

Gwynedd Library Service Consultation Summer 2015

The Library Service of the Future: Review and Recommendations

Report compiled

by

Judith Broady-Preston and Sian Shakespear

Dr Judith Broady-Preston, BA(Hons) MA PhD
MCLIP FHEA
Reader in Information Management,
Institute Director of Postgraduate Studies,
Institute of Management,
Prifysgol Aberystwyth University Aberystwyth,

Cymdeithion Sian Shakespear Associates
26, Stryd Fawr, Bethesda, Gwynedd, LL57 3AE
07890613933
www.sianshakespear.co.uk

Cymdeithion Sian Shakespear Associates

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1. Executive Summary

The following are the conclusions of a public consultation undertaken by Sian Shakespear Associates on behalf of Gwynedd Council on its Consultation document¹ during spring/summer 2015 and an independent expert view of Gwynedd Library Service.

Conclusions

- a. In the face of an increasingly difficult financial situation Gwynedd Council has to balance what it needs to do to fulfil its obligations under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964², meet user needs and expectations with other heavy demands on its budget. As one subset of Gwynedd's population the Public Library Service users who participated in the 2015 Consultation expressed strong views and were generally resistant to change since they have little understanding of, or sympathy with the budget cuts which the Council is facing.
- b. The draft vision and strategy '*More than Books*' does not fully recognise that library buildings perform important roles beyond books and information provision, in that they act as public spaces and social hubs in many communities and in relation to:
 - mental health - for example in the alleviation and prevention of dementia
 - prevention of anti-social behaviour
 - education - facilitating and supporting the acquisition of literacy and social skills
 - reducing the county's carbon footprint
 - contributing to the local economy
 - social cohesion on the basis of age, language or by assimilating newcomers.Furthermore many of these contribute towards the aims of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- c. It is no longer financially sustainable for Gwynedd Library Service to continue to maintain a range of buildings for library purposes only, with stock sitting on shelves not available, and computers not accessible for much of the time, due to the buildings being open on a part-time basis only. This is the case despite continuous pleas by users for the Council to retain library buildings even if they are open for fewer hours per week.
- d. The new library service provision needs to develop and change gradually so that users become familiar with changes and have an opportunity to change their own behaviour and usage patterns.
- e. Changes and adaptations need to be incorporated across the board at all service delivery points and in all communities in order to answer the needs of users and to fulfil the service's requirements to be sustainable and fit for the future.

¹ Cyngor Gwynedd Council (2015) *More than Books: Public Consultation on the Future of Gwynedd County Council's Library Service, Spring 2015*. Available: <https://www.gwynedd.gov.uk/en/Council/Documents---Council/Have-your-say/Public-consultation-on-the-future-of-Gwynedd-Councils-Library-Service.pdf>

² Her Majesty's Stationery Office (1964) *Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964*. Available: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/75>

f. Gwynedd Council needs to ensure that its Library Service meets the current standards for Public Libraries as issued by the Welsh Government³ in order to fulfil its statutory obligations. However in order to make the substantial budget cuts required under *Challenge Gwynedd*, to make it fit for purpose in the 21st century and meet the needs of users, Gwynedd Council requires a service model which makes it attractive for users to either:

- visit a main library
- visit a library authority-led community managed library⁴
- visit a mobile library
- access the Library Service on-line

g. The new library service provision will need to ensure that the following factors are met as fully as possible at each service delivery point:

- convenient opening/visiting times,
- high standard of service,
- attractive range of items and services,
- opportunities to socialise informally,
- ease of access,
- convenient links to transport.

It is also desirable to provide opportunities for users to either browse regularly updated collections or to be introduced to new books and authors.

h. Different communities have different capacities, capabilities and desires to become involved and shoulder responsibility in relation to libraries and no one model will suit all situations. Communication with regards to volunteer engagement will need to be handled carefully and gradually.

i. Volunteers could play a role to extend and enrich the library experience in:

- static libraries
- back room distribution
- events and training sessions
- on mobile library/home visits
- transport
- fundraising

in **support** of professional salaried staff if staff and volunteers receive training. However the current low staffing levels affect the capacity of staff to manage volunteers and users may be resistant to any volunteer scheme. Special skills, communication and experience are required.

³ Welsh Government (2014) *Libraries making a difference: the fifth quality framework of Welsh Public Library Standards 2014-2017*. Available: <http://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/140425wpls5en.pdf>

⁴ *Guidance on Community Managed Libraries and the Statutory Provision of Public Library Services in Wales*. Available: <http://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/150522community-managed-libraries-en.pdf>

- j. Whilst the opportunity to browse through and handle physical books is valued by many users, digital/on-line solutions could contribute if introduced sensitively, such as users being invited via a phone call or email to visit a library building or link to view books selected for them, based on their previous usage.
- k. Gwynedd Library buildings currently provide essential free computer access for sectors of the population in many communities, some of which have low digital inclusion rates. For the reason explained in point c. Gwynedd Council may not be able to continue to support some of these buildings into the future.
- l. Library buildings and their staff fulfil a valuable role in relation to the Welsh language within a range of communities throughout the county and play a significant role in some.
- m. Overall the number of Gwynedd Library Service users is in decline due to:
 - the older age-profile of users
 - the onset of the digital age making library buildings less relevant to younger people.
 However user trends in Penygroes library suggest that with a concerted effort and on-going marketing it is possible to increase user numbers even amongst younger users.
- n. The service delivery model will need to take into account a continuing increase in home library service users but also with this, a need not to diminish the 'service' aspect where staff spend time with users in their homes i.e. not to focus on the number of users only.
- o. Gwynedd Library Service, in cooperation with schools and the education service, needs to continue to develop and adapt in order to provide essential reading material for children, in and out of schools, to support their education and assist literacy skills and to increase user numbers into the future.

Recommendations

The Strategy/Vision

- a. To amend core aim 3 from: 'Promote the use of the service's resources and libraries as multifunctional centres for the community to use' to 'Support and promote the use of the service and its buildings as multifunctional informal and formal community spaces and services beyond books'.
- b. Amend a key service area/core theme reflecting the above to

Promoting the health and well-being of individuals and communities.
- c. Consider incorporating actions under the above which reflect the important role of the service and libraries in relation to community cohesion, mental health, social inclusion, the local economy and the Welsh language.

The provision

d. To deliver a more cost-effective and efficient service, there is a need to offer a wider range of library service provision than presently provided (+/-20 hours static or mobile library service), either as an individual solution or in combination with another, as outlined in Recommendations e- q below.

e. To create a variety of service models to improve and match service availability/opening hours with actual usage patterns by focussing on user needs. Particular attention needs to be paid to harmonising physical access/opening hours with local public transport timetables and work patterns.

f. Consider offering Community managed library services in the 8 libraries currently open less than 20 hours per week in addition to the 9 full-time libraries. To ensure that these are eligible to be considered as part of the statutory provision, establish Model C libraries – library authority-led community libraries - as recommended in *The Independent Trust and Community Libraries in Wales Report* (2014) (p.30)⁵ endorsed by the 2015 Welsh Government *Guidance on Community Managed Libraries and the Statutory Provision of Public Library Services in Wales* (p. 17).⁶ Such services should meet the 18 Core Entitlements outlined in the 2014 fifth Welsh Public Library Standards Framework⁷.

g. To move towards a more centralised storage and delivery system for CDs, DVDs, print based and electronic materials [‘British Library - Boston Spa service’ model] to support the whole range of library provision in order to avoid stock sitting on shelves in closed library buildings. The system and process to be overseen and managed by salaried staff but delivered operationally by trained volunteers via the range of buildings and mobile service or via other community facilities such as leisure facilities and schools.

h. Design and deliver a programme of activities and services in the 9 larger libraries to promote digital inclusion. These could be delivered by public library staff with the help of dedicated user groups derived from all the communities to pilot and advise on any new activities and services. The 9 libraries in the long term would lead on the e-resources and deliver face to face training as new services are rolled out to communities. Volunteers could support these developments by undertaking routine tasks such as book issue/return.

i. To increase literacy levels amongst children and young people, improve access to e-resources by providing e-book readers for loan in addition to e-materials (books, magazines and audio books) already supplied under the terms of the “ECALM” initiative (*Every Child a Library Member*)⁸.

⁵ Roberts, D.H.E. (2014) *Independent Trusts and Community Libraries in Wales: Research into the nature of the current and planned provision, December 2014, commissioned by the Welsh Government*. Available: <http://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/150211-independent-trusts-community-libraries-en.pdf>

⁶ Welsh Government (2015) *Guidance on Community Managed Libraries and the Statutory Provision of Public Library Services in Wales*. Available: <http://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/150522community-managed-libraries-en.pdf>

⁷ Welsh Government (2014) *Libraries making a difference: the fifth quality framework of Welsh Public Library Standards 2014-2017*. Available: <http://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/140425wpls5en.pdf>

⁸ Gwynedd piloted this scheme; for details see <http://www.cilip.org.uk/cilip-cymru-wales/news/every-child-member>

j. To support Recommendation a. above and in conjunction with f, to explore possible partnerships with relevant community groups/organisations and devise methods and activities to enable libraries to fulfil their potential as multifunctional formal and informal community spaces and promote health and well-being beyond supply and loan of resources.

k. Enlist an organisation with a proven track record in and experience of the voluntary sector, such as Mantell Gwynedd, to assist in recruiting suitable volunteers to help deliver all models of library provision and service points as appropriate.

l. Institute a planned volunteer recruitment and training programme to incorporate general training in service delivery and more specialist training in technology support and delivery, together with ancillary activities such as transporting library users to nearest library, fundraising and accompanying mobile library drivers to undertake home visits. Consideration should also be given to the introduction of a programme of training for salaried staff to enable them to manage and deliver new service models outlined above and volunteer staff effectively and efficiently.

m. Improve signposting to the whole breadth of library services including buildings, mobile services, inter-library loan facility and home visits – virtually and physically.

n. Refresh the marketing and communication of Gwynedd Council services as a whole including libraries in order to promote a local integrated service offer. To endeavour to run particular marketing campaigns over a 3 – 5 year period in order to build up a sustained effort to ultimately reverse the decline in user numbers, with a long term aim of increasing usage.

o. To explore possible opportunities for new partnerships or to develop existing arrangements with:

- Partneriaeth Ogwen at Bethesda
- the Post Office or Community Council at Criccieth
- Antur Nantlle at Penygroes
- the local primary school or social enterprise, Menter Fachwen, at Deiniolen
- GP surgery at Nefyn or social enterprise at Congl Meinciau, Botwnnog
- the Community Centre/Community Council at Llanberis,
- Ysgol Ardudwy Secondary School at Harlech,
- Cwmni Deudraeth at Penrhyndeudraeth.

p. To provide sufficient free computer access in alternative local public buildings/community service points at convenient times and conditions, for example leisure centres, schools and so forth if access to library buildings does not continue in specific communities.

q. Continue to employ Welsh speaking staff and actively recruit Welsh speaking volunteers to fulfil any front of house duties. Retain a broad selection of Welsh books in order to maintain the important role of libraries with regard to the Welsh language.

2. Introduction and Background

Introduction

1. Gwynedd Council initiated a Review of its Public Library Service in 2012 following the outcome of the 2012 Welsh Government assessment noting very low staffing levels for the service in relation to the national standard, with the potential to affect its ability to deliver a comprehensive service (see below). The outcome of Phase One of this Review (2012-14) was a Consultation document⁹ which outlined proposals and a vision for the future of the Library Service focusing on four key service areas:

- Developing Digital Skills
- Accessing Information
- Promoting Health and Well-Being
- Promoting Reading

2. Phase Two of the Review was a public consultation in relation to the contents of *More than Books*, conducted during Spring/Summer 2015 by Cymdeithion Sian Shakespear Associates on behalf of Gwynedd Council. The purpose of this stage was twofold: (1) to offer local people the opportunity to express their views and help shape the future of the Library Service; and (2) to measure the impact of possible changes.

3. The reasons for this review and its timing result from a combination of factors. In common with other local authorities in Wales, Gwynedd Council will receive less money from the Welsh Government to pay for local services (*More than books*, 2015, p.2). The Library Service has to “make substantial savings in line with other Council services – at least 25% of its budget by 2017/18” (*Consultation Summer 2015*).

Background

4. The provision of a “comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof” is a statutory requirement for local authorities in Wales under the terms of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964¹⁰. This requirement extends to all who live, work, or are in full time education in the area covered by Gwynedd Council. An acknowledged weakness of the 1964 Act is the lack of a formal definition of the phrase “comprehensive and efficient service”, together with clear guidance as to what the characteristics should be of such a service. The formulation of the

⁹ Cyngor Gwynedd Council (2015) *More than Books: Public Consultation on the Future of Gwynedd Council's Library Service*, Spring 2015. Available: <https://www.gwynedd.gov.uk/en/Council/Documents---Council/Have-your-say/Public-consultation-on-the-future-of-Gwynedd-Councils-Library-Service.pdf>

¹⁰ Her Majesty's Stationery Office (1964) *Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964*. Available: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/75>

framework of Welsh Public Library Standards¹¹ offers operational guidance, as does the outcome of Judicial Reviews such as that of the Wirral Enquiry¹²(p.9).

5. Responsibility for oversight of this statutory duty rests with the Welsh Government who in 2013 commissioned an Expert Review of Public Libraries in Wales from a Reference Panel (Chair: Claire Creaser) which reported July 2014.¹³ This Review looked at the role of public libraries in their communities and how they delivered services. Designed primarily to investigate ways in which Welsh public library services might cooperate with each other and deliver innovative services in the future, the Review also asked for responses to four questions, the first of which sought views in relation to the nature and type of services public libraries should offer in the future to meet changing local needs.¹⁴

6. The purpose of the Reference Panel was to make recommendations in relation to the future delivery of the statutory service “albeit with a degree of pragmatism given the current economic climate” with the proviso that “It is clear that maintaining the status quo is no longer an option” (*Expert Review...2014*, p.5).

7. The 2014 *Expert Review* identified and evaluated a range of potential future sustainable models of service delivery, including community managed libraries. Operating in England from 2011, a 2013 Arts Council England Report¹⁵ categorised three models of service provision for Community Libraries:

- a. Community Managed Co-Produced Library – community led and delivered, often with Council support and as part of the public library network, but seldom with salaried staff
- b. Community Supported Co-Produced Library – council led and funded, normally with salaried staff but with significant volunteer support
- c. Commissioned Community Co-Produced Library – council commissioned and fully funded but delivered by a third sector body such as a not-for-profit community, social enterprise or mutual organisation.

8. Recommendations IV and IX (*Expert Review...2014*) called for further research into the role of community libraries in Wales, including consideration of the role of Independent Charitable Trusts in the management of public library services, resulting in the commissioning of a study by the Welsh Government, December 2014.¹⁶ The resulting Roberts Report (2014) identified four models for

¹¹ Welsh Government (2014) *Libraries making a difference: the fifth quality framework of Welsh Public Library Standards 2014-2017*. Available: <http://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/140425wpls5en.pdf>

¹² Quoted in Welsh Government (2015) *Guidance on Community Managed Libraries and the Statutory Provision of Public Library Services in Wales*. Available:

<http://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/150522community-managed-libraries-en.pdf>

¹³ Welsh Government (2014) *Expert Review of Public Libraries in Wales 2014*. Available:

<http://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/141021libraries-review-report-en.pdf/>

¹⁴ Welsh Government (2014) *Welsh public libraries review*. Available:

<http://gov.wales/topics/cultureandsport/museums-archives-libraries/libraries/public-libraries-review/?lang=en>

¹⁵ Arts Council England (2013) *Learning from experience; guiding principles for local authorities*. Available:

<http://tinyurl.com/nobhgi6>

¹⁶ Roberts, D.H.E. (2014) *Independent Trusts and Community Libraries in Wales: Research into the nature of the current and planned provision, December 2014, commissioned by the Welsh Government*. Available:

<http://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/150211-independent-trusts-community-libraries-en.pdf>

Wales, with Model C being recommended currently as offering “the best prospect of sustainability and viability, and a suitable emphasis on service quality.”¹⁷

9. Community managed libraries may be included as part of the statutory provision if they conform to the 18 core entitlements outlined in the 2014 Fifth Welsh Public Library Standards Framework¹⁸ at the discretion of the authority. These entitlements outline what services and facilities members of the public may expect to be provided by any Welsh public library service (full list available as Appendix 1).

10. Such types of provision, when fully developed, offer the potential to deliver savings as they rely on volunteers delivering services in conjunction with skilled and knowledgeable staff. As a result, savings are not as great as with models which rely solely or predominantly on volunteers or external bodies alone, but offer a balanced approach to service provision, ensuring that the public receive a quality public library service that meets statutory requirements and not focused solely on achieving cost savings alone.¹⁹

11. A summary of the challenges facing future provision of library services in Gwynedd are outlined in *Consultation Summer 2015*.

Gwynedd Library Service: current provision²⁰

12. The Public Library Service has 17 physical (static) and four mobile libraries. Nine open for longer than 20 hours per week, categorised as “main” libraries, located in:

- Bala
- Bangor
- Barmouth
- Blaenau Ffestiniog
- Caernarfon
- Dolgellau
- Porthmadog
- Pwllheli
- Tywyn

The remaining eight static libraries are open for fewer than 20 hours per week located in:

- Bethesda
- Criccieth
- Deiniolen

¹⁷ Welsh Government (2015) *Guidance on Community Managed Libraries and the Statutory Provision of Public Library Services in Wales*. Available: <http://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/150522community-managed-libraries-en.pdf> p. 4.

¹⁸ Welsh Government (2014) *Libraries making a difference: the fifth quality framework of Welsh Public Library Standards 2014-2017*. Available: <http://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/140425wpls5en.pdf>

¹⁹ Welsh Government (2015) *Guidance on Community Managed Libraries and the Statutory Provision of Public Library Services in Wales*. Available: <http://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/150522community-managed-libraries-en.pdf>

²⁰ August 2015

- Harlech
- Llanberis
- Nefyn
- Penygroes
- Penrhyndeudraeth

13. Profiles and maps of the individual libraries are in *More than Books 2015* (Appendices 1 and 2), together with details of the range of services provided in 2015 (pp.3-4) and a summary of the current assessment of performance measured against the Welsh Public Library Standards Framework 2011-2014 demonstrating achievement of eight of the nine standards (pp.4-5).

3. 2015 Consultation and Review

Conduct and Timeline

14. Under the terms of the contract awarded February 2015, Sian Shakespear Associates conducted a consultation and review of the views of key stakeholders, based on the Gwynedd Council vision and proposals for the *Future of the Public Library Service*. Using the consultation document as a basis, the aims were to

- share information about the review, likely outcomes and the reasoning behind any proposed changes in service delivery
- gauge the extent to which the draft vision is complete
- elicit stakeholders' concerns regarding any proposed changes in order to complete an equalities assessment and to enable Gwynedd Council to consider any mitigation measures
- gather views on possible partnerships or alternative service delivery models in some communities
- offer suggestions regarding how best to provide as comprehensive a service as possible in view of the financial challenges induced by cuts in the annual grant Gwynedd Council receives from the Government.

15. The Consultation was conducted in two phases during spring and summer 2015:

Phase one: discussions with target groups during March – April prior to the period of purdah leading up to the General Election held 7 May

Phase two: questionnaire survey and public drop-in sessions delivered May – July following the General Election.

In detail the methods used were:

1. Paper and online questionnaires (self-selecting sample)²¹
2. Public drop-in sessions at 16 of the 17 libraries²²

²¹ Copy in Appendix 2.

3. Discussion group sessions held with targeted groups – Older People’s Council; Parent Groups; teenagers/young people (17- 24 years).
4. Discussion group sessions with staff – 2 staff meetings, one with mobile library staff
5. Workshop with Community Council representatives and service partners
6. Correspondence received – letters, written questions and petitions.

Consultation: Process and Outcomes

16. Each drop-in session followed a similar pattern as indicated in the outlines provided in Appendices 4 and 5. In each library, all were welcomed and received an explanation of the review and the likely outcomes for the service as a whole and their library specifically. In the nine full-time libraries individuals were then asked to comment and voice any concerns regarding the way the new Strategy and *Challenge Gwynedd* may affect various elements of current provision. In the eight part-time libraries, individuals were also asked to identify any concerns and then shown a list of three options for future service provision and invited to comment. All comments were noted and participants were invited to make suggestions of their own. Finally, they were shown a list of service priorities and asked to rank these on a scale of 1 – 6, with 1 = ‘most important’ and 6 = ‘least important’.

17. The elements of the Consultation which involved the participation of children were administered either by approved Gwynedd Council Staff or with/by parents to conform to current ethical standards for surveys involving Children and Vulnerable Adults. 500 questionnaires were distributed to and 100 were returned by children.

18. Numbers of returned, completed questionnaires = 544 hard copy/paper; 125 on-line questionnaires.

19. The numbers of participants in the face to face consultation sessions were:

- Parent groups – 18
- Young people’s focus group (17-24 years) – 10
- Older People’s Council – 37
- Drop-in sessions (16 libraries) – 428
- Staff - 36
- Community Council representatives and service partners - 35

20. The results obtained are illustrative and indicative; the process was designed to elicit opinion on the issues identified, but not to be representative of the entire population of Gwynedd. This latter approach would be far more extensive in terms of time and resources; it would entail obtaining responses from non-users in proportion to their numbers in the population as a whole, in addition to ensuring that all categories of current library users were equally proportionately represented. Current usage statistics show that 31% of the population of Gwynedd are members of the library

²² Since changes are planned in relation to the library provision in Bala resulting from the reorganisation of its schools, a specific consultation session was not held at Bala. Given the potential difference in impact on current service levels, differing outlines were used in the main full-time libraries and those with less than 20 hours provision currently. Copies of both outlines are available in Appendices 3 and 4.

service, with 20% of these “regular borrowers²³”; time and resources did not permit a representative survey of these differing categories.

4. Qualitative Results and Analysis

21. An earlier review (2012-2014) conducted by Gwynedd Council identified the challenges facing the service, together with a list of five key points. The main findings of this review were that

it would be unsustainable to continue with the service in its current form; and...a need for a clear direction for the Service in planning for the future and responding to the challenges of digital developments and budgetary restrictions.

A further outcome of this process was the drafting of a new Council vision for the library service - *Gwynedd’s Libraries – More than books.*²⁴

22. The results of this 2015 consultation are analysed and organised in relation to the three general aims of the current Council vision for the library service as outlined in *Gwynedd’s Libraries – More than books*:

- *Promote reading and access to printed and digital material for educational, leisure, health and well-being purposes [AIM 1]*
- *Provide and refer residents to information and reading resources of the highest quality [AIM 2]*
- *Promote the use of the service’s resources and libraries as multifunctional centres for the community to use [AIM 3]*

These aims translate into four core themes or service areas, outlined below

- Developing Digital Skills [CT1]
- Access to Information [CT2]
- Promoting Health and Well-being [CT3]
- Promoting Reading [CT4].

23. The core themes, together with customer expectations of the service, expressed during the consultation are used to structure the outcome of the consultation below. There is inevitably a degree of overlap within these themes; the themes under which the participants’ views are grouped reflect judgement by the authors as to which are the most appropriate given the content.

²³ Cyngor Gwynedd Council (2015) *Gwynedd Library Service: Consultation Summer 2015*. [leaflet]

²⁴ Cyngor Gwynedd Council (2015) *More than Books: Public Consultation on the Future of Gwynedd Council’s Library Service, Spring 2015*. Available: <https://www.gwynedd.gov.uk/en/Council/Documents---Council/Have-your-say/Public-consultation-on-the-future-of-Gwynedd-Councils-Library-Service.pdf> pp 5-6.

4.1 Developing Digital Skills

24. As recognised in *More than Books* (p.6), libraries have a role to play in promoting digital inclusion amongst Gwynedd's residents. Low levels of digital engagement currently are apparent as shown by the consultation findings that there is limited, partial, or no access to the internet/computer facilities generally outside of those provided by libraries in the following cases

- children without access to a computer at all, or to one without an internet connection, set against increasing expectations for homework to be wholly or partially reliant on internet access and completed on computers
- people searching for work or claiming benefits again have no or partial internet/computer access; Job Seekers Allowance claimants are required to record their job seeking endeavours on-line and frequently have to complete job applications on-line
- those undertaking research, such as older people undertaking family history research and those studying on low incomes.

25. The consultation provided evidence that Gwynedd libraries play a significant role in providing free computer access to meet the needs of the above. The Department for Works and Pension (Job Centre) staff actively refer claimants to libraries to use computers, for example. During several of the consultation sessions in the smaller part-time libraries, namely Deiniolen, Penygroes and Bethesda, the perception of being a 'deprived community' was allied strongly with a lack of digital engagement and hence inclusion.

26. According to research undertaken by the Welsh Government in 2010, in a considerable proportion of Gwynedd, 60% or fewer of the adult population aged 18+ were designated "digitally included" (map based data).²⁵

Examples from participants:

*"Reading helps me fall asleep at night.
I am on benefits, so buying books is not possible.
Also my son depends on the library to job search as he cannot afford to have broadband at his home"*

27. Parents and participants from the young people's focus group expressed the view that children should begin with books before engaging with e-books and e-readers. As one parent observed:

"Reading on his tablet tempts my child to do other things apart from reading."

28. With public library services under increasing pressure, it is important to recognise the role of public libraries as intergenerational community hubs, with free computer and internet access continuing to be provided in communities which require it.²⁶

²⁵ Smith, J. and Jones, I. (2010) *An analysis of digital inclusion In Wales* Available: <http://wiserd.ac.uk/files/7413/6567/1351/CC-ITC-3rdWGDigitalInclusion.pdf>

²⁶ Welsh Government (2014) *Digital Inclusion Delivery Plan – Update 2014: The strategic approach to digital*

29. The digital age may appear to make library buildings less relevant to young people and adults since they are perceived to be full of hard copy/‘paper books’. On-line vendors offering downloadable e-books free or at discount prices are seen as direct competition for Public Library Services, especially amongst users who use e-readers. There was some evidence during the consultation that digitally-savvy adults on low incomes and who may not hitherto be familiar with accessing paper books buy e-books at discount prices to read on their devices.

4.2. Access to Information

30. Enabling residents to access and use information is viewed as central to the future of the library service (*More than Books*, p.6). Defining and interpreting what is meant by the phrase ‘ability to access and use information’ is therefore crucial to meeting this fundamental need. Similarly, identifying and overcoming potential barriers to such use and access is also of key importance.

31. Significant factors are as follows:

- Language²⁷
- Location (physical space)²⁸
- Transport and travel
- Volunteers and/or community managed libraries

Language

32. Current census returns show that c. 65% of the population of Gwynedd aged three years or above are Welsh speakers, significantly higher than 20.5%, the statistic for Wales as a whole.²⁹ In general, the incidence of Welsh speakers and those born in Wales is higher in rural than in urban areas, for example Llanrug at 87.8%. Conversely, Welsh language fluency is at its highest in urban Caernarfon (87.4%) and is lower in Tywyn and Aberdyfi (35.5%) and Bangor (36.4%). In 2011 several communities previously considered strongholds of the language had fallen to close to the benchmark of 70% (this being the viable level at which the language is used on a daily basis), such as Llanberis, Penisarwaun, Llanaelhaearn and Morfa Nefyn.

33. The 2011 Census returns also showed a substantial decrease in the percentage of 60+ year olds able to speak Welsh, offering evidence of a trend towards older people immigrating into the county. Between 2001 and 2011 the overall increase in 60 year olds living in Gwynedd was + 13.9%.

The above figures do not include the numbers of Welsh learners which in many cases may be higher.

inclusion Available: <http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/comm/140630-digital-inclusion-deliver-plan-2014-en.pdf> p.5

²⁷ Literacy is clearly relevant in this context; issues relating to ‘literacy’ as a whole are addressed in Section 7. *Promoting Reading*

²⁸ Issues in relation to Digital access are outlined earlier in Section 4. *Developing Digital Skills*

²⁹ Cyngor Gwynedd Council (2014) *Gwynedd Language Strategy 2014 – 2017* The statistical context pp. 4- 6. Available: <https://www.gwynedd.gov.uk/en/Council/Documents--Council/Strategies-and-policies/Gwynedd-language-strategy.pdf>

34. Gwynedd’s libraries appear to play an essential role in respect of awareness and familiarity with the Welsh language and indeed in learning the language.

“Without a library there would be no opportunity for my child to choose a Welsh book and to read with me before he starts school in September and then afterwards, after school hours and during the summer holidays.”

“We have recently moved to the area and strongly rely on the library to develop our Welsh language”.

35. Libraries have a central role in promoting the Welsh language:

- All libraries have a good selection of Welsh language material.
- The range and availability of Welsh language materials is important for all families on low incomes with pre- and school age children, but especially for learners.
- Learners gain access to valuable language skills through the use of libraries by listening to Welsh being spoken and by talking to others - learners and fluent speakers – in Welsh.
- Library staff play a central role in developing language competency, by supporting and encouraging language use in general, but also specifically in recommending suitable materials to develop and enhance language skills further. As one participant observed: *“The librarian is so helpful with selecting which Welsh books I can read for my reading challenge as part of my Welsh course with Aberystwyth University.”*

36. In five of the eight smaller libraries there was a predominance of Welsh speakers or learners in the drop-in sessions which may reflect the rural location of some of the communities. In many communities, full and part-time libraries are perceived by many as ‘oases of Welshness’ either fully integrated into the natural language of the community such as in Penygroes or Bethesda, or as a ‘bastion’ in a community where Welsh is less prevalent as in Tywyn. The provision of an immersive environment helps families in encouraging children to read and speak Welsh; more generally, physical libraries provide opportunities for inter-generational social interaction which again, helps develop language skills.³⁰

“It could become expensive to buy Welsh books without the library.”

Location and usage patterns

37. Where and how individuals are able to access and use information is an issue of central importance. The provision and location of services for the future formed a central component of the Consultation. Opinions were invited on proposals to meet the statutory requirements for public library service provision by continuing to maintain

- nine main libraries – Bala, Bangor, Barmouth, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Caernarfon, Dolgellau, Porthmadog, Pwllheli, Tywyn
- mobile library service

³⁰ The role of libraries as spaces enabling social interaction as a contributory factor in individual health and well-being are evaluated in Section 6 *Promoting Health and Well-being*

- mobile library and information service for children and young people – Lori Ni
- home library service

38. A corollary of the above was that opening hours of the main libraries would be extended and adapted if finances allowed. Comments were also invited with regard to the desirability or otherwise of communities playing a more direct role in service delivery by active involvement as volunteers or by taking on responsibility for delivering a community library in the eight communities currently offering part-time library services.

39. One practical issue to note which came to light during the Consultation process was that it proved difficult to locate some of the physical libraries if not familiar with the area. There is a lack of signage within towns and communities which makes locating service points unnecessarily difficult.

40. Participants who would be affected by proposals to curtail services in the part-time static libraries valued the flexibility and ease of use the current provision offers. Having a local facility made it easier for individuals to visit more frequently, providing them with an opportunity to escape the house and walk and reduced their potential impact on Gwynedd’s carbon-footprint. One participant commented

“This library is part of our lives – we can pop in as and when”.

Similarly, the view was expressed that if services were offered only at the main libraries, visiting these libraries would take up more time and

“there’ll be less popping in”.

41. Significantly, participants viewed the proposed measures as a form of ‘creeping urbanisation’ of services, with the focus moving to towns at the expense of less affluent rural areas. Many of the communities in these latter areas had already seen a loss of services; it was perceived as important that public services were retained especially in areas where private sector services such as banks and post offices had already been withdrawn. 24% of areas within Gwynedd with a total population of c. 36,000 feature in the top 10% of most deprived areas in Wales in relation to access to services and c. 50% of these areas are within the catchment areas of part-time libraries with an uncertain future.³¹ Furthermore the following areas which are likely to be affected by the proposed changes to library provision: Llanllyfni and Clynnog, Deiniolen and Talysarn are within the 40% most deprived areas in Wales in relation to all indices: income, housing, employment, access to services, education, health, community safety, physical environment.

42. In relation to continuing provision at the main full-time libraries, the priorities for opening hours were

- after work, evenings and weekends
- benefit/pension days, market days and Fridays (weekly newspapers)
- coincide with bus and train timetables/schedules

³¹ Welsh Government (2015) *The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation: WIMD 2014*. Revised 12 August 2015. Available: <https://stats.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Community-Safety-and-Social-Inclusion/Welsh-Index-of-Multiple-Deprivation/WIMD-2014>

- lunchtime models – (1) close for longer periods over lunchtimes to enable longer evening opening hours OR (2) continuous opening by deploying staff differently such as the use of split shifts.

Mobile and home library services

43. Current mobile library service users³² expressed the view that the service overall was valuable, with several requesting that it should not be partially or wholly curtailed. 24% of these respondents stated that they also use a static library. However, there was the caveat by many that the book stock was seldom refreshed and an indication that users were not aware of the facility to reserve or request books.

44. Amongst library users in general, it was apparent that there was limited knowledge of the content, frequency and scope of the current mobile library service, apart from a general perception that a mobile visited rural communities. Similarly, there was a frequently expressed view that such services were predominantly for older people or those with limited access

“The mobile library is only useful for people who live nearby.”

“Is the mobile library available for everyone or just those who are infirm?”

45. Participants in the drop-in sessions in the libraries were generally unaware of the Home Library Service. Similarly, several users who collect books from their local library for older family members were not aware of the home service. In the written evidence, some housebound individuals were of the view that their only opportunity to borrow books would disappear if their local static library did not continue. The mobile service drivers expressed the opinion that library staff could play a more active role in referring individuals to the home service when they began to experience difficulties with mobility and wished to extend any referral system to other public services such as Occupational Health Services.

46. Overall, extension of the mobile service to include communities hitherto served by a static library was not viewed as a viable or desirable alternative model for future service provision, given the following factors:

- limited range of book stock carried and on offer
- frequency of visits – currently once a month
- timing of visits – during the working day
- less reliable service – impact of weather and road conditions
- limited space available for sitting and reading/browsing, especially with children,
- lack of space to socialise and less of a reward for the effort of venturing out of the house.

Transport and travel

47. Concentrating future service provision on fewer centres of population will result in individuals potentially having to travel greater distances in order to access physical library facilities. Logistical difficulties such as travelling with babies and young children on public transport, reduced public transport provision especially in the evenings, together with other barriers to physical use such as

³² c. 12% of questionnaires

the cost of travel and parking, including increased public transport fares, may result in fewer residents having access to physical libraries. All of which were raised as issues at the drop-in sessions, examples:

“It’s not easy to travel with [a]baby and toddler/child on a bus”

“It’s difficult or even impossible for older people to travel and walk to and from the bus and carry books at the same time.”

Volunteers, Community-managed libraries and Shared service provision

48. During the drop-in sessions comments were invited on alternative types of service delivery for those communities where withdrawal of a static part-time library service in its current form was proposed (Appendix 3) and these were met with a general negative response. It should be noted that participants were predominantly reacting to the news that Gwynedd Council may not be able to continue to support their local static library in its current form. Only in Bethesda was a viable alternative explored in any depth, although some tentative suggestions for differing alternatives were offered in Deiniolen, Nefyn and Llanberis.

49. Different communities displayed differing capabilities and capacities in relation to active engagement in delivering library services, either as volunteers working with staff, or in community run/led services, and/or shared space, service or partnership ventures. These variously depended on the availability of:

- volunteers
- partner body responsible for venture and/or ‘leaders’
- alternative buildings/venues.

50. Issues identified are as follows

1. **Scarcity of volunteers** (new) in some ‘long suffering’ communities:

“The same people do everything here”

“We are already struggling to keep other services going here with volunteers”

“We can’t cope with the loss of more facilities”

although it was reported that in some communities individuals were prepared to do so.

2. **Few natural ‘community leaders’** due to constraints of time where many work full-time and due to lack of experience and confidence:

“Individuals are prepared to ‘help’ but not to lead or take responsibility.”

3. **Difficulties in maintaining interest and engagement** in the longer term:

“Things can start here with enthusiasm but it’s difficult to sustain”

“ We won’t be able to keep this going on the back of coffee mornings alone.”

4. **Community politics and dynamics.** There is a need to reach out and actively recruit new volunteers sensitively especially in relation to Welsh speakers – Welsh speakers who have been long-term residents are perceived to be slower to come forward and volunteer than English speaking more recent residents.

5. **Welsh language** ability and use by volunteers is crucial:

“I would volunteer but I’m not fully bilingual. Doing this could help learners though”

6. **Ideological opposition.** The principle of helping to run a service deemed to be one which should be provided by the Council was poorly received in all eight of the part-time libraries. Issues of ‘fairness’ and ‘justice’ were highlighted in relation to the smaller communities seeming to bear the brunt of the cuts in services and being expected to shoulder responsibility:

“We pay the same taxes as the residents of the towns where the main libraries are located. It is dreadful that the Council is considering retaining the service in towns and cities but not in rural villages”

There was evidence of strong views and organised opposition to the Council’s proposals in Criccieth, Penygroes³³ and Nefyn and to an extent at Deiniolen, via petitions, protests, letters to the press and ministers.

51. In line with the general move towards partnership delivery in relation to a range of Council services, the ability of the social enterprises at Penygroes and Penrhyndeudraeth to deliver certain community services would be diminished unless alternative funding is found to replace rent paid by the Library Service.

52. Library buildings in Bethesda, Deiniolen, Llanberis and Nefyn are purpose-built, relatively modern and are valued as such by their communities. Similarly the users of Criccieth library are very fond of their building of historic value and no other obvious alternative building was identified. In none of these communities did a viable group or organisation immediately put itself forward to consider taking over running these library buildings although alternative partnership delivery provision could be explored in the following communities:

- Partneriaeth Ogwen at Bethesda
- the Post Office or Community Council at Criccieth
- Antur Nantlle at Penygroes
- the local primary school or social enterprise, Menter Fachwen, at Deiniolen
- GP surgery at Nefyn or social enterprise at Congl Meinciau, Botwnnog

³³ N.B. Penygroes library is the one library in Gwynedd increasing usage year on year despite the general trend of a decline in the number of service users across the authority.

- the Community Centre/Community Council at Llanberis,
- Ysgol Ardudwy Secondary School at Harlech,
- Cwmni Deudraeth at Penrhyndeudraeth.

53. A suggestion for a library service community link in Bethesda seems to be worth exploring since this community has a recent track record of undertaking relatively ambitious community projects and is working hard to combat the economic forces of post-industrial decline. It has community leaders and a social enterprise in place to make this an idea worthy of potential exploration.

54. Discussions were also held in the full-time libraries about the possibility of volunteers supporting or enhancing the service provided there. Generally participants were reluctant to suggest ways in which volunteers could be used to replace work currently undertaken by librarians, given the high regard in which they are held currently. Librarians were seen as:

- *“hav[ing] expertise”,*
- *“welcoming, kind, patient”,*
- *“expand[ing] reading horizons”,*
- *“open[ing] up the world of books to people and children”*
- *“go[ing] the extra mile beyond what is expected of them”.*

55. Participants were reluctant to be seen to undermine staff in any way; however some were willing (tentatively) to suggest that they may volunteer to:

- transport users to and from libraries,
- run a coffee bar and other money raising activities³⁴ such as book stalls
- run events and activities

A small number were prepared to consider volunteering either in support of librarians or to extend opening hours.

56. Library service staff were generally concerned about the proposed changes and expressed a lack of understanding of the rationale behind the proposals contained in the consultation document. There was a perceived lack of information and dialogue and requests for help and ideas. The review has evidently created a great deal of uncertainty and there is a need for decisions to be made so that staff can make their own decisions. There was a plea for more constant information.

4.3. Promoting Health and Well-being

56. The Library Service plays a central role in supporting individuals' health and well-being by offering Books on Prescription, access to online public health promotion activities and a Home Library Service.³⁵

³⁴ Please see appendix 8 for list of income raising suggestions.

³⁵ *More than Books*, p.6

57. Participants also acknowledged and perceived the value of libraries as public spaces; social hubs and “havens to escape to” since visits are frequently “multi-functional”, providing opportunities to network and socialise informally

“This building is a warm haven to escape to from the house and it’s one of the few places where everything is free”

“This library is more than books or the internet - it is a meeting place and has information about and for the village.”

58. The opportunity for social interaction with other library users and librarians is viewed as important for the state of mind and sense of well-being of library users of all ages

“The kindness displayed by the librarian has a good effect on me, helping my sense of well-being, keeping me healthy which then benefits everybody.”

This is equally true of users of the mobile service when they interact with the van driver.

59. Library buildings also play important roles in relation to

1. social **cohesion** - age, language or assimilating newcomers

“I have just moved here – this place was a point of reference and I was warmly welcomed and made to feel a part of the community”

“There’s nowhere else in town for children and older people to meet. It provides an important opportunity to socialise with people you are familiar with – the elderly and families and children after school.”

2. **reducing the county’s carbon footprint**

“Think of the children and people who can now walk to the library but will have to drive to Bangor or Caernarfon and the carbon dioxide which they will release into the air”
(Child, age 10)

3. **the local economy**, in giving people another reason to visit town and spend:

“The bank closed in the Village a year ago and there’s been a marked difference on the street as a result. The Post Office closed for a while and it was startling the effect this had on the numbers coming to the village. Thankfully it has now reopened. Without a doubt losing the static Library service in its current location would have a negative effect on the area’s economy.”

4. **the economy in general** by enabling people to complete job applications and gain employment:

“I know of someone who has just had a new job after completing the application form here”.

60. At 20.7% of the population, Gwynedd has one of the largest proportions of post-retirement age residents in Wales³⁶. As a result many libraries have an older age profile with the coastal towns of Harlech, Porthmadog, Criccieth and Barmouth all having the greater proportion of their library users aged over 65 years – ranging from 40% to 50%. Nefyn, Tywyn and Pwllheli libraries have 35% to 37% of their users over 65 years old. Due to the issues and challenges of growing older in relatively isolated communities – both rural and coastal – library buildings and mobile services can play a crucial role:

“This library is like ‘fresh air to me’ – I’ve just retired and started to use this library.”

“As a pensioner of 86 years I am dependent on the mobile library which comes monthly and is most helpful.”

61. Currently it is estimated that one in five households are occupied by lone pensioners, but by 2025 this is expected to increase to one in four households³⁷. From 2015 it is estimated that there will be an increase in Gwynedd of 9% in the number of people over the age of 80 by 2020 and by 2025 there will have been a 26% increase in this age group.

“I look forward to my weekly visits to the library for lots of reasons.... My visits are multifunctional: I use the computers, I talk with people, I keep up to date with what is going on locally and of course I borrow books....Being isolated and not seeing anyone for days has a detrimental effect on the health of older people.”

62. In accordance with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, as a public authority Gwynedd must work to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of its residents. To do this they must set and publish well-being objectives which show how they will work to achieve the following:

- A society in which people’s physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood.
- A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio economic background and circumstances).
- Attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities.
- A society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation.³⁸

³⁶ Internal unpublished documents by Gwynedd Council ‘Equalities Impact Assessment’ of Gwynedd Library Review ‘More than Books’.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Welsh Government (2015) *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: the essentials*. 2nd ed. Available: <http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/150623-guide-to-the-fg-act-en.pdf> pp.5-6

Evidence gathered during the consultation clearly shows that Gwynedd libraries perform an essential role in the achievement of all four of the above aims.

“Researching my family tree, which I couldn’t afford to do if I had to pay out of my pension, keeps my mind active which has been proved to help prevent dementia and means I can hopefully live independently for longer.”

63. It should be noted that some library buildings are valued by groups who use them:

‘I’m starting ‘Amser Twf’ in the library. Shutting the library will be disastrous because I’ll have to find another venue’.

‘Where will the community courses go if the building closes?’

During all the drop-in consultation sessions and in several questionnaire responses participants were of the opinion that more use could be made of these buildings, particularly in relation to raising income.

4.4. Promoting Reading

With public library ‘active borrower’ figures around 25% of the population in Wales, there are a lot of children and families who are not in the reading or library habit.³⁹

64. There is considerable research identifying the benefits and contribution which reading for pleasure makes to improving literacy skills/level, even in the digital age. In 2013 the results of a large scale research study examining the reading behaviour of approximately 6,000 young people derived from 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70) data⁴⁰, conducted by researchers at the Institute of Education, UCL concluded that

“There are concerns that young people’s reading for pleasure has declined. There could be various reasons for this, including more time spent in organised activities, more homework, and of course more time spent online...However, new technologies, such as e-readers, can offer easy access to books and newspapers and it is important that government policies support and encourage children’s reading, particularly in their teenage years.”⁴¹

65. Research published by the National Literacy Trust in 2011,⁴² based on a survey of 18,000 children, found that almost 4 million children in the UK did not own a book and that this proportion was increasing. In addition,

³⁹ Alyson’s Welsh libraries blog (2014) *Every child a library member: launched!* Available: <https://libalyson.wordpress.com/2014/03/19/every-child-a-library-member-launched/>

⁴⁰ This is a longitudinal study following the lives of more than 17,000 people born in England, Scotland and Wales in a single week of 1970

⁴¹ UCL Institute of Education (2015) *Reading for pleasure puts children ahead in the classroom, study finds* 11 September 2013. Available: <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/newsEvents/89938.html> [press release].

⁴² BBC News Education (2015) *National Literacy Trust highlights book-free millions* Available: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-16031370>

Children with their own books were more likely to be above-average readers and do better at school...[and] poorer children and boys were less likely to have books

This study also demonstrated a direct correlation between access to books and other reading materials, and levels of reading attainment and literacy.⁴³

66. The importance and centrality of literacy and reading in relation to the public library service in Gwynedd is evident. Gwynedd was one of the first six local authorities to participate in the *Every Child a Library Member (ECALM)* Project, the aim of which was to automatically enrol all primary school children in Wales to their local library service, beginning with Year 4 pupils (aged 8-9 yrs) in March 2014.

*By targeting children who are just about old enough to go to a library on their own or with friends (if they live near one), the project seeks to break cycles of poverty by enthusing all children, regardless of background or those with library habits, to enjoy reading and to use the library.*⁴⁴

In addition to the benefits outlined above, this is also a practical example of a partnership initiative involving the library service, primary schools and the Wales library marketing team, Museums Archives and Libraries Division (MALD), Welsh Government, working together to promote active membership.

67. The consultation findings showed that the role of libraries in relation to services for children was an issue of paramount importance identified by adults in all the discussion sessions and by the children themselves. Amongst the issues and services identified as important to survey participants were

- library visits for families and parents with young children:

“My eldest is a fantastic reader because he was able to come here and borrow as many books as he wanted”.

- visits by children on their own after school to do homework, read and just spend time – hang out – between school and homecoming/collection by parents

68. All parents surveyed, including those who may be less affluent, were keen for their children to have opportunities to learn outside the school environment, and viewed the local library as playing an essential role in this respect.

“Our little boy loves coming here and the whole process of looking at, choosing and borrowing a book teaches good values – borrowing, looking after something, sharing”

There was an overwhelming sense of not wanting future generations to be deprived:

⁴³ BBC News Education (2015) *National Literacy Trust highlights book-free millions* Available: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-16031370>

⁴⁴ Alyson's Welsh libraries blog (2014) *Every child a library member: launched!* Available: <https://libalyson.wordpress.com/2014/03/19/every-child-a-library-member-launched/>

“I want the children and people in the community to continue to benefit from facilities that I and previous generations did.”

They also commented on and reinforced the importance of children having access and being able to read hard copy/paper books away from screens and so forth.

69. There was some anecdotal evidence that certain schools offer encouragement to visit the local library, ranging from library visits to others holding library-based classes during school time.

“This is a learning tool – the head teacher encourages children to go to the library to undertake research and to do their homework.”

However, the pattern was by no means universal or consistent. Several parents expressed the view that school classes should actively visit libraries in order for children to learn about and have the library experience. We also heard from primary and secondary pupils who were of the view that children should visit libraries and the young people’s focus group believed that children should start with books before progressing onto reading on screens. Indeed they advocated an emphasis on children in libraries.

70. Issues in relation to the Lori Ni service were highlighted in that some parents expressed a degree of frustration with the practice of library books provided by this service being only available in school and not for home loan. There were also reports that school staff would remove Lori Ni books from pupils in classes to be put away until the next visit in case they were lost.

71. Overwhelmingly libraries were perceived as ‘safe’ places and the location and convenience of the library particularly in relation to the school and walking routes to and from is an important factor.

72. For both parents of young children and adult users the physical experience of browsing through books seems to be an aspect of static libraries which they particularly appreciate:

“A library link (drop off/pick up point) or the mobile service diminishes the magic of browsing and coming across the unexpected.”

5. Quantitative results and analysis

72. Details of the methods used and the response rates are given in Section 3 above. The quantitative results are presented separately from the thematic qualitative analysis as they address all the central themes of the consultation exercise by requiring participants to list, order and rank service priorities and essential elements.

5.1 Future and essential service priorities

73. All groups surveyed for the consultation were asked to rank order a series of future service priorities via different methods. The list of service priorities are given in Appendix 5.

74. In accordance with current ethical guidelines, the views of children were obtained solely via the questionnaire. 500 questionnaires were distributed to this group, 100 were returned by a sample of

children in the age range 6 – 11, giving a response rate of 20% with none spoilt or partially completed.⁴⁵

75. The results from the adult user groups in relation to future service priorities are derived from a combination of data obtained from both hard copy and on-line questionnaires, together with the results obtained from a similar exercise conducted during drop-in sessions.⁴⁶

76. In addition to the above, a similar but not identical exercise was undertaken with the following targeted focus groups who were asked to list and rank order 'essential' services in small groups

- Young people (age 17-23)
- Older Peoples Council
- Parents Groups

Children/Lori Ni users: priorities

77. In relation to the request to list, rank and order priorities, the distribution of responses by age in the sample of 100 children aged 6 – 11 is:

6-8 (n = 15)
9-11 (n= 80)
No answer: (n=5)

78. The following pie charts show the distribution of service priorities by participants who expressed preferences.

Figure 1: Priority 1 Children/Lori Ni users

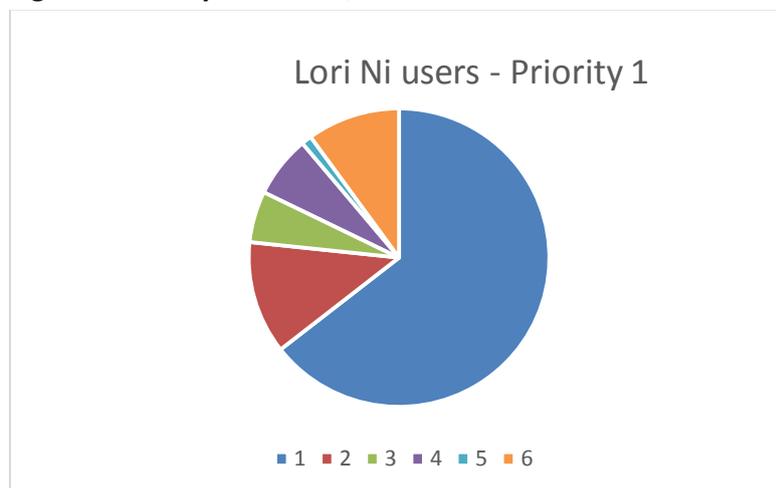
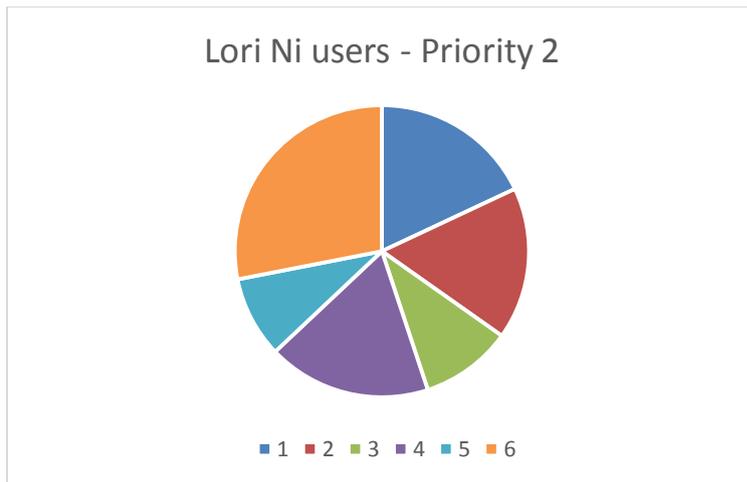


Figure 2: Priority 2 Children/Lori Ni users

⁴⁵ See also Section 3 para 17.

⁴⁶ NB In 44% of the hard copy questionnaires the responses to the rank order question were nil or spoilt.



KEY

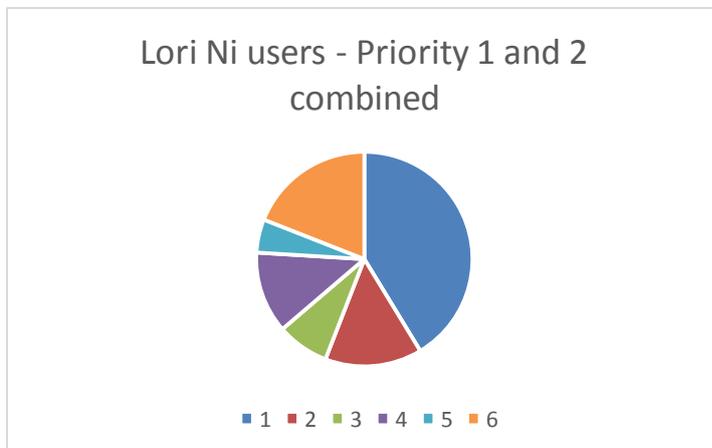
- 1 . Able to borrow paper books
- 2 . Events e.g. Summer Reading Challenge
- 3 . Use the computer
- 4 . Able to borrow e-books
- 5 . Able to borrow kindles or i-pads
- 6 . Libraries open after school

Priorities 1 and 2 Results:

- ‘To be able to borrow books’ was first place choice for priority 1, with 64% of respondents choosing this option.
- ‘Events e.g. reading challenge’ was the 2nd place choice for priority 1 at 12%
- ‘Open libraries after school hours’ was the 3rd place choice for priority 1 at 10%, BUT ‘open libraries after school hours’ was the most selected priority 2 at 28%
- ‘borrow paper books and also e-books’ were joint 2nd place priority 2 at 18% each
- ‘Events e.g. reading challenge’ was a close 3rd place priority 2 at 17%

79. Combining priorities 1 and 2 - i.e. participants chose this as either their first or second priority gives the following results as shown in Figure 3 below:

Figure 3: Priorities 1 and 2 combined - children/Lori Ni Users



KEY

- 1 . Able to borrow paper books
- 2 . Events e.g. Summer Reading Challenge
- 3 . Use the computer
- 4 . Able to borrow e-books
- 5 . Able to borrow kindles or i-pads
- 6 . Libraries open after school

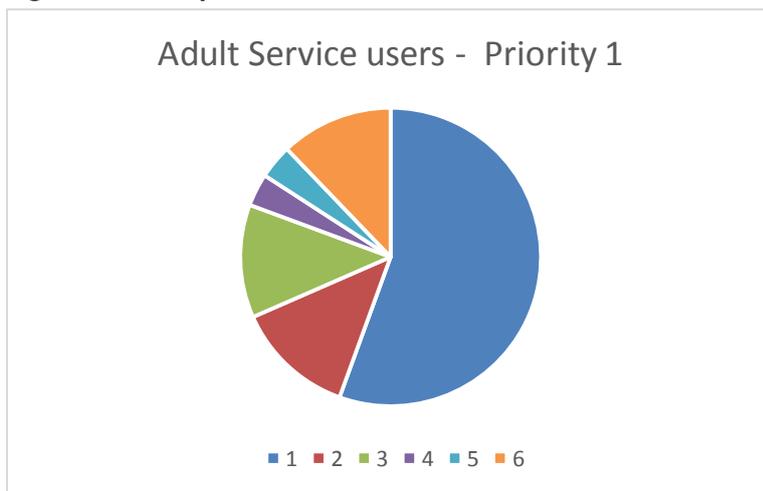
Priorities 1 and 2 combined:

1. 'To be able to borrow books' = 41%
2. 'Open libraries after school hours' = 19%
3. 'Events e.g. reading challenge' = 15%
4. 'To be able to borrow e-books' = 12%
5. 'Going on computers' = 7%
6. 'To be able to borrow reading devices' = 5%

Adult Service users: priorities

80. The following pie charts show the distribution of service priorities by participants who expressed preferences. Figure 4 shows the percentage proportions for priority 1 listings by this group.

Figure 4: Priority 1 Adult Service users



KEY

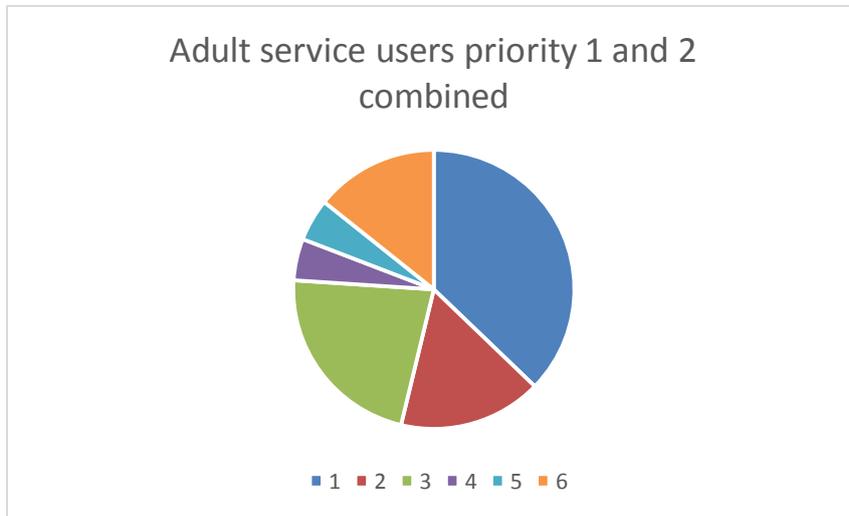
- 1 = A broad range of print and digital books
- 2 = Events and activities
- 3 = Free access to computers
- 4 = Reading devices for loan
- 5 = Access to digital reference material
- 6 = Extend and adapt opening hours of main libraries

Priority 1 results:

1. 'A broad range of print and digital books' = 56%.
2. 'Events and activities' = 13%
3. 'Free access to computers' and 'Extend and adapt opening hours of main libraries' = 12%
5. 'Access to digital reference material' and 'reading devices for loan' = 4% .

81. Combining priorities 1 and 2 - i.e. participants chose this as either their first or second priority gives the following results, as shown in Figure 5 below:

Figure 5: Priorities 1 and 2 combined - Adult Service users



KEY

- 1 = A broad range of print and digital books
- 2 = Events and activities
- 3 = Free access to computers
- 4 = Reading devices for loan
- 5 = Access to digital reference material
- 6 = Extend and adapt opening hours of main libraries

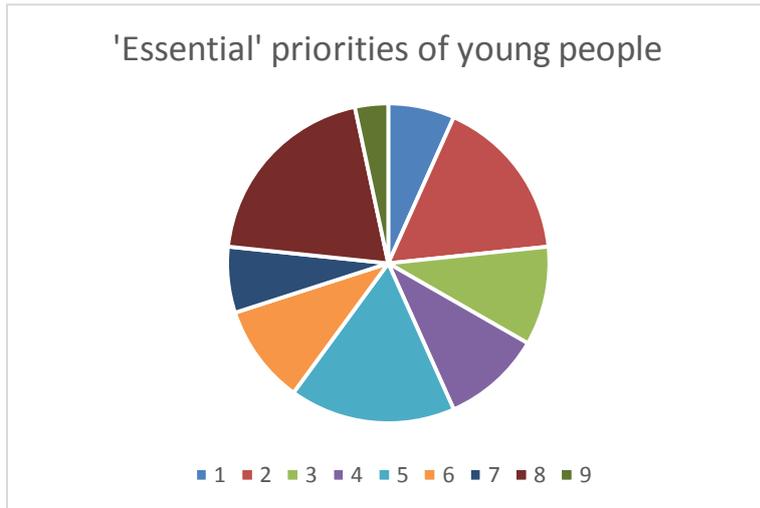
Priorities 1 and 2 combined:

- 1. 'A broad range of books' =37%
- 2. 'Free access to computers' = 22%
- 3. 'Events and activities' = 16%
- 4. 'Extend and adapt opening hours of main libraries' = 14%
- 5. 'Access to digital reference material' and 'Reading devices for loan' = 5%.

Focus groups: Results

82. Figure 6 shows the top nine essential library service elements identified by the focus group held with Young people (17 – 23), sample size = 10 .

Figure 6: Essential service elements - Young People focus group



KEY

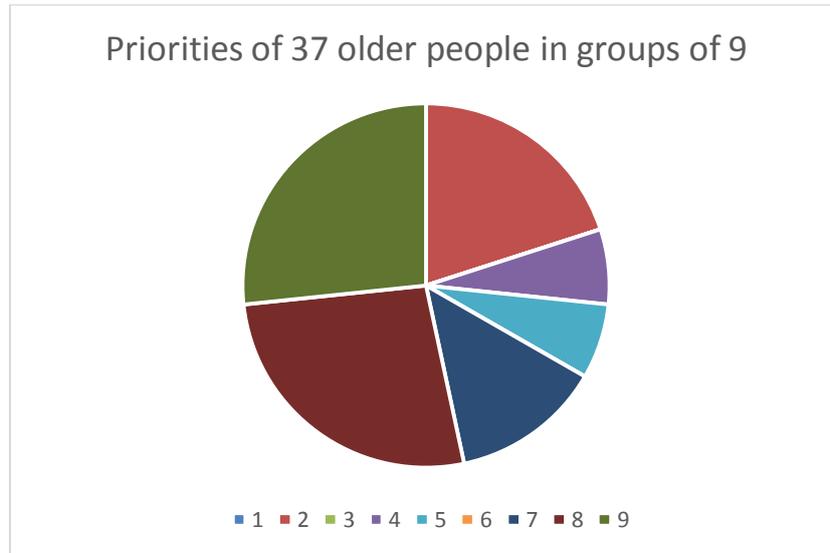
- 1 = Digital reading equipment
- 2 = Free access to computers
- 3 = Events and activities
- 4 = Flexible and longer opening hours for main libraries
- 5 = Lori Ni for children and young people
- 6 = Digital books to borrow
- 7 = Wide range of printed books
- 8 = Library service to homes of vulnerable people
- 9 = Mobile library

Essential elements results:

- 1. Home library service for vulnerable adults' = 20%
- 2. Lori Ni for children and young people' and 'Free access to computers' = 17%
- 4. 'Events and activities', 'Flexible and longer opening hours' and 'Digital books' =10%
- 7. 'Wide range of printed books' and 'e-reading devices' = 7%
- 9. 'Mobile library' =3%

83. Figure 7 shows the essential library service elements identified by the focus group held with Members of the Older People's Council - sample size = 37 in groups of nine. The categories 'e-reading devices', 'digital books', 'events and activities' were not listed by this group as essential. This should not be interpreted as indicating that this group does not value these services at all; rather they are not categorised as 'essential' by them when presented with a choice.

Figure 7: Essential service elements Older People’s Council



KEY

- 1 = Digital reading equipment
- 2 = Free access to computers
- 3 = Events and activities
- 4 = Flexible and longer opening hours for main libraries
- 5 = Lori Ni for children and young people
- 6 = Digital books to borrow
- 7 = Wide range of printed books
- 8 = Library service to homes of vulnerable people
- 9 = Mobile library

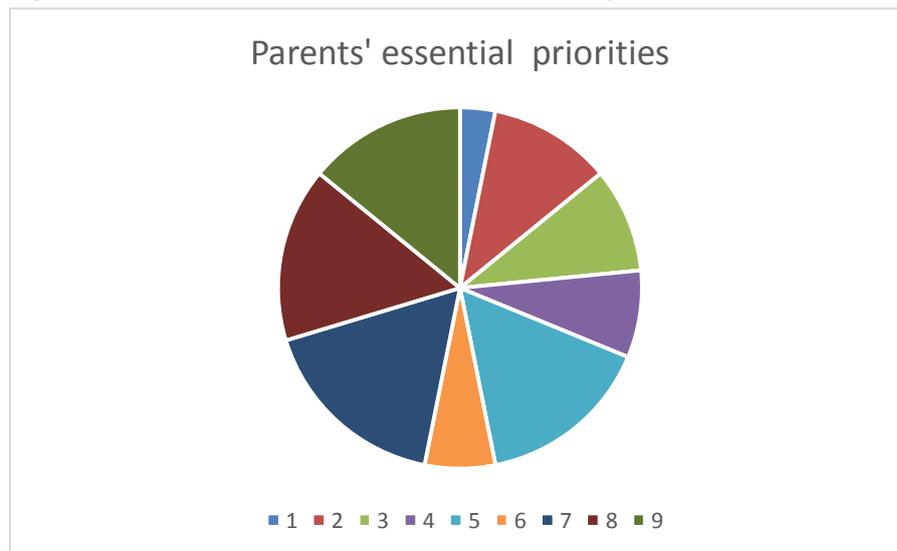
Essential elements results:

- 1. ‘Home library service for vulnerable adults’ and ‘Mobile library’ = 27%
- 3. ‘Free access to computers’ = 20%
- 4. ‘Wide range of printed books’ = 13%
- 5. ‘Lori Ni for children and young people’ and ‘Flexible and longer opening hours’ = 7%

84. Figure 8 shows the essential library service elements identified by the focus group held with Parent groups⁴⁷.

⁴⁷ NB two vulnerable adults and some children present.

Figure 8: Essential service elements Parents' Groups



KEY

- 1 = Digital reading equipment
- 2 = Free access to computers
- 3 = Events and activities
- 4 = Flexible and longer opening hours for main libraries
- 5 = Lori Ni for children and young people
- 6 = Digital books to borrow
- 7 = Wide range of printed books
- 8 = Library service to homes of vulnerable people
- 9 = Mobile library

Essential elements results:

- 1. 'Wide range of printed books' = 17%
- 2. 'Home library service for vulnerable adults' and 'Lori Ni for children and young people' = 15%
- 4. 'Mobile library' = 14%
- 5. 'Free access to computers' = 11%
- 6. 'Events and activities' = 9%
- 7. 'Flexible and longer opening hours' = 8%
- 8. 'Digital books' = 6%
- 9. 'e-reading devices' = 3%

Children/Lori Ni users: reading habits/preferences

85. Finally, the participants in the children's groups were also asked to list their current reading habits and preferences. The results are

- 51% read hard copy/paper books only
- 35% read both hard copy/paper and e books
- 12% read using e devices such as tablets, smartphones, Kindles and so on.

The above results may appear surprising for this age group. However, as indicated earlier, this is merely an indicative, illustrative sample. The seeming preference for hard copy/paper materials may in part be reflective of a number of factors, singly or in combination. Access to hardware and e-materials could be one factor, but also it may reflect a desire to please and give the answers the participants anticipate the questioner wishes to see/hear - a common syndrome in market research surveys and interviewing generally.

6. Conclusions

- a. In the face of an increasingly difficult financial situation Gwynedd Council has to balance what it needs to do to fulfil its obligations under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964⁴⁸, meet user needs and expectations with other heavy demands on its budget. As one subset of Gwynedd's population the Public Library Service users who participated in the 2015 Consultation expressed strong views and were generally resistant to change since they have little understanding of, or sympathy with the budget cuts which the Council is facing.
- b. The draft vision and strategy '*More than Books*' does not fully recognise that library buildings perform important roles beyond books and information provision, in that they act as public spaces and social hubs in many communities and in relation to:
 - mental health - for example in the alleviation and prevention of dementia
 - prevention of anti-social behaviour
 - education - facilitating and supporting the acquisition of literacy and social skills
 - reducing the county's carbon footprint
 - contributing to the local economy
 - social cohesion on the basis of age, language or by assimilating newcomers.Furthermore many of these contribute towards the aims of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- c. It is no longer financially sustainable for Gwynedd Library Service to continue to maintain a range of buildings for library purposes only, with stock sitting on shelves not available, and computers not accessible for much of the time, due to the buildings being open on a part-time basis only. This is the case despite continuous pleas by users for the Council to retain library buildings even if they are open for fewer hours per week.
- d. The new library service provision needs to develop and change gradually so that users become familiar with changes and have an opportunity to change their own behaviour and usage patterns.
- e. Changes and adaptations need to be incorporated across the board at all service delivery points and in all communities in order to answer the needs of users and to fulfil the service's requirements to be sustainable and fit for the future.

⁴⁸ Her Majesty's Stationery Office (1964) *Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964*. Available: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/75>

- f. Gwynedd Council needs to ensure that its Library Service meets the current standards for Public Libraries as issued by the Welsh Government⁴⁹ in order to fulfil its statutory obligations. However in order to make the substantial budget cuts required under *Challenge Gwynedd*, to make it fit for purpose in the 21st century and meet the needs of users, Gwynedd Council requires a service model which makes it attractive for users to either:
- visit a main library
 - visit a library authority-led community managed library⁵⁰
 - visit a mobile library
 - access the Library Service on-line
- g. The new library service provision will need to ensure that the following factors are met as fully as possible at each service delivery point:
- convenient opening/visiting times,
 - high standard of service,
 - attractive range of items and services,
 - opportunities to socialise informally,
 - ease of access,
 - convenient links to transport.
- It is also desirable to provide opportunities for users to either browse regularly updated collections or to be introduced to new books and authors.
- h. Different communities have different capacities, capabilities and desires to become involved and shoulder responsibility in relation to libraries and no one model will suit all situations. Communication with regards to volunteer engagement will need to be handled carefully and gradually.
- i. Volunteers could play a role to extend and enrich the library experience in:
- static libraries
 - back room distribution
 - events and training sessions
 - on mobile library/home visits
 - transport
 - fundraising

in **support** of professional salaried staff if staff and volunteers receive training. However the current low staffing levels affect the capacity of staff to manage volunteers and users may be resistant to any volunteer scheme. Special skills, communication and experience are required.

⁴⁹ Welsh Government (2014) *Libraries making a difference: the fifth quality framework of Welsh Public Library Standards 2014-2017*. Available: <http://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/140425wpls5en.pdf>

⁵⁰ *Guidance on Community Managed Libraries and the Statutory Provision of Public Library Services in Wales*. Available: <http://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/150522community-managed-libraries-en.pdf>

- j. Whilst the opportunity to browse through and handle physical books is valued by many users, digital/on-line solutions could contribute if introduced sensitively, such as users being invited via a phone call or email to visit a library building or link to view books selected for them, based on their previous usage.
- k. Gwynedd Library buildings currently provide essential free computer access for sectors of the population in many communities, some of which have low digital inclusion rates. For the reason explained in point c. Gwynedd Council may not be able to continue to support some of these buildings into the future.
- l. Library buildings and their staff fulfil a valuable role in relation to the Welsh language within a range of communities throughout the county and play a significant role in some.
- m. Overall the number of Gwynedd Library Service users is in decline due to:
 - the older age-profile of users
 - the onset of the digital age making library buildings less relevant to younger people.
 However user trends in Penygroes library suggest that with a concerted effort and on-going marketing it is possible to increase user numbers even amongst younger users.
- n. The service delivery model will need to take into account a continuing increase in home library service users but also with this, a need not to diminish the 'service' aspect where staff spend time with users in their homes i.e. not to focus on the number of users only.
- o. Gwynedd Library Service, in cooperation with schools and the education service, needs to continue to develop and adapt in order to provide essential reading material for children, in and out of schools, to support their education and assist literacy skills and to increase user numbers into the future.

Recommendations

The Strategy/Vision

a. To amend core aim 3 from: 'Promote the use of the service's resources and libraries as multifunctional centres for the community to use' to 'Support and promote the use of the service and its buildings as multifunctional informal and formal community spaces and services beyond books'.

b. Amend a key service area/core theme reflecting the above to

Promoting the health and well-being of individuals and communities.

c. Consider incorporating actions under the above which reflect the important role of the service and libraries in relation to community cohesion, mental health, social inclusion, the local economy and the Welsh language.

The provision

d. To deliver a more cost-effective and efficient service, there is a need to offer a wider range of library service models than presently provided (+/-20 hours static or mobile library service), either as an individual solution or in combination with another, as outlined in Recommendations e- q below.

e. To create a variety of service models to improve and match service availability/opening hours with actual usage patterns by focussing on user needs. Particular attention needs to be paid to harmonising physical access/opening hours with local public transport timetables and work patterns.

f. Consider offering Community managed library services in the 8 libraries currently open less than 20 hours per week in addition to the 9 full-time libraries. To ensure that these are eligible to be considered as part of the statutory provision, establish Model C libraries – library authority-led community libraries - as recommended in *The Independent Trust and Community Libraries in Wales Report* (2014) (p.30)⁵¹ endorsed by the 2015 Welsh Government *Guidance on Community Managed Libraries and the Statutory Provision of Public Library Services in Wales* (p. 17).⁵² Such services should meet the 18 Core Entitlements outlined in the 2014 fifth Welsh Public Library Standards Framework⁵³.

g. To move towards a more centralised storage and delivery system for CDs, DVDs, print based and electronic materials [‘the British Library - Boston Spa service’ model] to support the whole range of library provision in order to avoid stock sitting on shelves in closed library buildings. The system and process to be overseen and managed by salaried staff but delivered operationally by trained volunteers via the range of buildings and mobile service or via other community facilities such as leisure facilities and schools.

h. Design and deliver a programme of activities and services in the 9 larger libraries to promote digital inclusion. These could be delivered by public library staff with the help of dedicated user groups derived from all the communities to pilot and advise on any new activities and services. The 9 libraries in the long term would lead on the e-resources and deliver face to face training as new services are rolled out to communities. Volunteers could support these developments by undertaking routine tasks such as book issue/return.

i. To increase literacy levels amongst children and young people, improve access to e-resources by providing e-book readers for loan in addition to e-materials (books, magazines and audio books) already supplied under the terms of the “ECALM” initiative (*Every Child a Library Member*)⁵⁴ .

⁵¹ Roberts, D.H.E. (2014) *Independent Trusts and Community Libraries in Wales: Research into the nature of the current and planned provision, December 2014, commissioned by the Welsh Government*. Available: <http://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/150211-independent-trusts-community-libraries-en.pdf>

⁵² Welsh Government (2015) *Guidance on Community Managed Libraries and the Statutory Provision of Public Library Services in Wales*. Available: <http://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/150522community-managed-libraries-en.pdf>

⁵³ Welsh Government (2014) *Libraries making a difference: the fifth quality framework of Welsh Public Library Standards 2014-2017*. Available: <http://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/140425wpls5en.pdf>

⁵⁴ Gwynedd piloted this scheme; for details see <http://www.cilip.org.uk/cilip-cymru-wales/news/every-child-member>

j. To support Recommendation a. above and in conjunction with f, to explore possible partnerships with relevant community groups/organisations and devise methods and activities to enable libraries to fulfil their potential as multifunctional formal and informal community spaces and promote health and well-being beyond supply and loan of resources.

k. Enlist an organisation with a proven track record in and experience of the voluntary sector, such as Mantell Gwynedd, to assist in recruiting suitable volunteers to help deliver all models of library provision and service points as appropriate.

l. Institute a planned volunteer recruitment and training programme to incorporate general training in service delivery and more specialist training in technology support and delivery, together with ancillary activities such as transporting library users to nearest library, fundraising and accompanying mobile library drivers to undertake home visits. Consideration should also be given to the introduction of a programme of training for salaried staff to enable them to manage and deliver new service models outlined above and volunteer staff effectively and efficiently.

m. Improve signposting to the whole breadth of library services including buildings, mobile services, inter-library loan facility and home visits – virtually and physically.

n. Refresh the marketing and communication of Gwynedd Council services as a whole including libraries in order to promote a local integrated service offer. To endeavour to run particular marketing campaigns over a 3 – 5 year period in order to build up a sustained effort to ultimately reverse the decline in user numbers, with a long term aim of increasing usage.

o. To explore possible opportunities for new partnerships or to develop existing arrangements with:

- Partneriaeth Ogwen at Bethesda
- the Post Office or Community Council at Criccieth
- Antur Nantlle at Penygroes
- the local primary school or social enterprise, Menter Fachwen, at Deiniolen
- GP surgery at Nefyn or social enterprise at Congl Meinciau, Botwnnog
- the Community Centre/Community Council at Llanberis,
- Ysgol Ardudwy Secondary School at Harlech,
- Cwmni Deudraeth at Penrhyndeudraeth.

p. To provide sufficient free computer access in alternative local public buildings/community service points at convenient times and conditions, for example leisure centres, schools and so forth if access to library buildings does not continue in specific communities.

q. Continue to employ Welsh speaking staff and actively recruit Welsh speaking volunteers to fulfil any front of house duties. Retain a broad selection of Welsh books in order to maintain the important role of libraries with regard to the Welsh language.

APPENDICES

- APPENDIX 1 Welsh Government (2014) Libraries making a difference
The fifth quality framework of Welsh Public Library Standards 2014 – 2017
- APPENDIX 2a Questionnaire - Consultation on the Library Service (adults)
APPENDIX 2B Questionnaire - Consultation on the Library Service (children)
- APPENDIX 3 Discussion Outline for Drop-in Sessions Part time Libraries
- APPENDIX 4 Discussion Outline Drop-in sessions Main Libraries
- APPENDIX 5 Gwynedd Library Service Priorities
- APPENDIX 6 Consultation evidence and correspondence
- APPENDIX 7 Comments and feedback part-time libraries
- APPENDIX 8 Comments and feedback main libraries
- APPENDIX 9 Income generation suggestions