Independent Trust and Community Libraries in Wales

Research into the nature of current and planned provision, December 2014, commissioned by the Welsh Government

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Contents

1.   Executive Summary

1.   This research into community (i.e. libraries managed/supported by the community) and independent Trust libraries in Wales concentrated primarily on providing:

- a description of changes and developments that had already taken place in the delivery of public library services by December 2014;
- a description of relevant additional developments that were at an advanced planning stage or imminent, or due to be implemented in the near future.

2.   It was commissioned following the publication of the *Expert Review of Public Libraries in Wales 2014* in order to meet some of the recommendations of the Review. Due to the pace of developments since the publication of the Review, the original three suggested case studies was expanded to six.

3.   Evidence, in the form of case studies, was sought on the nature of these developments, and where possible, the research collected evidence relating to operational and management issues, as well as evidence pertaining to performance levels in what are regarded as key or core areas of provision under these new arrangements, compared to the situation prior to those arrangements being implemented.

4.   The study concludes and recommends that:

- the independent Trust library management arrangements established in Wales, based on formal service level management agreements, are suitable organisations to deliver statutory library services on behalf of the library authority, primarily because eventual responsibility and accountability for the service, and for the quality of provision, lies with the library authority. There are however, some inherent dangers in the existing and proposed Trust arrangements in terms of securing adequate annual budgets and in terms of providing safeguards for the library services should a Trust fail for any reason;
- of the various kinds of community library models that have developed in Wales in recent times, the only model that appears to offer the best prospect of sustainability and viability, and a suitable emphasis on service quality, is the model that has a close and formal working relationship with the local authority library service, namely Model C - the library authority-led community library. Where such an arrangement exists on a formal basis, then a library authority should be able to include the services offered by such community libraries as part of its statutory provision, but only at the discretion of the library authority.
- library authorities should consider a whole range of service delivery options should they decide that it is necessary to reconfigure library provision, and community libraries are only likely to succeed in the case of smaller libraries. The community library model should be considered an unrealistic option as a method for the delivery of a quality library service at larger service points.

2. Background and Introduction

5.   During the deliberations that led to the publication of the *Expert Review of Public Libraries in Wales 2014*, the Expert Panel members considered the matter of the emergence of community libraries in Wales and elsewhere, as well as the role of emergent Independent Charitable Trusts, as agencies or organisations that were to be responsible for the management of some public library services. The Panel agreed to recommend that:

> *"... immediate steps [should be taken] to collect evidence and assess the impact of the proposed changes to library service provision on the communities affected within the context of statutory requirements ... [in order] to inform future decisions by other local authorities". [Expert Review of Public Libraries 2014: Recommendation IV)*

6.   The Welsh Government (through CyMAL) then commissioned this research in late autumn 2014, having first obtained the agreement and cooperation of the authorities mentioned in the recommendation, and who were known to be active in these matters. Such was the rapidity of related developments and possible changes in the public library sector in the final months of 2014, it was decided to extend the study to four other library authorities in Wales (with their approval) in order to obtain a current and wider understanding of actual and proposed developments, and of the associated issues.

7.   The research into community libraries and independent Trust libraries in Wales concentrated primarily on providing:

- a description of changes and developments that had already taken place in the delivery of public library services by December 2014;
- a description of relevant additional developments that were at an advanced planning stage or imminent or due to be implemented in the near future.

8.   In addition, evidence in the form of case studies was gathered on the nature of these developments, and where possible, evidence relating to operational and management issues as well as evidence pertaining to performance levels in what are regarded as key or core areas of provision under these new arrangements compared to the situation prior to those arrangements being implemented.

9.   The ready and constructive contribution of library authorities in Wales and of the representatives of Independent Trusts and community organisations now involved in the development of library services, is gratefully acknowledged. Their anonymity as organisations and as individual respondents is respected in this report, and the emphasis throughout is on a general/case study approach.

10.   The research report presented here also refers to another particular Recommendation of

the Expert Review namely that:'

"... community managed libraries should not be considered as part of statutory provision at the present time, subject to the findings of the research..." (Expert Review of Public Libraries 2014: Recommendation VIII)

11. This research makes best endeavours to address that particular issue, but it is indeed a vexed question. The research seeks to offer observations that may assist the Welsh Government when its makes its decisions and issues guidelines on whether non library authority managed libraries could and should be considered as part of statutory provision, and if they could on what basis, and if they should not, again on what basis. This report also reveals certain interim issues related to the matter due to the timing of transitional arrangements and transfers of responsibilities that have arisen in some authorities. What the research process also discovered is that a decision and the production of suitable guidelines cannot be delayed for much longer - library authorities and their potential partners are now seeking an urgent and definitive decision. Reductions and substantial changes in the nature of public library provision in the near future, and in their management in Wales, are inevitable.

12. The various kinds of evidence and opinions reflected in this report were gathered by means of:

    - visits to selected library authorities and meeting representatives of the new organisations that were assuming responsibility for some library services;
    - referral to key documents, including legal agreements and service level agreements shared with the researcher by library authorities and their partner organisations on certain terms and conditions;
    - email and telephone communications with leaders and representatives of community groups that had established community libraries or were about to establish such libraries, and referral to documents relating to community libraries in Wales already in the public domain.

13. Their co-operation is acknowledged and much appreciated.

14. This research cannot claim to be anything other than a snapshot description and analysis of the situation as it existed in December 2014, with observations based on limited rather than comprehensive overall evidence, and on limited evidence relating to the operation and performance of community and Trust libraries that have been in existence for only a short period of time or are still only at the transition or initial implementation stage. The Expert Panel did express a view that further research into these matters should be undertaken after some 12 months (*Expert Review of Public Libraries 2014*: Recommendation IV), and that would undoubtedly be appropriate in the circumstances.

3.   Independent Authority-wide Trusts

15.   To date two authorities in Wales have already decided to place their statutory public library provision within a charitable Trust arrangement. Anecdotal evidence suggests that other authorities are giving active consideration to this option, with a third scheduled to be operational around April 2015. There are also some very early informal exploratory discussions taking place around the concept of forming a consortium of library Trusts in Wales, with one authority offering to take the lead in any such arrangement. For the purposes of this research two of the Trusts were included.

Case studies

Governance

16.   Only one Trust is actually in existence and operational at the time of this research. It was established in October 2014, with its main mission being to improve the quality of community life. It comprises a set of services previously offered and administered by the local authority itself, namely public libraries (a business unit that includes heritage services), community education, leisure facilities and services, and the arts. Public library provision is the only statutory duty included in the current portfolio of Trust-managed services. The Trust has been granted charitable status and has a Board of Trustees and a formal partnership agreement with the local authority in the form of a service level agreement. The authority pays the Trust an annual management fee for delivering the services. The Trust has a Managing Director, a Head of Operations and each strategic business unit has a designated operational head. Additional expertise and capacity is shortly to be added to the Trust's operational staff in the areas of marketing and financial management.

17.   A second Welsh library authority has resolved to place its library service into a charitable Trust as of April 2015. The leisure and culture Trust would comprise a number of services and physical, cultural and heritage assets including a public park, a historically important cultural site, a historically significant industrial heritage site, four leisure centres, a museum and public library service points. The Trust and its performance will be the responsibility of a local authority Client Manager through the main service level agreement. The Trust will have a Board of Trustees, a Chief Executive and a manager (or managers) for each unit, depending on the size of the operation. The library service will have its own dedicated library services unit manager.

Funding

18.   Both Trusts will receive funding from the local authority to provide library services, but there are differences in the funding models.

19.   One Trust's initial budget is based on the aggregate of the budgets allocated by the local

authority to each of the service areas now part of the Trust from April 2014, but in the case of the library service some expenditure reductions were made (compared to 2013-14) resulting in the loss of staff (4 FTE) prior to the formation of the Trust. The authority continues to supply some support and ancillary services such as payroll and ICT for an agreed fee, even though the Trust staff are now employed by the Trust after undergoing the TUPE process. Staff are employed on the same pay scales as previous arrangements and are protected for a period of two years

20. The following are the key features of the financial arrangements:

- the management fee will reduce by 2.6% for 15/16, 7.1% for 16/17, 2.8% for 17/18 and 2.9% for 18/19. This reduction will be discussed and confirmed on an annual basis and related to the financial settlement obtained by the authority from the Welsh Government in each of those five years. It is already known that further reductions in expenditure in the business units are necessary for 2015-16;
- all financial resources obtained under the management fee are consolidated and there is no specific allocation to any business unit or any ring-fencing of resources for particular purposes;
- the activities of each business unit will be accounted annually on a profit and loss basis, and each unit will be expected to generate income in each year and to provide lead functions that pertain to the development of different aspects of the Trust. It is accepted that this will pose a significant challenge to the library service, the only one of the Trust's business units that has not had to consider adopting commercial approaches to its activities in the past;
- some significant financial savings have already been achieved as Trust facilities do not pay Non Domestic Rates, and VAT payments on income generated are also exempt, even though Trusts pay VAT on expenditure.

21. It is anticipated that each unit in the Trust will promote the overall interests and success of the Trust, and each facility and location will promote and publicise the work of other units of the Trust and act as membership, recruitment and referral centres in that context. As well as being accountable under the profit and loss accounting method to be adopted, each strategic business unit will also be assessed annually on its contribution to the outcomes and social impact of the Trust's work.

22. The second Trust will also be paid a management fee for the delivery of operations and services within each unit, based on the actual budget provided by the local authority in 2014-15.

23. Each unit within this Trust will operate to a service level agreement and will be expected to achieve higher levels of performance and provide higher quality services. The buildings and facilities within which the Trust's services will be delivered will be leased from the local authority for a period of 20 years, but will remain in the authority's ownership. Other aspects of service may be added to the Trust's operations in due

course, and active consideration is being given to the transfer of management responsibility for assets such as playing fields of all kinds in due course.

24. It should be noted however, that:

      - the library service has already absorbed significant budget reductions during 2014-15 compared to its budget allocations in 2013-14, and has lost some 5 FTE members of staff. It is anticipated that further reductions in the library service may be necessary for 2015-16 when the authority's financial settlement from the Welsh Government is known and allocated;
      - because of this the manager of the library service is still considering additional options in relation to its future management, and is investigating the value and appropriateness of possible membership of a wider library Trust organisation in a consortium Trust with other library services in Wales, but this would have to be with the agreement of the authority. It is possible that such an arrangement would be regarded as compromising the authority's own Trust proposals and could render its Trust less viable.

25. It is anticipated that some back-room services such as ICT support and salaries and HR would still be provided by the authority on a service level and financial basis to be agreed and regularly reviewed with the Trust. All financial arrangements are guaranteed in the first instance for a period of five years, but it is expected that the management fee paid by the authority to the Trust for its services will reduce by some 2% annually in each of the five years.

26. Like all the other units within the Trust the library service will be expected to account for its activity on a profit and loss basis annually, to assess its impact and contribution to the Trust's aims and objectives annually, and to contribute to the promotion of the Trust's activities in all aspects. The current budgets will be made available to individual managers, although the Trust will have overall responsibility for where the budgets will be allocated. The library service could participate in the distribution of any financial surpluses created by the Trust in any given year, and benefit from such an arrangement. It is expected that the library service and its staff will transform methods of working where necessary.

27. The Trust has already identified significant elements of savings in future revenue expenditure - it estimates that it will save some £320,000 because it will not have to pay non domestic rates on its premises, and a further £22,000 of savings could accrue from changed arrangements for VAT payments on income. It also anticipates that it will be able to benefit in terms of attracting additional funding from new and wider sources as a result of its charitable status. However, it was also pointed out and readily acknowledged that there is a significant element of risk to adopting the Trust model for service provision as there is no fallback position identified should the Trust fail financially, but the statutory elements of provision could be removed from the Trust

should the operation be regarded as vulnerable at any point in the monitoring procedures.

28. Both Trusts have highlighted the opportunities to obtain additional funding from sources, e.g. charitable trusts, that are not available to them as part of the local authority.

Statutory Provision

29. Even though both Trusts are responsible for day to day delivery and management of the library service, the local authority itself will remain accountable to the Welsh Government for the nature and quality of public library provision, and the Annual Return required under the Welsh Government's quality measurement and assessment frameworks for public libraries, though drawn up by the Trust, will be submitted through the local authority. As such it would appear that the arrangements adopted in that context remain entirely appropriate and acceptable in the context of the Welsh Government's assessment frameworks.

30. Through that process the Welsh Government should be able to obtain sufficient evidence regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of library provision via this particular model, and should be able to take appropriate action if and when the assessment process should reveal an unsatisfactory situation.

Standards of Service

31. In one Trust the Welsh Government's Welsh Public Library Standards will form the basis of the service performance level expected of the library service business unit. The authority also reserves the right to remove functions and responsibilities from the Trust should that prove advantageous or necessary.

Review of Risks

32. Basing the required performance of the Trust on the Welsh Public Library Standards will reduce the risk in providing the public with a 'comprehensive' service under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

33. Procedures in place by both Trusts indicate that the risks to completing the Welsh Public Library Standards returns have been fully mitigated.

34. The local authorities have reserved the right to withdraw functions and services from the Trusts should the arrangements and performances prove to be less than satisfactory.

35. There would appear to be some inherent dangers and perhaps weaknesses in the business models of the Trusts that require further scrutiny:

- The difference in the future predicted funding varies between the two Trusts. Both Trusts are required to deliver annual savings but the indicative savings for one Trust is higher year on year and as much as 5% higher in one particular year.
- Should a whole Trust become unviable or fail financially, no indication was provided as to what would happen to the elements of statutory provision within the Trust. Some form of reassurance from the authority that the statutory library service would revert to being under its direct management or some other mode of delivery accountable to the authority in such circumstances is probably necessary. Trust officers in discussions emphasised the importance of, and need for, funding consistency and continuity, both for the Trust itself and also for the individual business units within it.
- In one Trust no budgets are currently ring-fenced, and the library service will have to compete for its budget on an annual basis against the other business units, some of which will have significant and recurring capital expenditure requirements (e.g. leisure facilities will need to remain current and attractive and educational facilities will need to remain competitive), and others, such as heritage and the arts, would inevitably require significant subsidies.
- In both Trusts the investment in modernising library buildings via the Community Learning Libraries capital grant programme has been advantageous in reducing future capital requirements to maintain the buildings. In the short term therefore major investment may not be necessary, but where the library is located in an old building, possibly Listed, there will be a need for regular investment to maintain the facilities.
- In one Trust the initial budget for the library business unit is based on the budget provided by the local authority in 2013-14 with additional reductions on top during 2014-15. Those levels of investment did not enable the service to improve or develop its performances in respect of the Fourth Framework of Welsh Public Library Standards, and the Welsh Government's reports to the authority over a number of years have highlighted the inadequate levels of investment made in the public library service over an extended period. The service may therefore already be inadequately funded at the time of its transfer into the Trust.
- There are limited opportunities for income generation. Most public library services in the past have experienced considerable difficulty in generating significant income, and encroachment into the area of charging fees for more services, the only possible option, would be contrary to the Welsh Government's stated free and fundamental user entitlements recently reaffirmed in various reports. Residents of the authorities would be placed under a significant disadvantage should a range of charges be introduced and they could migrate to other facilities and services offered by neighbouring authorities to the detriment of overall Trust performance levels.
- The nature and content of the service level agreements relating to library services requires scrutiny. Trust officers indicated that more detailed guidance and definition of statutory provision is needed from the Welsh Government in order to assist them

in the work of defining and delivering a suitable service within the new Trust arrangements.

- The business model requires the library service to adopt new and different approaches to service provision and methods of working. The timetable for such a transformation appears to be short, and the role of the Trust's finance officer and other managers in terms of developing such skills is crucial. It is similarly crucial in terms of identifying and supporting new and additional approaches to generating income from a wider range of resources.
- Both Trusts took longer than anticipated to become formally established.
- Participation in the various national and regional consortia seeking to improve and develop library services needs to be clarified and confirmed.
- Initial staff response in one Trust has been favourable, with morale among staff under the Trust reported as being higher than in recent years under the local authority, although integration of work practices and synergies are yet to be identified and applied in detail. However in the second Trust not all staff could relate to the benefits of being employed by a Trust rather than the local authority.

Opportunity

36. One Trust demonstrated a reasonable level of expectation that potential synergies in various aspects of the Trust's work can be achieved in reasonable time e.g. integrated staffing at certain locations, referral and promotional work for all elements of the Trust's portfolio of services at all sites and locations.

Recommendations

I. **One of the Trusts became operational 7 months into the 2014-15 financial year. The Welsh Government's Annual Return procedure in relation to performances in the Welsh Public Library Standards requires data on performances for the whole of the financial year. Therefore the Welsh Government needs to inform this Trust and this authority at the earliest opportunity whether it should submit data for the 2014-15 year that reflects aggregated performances both pre-Trust and in-Trust. It is suggested that as the service is in essence the same, that the data relating to the library service should indeed contain information from the pre-Trust and in - Trust periods. However, if the Welsh Government wishes to make an immediate comparative assessment of performances and the impact of the Trust arrangements on statutory library provision, data could be suitably disaggregated in the Annual Return, but this would involve the Trust, and indeed the Government and its assessors, in additional work.**

   Following the assessment of the Annual Return for 2014-15 within the Welsh Public Library Standards in the summer of 2015, the Welsh Government should take the advice of its assessors as to whether the level of performance of the library service managed by the Trust are satisfactory, and should act accordingly

within its powers and agreed protocols if they are deemed to be less than satisfactory.

II. The second Trust is now scheduled to come into operation in April 2015, the formal change having been postponed from October and November 2014. Before that date the Welsh Government will need to establish or confirm:

- that the library service will indeed be part of the Trust or is to be managed in some other suitable and robust manner;
- that no fundamental changes have been made to the various key intentions or to the proposed financial undertakings;
- that funding and reporting mechanisms relating to the delivery of the public library service will continue to identify compliance with the Welsh Public Library Standards 2014-17 as the intended service level commitment.

III. Should enquiries at that time reveal a satisfactory position, there appears not to be any reason why the Trust arrangements should not be regarded as a suitable mechanism for delivering the authority's statutory obligations.

IV. The Welsh Government will wish to pay particular attention to the performance of the library service in 2015-16, and to any trends in performance that may emerge following the Welsh Public Library Standards assessment process. It should be able to do so adequately under the requirements of the fifth Framework of Welsh Public Library Standards and as considered by the assessors following scrutiny of the 2015-16 Annual Return. It should then act in accordance with its powers and protocols should performances be regarded as less than satisfactory.

4.   Community Libraries

37.   Up to the end of December 2014 four library authorities in Wales had 'community libraries' within their areas, comprising:

- former authority library service points that have been transferred to a varied range of community-led and managed arrangements, independent of any library authority. To date these are very few in number.
- library service points based on collaboration between the former library authority and voluntary organisations. They could be described or broadly categorised as local authority supported volunteer libraries, where the local authority is continuing to support library service points in different ways, often on an informal basis, but has relinquished total responsibility and accountability for them. The arrangements will be described in more detail and evaluated in the case studies that follow.

Case Studies

38.   Public libraries in four authorities are included as part of this research and it is important to consider the circumstances that led to the identification of particular libraries for transfer to these arrangements by Welsh public library authorities in 2013-14:

- one authority decided to pursue this route as part of its library service development strategy and future provision plan that had been formulated more than three years ago, and as such should not necessarily be considered as the authority's response to recent urgent consideration of reductions in expenditure on public library provision. Nevertheless, financial and other resource considerations were prominent in the formulation of the original service development or improvement strategy;
- one authority decided to drastically reduce the number of service points it was prepared to fund and support following significant expenditure reductions announced in the autumn of 2013. It resolved to close a large number of service points and to compensate the communities affected by improving its mobile library provision. Community responses were strongly opposed to the authority's plans, and community groups launched a legal challenge to some of the specific proposals and, in some communities, offered the prospect of assuming responsibility for the libraries scheduled for closure;
- the other authorities also decided to reduce the total number of service points they were prepared to support in future following decisions to reduce expenditure on library provision as part of authority-wide programmes of expenditure reductions for the 2014-15 year. However, during a process of consultation with the communities that would be affected by library closure proposals, the authorities offered to transfer responsibility for those libraries to community partnerships and organisations. They also undertook to support the creation of community libraries

and committed themselves to continued support of various kinds for the community libraries within its boundaries.

39. A wider historical perspective indicates that a number of the libraries affected by these recent processes and strategic decisions had been the subject of detailed discussion for a considerable period of time and most, though not all, had been proposed for closure following various internal service reviews over a number of years. Discussions and recommendations related in the main to the actual and potential performance of these libraries - they tended to be open for a very limited number of hours per week, use was falling, cost effectiveness of the service at many service points was declining, many of the libraries were housed in buildings no longer fit for purpose, lacking basic amenities and facilities, and which constrained the development of the service to the extent that it no longer resembled a modern service. In some instances leases on those buildings were approaching the end of their life and the option of renewal was not available.

40. In addition, a dispassionate analysis would suggest that the pattern of public library provision had not properly undergone radical re-appraisal or rationalisation in many areas following local government reorganisation in 1974 and 1996 when former independent library authorities were merged or redistributed, thus creating a situation where library service points formerly managed by a number of library authorities were sometimes very close together and their catchment areas overlapped. Some aspects of provision, particularly the location of static service points, did not respond to demographic changes as they occurred between and within communities.

41. It is accepted however, that public library provision is not an issue that is always considered dispassionately and can be a very sensitive and politically difficult matter, as recent experience in Wales shows. Authorities were largely disinclined to rationalise provision in most instances due to such sensitivities.

42. It is also now known that currently in Wales more local authorities are giving active consideration to the possibility of adopting such arrangements for their own libraries, and have commenced the process of public consultation in some instances, in more general terms in some authorities, but also in relation to specific locations in others. However, the evidence suggests that the majority of the proposals relate to smaller libraries and service points - defined as open for fewer than 12 or so hours per week or which are housed in buildings that are very small and constrained in terms of service potential, or those that are under-performing and where use is declining. In some authorities, however, proposals relate to some of the larger libraries (often defined as those currently opening for up to 30 hours per week). Those proposals appear not to heed the findings of most of the recent research into community libraries that confirms that the community model is unsuitable and unsustainable for libraries having longer opening hours and for those that are generally regarded as larger library service points.

43. Some other local authorities are awaiting the Welsh Government's view on the matter of

how to define statutory provision and for guidance on whether the contribution if any, of community libraries to what could be defined as statutory provision in such circumstances. Local authorities are seeking urgent guidance on such matters so that arrangements can be expedited and alternative arrangements for provision put in place by April 2015.

44. The summary below has grouped the information into:

- **Model A - community managed libraries run independently of the local authority library service;**
- **Model B - community managed libraries benefitting from ongoing resource provision and high level staff support from the local authority; and**
- **Model C - community managed libraries that benefit from resources, advice, training and paid staff in each library, direct from the local authority**

Model A - Community managed libraries run independently of the local authority library service

45. In March 2014 one authority resolved to close 13 (50%) of its library service points due to major budget reductions for the 2014-15 financial year. For the most part the decisions in relation to individual service points considered their condition, their performance, their location in relation to other service points in close proximity and other issues, such as the end of a lease agreement on the current library building with no renewal option being available. Community responses were critical in several locations and the authority's decision for one location was to have been the subject of a Judicial Review. However, in that case, the authority agreed to continue the service at the particular location pending further consultation which is on-going. However, the initial proposal to close the library as a statutory and fully staffed library service point has not been fully discounted in order to meet its budgetary allocations.

46. Of all the library buildings closed many have since been disposed of or are now used for other purposes. There is therefore no prospect of those particular closed libraries re-opening (with the exception of two - see para. 49). The authority sought to compensate all the affected 13 communities by extending and enhancing its mobile library provision, providing fortnightly opportunities in those areas augmented by additional visits during weekday evenings and on Saturdays to selected locations.

47. As mentioned above, the authority has indicated that should community libraries be established in two of the service points closed, it may withdraw the mobile library service so as not to undermine community initiatives by competing for customers. In these two former authority libraries that could become community managed facilities, existing stock was left *in situ* but ICT provision was removed. The matter of future ownership or responsibility for the former library buildings should they become community-led libraries, was still under consideration at the time of this research.

48. Even though it is probably premature to properly and definitively assess the impact of library closures on the performance of the authority's library service, early indications suggest that even though 50% of the static libraries were closed, total issues in the current financial year (2014-15) have fallen by less - by some 25% according to the most recent calculations. Some of the fall could possibly be attributed to changes (reductions) in the opening hours and to the staffing levels of the remaining static authority-funded libraries. The authority also believes there is already a discernible change in use patterns in many libraries, and where there are increases in issues and visitor footfall, they tend to occur in libraries that are located in the larger towns that people visit for additional or other reasons, such as shopping. This suggests that library visits are increasingly linked to other activities, and fewer people may be making visits only to libraries.

49. There is a strong possibility of an element of co-location in two locations where community managed facilities may re-open. They will either re-open primarily as a library with some additional community functions, or as a community centre with a library as part of overall provision, but both supported and managed entirely by the communities concerned. However, the extent and nature of progress has been difficult to establish in one instance, but in the other it is understood that a library Trust has been established and a community managed library is now scheduled to open in January 2015 (exact date yet to be decided). Information provided by a representative member of the Trust group indicated that the Trust is to be responsible for the library building, having been granted a 21 year lease based on the Trust's business plan. The Trust is also to be responsible for the book stock and other resources and services, such as core furniture, all of which was left *in situ* by the library authority when the service point was closed. The library building was refurbished some four years ago with support from the Welsh Government's Community Learning Libraries Programme, and as such is modern, attractive and serviceable. However, the Trust now faces the task of providing all ICT facilities and services and associated infrastructure. A sufficient number of volunteers to meet the requirements of the Trust's business plan has already been recruited.

50. In terms of the core purpose of this research, it has been established that the authority will not be including performance data relating to the community libraries operating within its boundaries as part of what could be regarded as its statutory library provision, or as part of its Annual Return under the Welsh Public Library Standards 2014-17. The one library Trust that shared information with the study also confirmed that the Trust library will be completely independent of the local authority.

Recommendation

V. *Future research should seek to ascertain:*

- *whether that remains the authority's position in the future, and*
- *whether the existing Trust library (or possibly libraries) is seeking to adopt*

standards of service and quality provision similar to that set in that Welsh Public Library Standards 2014-17. or any future framework that the Welsh Government may issue;

- *whether the second community library reported as being under consideration at the time of this research, has actually opened.*

Model B - community managed libraries benefitting from ongoing resource provision and high level staff support from the local authority

51. Out of the three local authorities currently operating this model, two were included as part of the research.

52. Both authorities undertook a review of their library provision and decided to close libraries unless there was a commitment from the communities to manage the facilities. In general these were smaller library service points. Decisions were taken on the basis that the particular libraries were under-performing or were no longer cost effective to operate or whose buildings posed significant problems in terms of suitability, compliance with equality requirements and in terms of the level of investment required to make it serviceable. In many cases these libraries had been the subject of performance reviews over a significant period of time, but earlier review recommendations to withdraw services from many of those locations were not implemented.

53. For example under one authority's strategic library provision plan, the intention was to close the facility due to concerns about the physical state and condition of the library building, its significant limitations in terms of providing a modern library service, and the fact that the authority was investing (with a Welsh Government Community Learning Libraries Programme grant) in the expansion and refurbishment of its library in a nearby town that was regarded as the natural commercial, social and educational centre for a wider catchment area that included the community that was to have its library service removed. It also intended to co-locate a number of local authority services at that location. Such an arrangement was expected to secure a number of benefits and synergies such as greater cost efficiency overall in order to meet budget reductions, and particular benefits such as shared staffing and extended opening hours for the library service.

54. Following a period of consultation, and significant local opposition to library closures, a number of communities resolved to take over the management of their local library, with the authorities' library services providing assistance to these groups in establishing community managed libraries. The number transferred to community management by the two authorities ranged from one to nine.

55. **Without the dedication and commitment of the community groups who acted with great speed and community spirit when faced with difficult options, there can be very little doubt that the libraries would have closed. Library managers in both**

authorities were instrumental in providing support for the community groups in developing their proposals.

56. At the time of this research all were still operational but the finalisation of certain arrangements, such as the creation of a suitable charitable Trust status, where necessary, was still to be completed in a small number of cases. In all cases responsibility for the premises and for staffing the library was wholly transferred to the community organization or groups. In 9 cases, the community group continued to provide library services at the same venue as the previous library, the other being moved to a more suitable community centre. Arrangements regarding the lease of the buildings now vary considerably, from a formal agreement whereby the community groups pay the authority for use of the building (with re-imbursement in the form of an equivalent amount as grant-in-aid from the local authority), to the lease for the library premises reverting back to the local community group or organisation as original owners of the building, having previously been leased by the local authority.

57. In most circumstances the authorities decided not to extend/enhance mobile library services into the areas served by the community libraries so as not to create competition for customers, even though it is believed that the mobile services had capacity to accommodate such expansion.

58. In one authority's case, prior to transfer, it undertook a building survey and reported that it had undertaken the essential work necessary on the building, even though the community group responsible for managing the community-led library service argue that insufficient high priority work was carried out, and that the building still has a number of major limitations and fundamental deficiencies.

Agreements

59. One authority has developed a formal agreement setting out the terms between the library authority and the community or town council for the provision of a public library service and facilities to be operated by local volunteers recruited and managed by the relevant local body. However, it states clearly that it does not create a formal partnership or contract of employment between the two parties. The local authority for its part agrees to allow the town council to operate from the existing library building under licence and at a stipulated fee, but the arrangement is not a tenancy as such. The authority also identifies one of its own officers as the person with responsibility for liaising with the library, and who would on request, provide reasonable advice and support to the initiative, including guidance on the group's statutory obligations in relation to the library building and the service. This is clearly a significant matter relevant to the core interest of this study, but the document does not state in any more detail how those statutory obligations are to be interpreted or measured.

60. The above agreement also refers to additional quality standards that include:

- securing agreement in advance on any proposed amendment to the service;
- operating, managing and administering the library to standards reasonably required by the authority;
- ensuring correct administration of the LMS;
- maintaining minimum levels of staffing trained in the use of the LMS levels (namely two volunteers each time the library is open);
- accurate collection and transfer of monies - fines and the cost of borrowing DVDs is transferred to the authority; the volunteer group is able to generate a small amount of income for itself from the sale of second hand books;
- ensuring that the building is secure and that insurance and public liabilities are adequately covered;
- providing contact details of all existing and potential volunteers;
- reporting to the authority on a quarterly basis on costs, performance data, customer numbers and feedback, survey results and any other relevant data;
- paying non-domestic rates (the community group is not exempt from these payments as it has not yet achieved charitable status);
- attend regular meetings to review service provision;
- provide access to the authority's officers to attend the library premises;
- being responsible for the payment of all costs associated with the delivery of the service;
- make agreed payments to the authority for use of the LMS, ICT support and the costs of the Internet link.

61. In the second authority, the relationship is managed and sustained in accordance with a written template or matrix of the commitments and responsibilities of the two parties concerned, described as a 'service specification for the operation of a community library'. It is applied on the basis of mutual understanding rather than a contractual or formal agreement as such. However, there can be very little doubt that there are not insignificant resource implications, both current and in the future, for the library authority arising from the nature of the current collaborative arrangements should they remain in place. Those costs remain as yet not formally quantified. Respondents to this research all indicated that the future of all community libraries was totally dependent on the continuation of the partnership arrangement with the local authority.

62. In both authorities any new members enrolling at the volunteer-led libraries are given the library authority's membership cards. They can use all the authority's other libraries and have access to services such as the request and reservation system and to the total books and materials resource of the library authority. Branding has remained essentially the same. However evidence was found that one library is reported as being about to launch a publicity campaign of its own early in 2015 that may seek to re-balance the way it projects its independent identity but emphasises the access it provides to the wider resources.

Levels of service

63. Both authorities have undertaken to provide a range of facilities and services for the community libraries which can be summarised as follows:

- the book stock, furniture, fittings and ICT provision as existed prior to transfer;
- access to the authority's Library Management System (LMS), thus maintaining a clear link between the authority libraries and the community libraries, even though some problems are reported by community groups in terms of operational dependability;
- access to the total authority library resource holdings of books and materials and support for a request and reservation service facilitated by the LMS. However, in general, the local groups are reporting that the offer is not as substantial as originally anticipated, perhaps because the library authority's own book fund is reducing;
- access to new best sellers and other popular fiction purchased by the authority. All stock remains in the ownership of the library authority;
- regularly exchanged and circulated collections;
- a common membership facility - new users enrolling at community libraries are given the same membership card as previously and may use any of the authority's libraries;
- ICT support, and training for volunteers in its use, although this is also an area that appears not to be meeting all the original expectations and anticipated service support levels;
- support for any reading groups remaining active in community libraries and facilities.

64. For their part the community groups managing public library service points are expected to:

- be properly constituted as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation;
- commit themselves to manage a library for one year in the first instance, but leases on buildings are for a longer initial period in some cases;
- operate from premises that will be provided with an authority communication link;
- maintain proper data processing protocols and keep and forward library performance data to the authority;
- train volunteers in safeguarding principles, in equality, health and safety human rights, data protection and other matters, and to ensure that volunteers are properly trained in the use of the LMS and stock management procedures. Volunteers are also offered the opportunity to attend training similar to the staff of the authority. Volunteer staff are also expected to provide assistance to readers and advice and support for users whenever possible;
- maintain and clean the library building;

- maintain agreed regular opening hours;
- maintain all facilities and equipment in working order;
- manage any donations received;
- provide adequate insurance and liability cover for a range of facilities and services;
- undertake marketing and branding activity (though little appears to have been achieved in developing independent identities in this regard).

65. Encouragingly sufficient numbers of volunteers have been recruited in both authorities.

66. The Heads of both authorities' library service have assumed many of the mentoring and support roles that brought about the establishment of the community libraries, and facilitate the provision of professional support services, together with relevant colleagues in their respective areas of expertise.

Opening hours and usage

67. In one authority the opening hours of a community library have been maintained at previous levels. At the time of writing the report no suitable data on usage was available.

68. There is greater variation in the other authority studied. It is significant that the opening hours of the community managed libraries have reduced overall in many cases, by up to 66% (from 18 hours per week to 6) in one case,, compared to those of the authority's arrangements prior to transfer. Three have retained the original 10 hours per week period of opening. Aggregate opening hours of all these libraries together have reduced since becoming community libraries from 158.5 hours per week to 100.5. Some of the reductions came about on account of the limited numbers of volunteers available for regular rotas in a very small number of sites and seasonal volunteering problems, but generally it is reported that sufficient numbers of volunteer staff have been recruited, and with some ease in several cases.

69. Given the reduction in opening hours, it was only to be expected that total issues should fall compared to an equivalent period prior to the libraries becoming community managed facilities. The reduction is nevertheless very significant - the smallest decline in issues being 55%, the largest being 83%, with the average fall in issues among these community libraries being 56%.

70. The authority is not yet able to ascertain with any degree of certainty whether there has been any migration of users from the areas served by community libraries into the larger hub libraries that it is developing under its own strategic development plan. Issues at those libraries have remained largely static since April 2014.

71. The other data available relating to other aspects of services and facilities, and of their use by the public is rather fragmented. Visitor numbers to some of the community libraries have fallen in some cases by some 70%, but the use of ICT facilities has

remained at very similar levels to those achieved in the last year of the libraries as local authority facilities, which is a significant performance, reflecting the value and need for ICT provision within these communities.

72. Local authority officers in one authority are also required to report on progress and performance of the community libraries to the local authority. This is significant as it indicates a continuing sense of concern and support for the communities who lost their formal authority-funded library facilities. But it also indicates the need for monitoring a situation where the library authority still appears to have an active and close involvement and commitment to community-led library services within its boundaries. Indeed, it could be suggested that there continues to exist a strong element of political and authority influence over library provision through these community libraries. To date they are still branded and signed in the same manner as they were prior to transfer to community management, even though their independence was to have been emphasised in this regard from the outset. Nevertheless, the task of gathering, collating and validating statistical information appears to be a difficult one as each community library appears to be adopting different approaches to such tasks. A certain reluctance to use the library management system fully and consistently among volunteer staff may be contributing to the difficulties in this context.

Volunteer Skills

73. Respondents to this research in both authorities indicated that adding to the set of skills offered by the initial group of volunteers was very necessary, especially in the area of ICT provision and more specialised areas of activity. In some instances community groups had not recognised that public library services had become more specialised and sophisticated with the advent of technology.

Co-location

74. Most of the community libraries are now operating as charitable Trusts or became the responsibility of organisations that already had that independent status in order to carry out their other community roles. It is noticeable in the case of community libraries within one authority that there is an equal emphasis on continuing to provide a library service and developing the library service point and its building as a wider and multi-purpose community hub or focus. One respondent to the research described the community library primarily as a community facility hosting activities that could not be accommodated at any other venue within the community.

Benefits

75. Trusts enjoy certain financial benefits, as is the case with community libraries in the other case studies described in this research, and can secure opportunity funding from a range of sources not usually open to local authorities. Some of these community

libraries have already been successful in securing grants to develop and support their ICT facilities and others have been successful in their applications for support to improve their buildings. Nevertheless it is already apparent that securing adequate revenue funding and capital funding is a very significant challenge.

76.   To date, certain strengths have been identified in provision in both authorities:

- core book provision and a regular supply of new materials and specific materials in response to user requests are regarded by providers and users as largely satisfactory. The authorities continue to allocate funding to the needs of the community libraries. Stock refreshment, circulation and renewal and request services are also provided;
- sufficient numbers of volunteers with a range of pertinent skills have been recruited to meet the stipulated minimum staffing levels. But the need to train all active volunteers in the use of the LMS prior to being engaged with the public has imposed a limitation on the workforce, especially as technical and operational problems have arisen with the LMS on a rather frequent basis;
- one group of volunteers reports that it has obtained success in securing various kinds of additional practical support and is confident that it could achieve the necessary resources from various funders and patrons. There is clearly a strong continuing community support element;
- many groups believe that they are able to support users and readers with advice and guidance on reading materials, drawing on their collective skills and their experience and backgrounds.

Case Study - Service development

It was encouraging to hear about the aspirations of many of these community groups to develop the library provision.

One group has priorities in terms of securing service improvements and enhancements whilst recognising the limitations imposed on them by the building in particular. The group anticipate that when charitable status is confirmed in the not too distant future, that certain financial advantages will follow (exemption from payment of non-domestic rates, some VAT advantages and opportunities to seek external funding from a wider range of sources) so that improvements to services and facilities can be contemplated. In the first instance the group would wish to provide:

- better, more modern furniture and fittings;
- additional public access PCs;
- WiFi, so that additional platforms such as tablets could be utilised. It is argued that this would be particularly attractive to the area's numerous summer visitors and tourists;
- printing and photocopying facilities;

- improving the building's essential facilities - by connecting to mains water, providing a toilet and generally improving the building's appearance and attraction inside and out;
- broadening the range and availability of DVDs and Talking Books.

Issues

77. The following operational issues have been identified:

- the delay in arriving at key initial agreements was disconcerting during the formative period of operation;
- stipulated recurring costs are considered onerous. Training in areas such as customer care, health and safety, and handling requests are to be delivered in future in one authority by a group of volunteers with suitable backgrounds, as the authority's training fee is regarded as high;
- the condition of the buildings and the limitations that places on the development of a service remains a major problem in some cases;
- frequent malfunctions with the LMS and prolonged delays in terms of repairs and maintenance are reported as being a major problem. The volunteers have to resort to recording issues by hand when such problems occur, and up-loading information when the system is restored is considered an onerous and time-consuming chore;
- in some cases the absence of WiFi facilities imposes a major limitation on attracting ICT users, especially among visitors to the area and among temporary holiday residents;
- the reported absence of photocopying and printing facilities in some cases;
- recurring problems with public access ICT;
- opening hours may need adjustment to reflect actual patterns of use that could include some seasonal variations.

78. There are also other issues pertinent to the main considerations of this study:

- an uncertainty as to how the service will be assessed or evaluated by the authority at the end of the first and initial year. In one authority an initial agreement was signed in October 2014, and the authority indicates that it will begin the evaluation process in August 2015 and a decision communicated in good time (3 months ahead of the agreement date) to alert the group of volunteers as to what is required. This timetable needs to be communicated to the volunteer group;
- uncertainty as to how much mentoring and support volunteer groups can expect. Interpretations and expectations of the two parties vary significantly in this regard;
- in one authority the initial agreement states that should the position be deemed satisfactory following the review, then consideration will be given to extending the agreement by up to five years. The volunteer group would wish for the period to be longer as this would place them in a better position in respect of bidding for development grants from various sources. The group intends to secure Trust

status in the near future and would bid for support from what they perceive to be a stronger position. The work in this area has been supported by collaboration with other community library Trusts whose advice has proved invaluable;

- a feeling among volunteer leaders that the needs of the library in terms of ICT and LMS maintenance are very low among the library authority's priorities in one case. An inability to provide key performance reporting data is attributed to recurring system failures. A diminishing level of expectation from ICT users in particular, and a diminishing ability to access the library authority total resource on behalf of all users is regarded as a major limitation on service quality.

Future Challenges

79. Future challenges for community groups and library authorities can be summarised as follows:

- Maintaining, or even adding to, current levels of local authority support for community library services which are described as crucial to the existence and continuation of community based services. There is already some disappointment that the initial expectations in terms of exchanged and new book stock are not being met. It is feared that as the range and choice of materials made available diminishes, a downward spiral of local commitment and use may become apparent. Some community libraries may seek to augment collections by purchasing their own stock. There are also fears that further expenditure reductions imposed on the authority's library service will weaken provision in community libraries. It is also already apparent that loss of access to services in very specialised areas, such as security, technology and so on, is imposing an added and expensive burden to community group activities;
- Extending the community role of the premises within which the library is located. There is already a growing community social and entrepreneurial approach to this task, and an extended range of community activity is available at several locations, but this tends to blur the focus on library provision in some instances;
- Minimum volunteer staffing levels imposed by the agreements between the two parties are now more difficult to meet. One group indicated that community interest is already waning 8 months into the new initiative, and the library's rota of volunteers has dwindled to a small core. Securing a sufficient range of specialist skills and competences among the volunteers is difficult, especially in areas such as fund-raising, building and asset management, employing paid staff, dealing with suppliers and contractors, and with ICT. It is also anticipated that even more former local authority facilities and services are earmarked for closure or transfer to community groups in the near future, and the demand for volunteer time will become ever more acute;
- Securing sufficient revenue funding to maintain the current service. Even what appears to be one of the most progressive of the community libraries established since April 2014 reports in its newsletter that it has secured funding (some £25,000

to date from a range of sources) that is only sufficient at this stage to keep the library open until April 2015. Others have secured some additional funding for specific purposes, although the nature of developments is sometimes governed by the terms and conditions of grant schemes rather than by what are the priorities of the community libraries themselves. Income generation is reported as being a substantial and recurring challenge, and there is already a sense of frustration apparent in some instances that the proceeds of fund-raising activity will all have to be used for current and recurring core commitments, and volunteer groups are unlikely to be able to fund future developments and higher aspirations. Nevertheless, it is important to note that there are examples of recent successes in attracting funding for developmental purposes among these community libraries - funds for modernising the ICT facilities, for developing the programme of activities, and for extending and refurbishing the library building have been secured during the first year of operation. One group is hoping to develop the concept of home deliveries as an innovative enhancement to services;

- Clarifying and resolving certain ambiguities in the current arrangements between the library authority and the community libraries, particularly as they relate to future ICT provision. One local authority appears to be committed to supporting and maintaining ICT provision over the lifetime of current equipment and subscriptions only. Thereafter, the community groups will be expected to assume full responsibility for hardware and software renewal costs and for basic telecommunication infrastructure costs. Some are already experiencing problems with their equipment and facilities, and are beginning the process of securing financial support for a programme of renewal of ICT provision. The authority also has concerns as to how to maintain the LMS link when the new all-Wales LMS is commissioned and installed, as extending the new facility to community libraries would involve considerable expenditure for the authority itself;

- The substantial challenge of maintaining library buildings. Some of the libraries identified for closure were already problematic in terms of their state and their inherent unsuitability as locations for the delivery of modern library services. Maintenance and all operational running costs in some cases are already posing a challenge and long-term liabilities are looming in certain instances. Some respondents to this study suggested that capital resources were less difficult to identify and access than revenue funding. Substantial investment is required at several locations. On the other hand, there is evidence that some former libraries are becoming more active and successful as the focus of community activity in a wider range of areas;

- Improving the arrangements for volunteer training. This is perceived by both parties as being an issue that requires urgent attention - volunteers are sometimes reluctant to attend training in addition to undertaking rota duty commitments, and authority staff feel that the value of training is not always appreciated and understood among volunteers;

- Achieving all the governance, legal cover and liability insurance, and other arrangements stipulated in the partnership agreement;

- Addressing the limited abilities of community libraries to respond to and meet the needs of key user groups, such as primary school pupils, and arranging suitable library and reading-based activity for them as has been done in the past;
- Accommodating and managing a developing programme of community and social activities with more partners and clients in those instances where community libraries are increasingly becoming the community activity hub or focus. One community library has a salaried part-time qualified librarian to lead the initiative, others are indicating that arriving at a similar situation is a necessary solution to such issues. Dwindling human resources are having to be shared among a range of activities, and the library service is becoming only one of many concerns;
- Addressing the more limited nature of the relationship between volunteer staff and community library users in the context of advice, guidance and responding to requests for information, and in terms of supporting the use of ICT;
- Providing a community focus and supporting community life when all other forms of provision in both public and private sectors has largely dwindled or disappeared altogether.

Dependency on the local authority

80. **This model is best described as local authority supported community library provision. Dependence on the local authority is significant, and without that support it is difficult to see how many of the libraries would survive.**

Welsh Public Library Standards

81. In addition to authorities participating in this research, others have expressed a wish to include data relating to community managed libraries in their Annual Return under the Welsh Public Library Standards because:

- the local authority makes a significant contribution in actual expenditure on supporting the community-led library, particularly to the book stock, but is recompensed for other aspects of its support;
- because the existence of the community managed library fills what would otherwise be a significant gap in the geographical spread and reach of the service.

82. They are aware however, that:

- data collection may not be as robust as could be expected due to problems with the LMS and other factors;
- there is already what appears to be a very significant fall in the number of issues, but this is clearly a matter that needs confirmation;
- a certain trend is appearing that sees former users of community managed libraries accessing services at nearby modernised facilities where they may be known by

the library staff who have transferred there, or larger nearby towns.

Case Study - Statutory Provision

The issue of including the work and contribution of the community library(ies) that now exist within its boundaries, as part of the authority's statutory provision, presents a number of contradictory and obvious predicaments:

- performances in some instances have declined significantly as a result of the new mode of delivering library provision and the inherent weakness of the relationship in key aspects as noted above, and the validation of some of the data created by individual community libraries is a problem with which the authority would not wish to become involved;
- the exclusion of certain performance data from the community libraries data in the calculation of statutory provision would mean that the resources and materials, including ICT, and continuing commitment to items of expenditure, transferred or left in place by the authority to the community libraries since April 2014 as part of its support package, could not be included in authority data submitted to the Welsh Government, to the detriment of overall performances reflected in an Annual Return and possibly to the eventual assessment of the authority's library service;
- performances and activities in some instances may have developed and improved in certain respects, some of which such as a wider range of library community activities, would be pertinent and valuable to an Annual Return under the Welsh Public Library Standards issued by the Welsh Government;
- there is considerable political interest and support among partners in the current arrangements, but commitments in certain areas of provision and support may be time-limited, especially in relation to ICT services and facilities.

The service specification document that forms the basis of the relationship between the various individual libraries and the authority refers to the *service standards* expected of community groups managing libraries. They are a combination of routine procedures, ensuring availability of facilities and basic legal requirements and compliance with a range of requirements. It also refers to the intention to jointly monitor and review the service provided in each instance on an annual basis, supported by quarterly visits by the authority's relevant officers. Any necessary help, support and advice would be formulated on the basis of the findings of those processes. Failure to comply with significant undertakings could possibly result in the withdrawal of certain support or specific services, but the emphasis for now, appropriately enough, remains on continued support and advice rather than the imposition of sanctions.

There is no specific reference as such in the broad partnership documentation to the inclusion of performance data from community libraries in any authority Annual Return to the Welsh Government, nor is there any reference to the inclusion of community library services

as part of statutory provision in the authority. However, when the Welsh Government has issued its guidance as to what constitutes statutory provision, the authority will undoubtedly reflect on that guidance and consider its position.

In this instance, however, the fact that the statutory library authority has no control over the staffing and buildings of the community libraries, and the very limited and seemingly diminishing opening hours of some of the facilities, are probably key to the eventual decision made in that context.

Possible further adoption of Model B

83.   It is known that one of the authorities included in this study is giving active consideration to adopting similar arrangements for one, possibly two, additional existing library locations. Final decisions regarding those libraries will be made following the completion of the authority's consultation process on proposals regarding further expenditure reductions, the completion of impact assessments and option assessments relating to possible alternative venues for a library service, and consideration of other specific local issues. Should the change come about and arrangements broadly similar to those it has currently adopted are implemented, and taking the experience it has gained from its initial arrangement with a volunteer group, the authority is likely also to want to include data relating to those libraries in its future Annual Returns to the Welsh Government.

84.   Other local authorities across Wales are currently consulting on either library closures or transferring library facilities to community management using this model. This option delivers more financial savings than Model C below.

Recommendations

VI.   The amount of information available in relation operational data is limited and further monitoring of the performance of this model is required following 12 months (i.e. by January 2016) to evaluate the effectiveness of different models. The success of individual libraries is very much down to local factors.

VII.   There is a need to share documentation in an attempt to standardise service level agreements and other documents in relation to the establishment of this type of community managed library. Some of the documents developed under model C could be adapted for these purposes.

Model C - community managed libraries that benefit from resources, advice, training and paid staff in each library, direct from the local authority

85.   One authority has been implementing a strategic library development plan for four years and included a stratum of libraries within that plan that was categorised as 'community

libraries' from the outset. The libraries concerned were usually among the smallest, some of their buildings posed problems, and service delivery was initially considered less than cost effective and limited in nature. As a consequence these service points were considered vulnerable as the authority sought to rationalise provision in a context of reducing resources, and as it invested in its other major libraries that were within fairly easy travelling distance for inhabitants of these communities.

86. With support from the Welsh Government the authority employed a development officer whose work was dedicated to the community library initiative within the development plan. The authority was anxious to share its experience with the author of this research and contacted him during the course of the work in order to raise specific issues. In particular the authority expressed its concern that the Expert Panel's report implied that community libraries may not be considered as part of statutory provision in the immediate term, and possibly not in future, and felt that as a consequence its work in that area would not be adequately reflected in its Annual Returns to the Welsh Government nor in its overall statutory provision and performances to be assessed in future. The authority was content to be included in the research as a particular case study.

87. In its original work plan and timetable for the implementation of the various strands of its development plan, the authority was confident that it could establish community libraries over a two year period up to March 2014. In common with the experience of authorities elsewhere in the UK, the task took considerably longer than originally contemplated for a variety of reasons. However, by December 2014, three community libraries were operational as part of the library authority's pattern of provision and the other two have agreed all the necessary terms and conditions of the arrangement with the local authority. Four of the five community libraries already open, or due to open shortly, offer library services for 15 hours per week (the fifth is open for 10 hours per week at the request of the community organisation involved that placed greater emphasis on concentrated quality use of library hours rather than quantity), but as the buildings in which library provision is housed in all five cases is now perceived as having wider community and social roles and functions, all could be open and available for many more hours per week, for additional purposes.

88. The authority anticipates that it will be regularly reviewing the opening hours of its community libraries in conjunction with the community groups, and in the light of operational experience. Where possible the provision of an out of hours loan service is also included in the respective roles required of the partners, which if all planned community activity within a community building comes about, could greatly enhance the use of the library housed within it.

89. It is important to note that these community libraries have a hybrid staffing arrangement, with the library authority providing 15 hours per week of library authority employee staff time as its contribution to the management of library provision at these sites. It is

reported that volunteer policies and procedures have been developed following consultation with respective unions and recruitment includes work with a number of partners, including Social Services and Youth Justice, as well as the local Voluntary Services Council. It is acknowledged that there remains a need to recruit additional volunteers having a more specific and varied skill set in future, especially in the field of ICT provision, new media platforms and other more specialist areas of activity. The pattern of provision may therefore change, but it will remain responsive to community needs and consultation and within the agreement between the library authority and the community organisation. Volunteer recruitment has been one of the significant activities of the development officer in collaboration with the community groups, and that role will continue in the future. As such this is an arrangement that has proved to be commendably successful and offers a very important pointer and precedent for those other library authorities in Wales that are contemplating the creation of community libraries.

90. Library provision at the community libraries remains unchanged as far as the users are concerned, the facilities and services remain branded as local authority provision with additional acknowledgement of the partnership. But there is a significant broadening of the 'offer' and in the range of associated activities held in the library buildings and in the number of organisations operating within them since they became recognised community supported and managed facilities. They are now performing functions and community services that many other statutory library service points in Wales are still seeking to emulate. The authority does however emphasise that the arrangements entered into at all locations ensure that library provision remains the first and main priority.

91. The partnership between the statutory library authority and the community groups is based on a formal and highly prescriptive service level agreement that includes aims, mission and objectives that are both general and also related to the particular needs and aspirations of the collaborating communities or organisations. The agreement is intended to be operational for a period of three years in the first instance, but for five years in those cases where the terms and conditions of grant in aid received to facilitate the service stipulates a longer period. The authority commits itself to providing for each community library:

- a core collection of 3,000 books whose ownership remains with the authority;
- staff use of the Library Management System
- regular exchange and circulation of stock;
- 4 public-access PCs providing access to the Internet and/or secure WiFi;
- the necessary technological and communications network infrastructure;
- Data Protection procedures;
- shelving and other necessary furniture and fittings;
- regular access to professional advice and support, with a regular programme of 6 -

monthly joint meetings
- 15 hours of paid staffing.

92. In addition, the agreement requires the authority to identify the relevant contact officer/-s, the designated and agreed opening hours for the library component of the community facility, the distribution of responsibilities for meeting certain legislation, the period of the agreement and period of notice for termination, terms of any agreement to renew the formal partnership, and the nature of day-to-day management responsibilities and arrangements. It is obviously too early to begin assessing the effectiveness of these arrangements.

93. For their part the community support groups are expected to:

- be properly constituted charitable organisations;
- assume leaseholder responsibilities for the building and space in which the library is housed and to ensure equality of access and use;
- acquire and arrange appropriate insurance and indemnity for their aspects of the partnership's work, except in those clearly demarcated areas where the authority would continue to provide adequate arrangements;
- identify appropriate contact persons;
- create and maintain a business plan and measure outcomes against the targets set in the plan;
- participate in the work of collecting statistics;
- care for stock, furniture and equipment;
- ensure that there is no inappropriate use of telecommunications and technology;
- publicise the library services and facilities;
- comply with the authority's policy in relation to the Welsh language.

94. To date there is insufficient evidence to permit any assessment of the effectiveness of these arrangements.

95. The nature of the contribution and management of the volunteer workforce is also defined in considerable detail in the partnership agreements, and the respective roles of the authority and the community groups and partnership organisations are clearly assigned. It is this section of the agreement that primarily refers to the training of the volunteers in terms of conduct and behaviour, the achievement of partnership targets and objectives, and the importance of the Community Volunteer Handbook.

96. There are references to service quality standards and partnership targets within the various stipulations and assigned responsibilities in the agreement, such as the requirement that the support group assist the authority in the maintenance of the performances in the Welsh Public Library Standards. However, the formal agreement between the parties also refers to the monitoring and review of the performances and of

the overall arrangement. Particular issues included in the proposed monitoring and review procedures are:

- assessment of performance against targets (which could reasonably be expected to vary according to local circumstances and expectations);
- an evaluation of the sustainability of the service;
- consideration of the opinions and feedback of customers.

97. It is anticipated that this process will occur as part of the annual review meetings noted within the Service Level Agreement.

98. The value of having dedicated officer time to develop both the concept of authority-led and managed community libraries in this case study, and the detailed and measured approach that appears necessary to implement community library structures, are already reflected in the work and achievements of this authority and its partner organisations. In the other case studies in this research work, authorities and partners were given very little time to develop and agree arrangements, and the relationship is clearly still evolving to a certain degree, and needs further refinement in various situations. In this particular model, the detailed arrangements and comprehensive formal agreements are largely based on detailed consideration, extensive consultation, valuable cumulated experience, and reflection. CyMAL, through its support for the administration of the initiative in this model, should be satisfied that what has emerged provides a valuable template for other authorities in Wales to follow should they wish to develop a community library stratum for some of their smaller libraries.

99. The authority and its officers and partner organisations have an important role to perform in assisting any other authorities in Wales (and possibly elsewhere) to assist and advise where library authorities may be seeking to develop the concept and practice of authority-led community libraries.

100. **In relation to the core issues addressed by this research study, this case study has a number of key characteristics:**

- **library services, identified and branded jointly as a library authority in partnership with the 'community libraries' in selected locations, established and supported with significant assistance by community groups, remain formally library authority-led and jointly managed through robust, wide-ranging and clearly assigned service level partnership agreements;**
- **the key elements of the service level agreements that differentiate this authority from others in Wales that have adopted the community library model are clear. They relate to the continued deployment of an authority-employed workforce, but augmented by volunteers, clearly assigned and demarcated roles for volunteer staff, minimum opening requirements, in addition to clearly defined levels of core provision. In this instance there is**

also a commitment to monitor and evaluate service provision periodically, and the service level agreement specifically mentions maintaining performance levels and standards that relate to the relevant framework of Welsh Public Library Standards.

101. In common with the arrangements entered into between library authorities and partnership organisations elsewhere, responsibility for the building and space within which library services are to be provided by the partner community group are clearly identified. In the past many library service points in Wales defined as statutory were also based on not dissimilar arrangements. Many statutory libraries still provide services from leased buildings, some of which still leave a good deal to be desired in terms of their condition and fitness for purpose. The authority in this model has endeavoured to modernise and refurbish the buildings within which it will provide its 'community library', and before it is handed over to community management. It is possible that statutory library services in Wales in the future could be provided from buildings which have an ever-increasing range of ownership and management arrangements. Asset transfer processes and co-location arrangements are being actively considered and pursued by a number of Welsh library authorities at the present time, and the Welsh Government may not be able to be as prescriptive as in the past in terms of stipulating the qualitative and quantitative requirements of public library buildings. Keeping libraries of a suitable nature open, and by a range of innovative means, could well become a more significant consideration in the future.

102. **In terms of including service points and services identified under the term 'community library' as part of the assessment of statutory provision, the matter presents a particular issue in the case of this authority. Most of the other authorities in this research transferred responsibility to partner organisations (or will shortly do so) in accordance with the financial year. New arrangements were normally implemented on 1 April in those instances. In this authority however, community libraries have commenced operation (or will shortly do so) at various dates during the financial year, and the recommendation of the Expert Panel regarding the non-inclusion of community libraries within the calculation of the performance of statutory provision would mean that in some locations performances and relevant activity for a period of up to 10 or 11 months during the 2014-15 year would have to be disregarded. That would place them at a considerable disadvantage, and it could be argued that the Annual Return for the 2014-15 year would not in fact reflect the totality of the authority's performances and achievements. This would place them in the same unfortunate position as one of the authorities that has transferred the management of the library service to a Trust mid-year (see Recommendation I above)**

Recommendation

VIII. Regardless of what the Welsh Government eventually prescribes in its

forthcoming decisions and guidelines on this matter, it would appear appropriate that this authority and other affected authorities in Section 2 should be allowed at least to report that proportion of their activities and performances for the months of 2014-15 that the libraries concerned were still a part of previous conventional statutory arrangements. Indeed, it is possible that the model and arrangements developed by the authority in Model C could form the basis on which defining minimum statutory obligations via the community library model could be based. That is a matter discussed further in Section 5 below.

5.   Concluding Remarks

103. From this research it is possible to deduce that library authorities in Wales now have to deliver their statutory obligations to provide a comprehensive and efficient library services in a manner that requires substantially less expenditure, and that must deploy innovative alternative and less traditional modes of working and methods of provision as a consequence. The changes are likely to come about at an accelerated rate, and local authorities may implement their proposals regardless of any form of intervention from the Welsh Government on the grounds that achieving overall balanced budgets is their primary responsibility and concern.

104. There also appears to have been a weakening commitment to recognising statutory obligations in the public library sector in recent times - partly on account of misleading interpretations of statutory obligations by various organisations and library authorities and their representatives, but also due to the continued absence of clear and unambiguous definitions of the requirements of the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act. The various frameworks of Welsh Public Library Standards issued by the Welsh Government since 2002, initially as a form of guidance as to how to interpret the requirements of the Act by identifying core service areas and performance levels to achieve in those areas, have performed certain useful functions. The Standards are increasingly used as a management tool to assist performance measurement, to obtain comparative performance data, to achieve greater corporate engagement with library services and a better appreciation of their role in the delivery of corporate service priorities. The Standards frameworks have also created a process that obtained external independent comments, feedback and advice on library service performance. However, the Standards did not, and do not have, legal standing, and the *Expert Review* highlighted that issue and the implications.

105. As more varied ways of providing a library service emerge, some of which involve organisations and parties that are not part of the statutory local authority, the Welsh Government is now faced with a demand from local authorities and emerging stakeholders active in the sector to define statutory obligations more precisely, and to provide guidelines as to what may or may not contribute to statutory public library provision. In particular, the Welsh Government is being asked to respond in those terms to the emergence of independent library Trusts and community libraries, of which there are already a number of variants in Wales. In its consideration of the independent Trusts in Wales, this research recommends (*Section 2*) that the organisation already set up in one authority, and the second organisation that will become operational in another authority in April 2015, should be regarded as suitable to deliver and manage a public library service because:

- the service being delivered (or that is intended) is largely unchanged or very similar to that offered previously by the local authority as the statutory body, not withstanding some additional budgetary reductions in line with reductions required

of the local authority as a result of the Welsh Government's settlement with that authority;

- the arrangement is based on a service level agreement (SLA) that largely reflects previous levels of provision, even though the Trusts would wish for the Welsh Government to define its statutory requirements more precisely;

- the independent library Trusts in both instances are eventually accountable to the local authority for the quality and performance of the library service. The models vary in terms of sanctions to be applied should performances not meet the levels stipulated in the SLA;

- the Trusts would create the Annual Return currently required of all Welsh local authorities, but the Return would be submitted to the Welsh Government for scrutiny and assessment by the local authority. The Welsh Government already has a range of possible actions and sanctions to apply should provision and performances be less than satisfactory.

106. *Section 2* of this report refers to some of the potential weaknesses and difficulties that could arise from the manner that Trusts intend to operate, particularly the financial uncertainties and potential dangers, but at the present time it would be appropriate for the Welsh Government to regard the independent library Trusts already established or about to assume responsibility for library services, as suitable organisations to deliver a statutory library service, subject to an annual review through the Welsh Public Library Standards, and provided that library authorities are able to indicate and confirm what the position would be in terms of delivering the statutory obligations to provide a library service should a Trust fail.

107. The situation is more difficult in relation to the community libraries that have emerged and will continue to emerge in Wales. It has to be acknowledged that:

- the commitment and diligence of community leaders and organisations has ensured that a significant number of libraries have been saved from closure. Had many of these libraries been allowed to close, then any prospect of re-opening them would have been remote. Their continued existence may offer the distant prospect of being re-absorbed into the statutory service at some point in the future, should circumstances permit, and if such action would reflect community wishes;

- the achievements of community leaders and organisations in terms of managing a community crisis when confronted by very few options and a very limited timetable, have to be admired. Nevertheless, they already indicate the dangers to future sustainability of the community library model, and are able to identify recurring costs and maintaining community commitment and interest as the main challenges;

- as a consequence of the work of community groups a valued and valuable community resource has been kept, and many of the community libraries are operating in areas of considerable deprivation and social need and across a wider range of activities.

108. However, this research has identified a number of issues that relate to the future sustainability and viability of some of the community library arrangements currently in place in Wales (outlined in Models A-C above). Those already operational readily acknowledge:

- their continued very heavy dependence on the former local authority for core collections, essential facilities and services, and for advice and guidance on service delivery. In many instances users may not be able to identify the changes that have taken place, such is the seeming continued involvement or integration of the local authority in community library provision. The continuation of the relationship (and dependence) between community libraries and the local authority in the future is invariably regarded as essential to the continued existence of most community libraries. For their part local authorities in Wales have been remarkably generous in terms of their contribution to community library resources, and they generally seek to avoid undermining and competing for customers in areas served by community libraries;

- that the financial implications are already proving to be onerous and particularly daunting in some instances. Some of these arise from the agreements entered into between the partners at the time of transfer of agreed responsibilities, and it does appear that the financial liabilities transferred to community groups are particularly onerous. In such circumstances there is already a sense of frustration that generating funding is difficult and that much of the funding obtained has to be expended on meeting recurring revenue liabilities, and too little is available to spend on library developments and community aspirations. **In one instance a community group has calculated that the cost of community library provision is already higher than it was under the local authority**;

- that under some of the models adopted, but not all, there is a fear that the contributions of the local authority in key areas such as maintaining and supporting ICT provision are rather low in their list of priorities, and that advice and guidance may be time-limited and would diminish over time. The responsibilities of the community groups will multiply and become even more onerous. There does, however, appear to be significant political interest and support for the continued relationship between the statutory library service and its officers and the community libraries within one authority's boundaries, but not in all cases;

- that even though the process of recruiting volunteers for community libraries was remarkably successful initially, issues have already arisen in terms of establishing regular and constructive links with customers, in the use of ICT, in the engagement of volunteers with training and with the creation of effective staffing rotas. Indeed there is already some evidence of dwindling commitment among early recruits, and of very many competing community demands for volunteers;

- **that key performances have already declined - opening hours, issues and visitor numbers have fallen in most cases, and very substantially in some instances.** It is too early to accept that this is a trend that is likely to continue, but the reduction in opening hours necessary to enable the community to support the

library's activities in an adequate manner, means that the offer to the customer has diminished;

- there is an increasing emphasis on developing a wider programme of community activity - in many instances the library component of a community library is now seen as only one aspect of a wider community initiative. This is something all libraries should possibly aspire to achieve in a balanced fashion, but in the case of community libraries, such an emphasis is seen as the only realistic means of ensuring the viability of the overall initiative. In some instances the availability of opportunity funding also tends to govern or drive the direction in which community libraries develop;

- many of the current voluntary community libraries acquired their responsibilities due to inherent difficulties in achieving suitable provision and acceptable levels of performance at their particular sites and locations under the statutory library authority. Many were deemed to be failing libraries under the local authority, hence the original recommendation for closure, and it will be a very considerable (and perhaps unrealistic) challenge to expect all voluntary groups to make a success of failing situations that existed under well-resourced local authorities. The problem could become particularly acute in relation to buildings, and even though capital resources are sometimes easier to identify and locate, some of the community library buildings come with huge liabilities and challenges.

109. **As such, and at this stage, the viability and sustainability of some of the community library models that have emerged in Wales are largely unproven. But it would be unreasonable and very premature to make definitive judgments at this stage. Nothing should be done to endanger or undermine community-led initiatives of this kind as they are providing valued, if limited, services. Library authorities are also unlikely to be able to draw firm inferences that would support any strategies that follow or adopt some of the community library models now in existence. They would certainly be acting in a precipitate and possibly irresponsible fashion should they consider a community-led or managed model for their larger libraries in future. The evidence quite simply is not there to support such strategies nor to justify simple transfers of responsibility that could reasonably lead anyone to expect automatic success.**

110. **Community libraries are certainly not a panacea for all the problems created by diminishing expenditure on public library provision, merely one of several options that need careful evaluation.**

111. In addition, any consideration of the question whether the collaborative community library model is to be considered part of statutory library provision must give due consideration to service quality issues, and to monitoring and assessment mechanisms. With one exception, the models and service level agreements and other formal and informal partnership or transfer agreements developed in Wales, admittedly in the face of limited options and within very limited timetables at the end of 2013 and in the early

months of 2014, have developed either very limited or rather tentative arrangements in this context. Any guidance offered by the Welsh Government must give proper attention to this issue.

112. It is recommended that the Welsh Government in its proposed guidelines should give due regard to the more general findings of *A Local Inquiry: into the Public Library Service Provided by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council*, but taking into account also the nature of the better elements of service provision reflected in agreements, arrangements and practices already entered into during the creation of the community libraries in Wales. Below are observations in relation to the guidance factors (text in italics) from the Wirral report:

- In terms of *Securing and keeping a wide range of free resources*, the service offered by community libraries remain largely unchanged so far, and with library authority support, this core aspect of provision should continue to meet statutory requirements. However, any guidelines should insist on the continuation of arrangements between the library authority and partner community libraries that services remain free, that ICT services are renewed and maintained to a satisfactory level, and that customers continue to enjoy the advantages of access to networked information services and subscriptions, and that the community libraries should continue to have access to the authority's LMS, thus exposing users to the total resource of a library authority.

- In terms of *Meeting the general requirements (and any special requirements) of both adults and children,* the position that has developed in the community libraries so far in this context is less certain. The libraries are small and constraining, and open for a very limited number of hours, and reports on recent special activities held in some are less than encouraging. Some respondents to this research highlighted the difficulty of maintaining relationships with local schools. However, some community libraries are placing greater emphasis on such work and priorities, and the need for maintaining contact with, and access to, specialist collections and advice available through the library authorities should be a requirement included in any guidelines issued.

- *Free independent information and advice from staff.* This is an area that presents a significant challenge to volunteer staff in many community libraries. It is already clear that a reluctance to use ICT sources and services among some volunteers already limits their skills and service levels in this area, and the relative infrequency of rota duties limits an ability to create the continuing link and relationship between staff and users. It has been suggested that documenting requests for information or advice and guidance needs to be undertaken, and any such matter traced or transferred in order to ensure that responses are always timely and appropriate. That arrangement would only work where there is a formal agreement between a library authority and a community library on staffing, and on clear demarcation of duties set out in formal agreements and reinforced by appropriate and regular training. Obtaining such a commitment has been highlighted as an issue in current

work patterns among some volunteers.

- *Encouraging use and participation of the service* also presents a significant challenge to many community libraries, unless they have recruited volunteers with particular skills in this area. Falling use levels already reflect some of those difficulties. However, some formal and informal agreements between partners indicate a need and desire to undertake promotional activity, and the possibility of obtaining access to all library services in an area regardless of the origination of membership should assist in this regard. This area of activity should be indicated in the guidelines as being the responsibility of all partners and stakeholders.

As noted earlier, community libraries are sometimes the only community facility that remain in some areas and settlements, and access to larger authority libraries or hubs can be difficult for certain groups of users on account of transport and other deprivation issues. Access and geographical accessibility are relevant considerations that should feature in guidelines.

113. In summary therefore, Welsh Government guidelines on community managed libraries should encompass the following:

- the need for formal agreements between the statutory library authority and partner organisations, with clearly identified timescales for all aspects of the partnership, confirming that eventual and ultimate responsibility for the delivery and quality of the library service remains with the statutory authority that would, in turn, provide continuing support for the community library. Community managed libraries considered as part of statutory provision should only be based on a formal partnership with the statutory library authority. Agreements should include commitment to the continuing delivery of free services as it can be expected that raising income from service fees will become a major temptation;
- community library or other models of delivery should be included in official returns and calculations of statutory provision only at the discretion and the agreement of the statutory library authority, as it should always be considered the eventual accountable organisation, responsible for the validation of performance data and statistics;
- the size of the library under consideration for transfer to community partnership arrangements and the needs of the community and the accessibility of other library service points must be carefully considered. Unsustainable or over-ambitious provision should not be simply transferred to community management as a convenient solution. Failure would be almost inevitable in such circumstances;
- opening hours for a community library considered to be part of statutory provision should be agreed, but should not be less than 12 hours per week. Fewer opening hours would not justify suitable levels of continuing investment in facilities and services, and could create a barrier to access and use. Provision of self-service facilities in multi-purpose and multi-use community centres should be regarded as necessary and a priority for capital investment;

- ensuring that financial liabilities and responsibilities transferred to community groups, such as full repairing leases on buildings, high rent, all utility bills and the like, should not be unreasonable. Agreement over legal and other statutory liabilities and indemnification need to be addressed in full and fairer distribution of responsibilities agreed. Data protection and appropriate use of all facilities and services should also be addressed in formal agreements;
- agreements, contracts or service level agreements should clearly define and apportion the duties and responsibilities of the partners in as much unambiguous detail as possible;
- partnership arrangements should be monitored on an agreed basis, and formally reviewed on a regular basis - annually for the first three years, thereafter every three years, timetabled to coincide with the periods of Welsh Government assessment frameworks or strategic library plans for the sector. Local circumstances may require the duration of agreements to be modified. The nature and content of the monitoring and review procedures, and any possible sanctions to be applied in the event of difficulties arising in future, should be clearly identified from the outset;
- partnership agreements should also indicate what arrangements would be put in place to cater for the possible or unforeseen failure of any of the partner organisations to undertake their responsibilities or to continue in partnership;
- the service level agreements should reflect and include the requirements and user entitlements of current Welsh Government Welsh Public Library Standards, and any Welsh Public Library Standards that may pertain, and a clear undertaking to endeavour to achieve those Standards and to provide those entitlements. Requiring an individual community library to achieve the Standards as an independent entity would be clearly unreasonable, but if the community library component is to considered as part of statutory provision, they must contribute to the requirements of better performances in respect of the Standards and other requirements;
- changes to staffing arrangements represent one of the two major changes in the pattern of provision that have occurred in library services via community libraries in Wales. With very few exceptions, community libraries are staffed by unpaid volunteers. In one model in Wales however, the library authority is committed to providing a level of salaried staffing similar to that provided before the transfer, or a coordinating role in another authority. In other cases part-time temporary posts have been, or are, to be created, to provide the leadership for the community library initiatives, but roles and responsibilities would be wider than the library service itself. Staffing of community libraries should comprise two elements - either a continuing minimum element of local authority staffing for service points *in situ*, or in back-up services (such as bibliographical services, ICT support and the like), defined as hours per week or similar, or providing formal and regular access to the support, guidance and advice of local authority professional library staff, and support from volunteer staff, with the role and functions of the two elements of staffing being clearly demarcated. Only when there are these two elements to

staffing should a community library's work be considered part of statutory provision, as the absence of such provision greatly diminishes the overall elements of quality control and accountability that could and needs to be exercised by the statutory authority;

- volunteer staff training arrangements need to be agreed and commitments obtained;
- initial provision of adequate collections of materials in as many formats as possible calculated on previous provision and in the light of the library's catchment area and demography, with a commitment to exchanging stock and to circulate it at regular intervals. Similarly, that adequate provision of ICT facilities and services be provided, together with network infrastructure, including WiFi, duly maintained and repaired if necessary, and renewed at suitable intervals. Any library that cannot offer such facilities are only offering a very limited and inadequate service, and one that is unlikely to meet significant elements of community needs and expectations. Some community library groups believe that problems are emerging in this area of provision that present a significant risk to the future sustainability and viability of their community libraries;
- access to the authority's total resource through common membership and LMS services, and via request and reservation services;
- routines to collect robust and validated performance data need to be put in place, so that the contribution of the community libraries to the work and performance of the statutory partner authority can be properly calculated and reported;
- the matter of developing guidelines for library buildings is problematic. It is probable that library services will be offered and provided through a much more diverse range and number of outlets in future. Reference has already been made to the challenge facing community groups in Wales as they address the operational requirements of the buildings in which they are operating, having inherited some historically problematic buildings, and buildings that have inherent weaknesses and barriers. Guidelines and requirements for community library buildings could impose unrealistic demands on community groups, but there are already encouraging signs that buildings are being modified and managed in a more creative fashion. In essence therefore, guidelines can only indicate that every effort should be made to ensure that library facilities are fit for purpose, more attractive and accessible to all who wish to use them.

114. As noted earlier, the Welsh Government has been supporting the work of a community libraries development officer in one library authority in Wales (Model C above) by means of an Innovation and Development Grant. That authority has agreed in principle to make its work and experience over a three year period in this context available to all interested parties in the form of a Toolkit relating to the creation of community libraries. Other toolkits and guidance and advice, such as that created by the Arts Council England, is also more generally available. Reference to such sources by library authorities in Wales contemplating taking the community library route for some of its provision in the near future is strongly advised, primarily in order to avoid the errors of the past in this context.

Model C above has also developed a very detailed and comprehensive template service level agreement that now forms the basis for its relationship with its partner organisations. The Welsh Government should seek the agreement of that authority that its partnership template service level agreement could be made available to other interested organisations as soon as possible.

115. This research indicates that the value and contribution of community libraries to the overall provision of a satisfactory and sustainable quality can only be fully achieved through a continuing partnership with the relevant library authority. There could be significant gains for the library authority if it enters into a formal agreement with partner organisations in communities, as it could achieve any stipulated service expenditure reductions, yet at the same time it could continue to invest at very moderate levels in providing a library of a suitable quality that it can feel confident about, and accountable for. It is the only model that could possibly be considered for inclusion within statutory provision. One library authority has achieved this model - others may be in a position to develop, formalise and refine the existing relationship and achieve similar partnerships. Other authorities intending to follow this route would only be able to include such provision within statutory provision if it creates formal and sustainable partnerships.

116. This appears to be a far more responsible model than simply handing over problematic service points and already declining services to community groups, and it appears to chime with the wishes of many elected local authority members. There would also be some form of reassurance that core elements of service quality could be maintained. In addition communities would not lose their services suddenly and altogether either in the immediate term or if community initiatives should fail.

Recommendation

IX. *Wales should strive to develop the local authority-led community library model, based on a formal and enduring agreement, but only when circumstances dictate and only when the continued existence of a small library is threatened by local authority policies or imperatives.*