACTION

Taskforce

To encourage and develop the library workforce and especially new recruits and graduates

One of the most successful programmes to encourage talented young graduates into a profession is TeachFirst whose mission is ‘to end inequality in education by building a community of exceptional leaders who create change within classrooms, schools and across society’. Many graduates have now gone through this programme and this has helped raise the profile of the teaching profession.

Currently librarians and the wider public library workforce do not get universal recognition for the wide range of services that they provide to the public and the sector needs an equivalent programme to attract the next generation as well as developing further skills for the existing library workforce. The 21st century librarian will need to be more of a community impresario with digital and commercial expertise who can champion their communities’ needs and generate new business and audiences for the library.

The creation of programmes to recruit, encourage and develop library workforce at all levels should be led by the library taskforce with the active involvement of the Society of Chief Librarians, the Chartered Institute of Librarians and Information Professionals and other interested partners. Volunteers have always contributed to libraries and they should continue to be included in any workforce training to help them to take their skills to the next level.

Volunteers and community-led libraries

ACTION

Taskforce

To develop sector-led best practice guidelines to help local authorities when working with volunteers and community-led libraries

A core set of guidelines needs to be developed for working with volunteers and communities. This could share information, lessons learnt and best practice alongside legal, regulatory and operational issues. It can then be disseminated nationally through the digital network as well other channels.

This work should be led by the library taskforce in co-ordination with key partners including user groups, local authorities, the Local Government Association and the Society of Chief Librarians all of whom have considerable experience and dedication in this area.

It should complement and enhance existing guidelines such as:

- The *Community Knowledge Hub for Libraries*⁴
- *Learning from experience: guiding principles for local authorities*⁵
- *Learning from experience: summary briefing for local authorities*⁶

⁴ <http://libraries.communityknowledgehub.org.uk/>

⁵ <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/browse-advice-and-guidance/community-libraries-learning-experience-guiding-principles-local-authorities>

⁶ http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/Community_libraries_research_2013_summary_report.pdf

- *Rural library services in England: exploring recent changes and possible futures*⁷

The involvement of volunteers and communities in the public library service is not new; though their role and numbers have changed over time. Some of the more innovative places that we visited were run by such volunteers in partnership with their local authorities and with strong support from their communities and the library workforce.

Community-managed or community-supported libraries can present a creative way to manage resources and help support the professional library workforce. We would like to see communities consulted in greater depth and brought more into the management of their library service through a variety of different models. In so doing they better reflect the particular needs of their local area and can have a positive influence on what services are delivered, opening hours and having a sense of ownership and engagement.

There are examples of volunteer only libraries being set up across the country though there is a tendency for these to be established in reasonably affluent areas and there are still questions over their long term viability. The more disadvantaged localities often have the greater need for such a service but they don't tend to have the resources, experience or confidence to take over the running of their library.

There are also new models of delivery such as community co-operatives, mutuals and social enterprises. There have been encouraging signs that these can help improve the quality of the library service.

There is plainly not one library model that fits all situations and it is right that there is a range of options to fit in best with different community needs. However it is important that there is greater cohesion between these different types of libraries and that there is more support for both local authorities and their communities in understanding the different models and choices/support open to them.

⁷ <http://www.opm.co.uk/publications/rural-library-services-in-england-exploring-recent-changes-and-possible-futures/>

Role of local government

ACTION

Local government

- **Through the taskforce, to develop a culture of vigorous mutual support among local authorities through the sharing of good practice/resources and to seize the opportunities for even greater collaboration**
- **Through the taskforce, to consider all available options for the delivery of their library service**
- **Through the taskforce, to encourage more community involvement in the management of libraries through a variety of models**

Libraries are a local service, managed and funded locally, with councillors accountable to local taxpayers –this includes users and non-users alike – for the service they deliver. Whilst it might be more efficient to have fewer library authorities we are not recommending changes to the existing structures as this is a matter for central government to lead and agree on.

Local authorities should continue to have the statutory duty ‘to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof’⁸ taking into account local needs and within available resources. It is a matter for each authority to decide on what is ‘comprehensive and efficient’ for their own area, to determine how much they spend on libraries and how to manage and deliver their service at the local level.

⁸ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/75/contents>

The Local Government and Public Involvement and Health Act 2007 places a duty on principal authorities to have regard to the need to secure that any community governance for the area under review reflects the identities and interests of the local community in that area, and that it is 'effective and convenient'.

Libraries are among the most valued of civic spaces. They have a cross generational appeal that other local authority services can only dream of and are a gateway to information, ranging from public health to adult learning, jobs, volunteering, the police and other cultural services. Against a background of austerity the future of libraries has to be considered as part of the overall council service offer to communities. Libraries are most likely to be viable when they can demonstrate their value to the widest possible group of users.

Up and down the country many libraries are already exciting, relevant and vibrant community hubs that drive footfall to city and town centres and help to create a climate of aspiration. There are inspiring examples of local authorities collaborating with each other and other partners, bringing together services in a single location, to improve the efficiency of the library service. The Local Government Association already supports and promotes sector-led improvement and should continue to lead on this area in conjunction with other key partners in the library sector.

The need to share what works will continue to be of the utmost importance. A local government-led taskforce, jointly accountable to the Local Government Association and Ministers, could play a positive and powerful role seeking out and sharing the most exciting practice for other places to learn from and adapt to suit their own local circumstances, building on work to date.

There are a range of different models that authorities can consider and adopt to deliver their statutory duty and provide a library service that meets their community's needs: staff led public service mutuals; community mutuals; trusts; shared services; in-house; contracting-out etc. There are encouraging signs that establishing library management into community co-operatives, mutuals and social enterprises can improve the quality of the library service. One size does not fit all. What has worked in one area may not be applicable in another. It is up to councillors to consult their communities, carry out a rigorous options appraisal and put in place a model that reflects local needs and circumstances, as many are already doing.

Greater collaboration and sharing of resources between authorities can create efficiencies by reducing the number of buildings, managers and backroom staff while benefiting from other economies of scale. It also allows users greater access to wider services.

Efficiencies can be achieved by co-location of services; sharing/ outsourcing back office functions; and the greater use of library purchasing consortiums or existing frameworks for equipment. Political support, leadership and commitment to change will be needed at all levels for this to succeed and it is right that local government leads this.

Significant transformation takes time and longer-term benefits, financial or otherwise, may not be realised immediately – sometimes it is necessary to invest in the short-term to save in the longer term. A thorough options analysis is required in proper consultation with the local community looking at the strategic approach and levels of provision assessed across the network as a whole, including the other services that the local authority provides.

As well as the Local Government Association's sector-led improvement offer, central government has provided assistance and funding to help councils:

- The Mutuels Support Programme⁹ is a £10m fund to support services spin-out as employee controlled businesses by providing access to professional expertise and technical support that staff would not have access to or fund themselves. The programme has worked for libraries that are moving towards developing community led models
- The Department for Communities and Local Government established the Transformational Challenge Awards for 2014/15 and 2015/16 to help local authorities, including libraries, improve efficiency, reduce bureaucracy and integrate services where possible

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/mutuals-information-service>

Case studies

City of York

York's library and archives service (Explore) was one of the first in the country to spin out into a public service mutual organisation, using £100,000 advice and support from the Cabinet Office, Mutuels Support Programme. One third is owned by staff and two thirds by its community members. As a public service independent of the council, Explore has a clear voice and purpose and is able to generate greater involvement of local people in all aspects of the service, encouraging flexibility, innovation and partnership building with the community. In addition to keeping all their libraries open the ambition is to use libraries as community hubs, such as a health & wellbeing centre in partnership with local GP practices.

Explore is also working alongside Be Independent, York's adult social care public service mutual to help 3,500 elderly housebound residents to become more digitally active. Tablets and face-to-face training have been provided so that these residents can access the internet through portable WiFi devices. These are being used for activities such as talking via Skype to family and friends, online banking, food shopping and choosing library books. The hope is that this will support digital inclusion of the elderly within York, take library services directly to the housebound, and, more broadly, help residents to win back some independence.

Suffolk

All 44 libraries and the mobile, school and prison library services are directly delivered by an independent organisation which is an industrial and provident society with charitable status. It has a long-term contract with the County Council to ensure the service is delivered to an agreed specification and to work with local community groups to develop locally-focused services at each library. The Council remains the statutory authority with provision for the library service, and monitors its performance through a framework that forms part of the contract.

Suffolk Libraries is a membership organisation and has been working to encourage local people to form community groups which are then formally adopted as part of the society. Working with library staff, these groups have helped with fundraising activities, developing new ways of encouraging people to discover their library and helping them to improve what they offer their customers. For example, the Aldeburgh Library Foundation recently won Project of the Year at the Suffolk Adult Learners awards and the Friends of Thurston Library have helped to pilot a project to lend e-reader devices to people.

Northamptonshire

Enterprise Hubs is a partnership development between Northamptonshire Library and Information Service and the Northamptonshire Enterprise Partnership which stimulates business start-ups and self-employment among the region's budding entrepreneurs and job seekers. It helps people turn their skills and ideas into new businesses and self-employment. The initiative meets the needs of the community by providing information and support about jobs and employability. It was developed by library staff in partnership with the Northamptonshire Enterprise Partnership.

Since launching in April 2012 the service has helped over 900 people, including people who would not have otherwise considered entrepreneurship. Accounting for about 10% of the county's start-ups in that period, 105 are confirmed as already trading in areas ranging from boat-building and veterinary lab services to creative arts and cleaning services. In addition, some have become job creators, taking on staff and apprentices.

Newcastle upon Tyne

Newcastle upon Tyne Council has repositioned its core library network as community hubs. It will implement a fully integrated service with its Customer Service and Leisure Centres including the sharing of a front line workforce that are fully trained in customer service, leisure and sport, and library and information service delivery. The Council is also beginning to broker delivery partnerships through the hubs with the Arm's Length Housing Organisation, the Further Education College, one of the City's Universities, the Police, and other city wide and neighbourhood service providers.

The community library hub will be the key council building in communities, strategically placed across the City's neighbourhood and will provide a base for a range of locally relevant services. The library offer itself is being modernised, with a focus on its role as a catalyst for improved digital and traditional literacy skills across the City. All hubs will provide free access to superfast broadband and WiFi. The library building will continue to offer a safe and neutral community space which will also reflect its partnership status and partners' services. The newly configured space will maintain the library ethos of help, neutrality, excellent customer service and expert advice/mediation.

Arts Council: Libraries Grants for the arts

Through '*Envisioning the library of the future*' the Arts Council England has identified four development priorities for public libraries in England. The £6m *Libraries Grants for the arts* programme enables library services to explore new ways of working to deliver these priorities by working with artists and arts organisations.

During 2014 Rutland County Council led a consortium of four East Midlands' councils that showed how libraries are hubs of the community centres making the most of digital creativity. Young people aged 10- 14 worked together to produce their own mythical creatures (linked to the 2014 Mythical Maze Summer Reading Challenge) by designing and programming an Arduino Robot. With the support of the Arts Council funded 'Bridge' organisation (The Mighty Creatives), a digital arts organisation (Ignite!) was identified to work with young people to reveal and develop their capacity for creativity and creative thinking.

Those who got involved worked with a programmer, a sculpture/artist and a narrator to create and digitally programme mythical creatures which then toured to all libraries involved. By engaging artists, the libraries extended the scheme's impact in reading and literacy by linking with the 'STEAM' curriculum. Nearly 90 participants developed a stronger understanding of digital creativity and making, and the young people were able to take a lead as the project developed, working with librarians and local communities to develop this digital art and reading programme.

Devon

Devon County Council is experiencing many of the challenges and opportunities currently affecting rural areas, as evidenced by the research into rural libraries commissioned in 2014 by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Arts Council England. The Council has been exploring ways in which innovation can maximise the potential of its libraries to support happy, vibrant communities. Current initiatives include exploring the potential for hack-maker spaces in rural libraries as part of the national Enterprising Libraries initiative; galvanising the energy and interest of communities in supporting their local library; extending libraries' functions with meeting spaces and cafés; encouraging co-location with other services as a means of increasing footfall and sustainability.

Devon has begun the process of expanding its libraries into community hubs providing a greater range of activities; introducing new services to tackle digital exclusion and employability skills and securing public health funding for a wide range of health and wellbeing initiatives. Following a large scale public consultation exercise during 2014, the Council is now exploring the potential to establish a new organisation, which could be contracted by the Council from 2016 to deliver its statutory functions and to maximise the library service's potential to involve local communities in supporting and shaping library services and broader community outcomes in the future.

Universal Offers

Since 2013, the Society of Chief Librarians has developed a core set of offers to which library services across the country have signed up. There are currently offers focused on libraries' support for reading, health, information and digital. A fifth offer focused on learning is currently in development. The Universal Offers have been informed by customer research, tested with partners and customers and developed in conjunction with The Reading Agency and Arts Council England. The aim is to develop a core package of partnerships, resources and advocacy messages at a national level which can then be delivered locally and shaped to meet differing needs. Resources have been secured from funds to support the recommendations of Arts Council's *Envisioning the Library of the Future* report.

The offers enable library services across the country to share costs and resources – they provide value for money ensuring that library services are not duplicating energy and funds on developing individual offers/schemes across 151 individual library authorities. The national Books on Prescription scheme is one example of innovation which has emerged from the Universal Offers. In the first 12 months of the scheme, over 90% of library services adopted the scheme reaching over 275,000 adults across the country.

Enterprising libraries

Enterprising Libraries, a partnership between Arts Council England, the British Library and the Department for Communities and Local Government which turns library spaces into incubators for business ideas by providing coaching, advice, meeting spaces, and IT support to people interested in developing a proposal and taking it to the market. It builds on a successful British Library model for Business & Intellectual Property Centres. This supports small businesses and entrepreneurs through the provision of free access to current business and intellectual property information and expertise.

Access to Research initiative

The Access to Research initiative¹⁰ gives free, walk-in access to a wide range of academic articles and research in public libraries across the UK. Following successful technical trials, run in libraries over 10 million academic articles are now available, free of charge, in participating public libraries across the UK. Students, independent researchers and small businesses can now access many of the world's best academic papers through their local libraries, as a result of a unique collaboration between librarians and publishers, who have made their journal content available for free.

¹⁰ <http://www.accesstoresearch.org.uk/>

Citizens Advice Bureau

The Society of Chief Librarians is working with the Citizens Advice Bureau to develop a national protocol which could facilitate improved local partnership working between them. This will cover the potential for co-location, sharing of training materials for staff and volunteers and, with the support and involvement of Government Digital Service, increased collaboration on digital inclusion and assisted digital initiatives. The focus is on encouraging greater collaboration to support local communities' access to high quality information, advice and guidance; to enable greater access to government services online and to make the most cost effective use of library buildings as community hubs.

Learn My Way

Learn My Way (www.learnmyway.com) is a free online learning platform, built especially to make getting online easy. Learners can try the free online courses at home, work their way through with a friend or family member, or go to their local library or UK online centre for some help and guidance. The online courses are combined to create packages to help people follow a logical path through the site. Online Basics package is the first step along the road for absolute beginners to the internet, starting out with keyboard, mouse or touchscreen skills, simple searches and getting a first email address. For those who have mastered the basics, Online Plus provides a great way to progress to more in-depth learning, adding job hunting, shopping, socialising and managing money online to the repertoire of skills available to learners.

Cambridgeshire Learning and Skills supports digital inclusion cross Cambridgeshire in libraries in Ely, March, Wisbech, Cambridge, Huntingdon, also in Chatteris and Whittlesey libraries. They also run outreach activity in rural locations including a Pub Internet Club in the Anchor pub in Wimblington, and have a partnership with Tesco and have been using their Community Room to provide digital inclusion provision using Learn My Way. People are supported by staff and volunteers. They work with people who are in the "hardest to reach" areas of social and digital exclusion and who live in areas of rural deprivation. These learners often require a great deal of one to one support.

Taunton Library and Yeovil Library run digital inclusion classes using Learn My Way. Having a national platform enables them to help more people, in particular using it with the Somerset Village Agents Network so that they can do one-to-one support in rural locations. They work with local Parish Councils for marketing and promotion. The activity is mainly staffed with paid library staff and some volunteers who have come through the Jobcentre Plus work experience scheme. At the smaller libraries people can book sessions at their own convenience, and they have found that this flexibility is appealing to older learners - If they have a hospital appointment, are off on holiday, or looking after the grandchildren.

Since 2010, over 1.2 million new people have got basic online skills using Learn My Way, with many of them progressing on to employment or further learning. In these example libraries - and other successful libraries - it is the combination of the national digital platform being used by committed library staff passionate in wanting to help people gain basic online skills.



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