

Libraries

Your views matter

Frequently asked questions **Library consultation**

Updated December 2014

1. Public Libraries are a statutory service; don't your proposals contravene the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964?

As well as the legal requirements for us to provide public library services, we know that library services are an important part of communities in North Yorkshire and an important part of the service we provide. However, how we provide that service has to change. The level of savings required is such that we cannot afford to run as many libraries as we currently do. We are proposing keeping open our busiest libraries and are proposing having staff working alongside volunteers in a further 5 key centres of population. These 12 libraries account for 70% of our overall business. With the development of our digital offer making services available on-line, professional support of community managed libraries and the delivery of services via our mobile vehicle, we believe our proposals will continue to meet statutory requirements.

2. Many people rely on the library and may not be able to travel to one many miles away. How are you going to mitigate the impact on them?

We are making efforts to reduce the impact of the service changes on those in remote communities. Our proposals include working with communities to preserve services through supporting the transfer of some existing libraries to community management. Other steps, which include investment in digital resources to make library services available on-line, our Home Library Service ensuring people who cannot get to the library due to a disability or infirmity can get books delivered to their own homes and the Supermobile service visiting key rural communities, will help to reach more isolated areas.

We have undertaken an equalities impact assessment which is available to view on the council's website, www.northyorks.gov.uk/libraryconsultation

3. Will library staff lose their jobs?

The library service has already made savings of £2m since 2010. The requirement to save another £1.6m over the next 5 years and a move to increased community managed services will inevitably have an impact on staff. We will still need paid staff in the Core and Hybrid libraries, although their roles will change to reflect the greater involvement of communities and volunteers. The council has a support package in place to help staff through any staffing restructure process and, where possible, staff who do not secure a place in the new structure will be redeployed. However, given the scale of the financial challenge facing the council, some redundancies are expected.

4. What will happen if no group in my community comes forward- what sort of library service will we be able to access?

Every effort will be made to work with communities who wish to retain their library to enable them to do so. However, if a community is unable or unwilling to take on the running of the existing library service, the library may close, as funding isn't available to maintain the current number of libraries. It is proposed that council staffed libraries will remain in key locations and it is hoped that a network of community managed services will develop. The Home Library Service will also be available to those who qualify and a mobile service will visit some communities. Many library services, including ebooks, are now available on line.

5. How much do community led libraries cost to set up and run and how does this compare with running and staffing a branch?

There are no typical figures for the costs of running community led libraries, as experience has shown us that these can be very different. We do have details of the current costs and income for each library, (available on the council website, www.northyorks.gov.uk/library consultation) and a package of support will be available for community led libraries, depending on the range of services to be provided. We will work closely with communities that are interested in taking over their library to look at costs.

6. What support will the council offer to communities that come forward to run a library?

The council will continue to provide the professional elements of the service, including book stock, access to specialist on-line services, advice and guidance from the professional team based at the Core libraries and development for volunteers. We already have excellent relationships where community led libraries are working in this way, for example using service level agreements which detail what each partner will provide.

For groups wishing to take on the running of the library, a package of support is available that will include advice and guidance, training for volunteers and support with ICT. Support will also be available through the council's team of community officers and from the voluntary sector.

7. Why can't you look at reducing management and other back office costs?

Across the council, since 2010, the reduction in back office and managerial posts has been well over 20 per cent, with reductions in the front line at around 3 per cent. For the library service, back office costs, management reductions and changes in the way staff work have contributed to over £1m in savings. This latest round of budget reductions will see the library service budget being almost half of what it was 4 years ago and this requires significant change. We feel that the proposals we have set out, with a community managed model, is the best solution for North Yorkshire, still supported by professional staff, but enabling volunteers to take on some of the front facing role.

8. What timescales are you working to for handover to communities or closure?

The consultation will run until the 8th February 2015 after which the responses will be analysed and a report prepared for presentation to executive members in June 2015. It is anticipated that discussions on options would begin with possible partners and community groups during July to September 2015, prior to a final report to executive members in the autumn of 2015. If the proposals are accepted, we would expect to see community managed libraries operating in early in 2017.

9. What about the buildings? Are you looking to sell them?

Selling off assets is not the focus of this exercise however the council is looking at solutions to make the best use of the buildings that it owns. This will require detailed discussions with interested parties and potential partners such as town/parish councils and other agencies who want to work with us to maintain services in their locality. We will work with local communities on the solution that works best in each area.

10. What will happen at the end of the consultation process?

At the end of the consultation period in February, the responses will be analysed and will be used to inform the report to Executive council members before a decision is made in June 2015.

11. What happens if the consultation suggests a different solution or way forward?

Should the consultation suggest different options, these would be reflected in the report to executive members in June 2015. This report would include any revised proposals or recommendations.

12. Why don't you just reduce opening hours and staffing at all the libraries?

Reducing opening hours and staffing at all libraries won't deliver the level of savings required. Losing a further £1.6 million from the budget makes it impossible for the council to staff all libraries, even at a most basic level. The service has a number of fixed costs, e.g. for ICT, books and other materials and delivery vans, which are essential to run a library service. We plan to reduce these costs as far as possible, but they would still amount to nearly £1.5 million.

13. Why don't you replace some staff with volunteers at libraries and have volunteers working alongside paid staff?

Under the proposals, volunteer support is going to be needed at all libraries, in all cases working alongside paid staff in order to continue to deliver services.

14. Is this really a consultation or has the council already made up its mind?

Whilst we think that the proposals present the best way to deal with the financial challenges faced, this is a consultation and we are genuinely interested in your views. The last consultation on the library service in 2011 led to significant changes to the original proposals, so we are aware that things may change.

15. Why don't you use more mobile libraries to provide services across the county?

Our mobile fleet was removed in 2011 due to the cost of delivering the service and because the service was underused. Our Supermobile currently visits key rural communities.

16. Will the Supermobile be affected?

Our proposals include the continuing of the Supermobile service and a review will be carried out to ensure that it is used as effectively as possible.

17. What is the purpose of the Information events set up at each library?

The information events are intended as an informal drop in session where senior library managers will be in attendance to answer queries about the library consultation, what the proposals mean for different libraries and any other questions people may have. Whilst we are there to listen to people’s views, it is less a ‘have your say’ session as an opportunity to learn more about the proposals and their implications prior to filling in the consultation survey.

A representative from the Stronger Communities’ team will also be there. The work of the ‘stronger’ team is an important component in mitigating the impact of cuts across the wider Council and they are there to provide information about their work and how that can help libraries and communities.

18. Are there plans to share buildings to help reduce costs?

Libraries, whether County Council managed or community managed can be considered for other uses to form a community hub whilst maintaining the core library provision. This is dependent on lease arrangements, available space, negotiation, whether it is of benefit to the community and whether alternative buildings would be more suitable.

19. Is the intention to sell library buildings to make the library savings?

It is not the intention to sell buildings. The Library Service needs to make an on-going saving of £1.6m. One off ‘windfalls’ from sale of buildings will not help us to do that and any money from sales of buildings would not go back into the library service budget.

The library service is working to find solutions to retain services in communities. Where a community comes forward to take on the library service we would look to pass on the building at a peppercorn rent. If a community does not come forward and a library closes, a decision may be taken corporately to sell the building.

20. What savings has the library service made already?

The library service has already made savings of £2m between 2010 and 2014 through reducing its backroom staff, reducing opening hours and staffing across all libraries, renegotiating contracts with suppliers, reducing its management team and working in partnership to share costs. A further reduction to £4.2m by 2020 means we cannot deliver services as we do now and fundamental changes in delivery methods are required to maintain front-line provision of services.

Hybrid libraries

Hybrid libraries would operate with a County Council paid member of library staff managing day to day operational working alongside a community group or organisation volunteers. As these libraries are too busy to open with single staffing, it is proposed that the opening hours be dependent on the availability of volunteers recruited and managed by a community management group. The member of staff will work alongside the volunteers supporting, training and advising to ensure that the Service Agreement requirements are met, thus ensuring future sustainability and consistency of delivery. The County Council will pay the revenue costs for the premises as well as those relating to books, IT etc. The community group do not have to raise funds to maintain the building, however, they can raise funds for providing additional activities and events or providing equipment/furniture to add value to the service, or alternatively to fund additional staffing.

1. What contingency plans does the county council have if the community is not prepared to participate in the running and management of a library?

In the case of Core and Hybrid Libraries, if no volunteers came forward, there is insufficient funding available for staffing to maintain current opening hours. The result would be that opening hours would be significantly reduced.

2. What will 'management' of a hybrid library entail?

A community management group would be required to recruit and manage the volunteers and work with County Council staff to ensure that agreed policies and procedures and other requirements as set out in the locally agreed Service Level Agreement are followed.

3. What cover would be provided if the paid member of staff in the hybrid library was ill or on holiday?

There would be some 'cover' built into the Library Service budget to provide a member of staff in the event of holidays and sickness. However, cover for unplanned absence cannot be guaranteed as it will depend on staff availability.

4. What would be the composition of the Community Library Group and how many people would be part of it?

There is no set rule for this though past experience indicates that a group of 6-8 is usually sufficient to form a management committee, depending on the skills they are bringing and their time availability.

5. Apart from recruiting and maintaining a pool of volunteers what other 'obligations' would a hybrid library management group have?

This would be determined by the Service Level Agreement drawn up between the group and the County Council and would be negotiated on an individual site level. The primary 'obligation' would be to provide volunteers to enable opening hours to be maintained or at least not significantly reduced. Volunteers will have an 'obligation' to attend training sessions as relevant and required.

6. How many volunteers would be required to support a hybrid library?

This would depend on the time volunteers are able to give. Although volunteers would be working with a paid member of staff, it is anticipated that a pool of approximately 70 volunteers would be required to manage and operate a library with opening in the region of 35 hours per week. These volunteer roles would not necessarily be engaged in the day to day operation but may include volunteers fulfilling a number of added value activities such as specific events or being part of the management committee.

7. What does “building costs” mean?

The building costs include rates, rent, utilities, cleaning - However in Hybrid Libraries, The County Council would continue to pick up all these costs.

8. What costs (other than premises costs) would have to be met in hybrid libraries?

For Hybrid libraries the County Council would be responsible for infrastructure and staff costs. The community group would need to pay for volunteer insurance cover. The community group do not have to raise funds to maintain the building, however, they can raise funds for providing additional activities and events or providing equipment/ furniture to add value to the service, or alternatively to fund additional staffing.

9. Who would be responsible for raising income to meet those costs and where is that income likely to come from?

Income may be raised in a number of ways, in addition Community groups are able to apply for funds from a number of sources not available to local authorities. Support and advice will be available through the Stronger Communities team.

10. What discussions are taking place with district councils and other groups and organisations for rental space in the library?

One of the roles of the Stronger Communities team is to identify partnership opportunities and they are already having discussions with a wide range of organisations including District Councils.

11. Who will set fees for facilities usage?

Fees and charges are set by the County Council and are reviewed every year. In the interest of consistency, charges for computer use, fines, reservations and other services will continue to be set by the County Council. For out of hours' use of the building and meeting rooms, charges for events and activities could be set on a local basis.

12. To whom would the fund raising and spending group be accountable and who would audit the group's accounts?

Accountability for any money raised by the community groups would rest with the community group, including responsibility for auditing.