

### **Public Consultation into Library Savings Proposals**

#### **Increasing Volunteers in Council funded libraries**

1. Feedback received during the consultation suggested increasing the numbers of volunteers and thus reducing staff numbers in the proposed network of 16 County Council funded libraries. It was felt that this would enable the retention of paid staff across the wider network of community libraries.

#### **Volunteers in Leicestershire**

2. Traditionally the use of volunteers in Leicestershire Libraries has been limited to supporting activities that either:
  - a. Could not be undertaken due to a lack of staff resources; or to,
  - b. Provide support to specialist areas of service, such as Local Studies.
3. The use of volunteers can help local authorities reduce running costs as well as add value by contributing to increased community involvement in the library. Leicestershire does engage volunteers in its larger libraries who add value to the work of the staff, but are not intended to replace them. Volunteers will continue to be recruited.
4. Leicestershire's proposal for local community libraries is to enable a separate management arrangement for communities to manage the network of smaller libraries through volunteers as part of a separately constituted body.

#### **Case Study**

5. To gain additional insight into how volunteers are used, Oxfordshire County Council's library services have been used as a case study where volunteers have been used to save money across the service.
6. Oxfordshire County Council have increased their use of volunteers to supplement staffing at their libraries. Reductions in staff budgets in Oxfordshire have been covered by volunteers who support paid staff during the operation of their smaller community libraries. This has enabled them to extend the opening hours beyond that possible with paid staff (meaning the library is open without there being a paid member of staff on duty). Larger libraries continue to be fully funded and the authority is not replacing staff at their major libraries with volunteers in order to provide a staffing resource to community libraries.

#### **Factors to consider when using/increasing volunteers in LCC funded libraries**

7. There are a number of issues to consider in order to consider the validity of the proposal. These are detailed below.
8. Authorities such as Oxfordshire are not redeploying staff to smaller libraries from larger ones.

9. Recognition should be made between Leicestershire's proposal of separately constituted community bodies who would manage their local library through volunteers, and that of replacing County Council funded posts in Council funded libraries in order to maintain staffing in smaller libraries.
10. Should volunteers be continually used to provide services on a regular basis, in funded libraries, LCC would, in effect, be creating a contractual relationship. Even where there is not a written job description, consistent regular working could raise potential issues relating to employment legislation.
11. There would be an increased risk of conflict with trade unions who have publicly stated their position as:

*"UNISON believes that public library services should be sufficiently resourced and professionally staffed. Volunteers may have a role to play, but they should not be used as replacements for employed, paid, trained staff in the public library service....We do not believe that local authorities should use volunteers as a cost-cutting exercise or to make up for the loss of staff through cuts and redundancies. Volunteers should only be used in a limited number of circumstances to complement the work of paid staff."*

12. The loss of skills in libraries where there is a higher degree of complexity of work needs to be considered. The County's larger libraries field a wider range of customer demand in relation to the different resources available. These include larger local studies collections, and a greater range of diverse activity.
13. Larger libraries in Leicestershire are already operating at minimum staffing levels to maintain public health and safety and to ensure that the basic service can be delivered. In order to realise any savings, and retain some staff at a number of smaller libraries, as is proposed, would require a greater proportion of saving from a staffing resource that is already at minimum levels.

## **Conclusion**

14. Building a volunteer network to support the library services in the future is imperative – however the assumption that volunteers can take on the extra hours and work in LCC funded libraries given the factors above is not feasible. There could also potentially be significant 'support' inconsistencies from library to library on a daily/weekly basis, which from an operational perspective could actually lead to an increase in costs.
15. Staffing levels in larger libraries are already at the minimum required; therefore it is unlikely that giving volunteers a role beyond that of supplementing paid staffing activities would generate any significant savings that could be used to fund staffing in Community Libraries. This coupled with the potential to raise issues that relate to employment legislation make the proposal unviable.
16. The Council's current proposals for Community Libraries detail how local communities can be empowered to manage volunteers across a network of smaller libraries and sustain them through a transitional period of 7 years. The Council's current proposals for Community Libraries have built in a tapered financial and

business support which takes into account the above factors, making it more a sustainable, viable and robust option.