

## Guidance on Shared Library Services

### Introduction

In the current financial climate, the library sector faces some difficult decisions about how to manage and plan its services within the context of a need to reduce operating costs by as much as 30% over the next three years. The scale of the efficiency savings required necessitates a more fundamental assessment of existing models of library service delivery, building on the ethos and vision outlined in The Modernisation Review of Public Libraries published by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in March 2010.

Increasingly local councils are exploring options to protect and improve library services through the adoption of a more collaborative approach which includes sharing or merging 'frontline' or 'back office' functions with neighbouring councils.

This briefing paper provides elected members with some advice, ideas and case studies relating to shared library services that can provide a model to deliver efficiencies whilst maintaining high standards of service.

### Existing approach to sharing library services

Library services across the Yorkshire and Humber region have a strong track record in working together. Yorkshire Libraries and Information (YLI) is the regional library system for Yorkshire and Humber and is a constituted co-operative body to which library authorities in the region subscribe.

YLI currently manages the contract for book and other media supply on behalf of library authorities across the region (with the exception of Leeds) and works in partnership with the North West Libraries Consortium to procure stock collaboratively. YLI also offers a music and drama loans service which most library authorities in the region have bought into. Cross boundary collaboration through YLI and the North West Libraries Consortium has delivered a number of benefits to individual library authorities, namely:

- Reduction in library service operating costs;
- Enabled more books and other items to be purchased through increased discounts, which in turn has widened the resources available to library users;
- Reduction in costs for both libraries and suppliers by standardizing library servicing; and
- Allowed libraries to deliver books to customers more quickly through improved supply times and direct delivery.

Consequently library authorities across the region are already benefitting from cross-boundary working, albeit that to date this has predominantly focused on back office functions. However there are opportunities to identify further efficiencies by exploring options to share frontline services or governance on a cross boundary basis.

### **Potential scope of sharing library services**

There is no definitive list of which library services and functions can be shared across boundaries as this will depend on the structure of existing models of delivery. A recent report published by the West Midlands Culture and Sport Improvement Network on options for library cooperation identified six basic models of shared service delivery:

#### ***1. Single regional library authority***

A single organization would take over the services and premises of all library services across the region. Local political control would be exerted through a shared governance arrangement.

#### ***2. Single library support organization***

This would be a single organization running most of the library services for the region and employing most of the staff. However the organization would operate on a contractual basis, out of premises owned and branded by the individual Councils. Local political control would be via the contract.

#### ***3. Several sub-regional library authorities***

This is the equivalent of option 1 above, but implemented sub-regionally.

#### ***4. Several sub-regional library support organizations***

This is the equivalent of option 2 but implemented sub-regionally.

#### ***5. Semi-formal cooperative arrangements***

All library authorities would remain, but would share some areas of service (i.e. reader support) through Service Level Agreement (SLA) based arrangements.

#### ***6. Service specific alliances***

This is similar to option 5 but on a more commercial basis. One library authority may offer to run under contract a specific service or activity for several others at a rate which is cheaper than they could run it themselves (i.e. mobile library service or home bound service).

Options relating to semi-formal cooperative arrangements or service specific alliances may be explored on an individual or collective basis and will be dependent on the how Councils wish to configure their library services in the future.

The table below provides some ideas of areas where library authorities may wish to explore a shared approach in order to deliver efficiency savings. These examples do not include costs relating to shared governance and management arrangements (i.e. shared Head of Library Service) which are currently being explored by a number of library authorities as part of the Future Libraries Programme.

Frontline	Back Office
Business Information Service	Business Development Officer
Events (e.g. Summer Reading Challenge, Book Festival, Author visits).	Commissioning Officer
Home Based Service	Facilities Management
Library Assistants (in particular to provide cover for absence)	Human Resources
Library Outreach	I.T. Support and maintenance
Mobile Library Service	Library Management System
School Library Service	Marketing Officer
Specialist posts (e.g. Children's Librarian, Digital Development Officer, Social Inclusion Officer)	Procurement (in particular for new technology)
Training and workforce development	User / Public surveys / Research and consultation
Volunteer recruitment and management	

## **Operational and political considerations**

There are a number of important considerations for Councils wishing to explore shared library service delivery models. The extent to which these can be satisfactorily addressed may be dependent on the level of political and managerial buy-in to cross-boundary working.

- Concern regarding the loss of political control in any multi-Council (regional or sub-regional) library service model.
- Restructuring library services as part of a shared model may necessitate closure of existing library service points. This may encounter significant resistance from elected members in communities where libraries are currently located.
- Potential resistance of library staff and library users to a loss of branding and local identity in any multi-Council library service model.
- The process of harmonizing staff pay scales, job descriptions and terms and conditions of employment may reduce actual cost-savings in the short term and may require substantial negotiation with Unions.
- Moving towards a single regional or sub-regional model would require significant up front investment (i.e. single Library Management System) and a shared political and operational vision for library services.
- A reduction in the scale of corporate and management overhead required to support the service (i.e. the costs imposed by the host Council on the library authority to cover HR, IT and other corporate functions) or moves to share corporate functions between Councils may encounter both political and operational resistance.

However the scale of the current budget cuts means that traditional approaches of trimming budgets are unlikely to deliver the necessary savings. Consequently shared service delivery may present a useful approach to help retain or improve existing levels of service at lesser costs and more effectively utilize scarce resources and expertise across library services.

## **Summary**

Sharing services on a cross-boundary basis has the potential to provide a valuable contribution to the overall efficiency savings target within individual Councils. Coordinated efforts by individual library authorities to reduce or in some cases remove 'back office' costs, in conjunction with existing regional collaboration (YLI), means that there is an increasing need to focus on sharing 'frontline' services or more radical models of library service delivery such as regional or sub-regional services.

The adoption of new collaborative models of delivery cannot happen over night and should form part of a clearly structured and managed change programme that has both political and managerial support.

### **SPINE project (East of England public library service)**

The SPINE project is an options appraisal and feasibility investigation into the viability of creating some form of shared library services for partners in the East of England region. The seven partner councils are Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, Southend, Suffolk and Thurrock. The vision for the project was that by sharing services, current and future partners will be able to improve the efficiency of service delivery by reducing costs whilst maintaining or improving standards of service to the customer. The project was set against an anticipated fall in local government funding by between 20-30% minimum.

The initial options appraisal report published in September 2010 provides an assessment of the costs and benefits associated with sharing public library services across the East region. The report presents a strategic and economic case for change and detailed appraisal of 3 options for delivering services. The appraisal assesses each of the options against a set of critical success factors as follows:

- Releasing maximum savings: potential to achieve 25% savings over 3 years.
- If not established by 1st April 2011 any agreement must be sufficiently advanced that it will deliver over next 3 years.
- Satisfy legal and statutory requirements.
- Manageable risks.
- Transferable and scalable to other authorities.
- Attractive to all stakeholders.

The three options presented in the appraisal report are summarized below and are based on a total budget baseline for SPINE partnership of £76.8 million (2010/11 budget figures):

**Option 1-Sharing of back office and support functions.** This option covers the smallest % of the overall budget in terms of its scope, delivering a 71% saving on back office and support functions. This equates to **4%** of the total budget over 4 years.

**Option 2- Creation of a single library service (Separate legal entity).** This option sees sharing of all services, including the frontline operational delivery, but excludes corporate and indirect costs. A **14%** saving on the budget for services which are in scope is predicted.

**Option 3- Creation of a single library service (Separate legal entity).** Corporate and support costs are included.

This option covers the largest portion of the overall budget with significant savings identified from corporate and support costs (i.e. recharge). A **26%** saving on the baseline budget is predicted for this option over four years.

**Option 1** was selected as the preferred model and is estimated at providing a cashable saving of £0.8 – £1.5 million over 4 years across 5 SPINE partners (Hertfordshire and Norfolk withdrew).

For further information contact Stephen Taylor, SPINE Implementation Project Director, Tel: 01473 265309 Email: [stephen.taylor@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:stephen.taylor@suffolk.gov.uk)

### **The London Library Change Programme (LLCP)**

The London Library Change Programme (LLCP), which is one strand of the wider London Cultural Improvement Programme, is supporting boroughs to find new models of public library service delivery that will help to deliver budget savings and improved efficiency. Two preliminary phases of work have explored individual service efficiencies and the sharing of back-office functions.

The Programme aims to bring all 33 services up to the levels of the best and in particular to help to reduce overheads and improve services through increased collaboration and improved processes and the adoption of a systematic approach to having the right staff and skills in place to engage better with communities

Building on these foundations, Capital Ambition is supporting phase three of the programme to help boroughs implement new models of collaboration and shared service delivery, including strategic commissioning and the use of technology.

For further information visit  
([www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/networks/lcip/programme](http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/networks/lcip/programme))

### **Future Libraries Programme**

The Future Libraries Programme, formed by a partnership between national and local government, and driven by councils themselves, aims to help the library service during the current challenging financial situation, with an ambition to ensure libraries play a central role for communities in the Big Society. Ten proposals for innovative collaborations have been selected to test new models of library service delivery. Five of these in particular have focused on exploring models cross boundary shared service delivery. These include:

#### **Working Together - Greater Manchester Libraries**

Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, Wigan councils are testing the feasibility of a single Greater Manchester Library service, to identify efficiency savings and customer service improvement.

A critical question for this project is whether and how collaborative working could prevent reductions in customer facing services, prevent loss of specialist services and provide a more stable and sustainable way of working for the future.

### **Beyond Boundaries**

Lincolnshire, Rutland, Cambridgeshire, North East Lincolnshire and Peterborough's Vivacity Trust are working together on a project that is developing local library service solutions which work across authority boundaries. This project aims to meet the challenge that traditionally local authorities have not coordinated services across shared boundaries, leading to duplication, inefficiencies, over-provision, gaps in service and inconsistent user experience. The project is taking a coordinated look at the needs of users in the "corridors" along authorities shared boundaries and aims to produce a long- term plan for better joint working and develop a flexible commissioning framework that will allow the services required to be provided by the most appropriate provider.

### **South East London**

Bexley, Bromley, Croydon, Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark are working collaboratively on a project that aims to achieve a step change across library services in South East London. Participating library authorities are looking at options and opportunities for improving quality and reducing costs by working more closely together. These libraries aim to build on individual strengths to retain and improve best practice models and introduce new solutions.

### **Kensington & Chelsea, Hammersmith & Fulham and Westminster**

This project is working towards an integrated Libraries and Archives service planned and managed as a single service across all three boroughs. The project includes investigating alternative models for delivering library services which may provide a model for other London boroughs. The libraries project forms part of wider co-operative work between the three boroughs, which is considering options to merge other services such as education, children's services, environmental services, adult social care and corporate services

### **The South West Peninsula Library Partnership**

Cornwall, Devon, Plymouth and Torbay are pursuing a single library provider to provide services across all four councils as opposed to four of varying capacities, sizes and strengths. They are seeking improved community engagement around the creation, design and delivery of services as part of the collaborative service delivery model.

For more information on the Future Libraries Programme visit  
[www.mla.gov.uk/what/strategies/The future libraries programme](http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/strategies/The_future_libraries_programme)

## **Sources of information and guidance**

### **Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP)**

CILIP is the leading professional body for librarians, information specialists and knowledge managers. The website provides access to a range of publications and new items of interest to the library sector. [www.cilip.org.uk](http://www.cilip.org.uk)

### **Communities of Practice**

This is a community platform supporting collaborative networks for those involved in local delivery. This includes a shared service community for libraries and the Future Libraries Programme. [www.communities.idea.gov.uk](http://www.communities.idea.gov.uk)

### **Local Government Improvement and Development (formerly IDeA)**

The LGID website includes a wide range of resources and case studies on service transformation, shared services and collaboration. [www.idea.gov.uk](http://www.idea.gov.uk)

### **Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA)**

The MLA Councils Research Evidence Resources Website hosts a wide range of research publications and practice case studies relating to library service modernization and new models of service delivery. <http://research.mla.gov.uk/>

### **The Society of Chief Librarians (SCL)**

SCL is a local government association made up of the chief librarian of each library authority in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. SCL takes a leading role in the development of public libraries, through sharing best practices, advocating for continuous improvement on behalf of local people, and leading the debate on the future of the public library service. The website provides up to date news and case studies on new models of library service delivery. [www.goscl.com/](http://www.goscl.com/)

### **Yorkshire and Humber Improvement & Efficiency Partnership (YoHr Space)**

The YoHr Space website provides a range of case studies from across the region relating to funded programmes and projects focusing on improving service efficiency. [www.yohrspace.org.uk/](http://www.yohrspace.org.uk/)

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