

LIBRARIES ON THE MOVE

The impact of mobile library services in Scotland





LIBRARY

WEST COAST LIBRARY



Contents

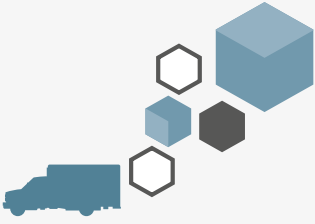
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Thank you to all the heads of service for taking the time to complete the survey, and to all the users who responded. Thanks also to Stirling library staff for inviting me for a day out on one of their mobiles, and to Shauna for the enjoyable and informative mobile library experience.

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1 Executive summary

This report was commissioned by the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) in October 2018 and undertaken during approximately a two month period. The overall purpose of the research was to gather evidence on the use and impact of mobile libraries.

The study was to also consider what role mobile library provision plays in delivering the aims of *Ambition and Opportunity: a strategy for public libraries in Scotland 2015-2020*, and specifically to:

- conduct a literature review of mobile services in Scotland and beyond;
- scope out the current landscape of mobile library service provision in Scotland, including frequency of delivery and vehicle specifications;
- investigate and present the broad range of services that are delivered by mobiles across Scotland in rural, suburban and urban locations;
- compare different models of service design and collaborative delivery;
- investigate the importance of individual choice when choosing material and the guidance and interaction a visiting librarian provides;
- demonstrate the impact mobile libraries have on people and communities including, but not restricted to: learning and development, loneliness, social isolation, health and wellbeing;
- provide suggestions for improvement, alternatives should mobiles be withdrawn and additional library services which could be delivered by mobile libraries that are currently restricted to static locations.

The research undertaken included a literature review, a survey of heads of services, interviews with other stakeholders and a survey of mobile library users. The report includes a brief history of mobile libraries and the current provision in Scotland. Highlights of Scottish mobile libraries in figures include:

- 49 mobile libraries in 22 local authorities
- Age range of the vehicles: two months to 18 years
- Nearly 37,000 mobile library users
- 637,375 book loans on mobiles in 2017-18
- 274,136 visits to mobiles in 2017-18
- 98% of mobile library users rate the service as very or extremely valuable
- Over 3,000 mobile library stops
- Average length of stop = 30 minutes
- Average collection size = c.2,500 items on board

The report considers the impact mobile libraries have on people's lives particularly in terms of loneliness and social isolation, health and wellbeing, learning and development, culture, and children's literacy. Comments made by the users provide evidence of how using mobile libraries helps people in all these areas.



The research found that mobile library services are greatly valued by users and were often referred to as a lifeline. Mobile library users valued the personal service from friendly and helpful staff, as well as the resources available. Using mobile libraries gives people a sense of belonging in the community, and has a direct beneficial impact particularly on the elderly in helping to reduce feelings of loneliness and social isolation. Children and young families also praised the mobile library service in helping with literacy, reading for pleasure and doing things as a family.

The evidence from the user survey found that mobile libraries contribute to almost all of the aims of *Ambition & Opportunity*, the national strategy for public libraries in Scotland. They help with people's reading, literacy and learning; contribute towards economic and social wellbeing; play an important part in culture and creativity; and are a highly valued public service. But most mobile libraries are currently unable to contribute towards digital inclusion, partly due to poor internet connectivity locally and lack of on-board digital facilities.

There are various planning and management issues to consider when reviewing mobile library services, and the report addresses some of these, including marketing, collaborative delivery models and external partnerships.

The mobile library service is a social service, where the personal connection between library staff member and user is central to its value. The broad scope of mobile libraries, in terms of benefits and geography, cannot be underestimated, and is difficult to replicate in alternative provision. Given the financial reductions of the last decade, and little prospect of change in the near future, providers of mobile libraries need to find a balance between an acceptable level of service for the public, particularly considering equality of access, and an acceptable cost to the provider.

The report concludes with a number of recommendations for consideration by policy holders, funders and strategic bodies. These fall broadly into marketing, management and strategic categories.

Marketing

- More and better information on library websites, including use of open data
- More marketing and promotion of the service to attract new users
- Creation of a Scottish mobile library video and a 'mobile libraries day' within Book Week Scotland.

Local planning and management issues

- Increased use and analysis of current and potential users, including using demographic and geographic information
- Refer to international planning guidance when reviewing mobile services and consider appropriate performance indicators and impact measures
- Engage directly with all mobile users when planning changes.

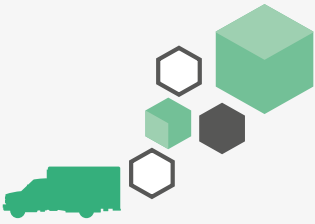
Strategic planning

- Inclusion of mobile, housebound and outreach services within any future How Good Is Our Public Library Service? framework and within any future public library strategy for Scotland, with appropriate impact measures
- Investment in digitally enabled mobile libraries, and inclusion within broadband connectivity improvements particularly in rural areas
- A capital improvement fund for mobile libraries, in recognition of the important role they play in social, health and wellbeing, educational, rural and cultural agendas.

As one user said:

“
The library visit is a lifeline to the outside world.
”

South Lanarkshire,
70s, F



2 Introduction

2.1 What is a mobile library?

'The overall objective of a mobile library service is to promote equity of service provision by enhancing the opportunity of access to library services. A mobile library provides the most flexible of library service, not being restricted to any particular population centre and able to respond to the needs of fluctuating populations.'¹

Although there are variations e.g. where animals or bicycles are used instead of a vehicle, a mobile library is a vehicle which has been specifically designed and equipped to stock books and other library-related items, and allows public access to the items at designated stops, usually in small villages or hamlets, according to a published timetable. Mobile libraries generally travel to places where it's hard to access static public libraries, although they may also operate in urban areas. The majority of mobile libraries are for everyone, although sometimes it may be a children's library or a digital service with few/no books on board.

Public library services may also operate housebound services where a much smaller vehicle delivers books directly to a person's home or to those in residential care. The focus of this research was on mobile libraries, not the housebound service.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) states that, 'Mobile library services are essential to the Public Library Service and should be seen as an integral part of it.'² By taking the service to people the mobile library helps overcome barriers to accessing library services such as physical health and wellbeing, availability of transport, age, (in)dependence or time constraints. Local authorities in Scotland have a statutory duty under section 163(2) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 to 'secure the provision of adequate library facilities for all persons resident in their area.'³

2.2 History of mobile libraries in the UK

Most sources cite a perambulating cart in Warrington, England in 1859 as the first mobile library in the UK.⁴ It was operated by the Mechanics Institute and members paid an annual subscription to use the library. Deposit collections in village shops and similar also existed at this time. Orton credits Perthshire as the first county to have a book delivery van, in 1921, and by the early 1950s there were over 100 mobile libraries in the UK. This had risen to 540 by 1970⁵ and 719 in 1990/91⁶ but in the last two decades their numbers have fallen.

2.3 Methodology

A range of quantitative and qualitative data gathering measures was undertaken in order to meet the aims of the research. These included: desktop research and literature review; online survey of the 32 local authority library service managers; survey of mobile library users (paper and electronic); telephone interviews with a selected sample of library managers; telephone interviews with relevant bodies, including the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland (CILIPS) and Libraries NI; and one site visit on a mobile library (Stirling).

2.3.1. Surveys

An online questionnaire was sent to all heads of service (32) and elicited a 96% response rate. The survey contained quantitative and qualitative questions and was followed up with in-depth telephone interviews with four heads of service and one face to face discussion.

The survey for users focused on questions which would elicit evidence of impact on their lives. The survey was distributed by library services and also featured in a press release issued in November 2018. A total of 277 online responses were received before the deadline, and 63 paper copies were sent in by local authorities, bringing the total to 340 responses. Responses were received from residents of 21 local authorities.

2.3.2. Literature review

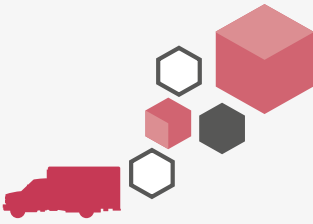
A literature review of mobile library services in Scotland, the UK and wider was undertaken. In general the literature tended to be descriptive in nature and not very recent. It tended to describe mobile library provision in a particular region or country, with little evidence from users. One of the more recent articles noted that, 'There is limited existing professional literature providing a comprehensive review of these services.'⁷

The literature review also included relevant issues such as rural communities, social isolation, health and wellbeing, reading and literacy, and Scottish Government strategies.

Findings from the literature review have been interwoven into the report.

“
The overall objective of a mobile library service is to promote equity of service provision by enhancing the opportunity of access to library services. A mobile library provides the most flexible of library service, not being restricted to any particular population centre and able to respond to the needs of fluctuating populations.
”





3 Current mobile library provision

The survey responses from the heads of service provided information about the current provision of mobile libraries in Scotland. A total of 22 local authorities (out of 32) have mobile libraries, with an additional authority working with two neighbouring authorities to deliver a mobile library service to villages near their borders.

3.1 Scottish mobiles libraries in figures

3.1.1 Number of mobile vehicles

Historic data on the number of mobile libraries in Scotland shows a decline in the last two decades. This trend is mirrored in Wales and the UK as a whole, as can be seen in Table 1 below. There had been a steady increase in mobile numbers from their early days in the 1930s and 1940s, but from 719 mobile library vehicles in 1990/91⁸ this had

fallen to 692 by 1995⁹ and the numbers have continued to decline since then.

There are very few authorities in Scotland who have retained the same number of mobiles from 2000 to 2018, and most have reduced their mobile library fleet from c.2010 onwards. This coincides with the recession following the global financial crisis of 2008. The table and map on pages 10 and 11 show the current number of mobile libraries in Scotland as of November 2018.

Table 1: Mobile library numbers in Scotland, Wales and the UK

| | 2000/01 | 2004/05 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 | 2017/18 | 2018 Survey |
|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------------|-------------|
| Scotland | 94 | 75 | 79 | 74 | 50 | 49 |
| Wales | 65 | 63 | 57 | 52 | 30 | n/a |
| UK | 655 | 585 | 548 | 503 | [191 in GB] | n/a |

Source: CIPFA Public Library Actuals¹⁰, other than the 2018 survey figure from Scotland. NB From 2016 the CIPFA Actuals did not include Northern Ireland.

3.1.2 Vehicle specifications

Almost all the current mobile libraries are 7.5 tonnes and vary in length from c.6.5m to 9m. These are classed as category C1 vehicles and therefore the driver does not need a special licence providing this category is on their UK driving licence. Despite this, they are a considerable size, particularly as most of them are travelling on small rural roads.

The age of the vehicles ranges from two months to 18 years. In general the vehicles need replacing after around 10 years as they suffer considerable wear and tear. The pressure on public sector budgets during the last decade has meant several services have removed vehicles, rather than incur the cost of replacements. However, a number of services intend to introduce new vehicles in 2019 (including Highland, Stirling and the Western Isles) and around a fifth of the current vehicles are under five years old. The capital cost of a new mobile library is around £120,000.

Some of the vehicles have disabled lift access, but the older vehicles in particular have steps which can be difficult for some elderly people to manage.

The specification for Stirling's new vehicles includes being satellite enabled which will facilitate digital participation through activities and training sessions on board. The vehicles will also have a third passenger seat which can swivel to face the van interior, enabling face-to-face sessions when stationary. There will also be a pull-down seat and table for staff to assist with mobile devices or for people to sit and use their own laptops.

3.1.3 Stops and timetables

There are over 3,000 mobile library stops in Scotland. On average, one mobile vehicle serves around 75 stops although some do more than 100 per vehicle, for example, the Shetland mobile library serves 271 stops.

There are no current guidelines in Scotland or England regarding household distance from a mobile stop or static library, but some local authorities adopt their own policy, varying from 1.5 miles to 3 miles. In both Northern Ireland and Wales their public library standards include a target percentage of households to be within a specific distance of a static library or mobile library stop. In Northern Ireland it is 85% within two miles¹¹, and in Wales it varies depending on the population density of the local authority.¹²

The average length of stops is around 30 minutes. Although the shortest stop for most services is 15 minutes, some services have five minute stops. The longest stops can be 2-3 hours long, which enables on board activities and training sessions, and allows more school classes to use the library.

The majority of stops are visited during the day on weekdays although some services have some evening stops, e.g. Perth & Kinross and Stirling. The frequency of timetabled visits varies with the majority of routes operating on a fortnightly basis, although there are some weekly and monthly timetables, and some visit every three weeks. The least frequent is Orkney which visits every eight weeks as a result of losing one of the vehicles in 2016/17. This has had an impact on usage and can also affect stock availability if stops are missed for any reason.

3.1.4 Digital provision

Very few mobile libraries in Scotland have any digital provision for the public mainly because of poor broadband connectivity in the predominantly rural areas. In addition, the relatively short average stop times and visits once every 2-4 weeks does not make checking email or carrying out online tasks very practical.

Some services do provide tablet devices for the public, e.g. Fife and Renfrewshire, and Highland provides micro:bits for the public to borrow. However, until faster, more reliable and more complete broadband coverage is achieved across Scotland even people at longer stops (1-2 hours) will struggle to make use of any digital equipment which might be provided. This limits the scope of mobile libraries to contribute towards digital participation, a key Scottish Government initiative.

3.1.5 Collections and services on board

Most of the mobile libraries carry an average collection of around 2,500 items at any one time. This level of stock matches what is recommended in IFLA's Mobile Library Guidelines, and although smaller than a community library, will be frequently changed by the staff and supplemented by requests from users. In addition to books, some vehicles also stock DVDs, CDs, audio books and jigsaws. Most also provide local information pamphlets and leaflets.

The mobiles which call at schools often deliver activities for children, including Bookbug song and rhyme sessions, story time and the Summer Reading Challenge. The children-only Skoobmobile in Renfrewshire has provided Lego Storytelling, Code Clubs, a bedtime reading programme and a Lego Heritage programme.

Some services link with relevant special days, e.g. World Book Day and National Poetry Day, and deliver events around these campaigns, such as competitions (Highland). Being able to deliver an event on board requires enough space, time and staff to facilitate it and is therefore not always possible on some routes or mobiles.

3.1.6 Users and usage

Based on figures supplied by 19 service providers, there are 36,791 registered mobile users/active borrowers (in 2017-18), which represents 7.7% of the active library borrowers of these authorities (using CIPFA Public Library Actuals 2017-18). When analysed by authority, this varies from representing under 1% of library members in some authorities to 19% for one (Highland). However, it must be remembered that some services have only one vehicle whilst others have several (Highland has eight). The average number of users served per vehicle also varies from around 100 up to c.3,000 (North Lanarkshire). The large variance may be linked to if there are school class visits and also the size and density of the population of the areas served. There are some 'dual' users who will predominantly use the mobile, but may also occasionally visit a community library.

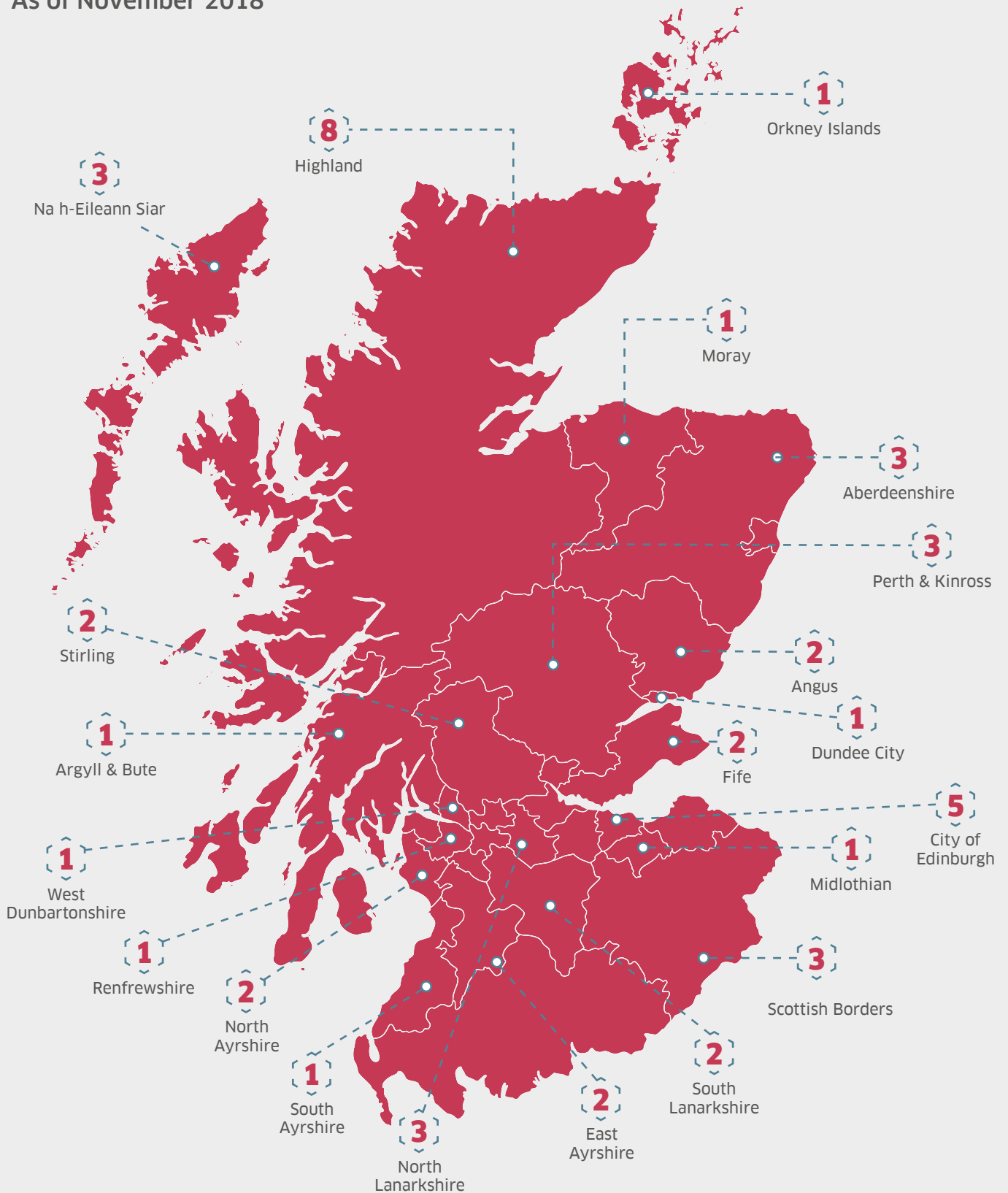
Table 2: Number of mobile libraries in Scotland at November 2018

| Local Authority | Total population | % of population classed as accessible and remote rural | No. of mobiles 2018 |
|--------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Aberdeen City | 228,800 | 1.4 | 0 |
| Aberdeenshire | 261,800 | 48.4 | 3 |
| Angus | 116,280 | 26.8 | 2 |
| Argyll & Bute | 86,810 | 47.2 | 1 |
| Clackmannanshire | 51,450 | 14.6 | 0 |
| Dumfries & Galloway | 149,200 | 53.2 | 0 |
| Dundee City | 148,710 | 0.5 | 1 |
| East Ayrshire | 121,940 | 28.6 | 2 |
| East Dunbartonshire | 108,130 | 5.1 | 0 |
| East Lothian | 104,840 | 25.8 | 0 |
| East Renfrewshire | 94,760 | 3.5 | 0 |
| Edinburgh, City of | 513,210 | 1.0 | 5 |
| Falkirk | 160,130 | 8.0 | 0 |
| Fife | 371,410 | 17.5 | 2 |
| Glasgow City | 621,020 | 0.4 | 0 |
| Highland | 235,180 | 47.4 | 8 |
| Inverclyde | 78,760 | 2.0 | 0 |
| Midlothian | 90,090 | 14.1 | 1 |
| Moray | 95,780 | 41.6 | 1 |
| Na h-Eileanan Siar | 26,950 | 72.4 | 3 |
| North Ayrshire | 135,790 | 9.2 | 2 |
| North Lanarkshire | 339,960 | 8.1 | 3 |
| Orkney Islands | 22,000 | 66.0 | 1 |
| Perth & Kinross | 151,100 | 46.1 | 3 |
| Renfrewshire | 176,830 | 4.7 | 1 |
| Scottish Borders | 115,020 | 46.8 | 3 |
| Shetland Islands | 23,080 | 70.4 | 1 |
| South Ayrshire | 112,680 | 21.5 | 1 |
| South Lanarkshire | 318,170 | 10.8 | 2 |
| Stirling | 94,000 | 33.5 | 2 |
| West Dunbartonshire | 89,610 | 1.3 | 1 |
| West Lothian | 181,310 | 8.3 | 0 |

Sources: Research survey and Scottish Government (population and rural figures).

Mobile libraries in Scotland

As of November 2018



The main user groups for all mobile library services are children (pre-school children in families and school-age children) and senior citizens. In addition, there are younger adults who may be unemployed or working from home. In very remote rural areas and on some of the islands it was noted that the user groups are a little more mixed. Users are predominantly female.

The users made 637,375 book loans in 2017-18 (figures from 20 of the 22 services). This represents 7% of total book loans for these authorities. When analysed by authority, this varies from below 1% of their book loans to 27% for the Western Isles. The large difference may be due to factors such as population served and the number of mobiles compared to community libraries, for example the Western Isles has three mobiles and four community libraries.

There were a total of 274,136 visits to 20 mobile library services during 2017-18. This represents 2% of the visits for library purposes from these 20 authorities. If services are reviewed on a purely numerical basis and cost per visit, this relatively low figure leaves mobile libraries vulnerable. However, the majority of mobile routes are in rural areas with low population density, meaning large visitor numbers are unlikely.

Overall there is a mixed picture of usage trends on Scottish mobiles. Some authorities are experiencing a slight increase in usage or maintaining current levels, e.g. Midlothian and South Lanarkshire. Some link the increase to their roll-out of Every Child a Library Member (ECALM) and increased engagement with school classes, e.g. Western Isles, whilst others note that adjusted timetables and routes have led to the increase. However, slightly more services have experienced reductions in usage which they note may be down to a dwindling pool of users as the

very elderly switch to housebound services, and/or where vehicles have been withdrawn due to age and not replaced.

3.1.7 Children's mobiles

There are three mobile vehicles that are specifically for children (Edinburgh, North Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire) but over 85% of 21 mobile library services visit primary schools during their general routes. In addition, just over a third visit nurseries and two services indicated that they visit secondary schools. A few services also visit Early Years Centres or special needs centres. Given the importance of encouraging reading for pleasure and the impact on literacy skills (see section 4.4.1), this high level of engagement with schools and nurseries is positive.

3.1.8 Staffing

Mobile library staffing levels tend to reflect the number of mobiles, although some heads of service commented that they had additional relief and/or support staff. There are around 60 mobile library staff in Scotland, which includes some part-time staff. Most mobile library staff are the driver/library staff member combined. Given the size of the vehicles, this requires someone to be experienced in library work, good with people and knowledgeable about books and authors, and also confident with driving large vehicles often on small roads, comfortable with lone working, and not put off by less than ideal working conditions.

3.1.9 Operational costs

The cost of operating mobile libraries varies to some degree on the age of the vehicle, as older ones tend to require more maintenance, as well as on the number of staff involved. On average, operating one mobile with one member of staff will cost around £50,000 pa. The capital cost of a new mobile library is usually over £100,000. The survey results reveal a mixed picture of costs, particularly where trusts deliver the library service on behalf of a local authority. In these cases the local authority often remains responsible for the capital costs of the vehicles whilst the trust is responsible for staffing, stock and other daily operational matters.

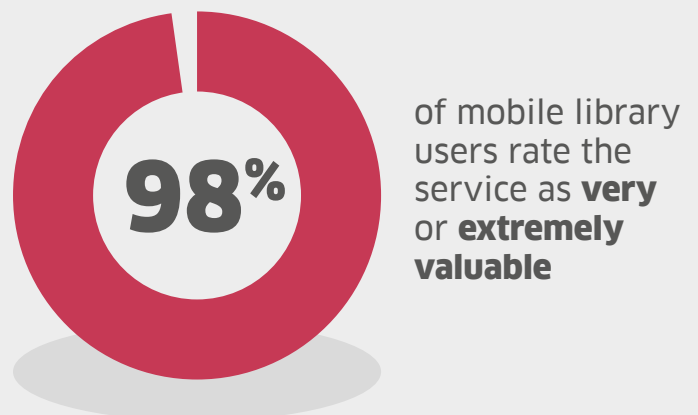
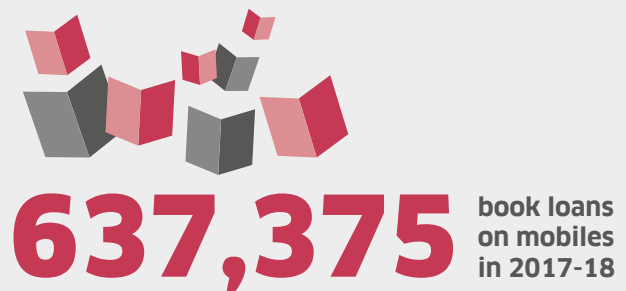
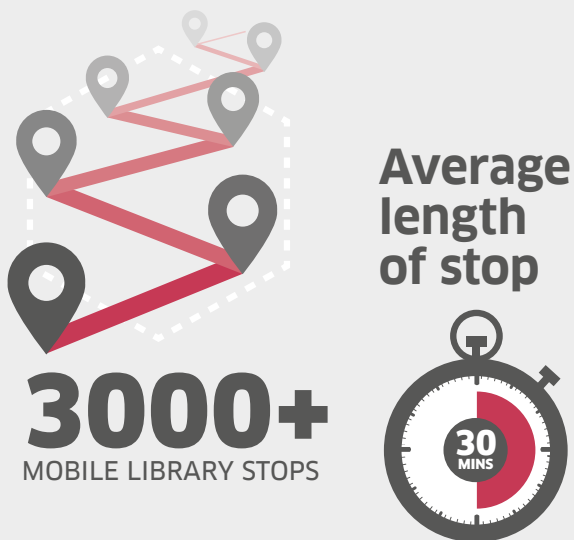
One service noted that their mobile library is part-funded by the local trust, as well as the council's Tackling Poverty programme. This was for a children's mobile and could be an avenue other services wish to explore.



Overall there is a mixed picture of usage trends on Scottish mobiles.



Highlights of Scottish mobile libraries





3.2 Other countries

3.2.1 Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland public libraries are overseen and delivered by Libraries NI. The merger of the previous five education and library boards into one body led to inherited differences of provision across the country and so a review of mobile library provision was undertaken in 2011. The consultation and strategic review led to a new strategy for mobile libraries.¹³ The main findings of the review, and the basis for their future focus were that:

- ▶ the mobile libraries are mainly used by older (retired) people, children and their parents/carers, and that the stock in the limited space should reflect these target groups;
- ▶ books, including audio, would be the main focus for services on the mobiles, rather than, for example, ICT provision;
- ▶ there should be criteria for stops based on distance from community libraries (three miles), customer demand and levels of use;
- ▶ there should be principles for serving children at school and playgroup and an extension of this service from a very low base to more such institutions;
- ▶ there is more work to be done on promoting the service.

Since the review, the services to children at school have been well received with demand higher than can be currently accommodated. Usage has fluctuated with some decline from adults although there has been a substantial increase in usage from children. Libraries NI has continued to deliver the service of 16 vehicles within its existing budget but until a new Northern Ireland Executive is formed, larger scale budget decisions and planning is unlikely. Recent interest in the mobile library service has risen mainly due to the cross-border nature of one of the routes.

3.2.2 Wales

Like Scotland, Wales has many rural local authorities and areas of low population density and one geographic area which is more heavily

urbanised. As indicated in Table 1, the number of mobile libraries in Wales has been falling in the last two decades and there are many authorities who no longer provide a mobile library service. However, two authorities (Ceredigion and Powys) recently took advantage of a Welsh Government library modernisation capital grant fund to apply for new mobile libraries. And in 2018 Carmarthenshire upgraded its mobile library fleet with three new vehicles with digital services on board, including Wi-Fi, iPads, photocopying and printing services, as well as extending the routes to more villages in the rural county and increasing the length of stops. The service also delivers a 'Rural Hwb' service with a customer service staff member on board the mobile to help deliver council services.

3.2.3 Nordic countries and Europe

Libraries in Nordic countries are often regarded as examples others could follow. The Nordic countries generally have very high literacy rates and high rates of library membership along with building exceptional new libraries. But as with Scotland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden have all seen fluctuations to their mobile numbers and a general decline, often due to financial reasons, or changing patterns of usage.¹⁴

In Finland there is a slightly different picture. Although it has lost mobiles (from 201 in 2000 to 134 in 2017) these mobiles have high usage levels.¹⁵ There were 6,445,646 loans via mobiles in 2017, with 10,244 stops. Finland's total population is similar to Scotland's, although the land mass is over four times as big, around three times more mobiles, and three times more stops. Mobile loans are about 10 times greater, which is likely to be a result of more reading and much higher membership levels in Finland. Finland also has the Netti-nysse mobile in Tampere, which is a long articulated bus specialising in teaching the use of the internet, web services and information searches. There is also a joint Nordic Mobile Library which serves the far north of Norway, Sweden and Finland and carries stock in four languages.¹⁶

Mobile library links have been forged by one authority (Highland) with Austria through a request from Austria to learn from Scotland. An exchange

programme of volunteers has taken place (in both directions), including a presentation at an international library conference in Austria.¹⁷

With the high literacy rates and high library membership levels in Nordic countries and some other European countries, there is scope to learn from their successes.

3.2.4 Around the world

Two recent reviews from around the world indicate that issues facing Scottish mobiles are similar to those in America, Canada and Australia. In 2016, Ottawa Public Library conducted a survey of public library managers in Canada and the United States on their outreach and mobile library services.

"The results indicate that many are offering homebound delivery and that bookmobiles remain popular, particularly in libraries serving large geographic areas. Some libraries are exploring kiosk, or vending machine style services. Lastly, new trends are emerging, notably pop-up libraries, vans, and book bikes. ... [I]t is apparent that a number of libraries are prioritizing serving populations experiencing physical or social barriers, such as rural residents, residents of community housing, shelters or detention centers, and those living in poverty."¹⁸

“With the high literacy rates and high library membership levels in Nordic countries and some other European countries, there is scope to learn from their successes.”

A 2015 review of mobile and outreach library services in New South Wales in Australia found that they fulfil an important social need as a meeting place and distribution point for local community information.¹⁹ The New South Wales report lists some of the challenges facing mobile libraries, a number of which are similar for Scotland and the rest of the UK:

- increasing costs, in particular fuel and maintenance
- rise of the online 24/7 library means many library services can be remotely accessed from home
- population decline in some rural areas
- increased mobility of the population combined with the loss of services such as schools, banks and shops in small towns has led to an increased tendency to drive to the nearest large town on a regular basis
- growing environmental concerns, including the effects of large vehicles travelling the countryside
- work health and safety concerns. Mobile drivers often work alone and in conditions that may be unacceptable
- changes in library/council management and strategic priorities.²⁰

Despite this list, the review recognises the benefits of mobile libraries and different outreach models and includes recommended guidelines and performance indicators for such services.

Mobile library guidelines are also included in New Zealand's public library standards, with a chapter covering matters such as management, the viability of stops (50 loans an hour minimum), the maximum daily distance to be travelled (200km), stock, staffing, equipment, marketing and performance indicators for issues, customer satisfaction, enquiries, visits and issues per stop.²¹





MOBILE LIBRARY



Code Club



Audio Books



Story Time

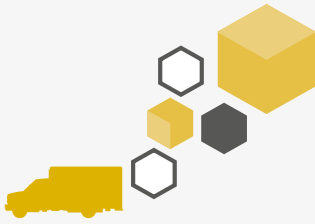


Gentle Exercise



DAF

SM8 ENE



4 The impact and difference made by mobile libraries

Research by organisations such as the Carnegie UK Trust shows that libraries contribute towards a range of measures including cultural, economic, educational and social wellbeing.²² Libraries are also included in the Scottish Government's Programme for Government for 2018-19, with particular reference to children, learning and culture.²³

The heads of service noted that their mobile libraries help contribute towards a number of local policies in areas such as children, communities, health and wellbeing, social isolation, learning and culture, as well as specific strategies such as Ambition & Opportunity – A National Strategy for Public Libraries 2015-2020, and Vibrant Libraries, Thriving Schools: A National Strategy for School Libraries in Scotland 2018-2023, along with other literacy and reading strategies and programmes.

They noted a range of benefits of mobile library provision, including:

- equality of access for rural, remote and isolated people and communities
- access for children and schools, and to related programmes
- access for those with restricted mobility and/or limited access to transport and support for independent living
- flexible library presence which can be used at special events or for temporary cover for a community library
- opportunities to work with external partners
- contribution towards reducing social isolation.

The evidence gathered through this research confirms that using mobile libraries has a considerable beneficial impact on people's lives in various key areas, some of which are explored in more depth in this section.

4.1 Loneliness, social isolation and communities

Loneliness and social isolation are similar but different. Social isolation refers to the objective measure of reduced social contact, while loneliness refers to a subjective state.²⁴ Despite the internet and social media, people are becoming increasingly

lonely and isolated and do not have the social relationships that they need. This has a negative effect on their health and has a cost, in personal and financial terms.

The Scottish Government is committed to tackling social isolation and loneliness and has recently issued A Connected Scotland: Our strategy for tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections. The strategy recognises that reducing social isolation and loneliness will contribute to improving the health, wellbeing and quality of life for the people of Scotland as both factors have an impact on mental and physical health. The strategy has four priority areas and notes the importance of culture for social cohesion and integration, with specific reference to libraries under priority 4 (support and infrastructure that fosters connections).²⁵

Research published by The Reading Agency found that '...reading should be considered one of the foremost ways in which we should look to address the growing challenge posed by loneliness.'²⁶ The evidence from Scottish users confirms this finding.

“
 ...reading should be considered one of the foremost ways in which we should look to address the growing challenge posed by loneliness.
 ”

4.1.1 Survey evidence

The mobile library user survey provides considerable evidence that using the mobile library service helps reduce feelings of loneliness and social isolation, through direct contact with the library staff and neighbours and also through reading itself. This is illustrated in the selection of quotes from Scottish mobile library users below.

“It’s helped me feel less isolated as I live in a rural area - often catch up with neighbours there too.”
(Angus, 50s, F)

“Friendliness of staff and bumping into neighbours makes me feel less lonely.” (Orkney, 60s, F)

“Reading always broadens the mind. I would never see anybody if it wasn’t for the library van. Also keeps me occupied as I get lonely.”
(Edinburgh, 70s, F)

“Sometimes the mobile driver is the only person I see all week.” (Highland, 70s, F)

“Living alone I don’t actually speak to many people so the mobile library is a friendly regular contact which brings me a feast of reading as well as some human contact.” (Stirling, 60s, F)

“Highlight of my month.” (Dundee, 60s, F)

“I started using the library as soon as I moved into the village as a newly separated woman. It has brought me into contact with my new neighbours and enabled me to become part of the local community very quickly.” (Stirling, 60s, F)

“When I first used the mobile library I was newly retired and my husband alive. Now I am less mobile and a widow. Books are now a huge part of my life.”
(Perth & Kinross, 70s, F)

“It’s so convenient for me. I also enjoy the social aspect.” (Dundee, 60s, F)

“It provides a meeting place to connect with neighbours and helps me sleep well each night by providing a book to read that helps me to relax and unwind.” (Stirling, 60s, M)

“Get to see another human being, very important living in a remote area.” (Western Isles, 50s, M)

“Having the library visit has lessened feelings of isolation and brings the wider world to my door. The internet is no substitute for the warmth, and interest of someone really interested in my requirements. Keeps my brain alive.”
(South Lanarkshire, 70s, F)

“When we first moved into [X], this was one of the first services we accessed. It helped greatly in dispelling my feelings of isolation and loneliness, and my young children and I quickly grew to look forward to our visits from the mobile library.”
(Scottish Borders, 40s, F)

Many respondents referred to feeling part of their community through using the mobile library. This is often from provision of local information about activities, cultural events, health clinics etc, but also through talking and meeting neighbours on the vehicle.

“It provides an invaluable - and possibly unquantifiable - community service.”
(Western Isles, 50s, F)

“The social importance of the mobile library coming to the village is incalculable.” (Stirling, 80s, F)

“...it helps keep communities mindful of others.”
(South Lanarkshire, 60s, M)

“Whenever it fits the timetable, the mobile visits the local village hall for our monthly morning gathering ‘Meet & Treat’. This is enormously valuable for community building.”
(Scottish Borders, 70s, M)

“I have made new friends and really felt part of the community as the library is always up to date with what is happening locally and is a firm date in my calendar.” (Stirling, 60s, F)

“Connects me to local community - I’m quite isolated but meet friends and neighbours I might not otherwise see.” (Orkney, 60s, F)

“The mobile library is extremely valuable in connecting us with the people, local information and learning opportunities across our region and we thrive as a result of being able to access the service.” (Scottish Borders, 40s, F)

4.1.2 Kindness

Many of the responses from the user survey mentioned the personal service and the kindness and friendliness of the mobile library staff. Recent research published by the Carnegie UK Trust on kindness and public policy notes 'the importance of human connection and relationships for individual and societal wellbeing.'²⁷ In their research, 42% of respondents in Scotland said that they had been treated with kindness when using the public library (significantly more than English, Welsh and NI libraries). Experiencing positive relationships and transactions has a beneficial impact on the wellbeing of individuals, thus the interactions on mobile libraries bring benefits on many levels.

"The staff are to be commended. They are all friendly and helpful." (Perth & Kinross, 70s, F)

"It is the care and thoughtfulness of its staff that I rate most highly. They know the people using the service and make the time to ensure an appropriate range of new reading books is available on each visit to maintain interest and diversity." (Scottish Borders, 40s, F)

"Staff cheer you up." (Dundee, 60s, F)

4.2 Health and wellbeing

Using libraries has a dual benefit on health and wellbeing, through the social contact and because reading itself can improve a person's health and wellbeing. The Reading Agency's report, A Society of Readers, sought to 'assess the potential impact of reading on several great challenges of our time: loneliness, mental health problems, dementia, and social (im)mobility.'²⁸ For each of these four issues the report outlined how reading can help, referring to a number of different research studies and evidence to support their findings. The report covered both reading for pleasure and reading for information (empowerment) and found that: 'Recreational reading and self-help reading both improve health outcomes, and improve health literacy which in turn benefits a person's health.'

In addition:

'Books can train our brains and lessen the symptoms of dementia. They can help us foster connections with other readers and help alleviate loneliness or depression. They can open up new ways to fulfil our individual potential, spreading opportunity to workplaces, deprived communities and prisons. In short, it is no exaggeration to say that reading can transform British society.'

The role of libraries in improving health literacy is recognised by the Scottish Government. In its health literacy action plan, Making it Easier: A health literacy action plan for Scotland 2017-2025, it seeks to enable 'all of us to have the confidence, knowledge, understanding and skills to maintain good health.'²⁹ The plan states that health literacy is important for social, environmental and economic reasons, and outlines four key actions, including one which relates to libraries and information services. It notes that library and information services have a key role to play in health literacy, through their role in providing information, linking to health information sources, and via digital literacy skills.

In addition to these health benefits, other research has found that library use not only has a primary benefit on people's health, it also leads to financial savings for health services. Research published by Arts Council England found that library usage was 'associated with higher life satisfaction, higher happiness and a higher sense of purpose in life...'. In addition:

'After controlling for other confounding factors, being a regular library user is associated with a 1.4 per cent increase in the likelihood of reporting good general health. ... Based on reductions in GP visits caused by this improvement in health, we predict the medical cost savings associated with library engagement at £1.32 per person per year. It is possible to aggregate NHS cost savings across the library-using English population to estimate an average cost saving of £27.5 million per year.'³⁰

If the same principles apply in Scotland, mobile library users are helping to reduce the cost burden on the NHS in Scotland.

4.2.1 Survey evidence

A selection of quotes from Scottish mobile library users provides evidence of the health benefits of using mobile libraries. This arises from the provision of quality health information in non-fiction books, leaflets about local health services and access to books for reading in general. Some mobiles also have partnerships with health agencies (see section 6.2.3). Many users said that books from the mobile library helped 'keep me sane' or 'keep me mentally fit' when stressed, helped them relax and unwind, and that the non-fiction health books were particularly useful if they had an illness. The service was also regarded as a lifeline for people who are carers.

"It helps me manage my mental health problem." (Western Isles, 60s, F)

"Helps keep my mum's mind active and stave off dementia." (Orkney)

"I read more and that has a fantastic impact on making me worry less. Reading reduces my stress levels and helps me relax." (Highland, 40s, F)

"I am more confident and less anxious." (Western Isles, 60s, F)

"Reading the books keeps me alert and helps meet others." (North Ayrshire, 70s, F)

"I have got fitter as I have to walk to the van. Can't do without my books." (South Lanarkshire, 80s, F)

"Use library cookery books for inspiration for healthy eating." (Perth & Kinross, 60s, F)

"Registered disabled and unable to get to a library independently. Being an avid reader I find it improves the quality of my life immeasurably." (Moray, 70s, F)

"When my depression was really bad, I couldn't even bring myself to go out to the van. The librarian would pick up my returns from the post bin and leave a bag of books she had chosen. Then, as health improved I could go out to the van again." (East Lothian, 50s, F)

"Reading makes me happy, reading makes me sleep well but can't buy a book every week as I read over 50 books a year." (Argyll & Bute)

"Borrowing music CDs cheers me up listening to music." (North Ayrshire, 70s, F)

"My garden and [X] arriving with the library van are high on the list of what makes life worth living." (Scottish Borders, 70s, F)

"This service has enriched my life and that of the community. Nearest public libraries are about 15-20 miles away so the convenience cannot be overstated." (Scottish Borders, 60s, F)

4.3 Learning and development

Most research on reading, libraries and the link to learning and development focuses on children (see section 4.4) but it is equally important for lifelong learning and skills development. The extensive literature review research published by The Reading Agency found that reading is important for social mobility and future prospects for children, and that '...an affinity for reading at a young age is a lifelong asset' and that '...[r]egular reading breeds important life skills, which translate into greater opportunities in life.'³¹

SLIC's Scottish Reading Strategy for public libraries outlines what public libraries offer in terms of four main areas: developing readers and improving literacy; health and wellbeing; language, diversity and cultural heritage; and advocacy and activism.³² Through providing access to books and other reading materials on mobile libraries, adults will be able to improve their literacy and language skills. Evidence from the user survey also found that one of the aims of the Reading Strategy, 'encourage people to read widely, trying new genres and exploring new ways of sharing their reading experiences encouraging people to read widely and explore', happens on the mobiles through users and the library staff member making recommendations (see section 6.5).

4.3.1 Survey evidence

Many of the mobile library users referred to the benefit of reading non-fiction books to help increase their knowledge, learn new skills and improve their existing skills and hobbies, such as for DIY, crafts, digital skills, gardening, cooking, as well as for studying.

“I am now working as a result of passing exams (the mobiles provided many of the books for my course). I am financially better off as a result of working.” (Angus, 50, F)

“The mobile library has a wide range of books on many different subjects. Useful if you want to try a new hobby or learn about something new.” (Orkney, 60s, F)

“Increase my knowledge.” (South Lanarkshire, 50s, F)

“Keeps your mind active.” (South Lanarkshire, 70s, M)

4.4 Children, reading and literacy

There are currently three mobile libraries in Scotland which are specifically for children or schools (Edinburgh City, North Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire). Research on children’s mobile libraries and reading found that they promote reading in diverse communities, the mobile staff encourage and develop children’s reading skills, and that the mobiles influence children’s reading habits, skills and abilities.³³ A review of literature relating to school libraries found that they had a positive impact on academic attainment, learning outcomes including information literacy, and positive attitudes towards learning.³⁴

All mobiles carry material for children as pre-nursery children, families and home-schooled children are key user groups for mobiles. Almost all mobile libraries in Scotland also visit nurseries and/or primary and/or secondary schools and some also visit early years centres.

Children need information for school work, reading materials to develop their literacy skills, exposure to different cultures, and to develop a love of

reading for pleasure. The latter can have a huge impact on educational attainment and future wellbeing and has been found to be more important than the education level of their parents.³⁵

The importance of reading in children’s lives is underlined by various UK research studies.³⁶ In Scotland, several strategies and programmes focus on reading and children, including the First Minister’s Reading Challenge; Every Child A Library Member (ECALM); Vibrant Libraries, Thriving Schools - A National Strategy for School Libraries in Scotland 2018-2023; the evaluation framework How Good Is Our School Library?; the School Library Improvement Fund; the Scottish Reading Strategy for public libraries, which has tailored offers for early years and teens; and strategic aim 1 of Ambition & Opportunity - A National Strategy for Public Libraries 2015-2020, which focuses on reading, literacy and learning. In addition, the recent Young Scot report on public libraries and young people provides useful insight into how libraries can be made more enticing for young people.³⁷ Several library managers indicated that the scheme had led to an increase in children using the mobile library service.

The new strategy for school libraries in Scotland states that ‘School libraries have a vital role to play, throughout the learner journey from 3-18, in supporting literacy, health and wellbeing, and improving attainment across the Curriculum’. The Strategy ‘sets out a vision where every child and young person in Scotland has access to a dynamic school library service.’³⁸ The mobile library service can complement school provision and may encourage more reading for pleasure rather than being associated with school work.

4.4.1 Survey evidence

Although the user survey was not designed specifically for children, a few did answer it. Several adults also referred to the benefits of using the mobile for their children. The evidence below highlights how important the mobile library is to children and parents.

“My child lights up when it arrives. Literally jumping up and down excited to choose new books. A great gift for the next generation.” (South Lanarkshire, 30s, F)

“My three children learned to love reading through the fun and adventure of bookbus days.” (Stirling, 50s, M)

“It is a lovely routine for us to read together in the evening. The children can calm down after a busy day.” (Edinburgh, 40s, F)

“It makes me really happy” (Edinburgh, 9, F)

“My reading has increased in school.” (Edinburgh, 9, F)

“Helped me with biology homework.” (South Ayrshire, 12)

“Because I can learn more.” (Edinburgh, 9, F)
(in reply to what they liked most about using the mobile)

“My whole family is reading more books and we share stories at bedtime.” (Edinburgh, 40s, F)

“It’s helped by helping me spell and learn new words and what they mean.” (Edinburgh, 9, F)

“Without access to money to travel anywhere, if the mobile library ... stopped coming to our village my children and I would not have had access to books. The only books they would have had during those crucial early years would have been the three in their Bookbug bag from the health visitor. Three books.” (Western Isles, 30s, F)

4.5 Culture and leisure

The Scottish Government is due to release its new cultural strategy at the time of writing, with libraries included in the draft strategy,³⁹ as well as featuring in the new national outcome for culture in the refreshed National Performance Framework: We are creative and our vibrant and diverse cultures are expressed and enjoyed widely.⁴⁰ Libraries are included in the term ‘cultural heritage’ and places where cultural activities take place. But how might using mobile libraries contribute towards this goal?

Although mobiles are generally too small and time-pressured to hold activities, such as author events, some users noted that their mobile library service had organised an event in a static community venue in the village. The provision of books in itself also contributes towards access to culture, as recognised by many of the users, and some mobiles provide films and music. Some also have leaflets and posters about local cultural events happening in the area.

4.5.1 Survey evidence

“I like books about different countries and they are available too.” (Perth & Kinross, 50s, F)

“I like to read about the world.” (Dundee, 80s, M)

“It is our wee community’s link to the world of literature, culture and craft.” (Stirling, 80s, M)

“A great resource of local knowledge and the provision of easy access to the world of literature.” (South Lanarkshire, 60s, M)

“It brings education and entertainment to our doorstep (nearly).” (Orkney, 60s, M)

“The mobile library is my window on many other worlds and stories.” (Shetland, 90s, F)

“My literary horizons have broadened.” (Orkney, 60s, M)

“Books open up worlds of possibilities.” (Perth & Kinross, 30s, F)

“I have learned a lot about Dundee through my choice of books.” (Dundee, 70s, F)

4.6 Others areas affected

As well as the areas outlined above, many users commented on other areas of their lives which are affected by the mobile library service. This includes matters such as personal finance, family relationships and independence.

4.6.1 Finance

For many people using the mobile saves them considerable amounts of money through not buying books and the cost of transport to a potentially distant town. Many mobile library users are avid readers who borrow up to 20 books at a time, which would be financially impossible for most people to buy.

“We could never buy all the books that we read and therefore the mobile library is a godsend.” (Stirling, couple, 60s)

4.6.2 Families

Families, particularly those with young children, are one of the main groups of mobile library users. They benefit not just from accessing the books but also how they use the books at home. It can also be an inter-generational experience as there may be very young children and elderly people on the mobile at the same time.

“It makes me feel empowered and something I and everyone in my household look forward to using. It supports my children’s language development and gives us opportunities for discussions as a family and brings us closer together.” (Western Isles, 20s, F)

“Lovely to see young and old using library.” (Angus, 50s, F)

“The children enjoy selecting a book from a different selection. They enjoy reading them with family members and sharing their stories.” (South Ayrshire, 40s, F)

“My family and I have become more confident and our communication has got stronger and it’s brought us together to have things to talk about rather than the TV.” (Western Isles, 20s, F)

4.6.3 Independence

For people who like to remain as independent as possible, being able to access the mobile library themselves and choose their own books is important. It reduces the need to rely on neighbours or family for lifts to the nearest town if they don’t have their own transport, and also gives a positive sense of achievement of being physically able to use it. This contributes towards someone’s health and wellbeing.

“In a county that has a high elderly population it is essential to keep minds active to sustain independent living.” (Orkney)

“[My mum] can pop along herself happy knowing she’s getting her reading for the coming weeks” (North Lanarkshire)

Several users referred to the mobile library as a “lifeline”. One example was provided by a woman who was in an abusive relationship and she was not allowed to mix with neighbours, had no access to a car or her own money, the telephone or the internet. However, once a fortnight when her husband was out during the day she would use the mobile with her children which provided her with an opportunity for some adult company as well as accessing the books. She said:

“I was isolated ... but I could take them onto that [mobile] full of books and they were so excited when they saw it pull up. For them it was being able to choose which stories they wanted to borrow. For me it was being able to do something positive with them, when there were so many barriers put up ... The mobile library was indescribably important to my children and I during the four years we lived there.”



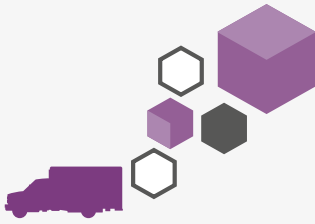
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5 Rural issues

5.1 Rural population

The Scottish Government's rural classification scheme defines settlements of fewer than 3,000 people as rural. It has further classifications of 'accessible rural' and 'remote rural', based on a drive time of 30 minutes or more from settlements of at least 10,000 people. Using this combined definition, 17% of the population of Scotland live in rural areas, although 98% of the landmass is rural.⁴¹

Using the three-fold classification, there are 11 local authorities with more than a third of their population living in rural areas (see Table 3 below). These authorities are likely to have more complex operational issues and are likely to face more challenges in providing an equitable library service to all residents. All but one of these authorities currently provide a mobile service.

Table 3: Local authorities with more than a third of their population classed as accessible and remote rural

| Local authority | Accessible and remote rural population (%) |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Na h-Eileanan Siar | 72.4 |
| Shetland Islands | 70.4 |
| Orkney Islands | 66.0 |
| Dumfries & Galloway | 53.2 |
| Aberdeenshire | 48.4 |
| Highland | 47.4 |
| Argyll & Bute | 47.2 |
| Scottish Borders | 46.8 |
| Perth & Kinross | 46.1 |
| Moray | 41.6 |
| Stirling | 33.5 |

Source: Scottish Government⁴²

There are also six and eight fold levels of classification and five authorities have a substantial percentage of their population in the 'very remote rural' category within the eight-fold classification. These are: Argyll & Bute (37.6%), Highland (23.8%), Na h-Eileanan Siar (72.4%), Orkney Islands (66%), and Shetland Islands at (70%).⁴³ These authorities are likely to have the most significant challenges in delivering a mobile library service in very remote areas.

As well as population numbers, the age of people living in rural areas is an important consideration. Generally, rural areas have a lower proportion of the population in the 16 to 34 age range and a higher proportion of people aged 45 and over. This is particularly true for the age range of 65 and over in remote rural areas.⁴⁴

For people living in rural areas, the mobile library may be one of the few visible local authority services people see or utilise and is regarded as a vital service. This was noted by some of the users in the survey.

"Please don't ever underestimate how this helps people in remote communities benefit from services people in urban areas may take for granted. We all pay Council Tax and, even if small numbers use it, the impact is much greater." (Shetland, 60s, M)

"[It] allows a free service in our rural area which makes our pupils feel valued and have some of the same educational and recreational experiences as other areas of the council." (South Lanarkshire, 40s, F)

"It is a crucial service in rural Scotland in different ways to different people." (Scottish Borders, 70s, F)

5.2 Rural challenges

Rural areas may be at a disadvantage in terms of availability of facilities, lower wages, poorer ICT connectivity, and fewer social, cultural and

economic opportunities. Research by Arts Council England (ACE) in 2014 into rural libraries in England found that there were specific challenges for rural libraries including:

- smaller and less dense populations so less potential to generate high footfall, which can mean lower level of investment
- older (and ageing) populations
- scarcity of other services (public or private)
- lower broadband connectivity and speed.⁴⁵

However, they found that rural areas tend to have greater levels of civic participation and community engagement. The Scottish Government also acknowledges that rural areas have a higher sense of neighbourhood and more people living in rural areas are more likely to describe their neighbourhood as a 'very good' place to live compared to the rest of Scotland. Rural areas also have proportionally slightly more people volunteering their time.⁴⁶ Whilst this may suit some localised services looking to utilise volunteers, it may be less appropriate for delivering a professional mobile library service over a dispersed catchment area.

5.3 Rural libraries

The ACE research found that the biggest driver for change for rural library services in recent years has been cost savings, and that in their eight case study areas, reviews of the mobile library service had led to

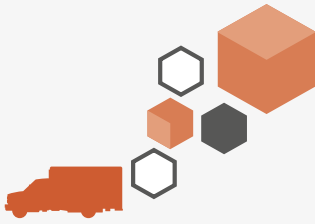
'...reductions in frequency and coverage of those services (e.g. from fortnightly to monthly visits or the removal of some stops where usage was lowest); reorganising of routes; investment in better equipped / more flexible vehicles; the ceasing of some mobile services entirely; [and] investment in technology-driven solutions.'⁴⁷

Examples provided in the ACE report outline different ways that library services have sought to manage reductions in the mobile library service. Surrey withdrew the mobile service and offered free transport to some residents to travel to their nearest static library. In Wakefield the vehicles were changed to smaller vans, staffing levels were reduced and the service was combined with housebound deliveries. And in Devon, the mobile service was reduced from 11 to four vehicles and re-focused on the most remote areas.

The evidence from the library managers' survey in Scotland indicates that of the 11 most rural authorities (outlined in Table 2), almost all of them have made reductions to their fleet of mobiles, and/or changed the timetable and reduced the frequency of visits. However, some of these 11 have more recently secured capital funding for new mobile libraries (Highland, Na h-Eileanan Siar and Stirling) and others have purchased new vehicles within the last four years (Orkney Islands, Perth & Kinross, Scottish Borders and Shetland Islands).

The ACE research report concludes that mobile libraries, combined with a digital offer, could enhance the rural library service offer.

“For people living in rural areas, the mobile library may be one of the few visible local authority services people see or utilise and is regarded as a vital service.”



6 Library management, policies and practice

Providing a mobile library service, often across rural and sparse populations, raises a number of management and operational issues. This section discusses some of the strategic issues involved, as well as day to day matters such as staffing and marketing.

6.1 Ambition & Opportunity

There are various ways mobile libraries contribute towards the goals of Ambition & Opportunity: A Strategy for Public Libraries in Scotland 2015-2020. The strategy comprises six main strategic aims and these are directly linked to the national outcomes and indicators of the Scottish Government. The six aims are:

- Libraries promoting reading, literacy and learning
- Libraries promoting digital inclusion
- Libraries promoting economic wellbeing
- Libraries promoting social wellbeing
- Libraries promoting culture and creativity
- Libraries as excellent public services.

The evidence from the user survey has found that mobile libraries contribute to almost all of these aims. They help with people's reading, literacy and learning; contribute towards economic and social wellbeing; play an important part in culture and creativity, and are a highly valued public service.

Partly due to the age of some of the vehicles, financial savings of the last decade, and poor internet connectivity and Wi-Fi availability, most mobile libraries are unable to currently contribute towards digital inclusion. This could change in the future if rural connectivity improves and if newer digitally-enabled vehicles are brought into service.

6.2 Management and planning issues

Bamkin's research on children's mobile libraries in Britain concluded that there were various practices which promoted reading and helped overcome library membership barriers. These were: the quality of operator and management relationships;

consistency of staffing; stock management decisions; and team working with other agencies and working closely with parents and carers.⁴⁸ These and other matters are covered by IFLA's Mobile Library Guidelines, which contains detailed suggestions regarding provision of a mobile library service.

As with all services, there are opportunities to try new things and adapt and adjust the service, although not all trials are successful. For example, one service trialled a promotion of e-books including on the livery, but take-up was limited, possibly reflecting poor internet connectivity in the area. One service experimented with a book exchange scheme in a couple of locations, but there was little take-up, which they felt reflected the value placed on the personal connection to the mobile.

One service (Dundee) adjusted the timetable to make engaging with nurseries more efficient and effective. Visits on the general routes changed from every two weeks to every three weeks, in line with the standard loan period for community libraries, and the 'new' week became solely for nursery visits. These visits require different stock with more early years material, as well as other items such as cushions and storytime rugs. Rather than swapping over on a daily basis, the mobile library is prepared once for the whole week of nursery visits. The new timetable has also enabled longer stops at nurseries so more children can visit and more events can take place on board.

Dundee has also introduced workplace visits to two out-of-town locations which have large car parks, and these have proven to be successful. This is something other services could consider if they have similar situations in order to reach new users of working age.

Recent reviews in some services have also refocused timetables to allow longer stops in some areas, or focused on the very remote areas, or on those users who do not also use community libraries. Some services have also increased the number of visits to nurseries, schools and residential homes/sheltered housing.

6.2.1 Forthcoming changes

As noted in section 3.1.2, some services will have new vehicles in 2019/2020. Other services noted that they may look at the timetables in order to create longer stops which will allow activities to take place on board, and also to deliver digital sessions where internet connectivity is available. One service is considering adjusting the timetables to coordinate some stops with activities taking place in community centres, which could increase usage, as well as link with external partners delivering events locally.

6.2.2 Marketing

The level of public information about mobile library services varies across local authorities. Some authorities, including the trusts which deliver the service on behalf of the local authority, provide route and timetable information on their websites, occasionally with online maps, e.g. Perth & Kinross, but others publish little or no detail of the routes or timetables and provide only contact details for further information. Some services publish annual reports about each mobile route, e.g. High Life Highland. Route and timetable provision also varies greatly in terms of readability and accessibility, with no standard format as to how the information is displayed. Some have complicated colour-coded leaflets, which if printed at home on a black and white printer would not be very useful.

There are also discrepancies relating to temporary service provision changes. Several of the users commented that they would welcome better communication if the vehicles will be off the road for repairs or maintenance or if the mobile cannot run for any reason. For example, changes for Orkney and Shetland mobiles are announced on the relevant local BBC radio station.

Some users felt that the service as a whole could be promoted more on local community social media

pages, village noticeboards or in other community areas. One person noted that they see the van parked, but are not sure if it's open or on a break. They said: *"If times / dates were advertised better we would def use this service."*

The exterior of the vehicle is also a free marketing and advertising space which is seen by hundreds of people. Most services do use the exterior in a bright and engaging way, but there is still potential to use this space to the library service's advantage to attract more users to libraries. Examples of using the livery to showcase what is on the inside can be found in the New South Wales review.⁴⁹ An example of a more quirky approach is Orkney Library which has the only named Scottish mobile library van, BookyMcBookface.

Looking internationally, there is a National BookMobile Day in America as part of national libraries week, organised by the American Library Association (ALA). This day celebrates bookmobiles and the library staff who provide the service. The ALA also has a bookmobile Handbook for Mobile Services Staff.⁵⁰ Similarly, there is an Australasian Mobile Library & Outreach Services Network which provides advocacy and support for the mobile services sectors in Australia and New Zealand and hold an annual two-day conference.⁵¹

6.2.3 External partners

Some services work with external partners to provide either occasional or ongoing additional services on board the mobile library. Several provide services from the local authority such as refuse/recycling bags, bus pass application and renewal forms, travel information, fire safety information, and information about other council services.

Where there is space on board (critically a second or third seat for additional people to travel) some partners come for the day to deliver information sessions for communities, for example, Angus mobile library service has worked with Police Scotland, NHS partners and housing teams; and Stirling has hosted Action on Hearing Loss on five separate days.

The charity gave out leaflets as well as conducting almost 100 hearing tests in that time on the mobile. Following this success, Action on Hearing Loss is rolling the partnership out to all Stirling libraries. Stirling also hold community liaison events locally e.g. 'Wee tea, books and a blether' at Gartmore and when the timetables coincide some mobiles attend local gatherings, e.g. a 'Meet and Treat' in the Scottish Borders.

Several services, e.g. Midlothian, Perth & Kinross, and South Lanarkshire, provide replacement hearing aid batteries, which has proven to be a very popular service. Perth & Kinross also provide walking stick ferrules, which is also popular.

At the opposite end of the age spectrum, Edinburgh's mobile library service worked with partners on the 'Holiday Hunger' project to reach children in areas of high multiple deprivation, and used the Summer Reading Challenge as a hook. This led to increased numbers of children participating in the Challenge and thus benefiting from reading.

6.3 Collaborative delivery

There is currently one example of local authorities working together to deliver a mobile library service in Scotland. In 2014/15, East Lothian undertook a review of its customer services and the decision was taken to withdraw the mobile library service for various reasons, including end of life of the vehicles. They consulted closely with mobile library users and found that a significant number were 'duplicate' members in that they also used a community library, but that other users had no alternative, often for mobility, health or transport reasons.

As a result of the discussions, the library service implemented a home service for all those who requested it, and created a partnership with two neighbouring authorities to provide a mobile service to a select number of border villages. Thus Midlothian and Scottish Borders both provide mobile library services within East Lothian, with cost savings for the latter. Mobile library users within these East Lothian areas have library cards for two different authorities if they wish to also use a community library in East Lothian.

Should the outcomes of the shared library card pilot in the Aberdeenshire area be positive, there is potential for other authorities and users to benefit from using one library card to access neighbouring services.

This collaborative approach shows the importance of thinking about geography and service provision. The areas chosen within East Lothian have considerable cross-border movement already, e.g. registration of births and deaths and people are familiar with using two different authorities. The service review in East Lothian also led to an increase in opening hours for some libraries, including seven-day openings, which has helped some mobile library users access a community library when they perhaps previously could not. The changes have generally been achieved through the review of all customer face-to-face services and co-location of services with shared staffing. Hours have been adjusted in response to usage and to shifting populations due to new housing developments.

This example shows there is scope to consider alternative delivery models, particularly if mapping and other planning tools are used to review existing routes, users, stops etc to potentially create more efficient mobile services, particularly in boundary areas.

6.4 Staff issues

'The staff are the most important asset on the mobile library and have to endure long hours in restricted surroundings.'⁵²

The evidence gathered in the user survey found exceptional levels of praise for the mobile library staff, and it confirms that they are the most important asset of the service. A significant number of people mentioned the staff when asked 'What do you like most about using the mobile library service?' The words used most often were friendly, helpful, knowledgeable and kind. The library staff on the mobiles know their customers very well, and this is evident in the comments with many users appreciating the personal service. This friendly personal interaction is one reason why users rate the social contact so highly, and how mobile

libraries make such an important contribution towards reducing feelings of loneliness and social isolation.

“The service is brilliant. So friendly, helpful, with a personal touch.” (Shetland, 60s, F)

“The friendly helpful staff who go above and beyond their duties to make using the library van a welcoming and social experience.” (Fife, 50s, F)

“The staff are so friendly and great when advising about books for myself and children - I always come off the van with a smile on my face.” (Angus, 30s, F)

The mobile library staff provide an excellent service, despite the less than ideal conditions. There are no toilets, no kitchen facilities, the vehicles are cold when the door is open at a stop, many are lone workers, and some do evening or weekend rotas. They are unlikely to receive additional pay or benefits despite their working conditions being inferior to office-based staff. And in at least one region (Highland) some of the mobile staff have to stay overnight because of the distance and the routes involved.

Whether mobile library staff have library qualifications varies locally. Some have decades of experience that a qualification perhaps cannot match. Mobile library staff need to not only be comfortable driving large vehicles, but also happy to work alone whilst also being a ‘people’s person’ who can remember everyone’s names and their book preferences. They also need to have a good understanding of reader development so that they can recommend authors to users, keep abreast of the book trade, and need to know the variations within genres – not all crime is the same! This is especially important if they are choosing books for users. On routes where school classes come on board, the library staff member must also be comfortable with engaging with children. Continuity of staff is also important as the rapport and engagement with mobile users is based on knowing each person individually and establishing a connection.

6.5 Stock and user choice

‘The stock of a mobile should aim to reflect the community’s need for recreation, information, education and culture. ... [With] material relevant to the age, sex, religion or ethnicity of the community.’⁵³

Availability of appropriate stock is critical because people won’t borrow items if they don’t like what’s available. The relatively small collection available on mobiles has to appeal to the various user groups and be appropriately allocated for adults and children (of all ages), fiction and non-fiction, large print, and to have sufficient choice within these categories, e.g. different genres of fiction.

Mobile library staff play an important part in ensuring the stock is appropriate and use a range of tools to achieve this including: personal knowledge of authors/genres/titles; personal knowledge of customers; reader development skills; book websites like Goodreads and Fantastic Fiction; use of evidence based stock management software to analyse trends; encouraging use of the library catalogue and request service; and providing regular newsletters for users featuring new and forthcoming titles.

“...the user survey found exceptional levels of praise for the mobile library staff, and it confirms that they are the most important asset of the service.”

Despite stock selection being an important issue for mobile libraries, there was very little published literature about this. There was also no discussion on the shift towards increased use of supplier selection of books, which tends to be more generic, and how this might affect the choice available for mobiles.

Comments from the user survey indicate that users recognised that the stock was more limited on the mobiles but that they valued the ability to request items online. Many users also commented that they were happy to try recommendations from the mobile staff and also from neighbours on the mobile. Some services provide monthly newsletters (via email or print) with details of new publications, and this service was frequently commended by users.

“Being able to order (new) books online saves time and helps our budget.” (Edinburgh, 70s)

“I benefit from the librarian’s knowledge and expertise as to what is available as well as enjoying choosing my own.” (Stirling, 60s, M)

“I love a book being kept aside or a suggestion but it is like being in a sweetie shop choosing my books. It is also wonderful if I am unable to be here to discover what treats [X] has chosen for me!” (Scottish Borders, 70s, F)

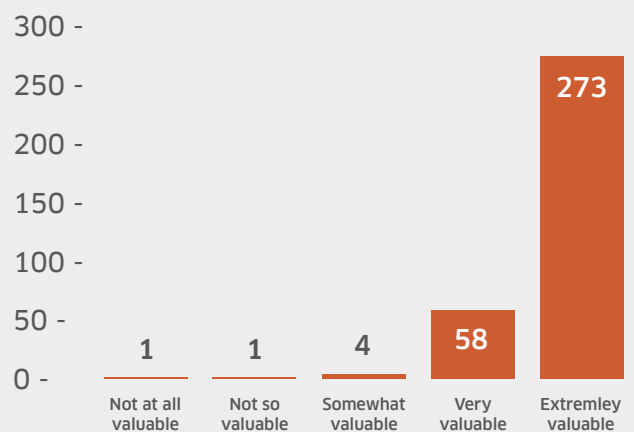
“Getting a list of new books is very helpful ... as it gives something to look forward to plus it opens up new areas which I might not otherwise have considered.” (Stirling, 60s, F)

Some users commented that they would like to be able to check whilst on the mobile if they’ve read a book before. This is also important if the staff member or neighbour is choosing the books for someone else. The ability to check is dependent on the system being connected to the Library Management System (LMS), and the LMS having this functionality; authorities with older LMS software and vehicles without an internet connection may not be able to do this.

6.6 Mobile library users

Mobile library users, like most library users, value the service greatly, as can be seen in the chart below, with 98% of the respondents rating the service as very or extremely valuable.

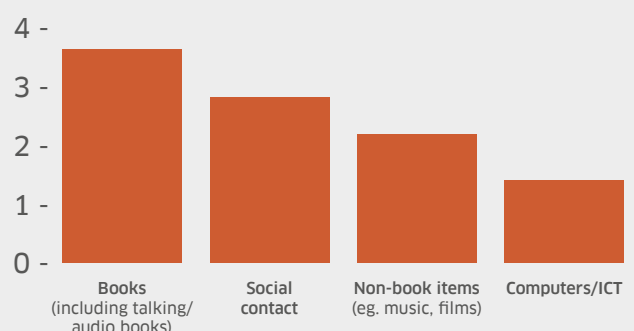
Chart 1: How valuable would you rate the mobile library service?



Base: 337 respondents

When asked which services provided by the mobile they valued the most, the majority favoured the books, however, this was not much ahead of social contact. This shows that the mobile library service is a significant social service.

Chart 2: Value of different services on mobile libraries (displayed by weighted average)



Base: 277 online respondents

In general, the majority of mobile library users tend to be older, mostly retired people, and young families with children. There are also generally more female users than male. They may also have health or mobility issues and may find accessing other services difficult. Public libraries pride themselves on their inclusive nature, so it is worth considering if there are any other groups who are perhaps under represented among mobile library users. For example, do any mobile services visit Gypsy/Traveller communities?

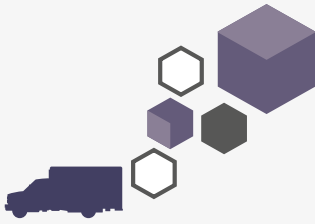
6.7 Costs and benefits

Masters level research from 2003 investigated four alternatives to mobiles on a cost basis: books by mail; village shop libraries; extending the housebound service; and transporting clients to the library. The research found that whilst transporting users to the library was the most cost effective method this was not popular with current users of the service.⁵⁴ Given the evidence of the wider social benefits of using mobile libraries, reducing analysis of the service to finances will not produce the best outcome for the public who use and love the service.

The ACE research into rural libraries recommends thinking about libraries in terms of 'economics of scope' rather than economies of scale, i.e. to consider the wider picture of what rural libraries provide, and where reductions in the unit cost result from the range (scope) of provision.⁵⁵ This could lead them to be seen as an asset-based advantage rather than as a financial drain. The report also notes the need 'to establish more robust outcome measures for the diverse range of social outcomes' of rural libraries. Both these points could apply to mobile libraries, as well as rural community libraries.

Given the financial reductions of the last decade and little prospect of change in the near future, providers of mobile libraries need to find a balance between an acceptable level of service for the public, particularly considering equality of access, and an acceptable cost to the provider. The scope of libraries, including mobiles, is very broad, and so a cost benefit analysis should not just reflect the cost of the delivery of the actual mobile service, but the social, educational and health benefits.





7 Impact of changes to services

Many authorities in Scotland have made reductions or changes to their mobile library service, primarily as a result of financial cuts. These changes have a disproportionate impact on older people, children and young families and people without transport, as these are the main user groups of mobiles.

Where equality impact assessments have been undertaken by local authorities, measures should have been put in place to reduce the impact of the changes on the old and young in particular.

Given the high value placed on the mobile library service by users it is inevitable that there will be anger and dismay at its reduction or withdrawal. In a conversation with one authority they explained how they had worked hard to mitigate any negative impact following a reduction to the mobile service. Every mobile library user was given an information sheet about the proposals and had a follow-up conversation with the driver/library staff member to talk through the options. This was carried out over a six month period and ensured that users were fully involved in choosing the best option for themselves.

One service noted that although alternatives were implemented, such as the home service, there has still been a reduction in engagement or contact with outlying communities previously served by the mobile. This suggests there may be more work required to promote alternatives and to re-engage with former mobile library users.

7.1 Survey evidence

Although the user survey was mainly completed by current mobile users, some people in areas where there have been recent changes, including withdrawal of the service, commented about the change, primarily to express anger or annoyance at the decision by the local authority. The change of frequency from four to eight weeks in the Orkney Islands was specifically mentioned, with one user commenting that it had a “negative impact on my mental health” and another commenting that the longer gap between visits meant that they have stopped using the library service. Recent changes in Argyll and Bute were also mentioned by users.

The user survey also asked: ‘If you couldn’t use the mobile library any more what would you do instead?’ Most said they would not read as much as they would not be able to afford the number of books they read. Those with mobility or health issues, or without access to transport (private or public) also noted they would have to rely on others to take them to the nearest library thus losing their independence. These conditions would lead to people reading less, which as many commented, would have a direct negative impact on their health and wellbeing. Others said they would be at a loss, isolated, heart-broken and devastated.

*“I would feel very deprived and more lonely.”
(Western Isles, 70s, F)*

“Have no choice but to read less and that’s not fair.” (Highland, 10 yr old)

*“Get very depressed and isolated.”
(Orkney, 60s, F)*

“Probably sink into a decline.” (Stirling, 60s, F)

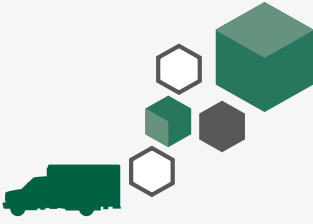
“I’d be distraught! Trips to the library would be extremely time-consuming and the sheer practicality of carrying books would present a problem.” (Angus, 60s, F)

Although there was a significant level of resistance to e-books, several users said they would possibly use e-books instead. Library services could promote their free e-books services more to mobile library users, especially as some appear not to be aware that public libraries offer free e-books, e-audio books and e-magazines. This may help some people when they’ve missed the mobile or it has been unable to call for whatever reason. However, several noted that with poor internet connectivity locally, they would struggle to download e-books.



CAPTAIN UNDERPANTS
SIX UNDERPANTS
BY DAVID PILKEY
DAV PILKEY





8 Alternatives, options and innovations

Mobile libraries as we currently experience them have been in existence for about 100 years. Are there innovations or alternatives that could improve the service for users? Are they the most efficient way to deliver a library service to remote or isolated people and communities?

To some extent the options available depend on what aspect of the mobile service is being considered, and as noted in section 6.6, the personal and social connection is almost as important as the books.

8.1 Deliver resources direct to the user

Public libraries currently use large vehicles to take the library to people whereas academic libraries tend to use other methods to reach distant learners. Are any of these methods suitable for public libraries?

8.1.1 Electronic delivery

Academic libraries tend to deliver their outreach services to distance learners electronically, through e-textbooks and e-journals. The Open University originally provided materials in the post in hardcopy format but now also provides them digitally, alongside digital access to its library collection.

Some public library services deliver digital variations of their housebound and mobile library service with loans of pre-loaded e-devices, such as e-readers or e-audio books. These can be useful if users are helped initially on how to use the devices, and can be beneficial for older people as the text can be enlarged or they can listen to the audio books if their eyesight is poor.

Customers with their own devices could be encouraged to use the library's free e-book offer. However, with poor broadband connectivity in many areas in Scotland this may not be a viable option. In addition, a remote digital service loses the social element of the mobile library service.

8.1.2 Postal delivery

Some academic libraries post material to their distance learners. This may work well for specific

course books, non-fiction items and articles but removes the element of browsing and user choice which is available in a library. However, the user survey found that mobile users do order some books online so this could be an option for some users if the library posted requested items directly to users. However, there would be a loss of the social connection as the transactions take place online and in the post.

Newport public library service in Wales has run a postal request system for over 10 years. The Book Express scheme allows a member to borrow 50 books a year which are delivered and returned by post, with pre-paid envelopes provided. However, users cannot also borrow books from static libraries or borrow heavily requested items.⁵⁶ This service may suit some people but would not appeal to more avid readers and for those who enjoy the social contact with others.

8.1.3 Housebound/home service

The housebound service delivers a more tailored experience than the mobile library, and provides access to books and other materials along with social connection. Although it is labour-intensive it may be more environmentally friendly as smaller and more fuel efficient vehicles can be used. Often where mobiles have been removed or reduced, the library service has expanded the housebound service for people who are unable to access static libraries.

A few services use volunteers to deliver the housebound service, and in general they are responsible for driving and delivery, with library staff retaining responsibility for the book selection. Use of volunteers often results from budget cuts and may increase if the financial cuts continue. This has implications for the professional nature and potentially the quality of the library service.

8.2 Alternative venues

Universities in the UK have a reciprocal access scheme under The Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL), whereby students at one university can study in and use some materials in another university library.⁵⁷ This is convenient for students during vacation if they are near another university. However, for public libraries there are no other library venues where users could go, especially in rural areas.

Academic libraries are also increasingly allowing access to their collections by members of the public, e.g. the Walk in Access Scheme in Wales⁵⁸ and Scotland.⁵⁹ However, for many parts of Scotland this would not be a feasible alternative as there are large geographic areas without university libraries. There may also be limited borrowing rights and the collections may not match what mobile users want to read.

Shared use of venues is increasingly being used by the public sector to co-locate services in one building. This can include leisure centres, schools, libraries, community centres and council customer services. For service providers this can lead to cost savings through reduced costs operating multiple buildings, and for users it can help save time by only needing to visit one location to undertake several transactions. This approach may work in towns but a mobile library serves many small hamlets and villages and creating a permanent library presence in a shared building in these locations might not be possible. As noted in section 5, a substantial proportion of the Scottish population live in rural areas where there may be no community or public buildings that could be used.

Some of the literature on outreach schemes refers to pop-up libraries. As with other pop-ups, these are generally occasional stalls at external third-party events, e.g. a festival, sporting activity or community event. Pop-up libraries can be useful for promotional purposes, either to showcase one or two elements of the service, e.g. e-books, and can reach new audiences but generally do not carry the volumes of stock that mobiles hold. However, one library service in Scotland (Aberdeen City) has a weekly pop-up library and Inverclyde has pop-up libraries in seven family centres/schools which have been facilitated through the Scottish Government's School Attainment Challenge funding,

and are therefore focused on children and families and improving learning and attainment.

8.2.1 Deposit collections and kiosks

Some library services operate deposit collections in residential care homes, sheltered housing, hospitals, or in more informal settings such as village shops or pubs. They are unstaffed small collections of books left in a location, operating on a self-issue and return basis. The library service refreshes the stock periodically. They represent considerable cost savings over providing a mobile library service, and have longer access hours than the mobile. However, although they provide local access to books for those who are unable to travel further afield, they require a suitable community location and do not provide the valued social interaction with library staff.

Deposit collections were the precursor to many mobile libraries, and a modern variation is via kiosks or library vending machines.⁶⁰ Anaheim public library service in California has installed a Books on the Go! vending machine in the Transportation Centre. It looks like a food and drinks vending machine but is stocked with bestsellers and new books. Customers can borrow the books for free and also download free e-books from the digital hotspot.⁶¹

The review of mobile and outreach library services in New South Wales⁶² found that library kiosks or vending machines were useful for high traffic areas like supermarkets and bus stations, but by inference would be less likely to be appropriate for remote and rural areas.

Delivering books to Amazon-style pick-up lockers is another option, however, the types of locations for such lockers tends to be supermarkets or similar places of high footfall which are only available in large towns, and would therefore not be accessible to many mobile library users.

“
... the personal and
social connection is
almost as important as
the books.”

8.3 Different vehicles

As services replace their mobile vehicles roughly every 10-15 years, they are increasingly moving towards smaller vehicles. This makes the driving easier as well as being more suitable for small roads in rural areas. Some services already operate different sizes of vehicles for different routes. A special issue of the magazine for public libraries in New South Wales found that 'the trend in mobile libraries is towards smaller, highly versatile and digitally enabled vehicles that any staff member can drive.'⁶³

Other new approaches are fully digital vehicles such as the mobile digital Fablab in the Netherlands. The 'Fablab is a worldwide hub of open design spaces and facilities where you can make (almost) anything'⁶⁴, with the FryskLab being a mobile version of this fabrication laboratory. This may work in urban areas with good internet connectivity but is less appropriate for much of rural and remote Scotland until broadband connectivity is improved.

8.4 Collaboration with third-party services

8.4.1 Provision of other public services on board

Some library managers in Scotland highlighted examples of where they have worked with other providers to deliver several services from the mobile library (see section 6.2.3). This can help the mobile library service be more sustainable (particularly if a charge is made to the additional service provider), and can also attract new library users. However, space is limited on most mobile library vehicles and some may not have a seat for a second person or may not have space for the activity. It may also require longer stopping times in order to facilitate the activity being delivered by the partner service.

8.4.2 Books delivered by third party services

There are currently two authorities in Scotland trialling direct delivery of books via the Food Train, a third party provider. In West Lothian it forms their housebound service and Dumfries & Galloway is piloting it in one area for at home users. The Food Train is a paid-for service for people who are over 65 and struggle to do their own shopping and instead it is delivered to them by volunteers.

They pay for the cost of the shopping, a delivery charge, and a nominal membership fee⁶⁵. The library services are utilising the delivery element to reach new and existing customers and it is understood that there is no charge to members of the public for the scheme as the library pays for the service. This is similar to a suggestion in the ACE report on rural libraries which considered joining with supermarket delivery schemes and school buses to get the books to users.⁶⁶

Although these methods of book delivery may be more cost effective and environmentally friendly than multiple separate delivery vehicles, it raises important questions about a library being free at point of use. If some providers begin to charge the public directly to access the scheme this would be a fundamental change to public library provision and could exclude those who need the service the most.

8.5 Open data and public information

As noted in the marketing section, finding out about the mobile libraries operating in an area can be difficult, with varying levels of information provided. If timetables are available the detail can be confusing, particularly if stops are given broad or generic names which someone new to the area may not know.

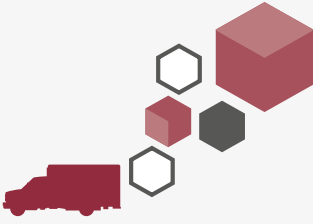
There is potential with open data to create more accessible information about mobile libraries, using data provided by library services such as location of stops. Libraries Hacked has suggested that one site could be created to store all the route and timetable information. The webpage could provide a map of all the mobile library stops and could be searchable by postcode, village or address. It would also link to the timetable so people could check when the mobile was next due and the results could also be downloaded to mobile devices. Not only could this benefit members of the public and potentially attract new users, it could also facilitate more efficient planning particularly at border boundaries. The data could be overlaid with additional information to analyse population demographics, public transport availability etc. Similar open data

mapping has been created by Libraries Hacked, for example for Somerset Libraries.⁶⁷

This type of open data mapping could be created for one authority, a region, or for the whole of Scotland. However, it would need to be maintained by library services if there were changes to the mobiles, and the site as a whole would need to be regularly checked. Also, in very rural areas one postcode can cover a large area and may not pinpoint the exact mobile library stop which could affect the results. A future development could be to install live GPS on the mobile vehicles, enabling them to be visualised online (and even named, like the gritters in Scotland).⁶⁸

“
There is potential with open data to create more accessible information about mobile libraries, using data provided by library services such as location of stops.
”





9 Recommendations

The mobile library service is a highly valued social, cultural, educational and health service which has been in operation for around 100 years. In general, alternatives tend not to be able to replicate all aspects of the mobile library service.

For example, sending books direct or switching to e-books provides only the book element; transporting people to a library could provide the books and the social contact but displaces people from their community and may not be possible for the very young or elderly people with mobility issues. Housebound/at home services may be suitable for the elderly but tend not to be offered for families with very young children or the self-employed in remote rural areas.

It is also difficult to identify additional library services which could be delivered on the mobiles given the space and time constrictions. However, with longer stops, additional seating and digital capabilities, mobile libraries could offer more learning and cultural events on board, as well as more opportunities for external partners to deliver activities to mobile library users.

The recommendations below fall into three broad categories: marketing, planning and management at local authority level, and strategic ideas at a national level.

9.1 Marketing

- More and better information could be provided on library websites about the routes, with maps and clearer timetables.
- More marketing and promotion of the service to attract new users and combat declining usage in some areas. For example, leafleting all households in villages or hamlets where the vehicles already call to maximise numbers visiting each stop.
- SLIC to consider creating a Scottish mobile library video, using figures from this research, for advocacy purposes.

- SLIC to consider creating a 'mobile libraries day' within Book Week Scotland or within the UK Libraries Week.
- Open data mapping tools could be investigated, by a single authority, or at a regional or all-Scotland level, to create a useful discovery tool for users, and also as a planning tool to review routes.

9.2 Local planning and management issues

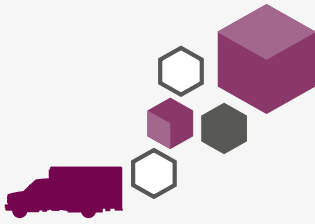
- a) Increase use and analysis of current and potential users, including using demographic and geographic information to map against indices of multiple deprivation, age, disability, public transport provision etc, and use this to target new users.
- b) Public library services which are reviewing their mobile service to read the IFLA guidelines for detailed planning guidance, and the New South Wales report which includes a summary of alternatives and their advantages and disadvantages alongside recommended performance indicators, impact measures and case studies.
- c) If local authorities and trusts are considering changes to the mobile library service, open conversations should be held early on in the process with every user, outlining the proposals and agreeing on the best option for each person.

9.3 Strategic planning

- a) SLIC to consider including mobile, housebound and outreach services within any future How Good Is Our Public Library Service? framework.
- b) Outcome and impact measures for mobile libraries could be included in any future library strategy (and be based on the International Standard ISO 11620:2014 Information and documentation – library performance indicators).
- c) SLIC to investigate the potential for a capital improvement fund for mobile libraries.
- d) Scottish Government to review support for mobile libraries given the role they play in important social, health and wellbeing, educational agendas.
- e) Scottish Government to review potential support for improving the digital capabilities of the mobile libraries and the connectivity in the areas served by the mobiles to enable mobile libraries to also contribute towards digital inclusion.

“
The mobile library service is a highly valued social, cultural, educational and health service which has been in operation for around 100 years.
”





10 Conclusion

Provision of a mobile library service addresses the issue of spatial inequality. Mobile libraries expand the reach of the public library service and can be viewed on a basic level (a van delivering and collecting books), or in a more holistic way which recognises that the vehicle is a social and learning place, a recreational and community space, and a very friendly and welcoming space, open to everyone. One head of service referred to the mobile service as 'democracy in action'.

Because it potentially can serve everyone and has wide reaching benefits, it raises the question of what the role of the mobile library service currently is, and should be in the future. Is it a book exchange system? Is it a social service? Should it be for everyone or target specific groups?

At a time when many public and private services are contracting from rural and remote areas, e.g. banks, post offices, buses, pubs, does this make the mobile library service more important? Some people, including policy makers, may feel that as more information and materials are available digitally, the demand or need for mobile or outreach services is reduced. However, those who are physically or geographically isolated are often also digitally excluded either through personal reasons (age, lack of skills or money) or infrastructure (lack of internet connections). In addition, the mobile library is a social, educational, recreational, health, and cultural service. If it was merely a book delivery system, then postal delivery would suffice.

But do we cling onto mobiles from nostalgia when there may be more efficient or effective ways of providing what is required? Are those who are socially isolated best served by a mobile library coming once every three weeks for 20 minutes, or should other social care services be explored such as taking people to a central venue more frequently for a longer activity?

These questions raise issues that need discussing at local and national level with policy makers and funders. The mobile library service is hugely valued and has beneficial impacts in many different ways, yet it is often little known about and under-utilised. As a result it is often vulnerable when budgets

are cut. But as the quotes from users show, it is an incredible service, delivered by amazing library staff, which achieves significant outcomes.

10.1 Last words

The last words belong to the users of Scottish mobiles.

"I just love it! The cheery yellow van, lovely mobile librarian to have a blether with and lots of wonderful books to choose from. It's a three-weekly highlight in my life!"
(Western Isles, 60s, F)

"Books and banter" (Orkney, 60s F)

"An uplifting experience" (South Lanarkshire, 60s, F)

"I've enjoyed 20 years of bookbus use. Vital for my children's learning and for my wellbeing and happiness. There's not many things I'd take to the barricades to defend anymore - but the bookbus is one." (Stirling, 50s, M)

"My life would not be the same without it!"
(North Ayrshire, 90s, F)

"It really is a life line for the older people, people without cars and young children who can't easily get into branches, for the disabled or those just not feeling well enough to go too far. It is a rare point of human contact as well as a gateway for exploring books"
(Stirling, 60s F)

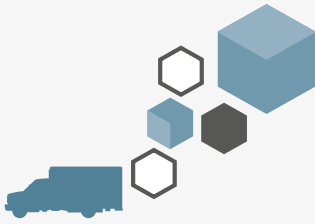
“Being disabled and semi-housebound the mobile library makes life so much easier for me.... the mobile is a vital part of my life.”
(Scottish Borders, 70s, M)

“More choice [of books in a branch] but not more magical.” (Scottish Borders, 70s, F)

“...emphasise its importance to culture, community, learning and literature. Its effectiveness at countering possible isolation and remoteness. Its value for money.”
(Stirling, 50s, M)

“I wait to see the yellow van wind its way down the s-bend hill and know it is full of treats. It lifts my spirits and makes me smile.”
(Western Isles, 60s, F)





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