

# SIEGHART REVIEW OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES



ROSS LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

Chair of Ross Library Development Group  
Dr Elinor Kelly  
7 Library Mews  
Ross on Wye HR9 7FN  
01989 764092  
[www.rldg.org.uk](http://www.rldg.org.uk)  
[rldg@deangate.co.uk](mailto:rldg@deangate.co.uk)



## Summary

In the rural county of Herefordshire where isolation is a serious issue, Herefordshire Library Service

- Recognises the vital role of public libraries – safe, welcoming public places providing an ever-widening range of services for all ....
- but struggles to maintain momentum because of budget cuts and restrictions on digital lending
- Services the growing number of volunteer-run community libraries as a means of outreach beyond the hubs ....
- but struggles to meet the multiplying demands – especially for new kinds of professional guidance and support
- Recognises digital potential and seeks to overcome the digital divide ...
- but lacks the resources to induct and support e-learners on the scale required

## Introduction

This submission has been drafted by Ross Library Development Group (RLDG) a Community Interest Group with 63 members that works closely with Herefordshire Library Service (HLS) in order to make the most effective use of Ross Town's Library while campaigning to secure a Library service across the county. Several times our members have risen to the challenge of yet another consultation and lobbied Herefordshire Council in impressive numbers of emails, letters and discussions in MP and Councillor surgeries. A core group of volunteers is involved in fundraising to meet our aims:

- Develop the Library as the hub of cultural activities in liaison with other local Societies
- Supplement purchases of resources for the Library
- Promote and support community cultural activities for Ross on Wye and the surrounding area

Ross Library is the best placed and most popular public building in Ross with between 400-600 members of the public entering daily to use the Library's facilities – bookshelves, computers, reading room, interview rooms, exhibition gallery and the enquiry desks of the Library and Customer Services. Every year the Library processes 130,000 issues of books, audio books CDs, DVDs and Games to 1500 active borrowers. Even before other services began to occupy space, the building was a hive of activity.

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 the demands of today. The Ground Floor leads down via ramp and stairs to the Lower Ground Floor which is devoted to Library services - the Children's Corner, Youth Library, Computer work stations and the open shelves of 30,000 books.

RLDG's focus has been on supporting HLS in diversifying use of the building and generating new forms of revenue. Customer Services now share the ground floor reception counter with the Library staff, at various times meeting rooms are let to the town's Registrar, local councillor and MP surgeries, advice sessions of Housing Associations, Youth Housing Support, SSAFA, the community police officers and other partner services offering personal counselling. Soon the local Job Centre will move in to rent specially adapted office and interview space.

"What's going on here is one possible solution to the library crisis; libraries sharing space with other council services" – *Michael Rosen, visiting Ross Library before his Radio4 broadcasts on the future of libraries*

The Ground Floor also houses the Dennis Potter Community Room - booked for RLDG's own evening events and coffee mornings and for exhibitions, seminars, computer classes and teenage war games. Through its events (see Annexe One) and grants RLDG has raised the funds for purchase of folding event seating and for the gate that will close entry to the Lower Ground floor in the evenings and weekends. Rental income from the Room will increase as soon as a new barrier gate is installed (to secure the library areas out of hours). Income will expand further when kitchen facilities are installed, again by means of grants raised by RLDG.

## **1. Is the current delivery of the public library service the most comprehensive and efficient?**

RLDG has discussed this question within the context of our location – Herefordshire is the most rural county in England with a population of only 183,500 - 54% of whom live in rural areas of which 44% live in the most rural locations with consequent problems of access to services. Ross is the most southerly of the five market towns and has a population of 10,580 – 21.6% have no private transport (no car or van), 27% have no qualifications, 34% live in one person households. Rural isolation is a serious issue.

Until the current round of budget cuts HLS proved to be remarkably cost effective. Herefordshire had the second lowest population and the fewest number of libraries in the West Midlands, but it also had the highest level of active borrowers per 1,000 population. Its revenue expenditure was the 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest in the West Midlands with the lowest level of book stock per 1000 population in the West Midlands, but stock quality was one of the highest in the West Midlands. HLS also had a particularly high number of housebound customers.

"The number of active borrowers is a key indication of how well the library service engages with the public. Herefordshire is in the top quartile suggesting that the library service engages well with the population when compared to the other authorities. Herefordshire comes out as being at the lowest end of the comparison (for revenue expenditure), which suggests that it is providing a low cost service." (*Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy*).

Can HLS still be regarded as efficient? If a measure of 'efficiency' is the capacity of HLS staff to work harder and faster than ever before while colleagues have left without replacement then maybe the service has become more efficient. But is this form of 'efficiency' sustainable? The demands on the remaining staff have increased to the point of exhaustion.

What can be the measure of 'comprehensive' when the public library service is in enforced retreat? HLS has sought to preserve a library service across the county by developing a two-tier model. It is continuing to run and staff Hereford Library and the five market town libraries. But it relies on volunteers to run the community libraries with increased demand on back room support from professional staff. Many libraries, both public and community, have reduced their by 20-50% within the past 12 months.

### **Digital Divide and Digital Potential**

In a rural county such as Herefordshire the digital divide is deeply felt. The Royal Geographical Society working with IBG reported the following for the UK as a whole

1 in 4 adults in the UK have never used the internet  
A third of households in the UK don't have the internet  
39% of the people in UK without access are over 65  
49% of people without access are in the lowest socio-economic groups (DE)  
70% of people who live in social housing aren't online  
80% of government interactions with the public take place with the bottom 25% of society, so failing to encourage everyone online keeps government costs high  
£560 The amount digitally excluded households are missing out on per year from not shopping and paying bills online  
*<http://www.21stcenturychallenges.org/60-seconds/what-is-the-digital-divide>*

Herefordshire is particularly vulnerable to the digital divide. Its population includes a high proportion of older people - 22% are aged over 65 (40,800 people) compared with 17% nationally. It is a low wage economy – its weekly wage is £384 compared to £512 nationally; 3.3% of working age are unemployed and 15.2% work part-time; moreover there are still geographical gaps in internet and mobile coverage. Yet, equally compelling is digital potential. Currently HLS is stuck between a rock and a hard place because they cannot respond to requests to borrow digital books.

Next financial year HLS will launch an e-book lending service in partnership with a major Large Print and Audio supplier. This is a welcome development - e-books have revolutionised the reading experience of partially sighted readers who can increase font size or change lighting levels appropriately. Also online ordering of e-books will be a considerable bonus for remote households and for elderly, housebound readers unable to come into the library. However, the new service comes at a time when stock budgets have been decimated for several years in a row and continue to be under pressure, so the

danger is that the expansion into e-books will be at the expense of print books. There is a need for both physical and e-books; it should not be a choice of one or the other, but in the future it is likely that only the largest and wealthiest few library authorities will be able to afford both. The logical answer is to reach agreement between publishers, booksellers and libraries and create a national e-lending service to which all library authorities can subscribe.

Many older people are aware of and eager to engage with the new technology if guided and supported in their learning. They would value the chance to save money by shopping and paying bills online. They would also appreciate the opportunity to order books and learn to surf the internet for articles of interest. At last, broadband access to the internet is being improved through the collaborative scheme of Fastershire.

### **November 2013 First Herefordshire area benefits from Fastershire fibre broadband project**

Residents in Ross on Wye are celebrating being connected to a fibre optic broadband network for the first time under the Fastershire project. The initiative is a collaboration between service provider BT, Herefordshire Council and Gloucestershire County Council. The market town of Ross-on-Wye has become the first area to benefit from the scheme, with 3,000 properties connected as part of the first phase of the rollout. It is estimated that another 4,000 homes and businesses in the town will gain access to superfast broadband speeds in the coming month, as the rest of the rollout is completed.

***<http://www.fibrebroadband.co.uk/news/first-herefordshire-area-benefits-from-fastershire-fibre-broadband-project-801663911/>***

In March 2014 Ross Library hosted the first Fastershire Introduction to the Internet course (see Annexe Two). All fifteen places were booked, especially by people who spoke of how anxious they are to carry out essential tasks unaided, and to learn how to enjoy the rewards of keeping in touch with family and friends through email, Facebook, Skype etc. We anticipate growing demand for this facility, especially when Ross Library's WiFi is made available for public use, allowing readers to use their own laptops and tablets.

More problematic is the question of how to connect with residents on lower incomes – how can they be supported if they can afford neither broadband subscriptions nor their own computers? In the year 2012-13 HLS provided 36,000 PC Sessions with staff nearby to assist. Library computer work stations remain essential if inroads are to be made into the digital divide.

## 2. What is the role of community libraries in the delivery of library “offer”?

**1873:** Thomas Blake opened his Free Library and Reading Room in Ross for all to use.

**1890:** The Ross Free Library and Reading Rooms in Broad Street were presented to the inhabitants of Ross by their fellow townsman, Thomas Blake, formerly M.P. for the borough of Leominster and subsequently for the Forest of Dean. The institution which was formally opened in August 1873 comprised news and refreshment rooms on the ground floor, and reading room, book room, chess room &c. on the first floor.

**1894:** the newly founded Colwall Parish Council started providing a wide range of services, including a rate supported library from 1899.

**1899:** John Percival, Bishop of Hereford, provided a mobile library service based on ecclesiastical parishes. It pioneered features found in the later county library service.

*Local trade directories and Library Review Vol 34 Issue 4*

The concept of community libraries is not new. It is a variation on the theme of how to ensure maximum free access to reading and study materials for people scattered across a rural county. Thomas Blake was a wise philanthropist who initiated Ross’s first free library to serve the townsfolk of the time. The library initiated by Colwall Parish Council and the mobile library service provided by the Bishop were forerunners in what would become the county library service. A county library service cannot survive without sufficient book stock and without the means of circulating that stock around the towns, villages and hamlets. Community libraries need to be connected into publicly funded hubs if they are to remain well-resourced and managed, linking into the new technologies, guided by library expertise. Community libraries need professional backup systems.

Today’s library service does not rely on enlightened philanthropists but on a process of devolution that may involve parish councils, but is certainly reliant on a growing army of volunteers. The rate at which ‘community libraries’ are being developed in Herefordshire has quickened as a result of cutbacks in local government. The emphasis now is on Hereford and the market town libraries, each of which must learn to share their premises with other services and generate income to offset the costs of maintaining professional staff, book stock and management systems.

In Annexe Three, the case studies of Peterchurch and Fownhope community libraries are summarised. Peterchurch has worked closely with HLS from the time it first opened its doors, Fownhope has called on HLS for assistance in maintaining its book stock. In both cases it is salutary to note the scale of volunteering required to run the two libraries – Peterchurch maintains a rota of 18 volunteers to maintain a book stock of 1000 for a total of 10 hours per week. Fownhope has a rota of 21 volunteers to maintain a book stock of 5000 for four hours a week.

Peterchurch and Fownhope demonstrate that community libraries are more than 'just volunteers'. They continue to need professional library staff for access to the HLS book stock, management systems and for guidance in managing personnel matters. Community managed libraries can be run to high standards if they involve volunteers and paid professionals working closely together – but meeting such standards is no easy task when volunteers are involved.

### **Volunteers – The Disciplines of the Public Library System**

In Annexe Four some of the services provided by HLS for readers with special needs are summarised. All these services rely on records being kept so that library staff can check eligibility and ensure appropriate response. Especially sensitive are records relating to the Books on Prescription scheme. These books are prescribed by local GPs to patients with mental health conditions which are then collected from the local library. In common with other services dependent on volunteers there is risk of breach of privacy and personal embarrassment for both reader and volunteer – especially in community libraries in small rural communities.

Paid, trained and experienced library staff work to a strict code of ethics and are given constant reminders, briefings and training on data protection, information governance and related matters. Furthermore, they are bound by 'customer care standards' which cover all aspects of communication, including the appropriate sharing of personal information in accordance to the law. They deal discreetly with personal details and enquiries on a day-to-day basis, it is an integral part of their ethos. In exchange for partnership with HLS, volunteers in community libraries will be required to work within the administrative and ethical guidelines that apply to professional staff. The risk is that many enthusiastic volunteers may find it difficult to sustain their commitment, when they realise they will be required to adhere to a code of conduct with the possibility of disciplinary action if they breach the code.

In Peterchurch, lessons were learned about how professional staff and volunteers can learn to understand each other and work together to maintain the disciplines of public service. In Fownhope, the initial enthusiasm for its community book scheme has matured in ways that have been hard to sustain unaided. Volunteer numbers have dropped and the scheme cannot replenish the book stock it requires through the random process of donations so are asking HLS for further stock in the future.

With the rise in dependency of HLS on volunteers, questions have to be asked about how sustainable this level of volunteering activity can be. It is worth remembering the cautionary tale of volunteer school governors, who are often the same people who have campaigned to keep their local libraries open. Across England, there are now 30,000 vacancies for governors, with the greatest number of vacancies in areas of deprivation. In the opinion of some the burdens on governors now are so great, and the expectations so high, that the old amateur system is broken beyond repair. Although the burdens of public library service are not as heavy as in the case of school governors, it is imperative that volunteer retention is as high on the agenda as volunteer recruitment.

Working with volunteers is not cost-free. Recruitment requires press advertising and active promotion. This in turn implies a need for a budget and, ideally, a paid post to develop a Recruitment and Retention of Volunteers Programme. Initial enthusiasm will not be sustained and the pool of available volunteers has its limits – not least the requirement to be available in daytime opening hours. If a volunteer-run library is to remain open then there will be a constant need, and finding new volunteers requires skill, determination, and ingenuity. Indeed, already there is increased competition for volunteers as government cuts eat into the fabric of service provision. Today's volunteers, mainly the retired people of a certain age who are available in the daytime, expect their contribution to be time-limited.

### **3. What should be the core principles of a public library service into the future?**

Ross library is a magical place for my 12 month daughter. The weekly Bounce and Rhymes are really great. A free event run by enthusiastic and skilled staff. She loves the library so much and she's only one year old. Libraries are magical places.

*RLDG Facebook*

No other place is so safe and secure to pop in, it is relaxing and informal, other groups are more structured / The kids browse through books at the same time as listening, playing and running about. There are plenty of books for them to pull out and 'read' / It is a well-time short session where the kids are socialising, singing songs together. We take home the songs and the books they want / Parents have a chance to sit down, chat and enjoy ourselves too / It is our lifeline in the week.

*Bounce and Rhyme, Ross Library March 14<sup>th</sup> 2014*

My family really value the library in Ross. My wife has cancer and spends many hours each week reading books borrowed from the library. My 10 year old son regards the Tuesday evening war games as the highlight of his month. We will fight to retain the excellent facilities and service you provide.

*RLDG Facebook*

Staff very helpful indeed, took time to help me use computers. Very good customer service. Thank you.

*Library Comments Book*

#### **Acknowledge Professionalism**

Qualified librarians are graduate professionals in the crucial area of knowledge management, and front line staff receive rigorous training in technical, legal and relational aspects of the role. The professionalism of both groups in these traditional areas is now supplemented by new skills as they service networks of community libraries, learn how to share space with other services and work more closely with volunteers. Additionally they have to develop operational and technical skills in the uses and application of IT. This professionalism should be acknowledged; they should be deeply involved in developing the

future of libraries and all areas of knowledge access and sharing and they should also be recognised as doing far more than stamp and shelve book

### **Provide Safe Space**

Public libraries are unique in providing safe space for all. The toddlers in Bounce and Rhyme play in more space than they can find at home and surrounded by more colourful books than they can hope to borrow. School pupils come to the library to browse, study in a quiet place or simply wait for their lift home. Adults, of any age and any income, know they are welcome to come to the library to change their books, browse, read or snooze.

### **Share Space**

The ground floor of Ross Library is already shared with other services and with the community facilities of the Dennis Potter Room. In the lower ground floor, most bookshelves are on wheels, ready to be pushed back to create space for drama and music performance and for larger meetings. As soon as the gate is installed, the Dennis Potter Room will be advertised for use by local groups and clubs outside library opening times. Libraries are trusted as community spaces for community centred activities and partnerships they contribute to social cohesiveness by sharing space.

### **Maximise access**

Extend opening hours as far as possible, invest in digital facilities, maintain and circulate a high quality and wide-ranging book stock.

### **Maximise Inclusion**

Libraries already reach out to vulnerable and excluded people. They have embarked on in-house internet training for readers and cannot keep up with demand. Until the licensing of e-lending is agreed, they cannot embark on the urgently needed programme for remote and housebound readers.

### **Maintain the widest possible stock**

Libraries are the gateway to the print and digital worlds of 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge.

## **Conclusions**

Is it expected that a rural county such as Herefordshire should be required to 'go it alone' in seeking to support a comprehensive and efficient service? Herefordshire's population is too small and many are too poor to generate a high level of local taxation. Without the financial resources HLS requires it must attract new forms of funding if it is to maintain its book stock and current services and invest in the digital innovation that will extend its range of services to the public.

There is no clear definition of the central statutory concept of a 'comprehensive and efficient' service. As a result every authority has developed its own interpretation, often in response not to a measured review, but according to the responding to the scale of campaigning launched in defence of libraries. It is time for an agreed statement about core services that will be provided by public libraries and available to all.

Urgently required also is national agreement on a basic code of conduct for volunteers and for clarity about the means by which professional standards can be maintained in volunteer-run community libraries.

RLDG endorses and recommends the statement summarised in the Bookseller Magazine

Establish a library development agency to support authorities and to provide effective leadership

Encourage the 151 separately managed authorities in England alone to share and merge their services

Optimise the use of technology to improve efficiency and standardisation

Remove unnecessary duplication and cost

Implement a national e-lending service which removes the need for 151 authorities to separately get their act together

Ensure that any volunteer led libraries are properly supported by professional staff

Ensure that any potential legal, regulatory and operational hurdles are resolved

Enable the public library service to support and promote literacy (including digital) reading education and the acquisition of information and knowledge

Create a viable public library service that supports the changing needs of today's society

*The Bookseller 10.02.14*

### **Annexes:**

One: RLDG Programme of Activities

Two: Introduction to the Internet – newspaper article

Three: Case Studies: Peterchurch and Fownhope community libraries

Four: HLS Services for Readers with Special Needs

## Ross Library Development Group (RLDG) Events 2013-14

<b>Evening Events 2013</b>		Title	Attendance
Feb 20th	Jesse Norman, MP	Life as a Backbencher in the House of Commons	30
Mar 12th	Andrew Taylor, author	'The Scent of Death', his new book	30
Apr 16th	Jo Scrivin	Behind the Scenes at the Ross Gazette	20
May 10th	Jill Pitkeathley, Baroness	Being a Peer and Deputy Speaker in the House of Lords	44
June 18th	Janet and Mark Robinson	Mary Came, Mary Went, The Life of Servants in a 19 <sup>th</sup> Century rectory	25
July 16th	Philip Gray, Fineleaf Publishing	A Publisher's Perspective	34
Sept 10th	Paul Costello, author	'Utterly Undiscovered' his recent book	21
Oct 8th	Daphne Wyatt	The Marsh Arabs and Arabian Feasts	29
Nov 19th	Caroline Sanderson	In the Footsteps of Jane Austen	43
Dec 3rd	Rhys Griffiths	Herefordshire Archives and the New Archive Centre	29
<b>Evening Events 2014</b>			
Jan 21st	Howard Owen	The Phoenix Theatre in Ross	27
Feb 18th	Jan Long	Gertrude Bell and the Founding of Iraq	30
Mar 18th	Sheridan Swinson	Aardvark Books: a Bookshop with a difference	32
Apr 8th	Phillip Dennis	An Asian Kaleidoscope	
May 20th	Gareth Nutt	Ethiopia - A Portrait of a Developing Nation	
June 24th	AGM and Andy Johnson	Logaston Press	
July 14th	TBA	The Work of a Magistrate	
<b>Other Events 2013-4</b>			
Sept 26th	High School pupils	Drama Performance	45
Dec 1st	RLDG and Library Staff	Live At the Library – Ross Traders Xmas Fayre	153
Feb. 8 <sup>th</sup> 2014	RLDG and Library	Participation in National Libraries Day	N/A
April 26 <sup>th</sup> – May 18th	RLDG with Library & other local groups	Celebration of the Hedgehog (40 + events)	
May 19 <sup>th</sup> to 31 <sup>st</sup>		Herefordshire Family History Society Programme	

**Other RLDG Activities:** Coffee mornings on the first Thursday of every month

# Introduction to the Internet



- A bit of buddy support during the very relaxed tea break

ROSS-ON-WYE Library hosted a wonderful Introduction to the Internet session last week - a taster session for a free course, courtesy of Fastershire. The participants were a mix of those who wanted to learn more about their computers and those who were really new to the art. The tutor, Frances Davison, was reassuring

and knowledgeable and the group were good humoured and delighted to be encouraged to "Have a Go". The Ross Library Development Group provided tea, coffee and some friendly support and the session flew by.

Clare West from the Development Group said: "We are really pleased that Ross Library has been chosen to run this pilot event and we are happy to help get it off to a good start. The course will be running on Monday mornings and it would be great if someone could spare an hour or two to support these very willing learners."

If you are interested in finding out more, pop into the library and ask about IT and internet training - you will be asked to fill in a card that will be passed onto the Fastershire team. And if you would like to help out by spending a couple of hours being a buddy to people new to the internet please contact the Ross Library Development Group via the library or by e-mailing Clare on [rldg@deangate.co.uk](mailto:rldg@deangate.co.uk).

## **Annexe Three: Case Studies Peterchurch and Fownhope**

### **Peterchurch**

Location: The bell-ringing chamber of St Peters Church with fixed shelving.

Peterchurch Library opened in Jan 2010, supported by HLS and managed by volunteers. The stock is changed on the basis of demand – emails with suggestions and bundles of books to swap in the library delivery. As well as the books, talking books and DVDs housed in the library itself, customers are able to request titles on the library catalogue and have them delivered to Peterchurch Library. Members may also use their Herefordshire library card at home to access the Online Reference Library and manage their library account via the Herefordshire Libraries website.

Professional staff support is available at all times when the library is open. Quarterly volunteer meetings are chaired by HLS staff. At least once per year HLS do a swap of the entire contents of the library. Volunteers are recruited and trained by professional HLS library staff and given a taster training session in Ross Library. Banking and admin duties are handled by the coordination assistant at Ross Library.

#### **Summary:**

Access to HLS systems is restricted.

Book Stock: 1000 HLS stock

Opening Hours: 10 hours per week – Wednesday 1-5; Thursday 1-5; Saturday 10-12

Volunteers: 18

### **Fownhope**

Location: Community Lounge in sheltered housing complex, with the use of mobile book cases that are wheeled into position.

Fownhope Community Library opened in 2012 and is managed by volunteers. Fownhope does not have access to HLS systems but were given a lot of guidance when they were setting up and borrowed books for quite a while. Because they are based in a sheltered housing complex they initially borrowed a lot of large print, but there was not the take up they expected from the residents. Apart from that they had such a large number of donations to start them off that they had no room for any more stock.

They bought some children's books recently with a grant and have now asked to borrow some teenage stock from HLS because they are hoping to encourage more usage by older children. They say their visitor/borrowing figures have dropped slightly and they have asked for HLS to go over and give them some advice in April, they hope to continue to draw on HLS book stock.

#### **Summary:**

Professional Support now requested

No Access to HLS systems

Book Stock: 5,000 donated

Opening Hours: Weds 2-4 and Saturday 10-12

Volunteers: currently 21 (29 in 2013) in total / three at each session. Extra hour required per session in order to prepare the book display and return to storage.

Registered Readers: 186

## **Annexe Four: HLS Provision for Special Needs**

### **Herefordshire Library Service (HLS) provides the following services for readers with special needs:**

**Access to library:** Large print and talking books are available at all libraries. All libraries have hearing loops fitted, as well as membership forms in Braille and large print and on CD.

**Access tickets:** All libraries can issue an access card for disabled customers and those who have difficulty using the main book collection, such as people with dyslexia. There are no hire charges and no fines for overdue items.

**Services for the visually impaired:** In addition to being eligible for an access card, visually impaired and blind customers can use assistive technology in some of our libraries. MyReader auto-readers in Hereford library enable those with low vision to read books at their ease. The ScannaR System in Hereford library scans and reads back text documents, letters, brochures, newspapers, reports and other print materials. Dolphin Supernova software is available at Hereford, Leominster and Ross.

**Carers' tickets:** Registered carers are able to obtain a concessionary library card which allows them to have items for longer and without charges or fines for overdues.

**Physical access:** With the exception of the historic buildings in which Hereford and Ledbury libraries are housed, all libraries are fully accessible.

**Domiciliary services:** The home delivery service is offered to those who are unable to visit their local library and who do not have anyone who can visit on their behalf. This is a free service providing books and spoken word CDs on a six week basis.

Applicants are assessed on request, by a member of staff who has been trained and checked by the Criminal Records Bureau. Once a decision has been made the first delivery is organised and applicants are invited to discuss their reading preferences. This can be a short or long term arrangement. The details may be shared with adult social care teams so that the Council has a greater understanding of the services vulnerable residents in Herefordshire are receiving.