

Libraries for Life

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Joint Action for Herefordshire Libraries



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Herefordshire Libraries

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J AHL (Joint Action for Herefordshire Libraries) is an independent action group. Members are drawn from all the county library friends and users' organisations, and we aim to represent the needs of all library users across the county.

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Our tree logo is used with the kind permission of Cecil County Public Library Maryland USA – but the apple is all our own!

Investing in Libraries for the Future

~ our manifesto ~

Public libraries – like the NHS - are a vital service backed by Act of Parliament. Wherever you live in the UK your local authority is bound by law to provide a comprehensive and efficient public library service.

Public libraries are also an asset and investment. They are a lifeline at the heart of our communities - the safe place where people of all ages find information and advice, learning and leisure, companionship and activity, peace and reflection. They are a gateway to local services. They help job seekers find work. They support businesses, visitors, and those seeking help.

Since 2005, Herefordshire Council has slashed library opening hours by almost 40%. That's not all. In 2013, councillors seriously considered scrapping all libraries in the county except for Hereford library. The strength of opposition from local people and hard work behind the scenes by the library service stopped this and saved our libraries. A properly funded library service is vital to the health and wellbeing of our local communities, particularly in the current changing and challenging times. Libraries need to be supported and improved, not cut back or closed. If we work constructively as partners – county, town and parish councils, library professionals, library support groups, volunteers, education and health bodies – our library service can prosper.

Representing library users throughout the county, we call on Herefordshire Council to:

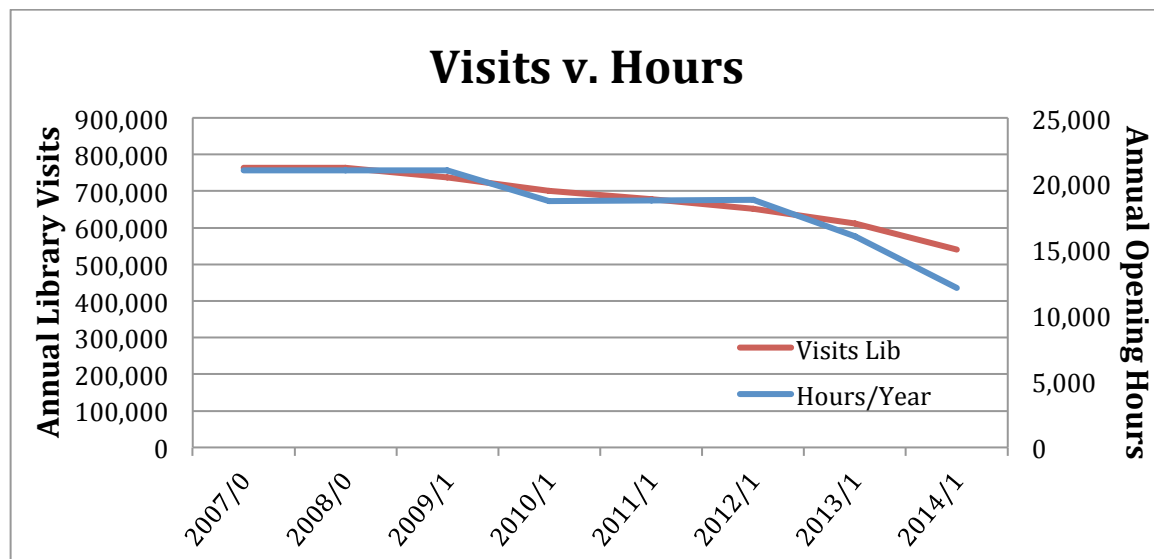
1. Recognise that the current network of libraries in our market towns and parishes is the minimum required to support our local communities and to give reasonable access to the service.
2. Invest in the current network to avoid isolating residents from access to services, learning and leisure.
3. Ensure that our library service has appropriate and sufficient professional staff, so that it can function effectively.
4. Allow the library professionals to make any decision to recruit and support volunteers, recognising that volunteers cannot be effective without the guidance of professional paid staff.
5. Support our libraries so that they can continue to develop as community hubs which can provide:
 - a range of activities and information to encourage health and well-being.
 - an economic contribution to their local communities.
 - provision of both face-to-face support and digital/online access to information and advice.
 - support for residents who need help accessing online services.
 - a key resource for the development of literacy and knowledge.

This report summarises our thinking about the service as it stands, the threats posed by the severe constraints on local authority spending, and the library service we believe the residents of Herefordshire deserve.

Where are we now?

The Big Picture

The 2014 overview of Herefordshire libraries¹ shows the county to have below average expenditure per 1000 population, a smaller number of libraries than comparable authorities, and less book stock. This suggests that even before the last round of cuts the service was being poorly supported by the authority. Library visits have dropped over the last decade but so have opening hours – by nearly 40%. Careful analysis of the relevant figures indicates that the drop in usage has followed the cut in hours, not vice versa. There has in fact been some recovery in visits per hour, especially where there has been investment and improvement as in the wonderful new library in the Ledbury Master’s House.



The professional staff numbers have been steadily reduced. In Herefordshire 50% of staffing hours are provided by volunteers.² The remaining staff work extremely hard to maintain the professionally run libraries, the volunteer libraries and the extra services like community book schemes and the delivered service, plus income generating activities like the schools service and the internal courier service. However, there is an inevitable erosion, particularly on the front line, where the library visitor’s chances of getting advice or guidance from a trained librarian are now minimal.

In a world where online access is increasingly the route to national and local services, the libraries have become a key resource in a whole new way. Those without the means or the skills to get online at home go to the library for access and support. Those who cannot carry out essential dealings with government or council departments because their broadband speed is insufficient, again head for the library.

¹ Herefordshire Libraries and market town CS Overview - Facts and Figures 2016 (final)

² ibid

There is also a serious question about the use of valuable civic resources. The fact that buildings like the superb modern library in Ross or the stunning, restored Master's House are only officially open four and a half days a week represents a false economy. Community groups can extend that usage and make the most of these iconic buildings. Although this would require some investment and support from the centre, such activity also offers opportunities for income generation.

A Rich Variety

Despite its small and scattered population and relatively small library service Herefordshire has an extraordinary variety of libraries and services. (see annexe) It can be said that, on a small scale, many of the options for library delivery have already been tested and tried locally. This rich source of experience shows that one size does not fit all. We have successful volunteer libraries like Leintwardine and Peterchurch. These are small libraries running with considerable professional back up from the library team and therefore without huge cost savings. We have the main market town libraries which carry much of the book stock for the county and provide a range of other services. This has the double benefit of creating multi service hubs (a "one stop shop" approach) and also making more economic use of the buildings. Hopefully in the not too distant future we will also have a central library worthy of a city with the culture and extraordinary heritage of Hereford.

The old mobile library service has been replaced by Delivered Services which currently supply about 160 housebound people and around 30 nursing/care homes. There are twelve community-run book schemes that operate from village halls, community centres and village shops, providing a focus for community activity. These are not linked to the library network, but are supported by the central library service team and get a regular exchange of library books on a six or eight week basis. Many contribute to a wider 'hub' in their communities, operating alongside village coffee mornings while contributing to the resilience and sustainability of village markets and shops.

Public Support

At every point in the service you will find supporters – regular users and occasional visitors, young Mums and elderly computer users, students and business people, volunteers, campaigners and fund raisers – all of whom recognise the value of a service which is delivered locally and provides access to culture, leisure, education, business information, local history, health advice and self-help. Some join our user groups – some just assume the library will always be there and are horrified when we tell them it is not so. All of them recognise this to be a really valuable and inclusive grass roots service.

Why do our libraries matter?

Herefordshire Council has defined four key priorities.

- 1. Enable residents to live safe, healthy and independent lives**
- 2. Keep children and young people safe and give them a great start in life**
- 3. Support the growth of our economy**
- 4. Secure better services, quality of life and value for money**

Libraries provide a proven contribution to each of those priorities and so the protection and improvement of the library service is a direct contribution to local priorities.

Enable residents to live safe, healthy and independent lives

Libraries have always been sources of information – from the staff and from the stock. Whilst the face-to-face contact with trained librarians has sadly diminished and needs to be restored, other sources have increased. With more information being provided online, access to the internet has become more important. For many residents this is done via the library. This includes both direct and indirect health support and information, the very successful “Books on Prescription” and Shelf Help projects. Libraries encourage independence, self-development and social interaction. They are a safe place, open to all, providing service, welcome and support to people from every demographic and economic sector. They are the first source of help to many new arrivals in an area – whether tourists, new residents or migrant workers. Research indicates that people who use the library regularly tend to make less call on social care and health services.³

Keep children and young people safe and give them a great start in life

Libraries are a “safe place” where children can begin to achieve some independence, develop creativity, and learn to interact with people from beyond the family circle. They are a priceless source to young families, allowing children to learn to love books and reading without the constraints of limited incomes. Research shows that children with the library habit do not suffer the skill drop during the school holidays which is common with their non reading peers. Literacy is a crucial skill providing the key foundation for education, and libraries foster that skill. They also allow children to develop their own tastes and interests outside the boundaries of increasingly tight school curricula. Teenagers use the library as a quiet place for homework, research and revision, a place to expand their cultural horizons and a source of self-help books at times when asking for help seems quite impossible.

Support the growth of our economy,

The Council’s own figures⁴ show Herefordshire to be a low wage, high working hours economy, with a higher than average number of small businesses (those with fewer than 10 employees). There are also issues around employment deprivation and adult skills. Many businesses, especially but not exclusively agricultural ones, have

³ The health and wellbeing benefits of public libraries <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/>

⁴ <https://factsandfigures.herefordshire.gov.uk>

geographic barriers to services – including online services. For any business which has broadband speed issues or a temporary loss of internet facilities the library becomes a second office –whether to fill in the DEFRA forms, contact clients, seek new staff or explore new ideas. The library gives access to research and reference materials which most small businesses or individuals cannot afford in house. For the unskilled the library may well be the starting point to self-improvement, and for the unemployed it is now vital for online jobsearch. There is also emerging evidence that the presence of public services in working areas supports and encourages local businesses:

“high streets ... have played a key role in ensuring access to important services such as health, education, transport, and culture for residents living around the high street and the wider area, especially for groups such as the elderly, the young and those on lower incomes, who generally find it more difficult to access services by private car. In areas where these services have been removed from the high street the consequences have been hugely damaging to the community cohesion of these areas.

With a growing but ageing population and increasing inequalities facing Britons, access to public services is as critical as ever. However, with such provision being threatened by public sector cuts and the issue of the decline of the high street as a place for public service provision persisting, the very foundations on which to build a vibrant high street for the future are at risk.”⁵

An independent report for Scottish Libraries⁶ found that the users of libraries place the following values on library services per visit: £24.10 in Scotland; £26.38 in Wales; and £27.27 in Northern Ireland. This theoretical monetary value is estimated via the amount users invest in using the services through their time and what they spend in the locality. When compared to the expenditure on library services, the user estimated value per visit of our survey respondents is over 6 times greater than the cost of provision in Northern Ireland, over 5.5 greater in Scotland and over 7.5 times greater in Wales. The operation of the library facilities also supports employment and supply chains locally. This results from the consumption spending of library employees (from their wages) and creating profits for the suppliers of goods and services to the libraries. These effects ‘multiply’ through the economy as the suppliers pay staff wages who then go on to spend in the locality. This research estimates that in 2012-13 the libraries supported 1,296 jobs in Scotland, 596 jobs in Wales and 327 in jobs in Northern Ireland **over and above** those directly employed by the service.

Secure better services, quality of life and value for money

All the issues covered above contribute to a higher quality of life. Improving and extending the library service would be an economic way to provide better local services. However, at a time when local government is being starved of funding the issue of value for money becomes even more significant than usual.

⁵ The Future High Street pub. <http://www.futurespacesfoundation.org>

⁶ <http://scottishlibraries.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/alma-uk-final-report-01-04-2014-1.pdf>

The justification of publicly supported libraries during periods of fiscal austerity has been brought into question, not just in England or Herefordshire, but around the world. The issue has been studied widely in the English speaking world, particularly by the academic community, and in the UK the Arts council have been active in supporting research in this area.⁷

A review of such studies in English language countries was presented in the Public Libraries News.⁸ The main question in the research was: for every £1 paid into libraries, what was the economic benefit to the community? Among the studies in this review, the following results were found:

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|---------------|-------|-------|-------|
| • Australia | £2.30 | • UK | £7.90 |
| • Australia | £3.50 | • UK | £1.60 |
| • Australia | £2.90 | • USA | £3.89 |
| • Canada | £5.63 | • USA | £2.86 |
| • Canada | £5.36 | • USA | £4.42 |
| • New Zealand | £4.00 | | |

While the eleven studies varied considerably in design and methodology, the results are consistently positive. From the highest result of £7.90 returned for every £1 spent to the lowest of £1.60, The average of the result was £4.03 return for each £1 spent.

Meanwhile a DCMS report has estimated the value to individuals of library use. A significant association was also found between frequent library use and reported wellbeing. Using libraries frequently was valued at £1,359 per person per year for library users, or £113 per person per month.⁹

⁷ http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Evidence_review_economic_contribution_libraries_2014.pdf

⁸ <http://www.publiclibrariesnews.com/reasons-for/reasons-for-libraries-values-for-money>

⁹ Quantifying and Valuing the Wellbeing Impacts of Culture and Sport April 2014 DCMS report

Our Vision for Herefordshire

The library users and supporters in the county come in all ages, locations and types – what unites them is the recognition of libraries as that rare service which joins all the dots – the starting point for the search for information, support, entertainment and development. We all want to see the county prosper and develop without losing the things we treasure, from landscape and heritage to civic values and culture. A healthy, efficient and accessible library service contributing to each of the Herefordshire Council objectives is a solid foundation for that.

We visualise a thriving well staffed library service forming a key element in the City of culture bid, a valuable cultural resource to the future University, a crucial support for business and enterprise from the traditional agricultural enterprise to the emerging knowledge economy. We consider a 21st Century library service to be vital to all sectors of the county from the toddler meeting books for the first time, to the active retired seeking stimulus and new skills.

At the heart of that service we look forward to a new and transformed Central Library in Broad Street, the heart of the service. We anticipate that the new central library will become a cultural and information hub to bring together community services, tourism, business support, digital access and a modern library display, and become a meeting place for young and old with active links to museums and archives.

As we have seen, one of interesting features of the Library Service in Herefordshire is the extraordinary variety – and that in turn gives us some clear ideas about the possibilities and risks for the future:

Volunteer Libraries

It is true that a “community library” – or volunteer library to give it a more accurate name – is possible and can be successful. Peterchurch and Leintwardine are shining examples. However, they are very small libraries in very small communities which happen to have sufficient able and willing volunteers to keep them alive. They are also successful because of the professional support from the employed library team. They do not run without staff costs. Extending this model to larger libraries simply will not work – there is too much complexity and financial responsibility. It would place too great a demand on the already over stretched pool of volunteers and it would undermine the infrastructure which allows the current volunteer libraries to function. The outcome would be the loss of the larger libraries – which is not acceptable to any of us – and probably endanger the current volunteer libraries as well.

Library “plus”

The development of the **Kington Centre** is an excellent example of using a library as the footprint of the council within a community – delivering a range of health, wellbeing and information services alongside the library role. As austerity increasingly reduces services, this kind of synergy is increasingly important and logical. The **Ross Library** model, extending the use and defraying the costs of the building through the presence of the Jobcentre is another example. Both work because they extend the essential model of the library as a place for everyone and a source of information and support. **Leominster** offers similar possibilities.

There is clearly real potential, where space permits, in creating this kind of community hub, which becomes the first port of call for visitors and residents alike and contributes to prosperous and lively high streets. What is crucial is that the buildings are open and fully staffed with professionals.

Executive Summary

Faced with funding cuts there are two basic options for Herefordshire's libraries: cut expenditure or increase income. Herefordshire Library Service is known to be one of the most cost effective in the country. There is little left that can be cut without fatally damaging the service.

Libraries are excellent value for money. National and international research shows clearly that they provide a real return on investment for individuals and communities alike. Libraries are also the Council's presence in each community. They can provide the access point to most Council services and are a key factor in the county's economy.

The way forward has to be to increase income. This can be done indirectly by continuing the achievements made so far in developing libraries as multi service hubs. Libraries are known to be uniquely safe and welcoming places, especially for young children and frail adults. With access to Council services being increasingly online, libraries are ideally placed to support this. More directly there are opportunities for hiring out space/meeting areas, running events, and merchandising.

Whilst we recognise the pressures on local budgets we believe that exploring new opportunities and investing in both premises and, most importantly, in professional staff will bring real benefits and enable the Library Service to become a crucial player in the future prosperity and well-being of Herefordshire and its residents.

Annexe:

A Portrait Gallery

As mentioned earlier Herefordshire has an astonishing range of libraries, in location, size, activity and style. Here we take a look at a few of them in the words of their own users, to get a taste of that variety and perhaps an indication of what can be achieved with further investment and support. Despite its obvious importance, we have not included the Central Library in Broad Street since it is currently closed.

The Kington Centre (Library) is a pilot for a health and wellbeing centre and is located in a very rural part of the County, with poor public transport, so many of the users rely on it for access to services and activities. The Centre provides the Herefordshire Council (HC) library service and access to the HC customer services and facilitates and promotes relevant health and wellbeing events. This includes the Healthy Lifestyle Trainer Service (public health), the Pharmacy health promotion such as blood pressure testing, WISH pop-up, Baby Play, Functional English classes, IT workshops and much more. The community library option, would still require at least one full time member of staff to mobilise and organise since everything else in Kington is already run by volunteers and library has become a catalyst to encourage a wider range of community action. Apart from the fact of limited funds, Kington Town council could face a major legal challenge if they provided additional funds to support the service since residents in the adjacent parish councils are also library users.

Ledbury Library has seen significant increase in use since the move to the Master's House. This is in line with general evidence in the UK and worldwide, that when there is investment in libraries, there is increased use. The increase in children's membership has been particularly good. Schools activities have been piloted this year which have been a huge success. Research shows that children who use libraries during the summer holidays do not suffer the dip in attainment experienced by those who don't read in the summer. Given that the Ledbury Cluster of Schools achieves results above average for the county, this is an important aspect and underpins good levels of child literacy.

The Library and Customer Services team, together with the Ledbury Library Development Group and the Friends of the Master's House, has put on a wide range of events through the year. Some of these have been supported by HLF funding and overall these have been cost neutral or generated some income. In addition, the improved library facility and the events have brought in more visitors and this has supported the economy of the town.

The Customer Services element has proved extremely important. This cannot be measured by numbers alone. We have a significant proportion of people who have low levels of, or no, computer literacy and for many, their only access to the internet is via computers at the library. This is particularly important for job seekers. Customer Services are highly valued in the town. Even residents with good levels of computer literacy struggle with the Council's website and access to services and value the support from the team.

Overall, the 'operation' in Ledbury is very complex. We note in the report to the Scrutiny Committee that there is strong emphasis on the use of volunteers. The LLDG are very aware that the 'volunteer population' in Ledbury is extremely stretched and volunteers only come forward on an ad hoc basis, preferring to avoid long term, regular commitments. Given this, and the fact that staffing libraries with volunteers does not produce much of a saving since the cost of the support staff needed increases dramatically

– the LLDG do not believe that Ledbury Library could be run by volunteers. We are clear that Ledbury Library remains a core part of the town’s economy and should be treated as an investment not a cost.

Since 2014, **Leintwardine Library** has been staffed by volunteers, with the support and supervision of qualified staff based at Leominster Library. The site costs (rent and electricity) are now funded by the Parish Council. This has been a great success. The volunteers remain enthusiastic and committed, and have become thoroughly competent in performing their duties. Library use has increased by 13%, and a new support group, Friends of Leintwardine Community Library (FOLCL), has been established. FOLCL now organises activities aimed at promoting the library as a community hub. These activities include creative writing and craft competitions for local school children, a mini-festival “Shake-fest” to mark the Shakespeare 400th anniversary, World Book Night celebrations with local authors, readings and free-book give-aways and activity mornings for younger children.

Leominster Library is well sited in the heart of the town in an attractive and easily accessed building. Like each of the other market town libraries they offer far more than “just books” and some examples of activities there in the last year include Bounce & Rhyme and Story Times each Thursday morning in term time, with up to 25 children attending each week , plus numerous other children’s craft, drama and storytime events. Adults are not neglected with talks, exhibitions , health advice, computer training, a family history course and a “murder mystery”. They also provided work experience for pupils from the local High School.

The Friends of Leominster Library would welcome the option of an Enhanced Service. Leominster Library is already multi-usage but there could be room for more especially if space is created in the Customer Services area with fewer operatives and an appointments only system to eliminate queues .

Proposals to maximise contact via the internet seem unrealistic in an area like North Herefordshire which has low % of PC ownership. We are also sceptical about the idea that "organisations" could operate libraries , covering costs with "some" support from the county library service. Even if Leominster was run entirely on site by volunteers we feel that a minimum of £50k pa would need to be guaranteed by Herefordshire Council, which seems unlikely in this climate.

Peterchurch; the library in the belltower Our small library was installed in the belltower of St.Peter’s Church, at the beginning of 2010. It was part of a new vision of using the church building for various communal purposes, and in particular to provide a much needed venue for Herefordshire Council to run its children's services (namely Sure Start) in the Golden Valley. As the mobile library service was about to be withdrawn, a space for a volunteer library was also needed. The project was funded by Grants, mainly from Herefordshire Council under its Leader project, the Big Lottery and Awards for All. An architect designed special ‘pod’ structure to contain stairs, a lift, a kitchen, an electricity board, and a mezzanine on the same level as the belltower/library, was built into the main body of the church building.

Volunteer librarians had been trained by the central library staff at Hereford beforehand, and the library is now run on a rota of about 18-20 volunteers, two afternoons a week and Saturday mornings 10am –noon. The weekdays sessions are wo-manned (no male volunteers yet) in two shifts (1-3pm and 3-5pm).

Without the help of a the dedicated professional librarians in Hereford, who deal with stock control, rotations of books to our library, a once a week delivery/pick up of reserved books/returning books, and any questions, problems, help and advice, as well as training up any new rota members, we would not be able to function and deliver the service to our village and surrounding villages. In particular, Jan Nesaratnam and Steve Jones among others have supported us throughout the years.

The library has been run for over six years now and is a very popular installation and meeting point for local people, also providing a social contact point, local news dissemination centre, support and advice.

In addition plans are afoot, and gaining momentum to expand services into the main body of the Church by relocating the volunteer-run cafe, which was open only one day a week, but which is due to re-open shortly on most weekdays, and extending the library. The office staff will be more on hand to deal with any matters arising and to welcome visitors into the newly created Hub for the Golden Valley Communities."

Ross Library is the best placed and most popular public building in Ross with 56 members of the public entering hourly, a total of 103,683 visits per year.

We have the advantage of a light and airy building that was constructed in 1988 to a design that has proved to be extraordinarily adaptable to changing demand. The Upper Floor/Mezzanine is the main working area for Library and Customer Services staff, with a rest room and kitchen. The Ground Floor houses the Library and Customer Services reception counter and enquiry desks and, since July 2014, the Job Centre Plus. The available rooms also host a range of other public services - the town's Registrar, the surgeries of local councillors, WISH and HMRC. The Dennis Potter Community Room is a reading and study space that is also available for community meetings, exhibitions, events and classes and could be further utilised. The Lower Ground Floor houses the Library shelves and back offices, the 11 public computers, and the libraries for children and teens.

The building lends itself to Enhanced Service. The tenancy of the Job Centre Plus has proved to be very successful, If appropriate staffing could be arranged it could host a wide range of evening and weekend courses. Currently the only evening when this is possible is the once-monthly Tuesday evening events of the Ross Library Development Group. Evening and weekend courses would generate new income through room rental. The introduction of a community well-being centre, with related events, classes and courses, quick health checks would be greatly welcomed, as would the consolidation of advice and support (already given) for IT training and advocacy, also for debt and finance, and for volunteering opportunities.

Ross Library is known to be a uniquely safe and welcoming environment in which staff and public have adapted to changes like electronic self-issue, online reservations etc. At the same time, responses to the most recent survey show how crucial it is for visitors to be able to browse (and introduce children to) a wide range of library stock, have the chance to access information (online as well as face to face) and IT training.

Ross and the community libraries that it supports would suffer badly from a crude cutting of staff. Instead Library and Customer Service staff who have proved their flexibility and adaptability should be retrained to further expand the range of community services that thrive on their close physical association with this much-loved Library.