



**Response to specific questions the consultation document:
Empower, Inform, Enrich – The Modernisation review of public libraries.**

This document sets out East Lindsey District Council's response to the specific questions set out in the consultation. In addition to Council comments, input has been provided from our Local Strategic Partnership, the Quality of Life for Older People Specialist Network and the Vulnerable People Support Service.

Overall the Council supports the Library Service initiative to modernise public libraries, many of the ideas contained in the consultation document will ensure sustainability of future service delivery. However, when considering the pace at which change is achieved we ask that you are mindful of the need to retain what would otherwise seem like old fashion facilities, for example our Older People Specialist Network pointed out that many of their members still use videos and audio cassettes and find libraries an invaluable source for these.

One of the biggest future challenges facing East Lindsey as a district is the predicted growth in older people who will need services to be targeted specifically for them, currently more than a quarter of our population is of pensionable age. This challenge is coupled with a traditional net outwards migration of younger people with qualifications.

The district's lower than average amount of public transport, coupled with the growing cost of motoring, means that local delivery is very important. East Lindsey District Council understand the financial difficulty of providing remote access and have engaged with Lincolnshire County Council Library Services to co-local and integrate both services from one location. We have successful examples at Mablethorpe, Tattershall and Horncastle.

Q1

Does every library authority have to share a common purpose? Are these purposes complementary and relevant? Are some more important than others? Are there other purposes we should consider?

All libraries should share a common core purpose of providing books, learning information and entertainment to customers. The Library should be located at the centre of the Community and be seen as an education resource and proactive provider of information and learning. Location is especially important to vulnerable people who often find social inclusion difficult.

Q2

Do you think the current roles as defined for central and local government are still appropriate? Is the 1964 legislative framework still appropriate or does it need review? If so what changes would you like to see? Is there any value in central government having a more direct role in setting the vision and objectives for the library service or is the service better managed entirely at local level.

It is important that whoever ultimately controls the Library Service recognises the need for local libraries to remain flexible to enable them to satisfy local needs and react to area specific issues for example East Lindsey has a large elderly population on the coast and the some parts of the area have poor transport links.

Q3

Could (a) central government departments, and (b) local authorities better use the public library service to communicate initiatives and contribute to other public services? Do you have any ideas on how this might work?

East Lindsey District Council have been proactive with Lincolnshire County Council in creating Community Access Points by co-locating the delivery of district council services with the library provision in many of its major towns. This 'one stop' provision is a model that could be expanded to include other agencies. This is something that the vulnerable and older people groups were keen to stress, particularly in relation to health advice.

Q4

A recent report by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Libraries, Literacy and Information Management concluded that central Government structures complicate the delivery of library funding and policy. The Report also called into question the suitability of the MLA and ACL and recommended a Library Development Agency.

- Are there benefits in changing the structures in government?
- Are there benefits in changing the structures or roles of the public bodies?
- Is there a value in a greater central function around particular issues? Eg Marketing and publicity, digital services?
- Do you see any benefit in establishing new national/local structures as set out in Margaret Hodge's essay?

It is recognised that there are benefits from greater central control including, consistency and cost effectiveness, especially in the big issues around technology development and procurement. However it is vitally important that local libraries have the flexibility to adapt to local issues and changes.

Q5

In 2007 the Department for Communities and Local Government published Developing the Local Government Services Market: New ways of working and new models of provision within the public library service but only a handful of local authorities currently deliver libraries through a trust or private company. The case studies show that alternative delivery models can be effective so how might we best encourage Local Authorities to explore the opportunities they offer? What other governance models might be suitable for library services or are there barriers to introducing these models? For instance:

- What could libraries learn from other sectors including the private sector?
 - Would other models of delivery and funding – eg the academy model for schools, social enterprise models or Foundation Trusts for hospitals – be appropriate for library services?
- Generally speaking it is recognised that the private sector have more expertise in marketing products and services and it could be argued that they also have a shrewd focus on efficiencies. They may also be likely to have ideas about generating more revenue streams. The Vulnerable People Group were keen to point out the need to retain a social perspective in delivery that recognises the diverse nature of modern communities.

Q6

How can we prioritise investment in libraries, especially at a time of financial constraints? You may like to consider:

- How we might ensure that all libraries are able to develop successful funding models which are based on a diversity of funding streams.
- How could we help open new and more revenue streams for libraries?
- What could libraries learn from other sectors?
- How do we effectively spread best practice?

If, as previously suggested, a sharper focus was used in the provision of a wide range of services, especially to the socially excluded, elderly and vulnerable it may be possible to pool services and make financial efficiencies. The sharing of innovative ideas and best practice can be achieved by either introducing a new network or utilising the current network or Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships.

Q7

Digital Services: What is the future of library services in a digital environment? What changes do you envisage as a result of changes in technology over the next 5-10 years? You might like to consider –

- How can we use the digital revolution to extend access to library resources?
- Should virtual lending (ie lending downloads to the home via the internet) be the future of the public library service either generally or in some areas? What challenges would virtual lending present?
- What digital content should libraries provide? For example should all libraries make subscription online services available to users? Should this be a free service?
- Web 2.0 enables people and communities to contribute web content? Do you think that there is a role for libraries in Web 2.0? If so, what?
- Is there other content or technology which you think should be guaranteed to users?
- How can libraries support the Digital Inclusion agenda? What are some of the potential obstacles to greater digital engagement within libraries, and how might these be overcome?
- What other opportunities does new technology present for libraries? Do you have ideas for innovative ways in which new technology could be applied in local libraries.

The Essex case study showed that it is possible to provide content that can be read on multi-purpose, generic devices such as a home computer or laptop. These systems enable the authority to have a far greater selection of titles, as well as providing remote access and therefore would be a useful addition to any Library.

There is also e-audio available through Overdrive, this is also compatible with iPods and iPhones, thus attracting a new range of users, many of whom go on to use e-books as well.

On the face of it virtual lending appears to be a very viable option for the future delivery of library services. Issues such as security of the download and virus protection will need

addressing and any software or programme download requirement will need to be freely available.

Care needs to be taken when considering the introduction of subscription online services. Such a route could be restrictive, something our vulnerable people group identified. Perhaps a more acceptable option would be to generate revenue from webpage advertising to help subsidise this service. Alternatively, if subscriptions are required, could these be reduced for people on means tested benefits?

Technology should be considered where it enables customers to use library facilities who would otherwise struggle to do so, for example partially sighted people and deaf people. Use of technology may well be extremely useful for citizens in East Lindsey because of the poor transport and sparse population

Having commented above it is important to point out that the older people network are keen that less modern technology is also available for their members, many of whom do not possess modern technology and still wish to borrow video tapes and music cassettes. With this in mind any plans should try to 'bridge the gap' until there are greater numbers of technology aware users.

The current web access facilities should be expanded and the mobile library facility needs to be retained to ensure rural residents are not excluded.

Q8

Digital technology is already helping with the back office and administrative functions of many libraries

- How can we spread best practice and maximise those opportunities?
- Self service and return technology is intended to free up library staff to deal with more complex customer enquiries.

Should this technology be available in all libraries?

It makes sense that the technology should be available in all libraries to provide fair access to the same facilities. The older people forum asked that it be recognised that many older people are not as comfortable with the self serve facilities and do benefit from interaction with staff, this is an important wellbeing issue to them.

Q9

Do Local Authority IT strategies support or impede libraries' digital innovation? Should libraries have a national web presence? Would a national online catalogue covering all public libraries be beneficial?

A national web presence would seem to be a good progression especially combined with a national online catalogue. This could attract new users

Q10

Are there any services which you consider should be prescribed across all library services or should services be entirely determined at local level? Is there any value in having a clear national 'offer to consumers of the library in the 21st century'. If so which elements would be vital components? Besides hard copy books do you think there are other services which should be free at the point of delivery on a national basis?

Q11

How can we widen usage and make libraries more accessible to the public? For instance:

- On what basis should library leaders make decisions about opening hours and location?
- Should library joining and membership arrangements be simplified across all libraries?

Indeed should library membership be national so that citizens can use any library and borrow and return material anywhere.

- Do you think there are particular services which would encourage more library use?

You might wish to consider a universal home delivery service (in addition to the scheme for housebound people), and enabling people to request a book online.

- Only a third of 16-24 year olds now visit public libraries. How can we ensure that young people who leave full time education remain library users?

How can we improve our understanding of the people who use libraries – and of the people who do not – in order to improve services to them?

- How might library users have a greater voice in decision making?

Consultation with customers is vital to ensure that their needs are taken into account. It would seem fruitless widening opening hours if customers do not wish to use the library at these times. There are very rural areas to be considered when looking at locations for libraries as well as transport links.

With the sparsity profile of Lincolnshire it would be easier for customers to take out and return books across county boundaries.

Additional services that negated the need for customers to travel to visit libraries would encourage less mobile people to start using library services.

Consultation both online, within focus groups and letter drops could be used to gauge public opinion and give users a greater voice in decision-making.

More effort could made in schools to increase the knowledge of what is available in the libraries

Q12

Do we do enough to market library services? If not, what more could/should be done to promote or explain the benefits of libraries?

There are a growing number of voluntary groups around the district, which could help libraries to gather local consultation and promote the local library. Many District Council services are delivered to hard to reach groups and more use could be made of these contacts to promote the library service

Q13

Commercial partnerships through libraries are not common. How might we bring more private funding into the public library service?

- What commercial activities should we encourage libraries to operate? (Examples of commercial activities or partnerships might be book selling or partnerships with bookshops, provision of coffee shops, rental of certain materials, contracts with local business, national partnerships with private companies?)
- What benefits do you think these might bring to the library service?
- Are there any commercial activities which you think are not appropriate for libraries to undertake?

Q14

Where can libraries learn from the commercial sector and what private partnerships can you think of which have been useful for library services?

- How can we better spread good practice here?

Q15

What are the circumstances in which a Local Authority would be justified in closing a library?

This should only be done when there is evidence that the library and all of the facilities it provides are not being used. A clear strategy to increase the use of the library must be followed before a closure is considered and consultation with local residents should be held.

Q16

Co-location of libraries with other public services, schools and colleges or business is becoming increasingly prevalent. When is co-location successful and what factors should LAs consider in making co-location decisions?

East Lindsey and Lincolnshire County Councils have shown that co-location can work very successfully, but the major advantage is gained from full integration of duties so all staff are equally able to provide a seamless service. This can produce staffing challenges for two tier models where employees are employed by different Councils. In more sensitive co-locations good risk assessments need to be undertaken, but even in the case of a school location our Councils have proved that it is possible to achieve.

Q17

There is a mixed economy of library buildings including large central libraries, smaller local libraries and mobile libraries. What should library leaders consider in making decisions about the make-up of their library service? For instance:

- What kind of customer information should library leaders have in deciding where to locate libraries?
- How should Library leaders make decisions about library buildings' accessibility and fitness for purpose?
- How should the library service be provided in small rural communities?
- Are there benefits from unstaffed mini-libraries, library machines and self service check out of books?
- How important is it that libraries should be housed in dedicated buildings?

Locations of libraries should reflect the customer's ability to reach the library, including local transport links and other facilities available locally. Demographics and the size of the local population would also be sensible factors to use.

Access and fitness for purpose should be established through consultation, DDA compliance and current usage. Would it be more cost effective to rent spaces, which are already DDA compliant or used by other services locally rather than building, buying or adapting your own?

There are opportunities to establish smaller libraries, mobile libraries and various options via the Internet. There is also a potential to use other local facilities, such as pubs, post offices etc.

Q18

How could we encourage a greater skill mix beyond traditional librarianship in the library service?

- Do you think library courses have the relevant content and teach the right skills to equip the library workforce?
- How can we ensure that the library service attracts and nurtures leaders with the ability to drive improvement, engage in partnerships and innovate services?
- What other skills and/ or qualifications are required to staff a modern library?

Clearly IT skills are becoming increasingly important in performing most roles in society. Improved awareness of welfare benefit and vulnerable adult and children issues could increase the range of advice available through the library. This could increase the number of visitors who may well than use library facilities.

Q19

Do you think that volunteering is a useful component of the library workforce? How can we ensure that volunteering arrangements are used to best effect?

This can be a good opportunity to establish links with the local community

Q20

Is it important that libraries remain a statutory obligation for local authorities?

- What might be the advantages and disadvantages?
- For instance, would the removal of statute allow greater flexibility for fundraising or different modes of operation currently off limits?

The removal of statute could be an opportunity for greater flexibility, however with no statutory duty there may be a greater risk of reductions in both access and provision.

Q21

Is the obligation to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service the correct one?

- Does it need further definition or guidance around what that means or should the interpretation be left to local authorities?
- For instance, should there be more prescription around opening hours, web presence, service provision, staff skill mix?
- Is there a need for less, more or different local or national monitoring?
- Are visits and books borrowed still relevant?
- What else should we consider and measure when determining the efficiency and effectiveness of our libraries?
- Would an accreditation scheme for libraries be beneficial or are there other systems which might incentivise libraries to deliver more effectively?
- Is the Secretary of State's power to intervene still appropriate?

As previously stated it seems appropriate to allow some flexibility in opening times to reflect usage and local needs. The vulnerable people groups suggested that more awareness of the diverse nature of the local customers should be recorded and assessed

Q23

What research do we need to do to best demonstrate the benefits of the library service to local and national leaders? Who would be best placed to initiate this research?

In our experience the best people to extol the virtues of a service to others are the customers themselves. Case studies and interviews with customers who have experienced real benefit from the service tend to resonate better with other potential customers.