



Results from Your Views on Public Libraries Survey

Executive Summary

The National Strategy for Scottish Public Libraries Working Group has been tasked with the development of a National Strategy for Scotland's public libraries. The current economic climate and drive to identify efficiency savings will put increasing pressure on public libraries across Scotland with many councils are having to make difficult decisions regarding funding. Other challenges public libraries are facing relate to the fundamental changes which have taken place in the way in which information and knowledge is created and shared. With the increasing digitisation of information, the public library service needs to have a clear vision for a future in which providing knowledge through the medium of books becomes increasingly marginal. A national strategy would ensure public libraries' continued relevance and enable them to both consolidate and co-ordinate their ability to deliver on key policy areas. In turn, this would help public libraries to make the case for continued funding.

The responses to the Your Views Survey indicated support for the development of a national strategy for public libraries in Scotland, as well as providing a wealth of information about the views of library and information service managers and staff, and other stakeholders including researchers, charities and members of the public, across Scotland. The full report provides a deep and narrative report on the complexities of the research topic, which cannot be reproduced here but is précised in the rest of this summary.

Values and aims of public libraries

Respondents described a wide range of what they believe are the values and should be the aims for public libraries: to be a universal and trusted service; to be a public service; to curate and support people's use of libraries; to provide a suitable library space; to support democracy, equality and social justice; to provide information and knowledge resources; to support and strengthen communities; to support individuals; to support health and wellbeing; to support creativity; to support leisure and culture; to support people's use of technology and digital resources; to support business and the economy and to protect the environment.

Respondents suggested that these aims could be achieved through continuous improvement; by responding to community needs and interests; through working in partnership with relevant organisations; through running a well-staffed service; through

promoting library services; through the introduction of library standards; and through investment in resources.

Delivering the values and aims of public libraries

In terms of recommended changes to public library services, respondents suggested a number of required changes and developments to libraries, both locally and in relation to national delivery: focus on core services; reassess services; change library standards and methods of measurement; change library buildings; change the relationships between libraries and their communities; change public perceptions of libraries; change relationships with partner organisations; assess library funding and spending; improve technology in libraries; invest in library staff and training; change relationships with local authorities and other organisations; and support the commercial sector.

Respondents also identified a number of barriers to the implementation of the desired changes they identified. Several respondents identified funding and cost as a barrier to change, suggesting that the core service of books needs to be properly funded and promoted, and that small incremental changes will not allow for fast or significant enough changes. A number of respondents did not think it was possible to implement the required changes without increased library funding. Another barrier to change identified was the loss of professional staff over the last few years as the result of service cuts, which makes it difficult for libraries to meet the needs of their communities in any meaningful way. Parent bodies were also identified as a barrier to positive change, with some parent departments perceived as being hostile to public libraries and their aims.

Key areas for change

Respondents suggested there is a need to: articulate the purposes and value of libraries; develop standards and methods of measurement; articulate a standard volunteer policy; invest in staff and training; improve community engagement; improve partnership working; explore opportunities for more funding and more effective spending; improve technology and digital resources; improve library buildings; and support marginalised groups' use of libraries. In addition, among a number of recommendations, several respondents suggested that libraries need to stop issuing fines and charges and stop taking a consumerist approach to policy and service provision.

Priorities for a 21st century library service

In order of most frequently reported to least reported, respondents viewed the following areas as priorities for modern library services: opening hours in tune with individual and community needs; staff development, training and support; book lending; digital and information literacy; access to digital resources and digital inclusion; general and lifelong learning; being a safe community hub; family and local history; access to WiFi; ebook lending; cultural heritage; curating information; promoting reading for pleasure/reader development; supporting literacies; community engagement and involvement; partnership and collaboration; supporting health and wellbeing; events and programming; free access to resources and services; study space; and being a meeting place.

Actions to developing the priorities

Recommendations for actions that library services can take to develop the priorities identified included: developing national library standards; investing in staff; aligning library

services to local and national strategic outcomes; increasing community engagement; promoting and advocating for services; investing in technology; supporting digital and information literacy; negotiating licensing arrangements for electronic resources; lending more books and fostering a love of learning; improving partnerships; promoting local and national culture and heritage; and making libraries a safe community hub.

Areas for co-operation

A number of areas for possible co-operation and shared service provision were identified, including: community services; archives and cultural services; local colleges and training providers; employment support services; Department for Work and Pensions; one stop shops; higher and further education providers; Education Scotland; disability and mental health organisations; the NHS; MacMillan cancer care; care homes; business advice services; local bookshops; schools; museums; theatres; visual arts organisations; cafés; community centres; banks; post offices; tourist offices; Councillor/MP/MSP/MEP surgeries; Citizens Advice Bureaux; and social work and social care services.

Several types of shared service and co-operation were recommended *against* because they were viewed as inappropriate, which included several of those identified above and included customer access points, one stop shops, local offices, the more commercial arms of local authorities, retail, health services, leisure centres, merged community and school libraries and the DSS.

Where respondents viewed co-operation and partnerships between services as appropriate, the general benefits considered were expansion of the types of services provided, opportunities to “capture” users of other services, more information sharing, opportunity for increased opening hours, and the improved cost-effectiveness of library and partner service provision. The majority of the other potential benefits and uses of co-operation identified were benefits which help members of the community with employment prospects, or would be of benefit to the partner organisation or prevent library services from closing, rather than being of benefit to library services and the identified mission of libraries per se. Where respondents viewed co-operation and shared services as inappropriate, the concerns related to unnatural pairings with services with different remits and little in common; an inequality of power and resources in the partnership; a different and conflicting ethos and mentality of service provision; conflict with practical access policies; and the possible curtailing of the library’s ability to deliver services.

A number of general considerations to take into account were identified, including emphasis from respondents who were generally pro-shared services and co-operation that there may be some areas and partnerships where robust limits and agreements regarding protocol such as information sharing, data protection, customer expectations and roles of each aspect of the shared service should be planned before rolling out new approaches.

Other suggestions included: ensuring the success of partnerships and collaborations and through good working relationships, mutual respect and understanding for each other’s services; ensuring that libraries’ strong local identities and roots in communities are maintained; and ensuring that there is equal advantage to all parties and clear benefits for the public library service.

Possible service delivery models

A range of potential models for service delivery were identified:

- Local authority model
- Arms-length trust / multi-service ALEO/ALO
- Integrated services
- Co-location
- Charitable company
- Charitable trust
- Leisure trust
- Social economy model
- Voluntary sector
- Private sector
- Community-based model
- Co-operative mutualisation
- Nationalisation (nationalised service with devolved services)
- Private sector organisations
- Community interest companies
- Not for profit organisations
- Sponsorship
- Hybrid models (two different service delivery models in operation)

Perceived benefits of these models included: ability to maintain the library service; ability to meet local and national priority outcomes; flexibility; cost-saving; protection from more severe cuts; and income generation opportunities. Perceived drawbacks included: a lack of funding; a lack of councillor engagement with libraries; libraries being small fish in the big ponds of local councils; issues with the splitting of management roles and remits; threats to the long-term existence of libraries; lack of evidence that the models are successful; lack of evaluation of performance of the models; lack of democratic accountability; and pressure to generate income.

A number of respondents made general comments about the considerations that should be made when looking at different models of service delivery. The accountability of public library services was a point raised by several respondents.

A number of respondents stressed that regardless of service model, it is important to ensure that the public have access to a core service with consistent standards which do not reflect a post-code lottery of libraries. They also emphasised the need to ensure that potential commercial models must agree with local authorities on the extent and inclusivity of library provision, and values and beliefs of public library services, which should not be diminished by the commercial organisations' profit motives.

Other respondents emphasised the importance of professional, qualified and trained library staff who work to ensure the universal nature of public libraries. One respondent suggested that although they believe local authorities are best placed to provide library services, they could benefit from being less hierarchical and more democratic workplaces to enable staff to contribute to decision-making processes, which would allow libraries to become more dynamic and responsive.

The role of volunteers in different models of library provision was a recurring theme throughout the survey responses, with a number of respondents stressing that they believe there is a role for volunteers within library services but that it should be limited.

Public, voluntary and private sector collaborations

respondents suggested the following collaborations: health and wellbeing organisations and charities (e.g. Macmillan, RNIB, Action on Hearing Loss, Dementia Care, self-help groups, bibliotherapy, counselling services, NHS); family history societies; heritage groups; colleges (FE); universities (HE); community education (e.g. adults in basic education); retailers (restaurants and cafes, book shops, printers, stationers, individual traders); financial inclusion organisations; credit unions and banks; small business support (e.g. business gateway); open access digital subscription services; Skills Development Scotland; local clergy; job centre plus and other welfare and benefits services; employment services; community police; Citizens' Advice Bureaux, legal and other advice agencies; literacy workers and charities; registrars; tourist information (Visit Scotland); councillors surgeries; housing area offices; post offices; art galleries and museums; after school clubs; community groups; environmental organisations; schools and schools' library services; friends of the library and friends of the archives; youth groups; dating agencies; and motivational speakers.

Many of these suggestions were made with the caveat that they should be viewed as a last resort in keeping service points open and that volunteers should be used to add value to the service provided by professionally qualified and trained library staff, not replace it. Furthermore, issues were raised with the conflicting ethos of profit-making entities, which may present a barrier to use or compromises the library's ability to be neutral, safe spaces to access services. Commercialisation of spaces in a library context may detract from the ability to provide safe public space and sponsorship should be considered carefully. Commercial partnerships risk the independence and trusted status libraries have developed over the decades. It was viewed as inappropriate to collaborate with or partner with some (perhaps not necessarily all) commercial or private organisations where there could be a clash of ethos. Issues regarding data protection in some of the services were also raised.

Measures for assessing the impact of public libraries

A number of suggestions were made relating to how to assess the impact of public libraries, including the use or amendment of existing measures, quantitative measures and qualitative measures. Several respondents advocated the use of multiple measures, including mixed approaches to data collection and use, in the form of a "basket" of national indicators and outcomes in line with a new strategic framework.

The most frequently identified frameworks and indicators identified included How Good Is Our Public Library Service? (SLIC), the paid-for CIPFA PLUS Survey, CIPFA Performance Indicators, Economic Impact Studies, the Public Libraries Quality Improvement Matrix, How Good Is Our Culture and Sports? (Education Scotland), and reviews of SPIs and KPIs.

A number of quantitative forms of data were identified. Several of these forms of data are regularly collected by library services, such as book issues, collection statistics, footfall and use of online resources. Others are less commonly used by libraries to identify impact, such

as educational attainment of individuals within communities, increases in employment, long-term individual outcomes and development of information literacy and digital skills.

Emphasis was given to the importance of understanding what impact libraries have on people's lives in terms of wellbeing, literacy, educational attainment, employability, citizenship, social capital and community cohesion. In order to understand library's impact in these areas, respondents recommended working in partnership with partners who already track this type of information. Structured feedback on co-operative and partnership working from internal and external partners and agencies was also recommended.

A number of participants expressed concern that although quantitative measures serve some purposes, they are limited and that the impact of libraries can only be meaningfully explored using qualitative methods of data collection, analysis and reporting.

Several respondents identified issues which they thought should be taken into account before deciding on methods of measuring impact. These considerations include the time it takes for library staff to collect data and how complex the process is, because staff are stretched and under pressure.

Use of consistent measurement

The majority of respondents (56) expressed a positive view toward consistent measurement across all Scottish public libraries and thought it would be beneficial for a number of reasons, including:

- Sharing best practice
- Ensuring consistent measurement to evaluate overall impact of Scottish public libraries
- Enabling greater collaboration
- Fostering a culture of continuous improvement
- Creation of benchmarks
- Measuring progress
- Accurate and fair reporting

Suggested methods for developing consistent measurement across public libraries included using the 'How Good Is Our Public Library Service?' document, verified self-evaluation, agreed collated statistical datasets, and benchmarking. Another respondent suggested that data analysis tools could be shared across authorities, which would spread the cost of subscriptions. Some respondents suggested the use of the How Good is Our Culture and Sport¹, the quality improvement framework for culture and sport provision developed by Education Scotland in 2012, and How Good Is Our Public Library Service², the Public Library Improvement Model for Scotland developed by the Scottish Library and Information Council and revised in 2013.

¹ http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/Images/HGIOS&S%20-%20251012_tcm4-712897.pdf

² http://www.scottishlibraries.org/storage/SLIC_How_Good_Is_Our_Public_Library_WEB.pdf

Additional comments

Several additional comments were made, emphasising the importance of the need to consult widely and meaningfully with the public, the role of libraries in digital inclusion strategies, the importance of paid, professional staff and the role of volunteers, and opportunities for partnership working.