



About Locality

Locality is the UK's leading network of community development trusts, settlements, social action centres and community enterprise practitioners with over 700 members. There is no typical member - we work in both rural and urban areas and with both large and small community organisations. What we do have in common is our approach, our belief in our communities and our commitment to change through community enterprise and community asset development.

Locality aims to:

- **Be a voice for our movement:** ensuring the views of our members are heard at the highest levels of government and by other decision-makers;
- **Provide hands-on support to members - prospective and existing:** helping to build stronger organisations, acquire new assets and develop new trading enterprises;
- **Facilitate peer-to-peer learning:** helping community organisations to network, share experiences, learn from and support each other.

Our movement is ambitious for change in local communities. We are committed to social justice, collective action and community self-help. We believe in fostering a new spirit of enterprise that can deliver the practical change that lies at the heart of building and rebuilding communities.

Our members work in some of the most deprived communities in the country - and within our membership there is an extraordinary reservoir of talent and experience in using assets and enterprise to create wealth in communities and keep it there. Through Locality, this unique knowledge base can be shared across the public and third sectors, disseminating learning from each new success and each new achievement, and encouraging communities to take control of their own futures.

Building on that experience, and involving our members in everything we do, has allowed us to position Locality as an innovative and influential player:

- Locality is recognised as a key Strategic Partner of the Office for Civil Society - <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/news/office-civil-society-appoints-strategic-partners>
- Locality manages the DCLG-funded My Community Rights Service, and has supported 8,000+ local initiatives to explore community asset acquisition and service delivery since 2012 - <http://www.mycommunityrights.org.uk/>

phone 0845 458 8336
fax 0845 458 8337
web locality.org.uk
email info@locality.org.uk

33 Corsham Street, London N1 5DR

- Locality, in partnership with the Local Government Association, is delivering the Our Place programme, working with 100 neighbourhoods to give people more power over local services and budgets - <http://locality.org.uk/projects/place/#sthash.zXpM72G7.dpuf>

For further information, please visit: <http://www.locality.org.uk/>

Our Libraries Work

Many of our members have long-standing relationships with library services - hosting publicly managed libraries in community buildings (e.g. Zest, Sheffield), taking ownership of library assets and securing capital investment to help upgrade public libraries (e.g. Prudhoe Community Partnership, Northumberland), taking over the management of library services (e.g. Alt Valley Community Trust, Liverpool), or calling for the establishment of new libraries and managing them on a contractual basis (e.g. Fresh Horizons, Huddersfield).

However, three years ago, we began to receive requests for support as local library branches came under threat of closure and the option of community ownership/management became apparent. So, we opted to work in-depth with 10 local authorities and 50+ community groups to establish a dedicated community managed library network which nowadays benefits from over 250 members: <http://libraries.communityknowledgehub.org.uk/>

We have continued to offer some 200 councils and community organisations advice and support via the My Community Rights service in the interim. We have also undertaken research for Arts Council England to distil guiding principles for local authorities in relation to community involvement in libraries - <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/supporting-libraries/community-libraries-research/>

At present, work to explore how to Enable Enterprise in Libraries is underway in response to calls for assistance where income generation within a library context is concerned - <http://locality.org.uk/news/enabling-enterprise-libraries/> We are also working with OPM to better understand the rural impacts of changes to library services for Defra working with eight library authorities - <http://libraries.communityknowledgehub.org.uk/blog/research-begins-rural-impacts-changes-library-services>

Responses

1. What are the core principles of a public library service into the future?

Locality members work predominantly in deprived communities, and we believe that people in those communities are too often denied resources and opportunities to fulfil their potential. We see literacy, access to information and education as one means of redressing this, and therefore believe libraries have a vitally important role to play. Related to this, many of the beneficiaries with whom our members work lack access to the internet and/or the ICT equipment, skills and confidence they need - whether to access what are, increasingly, digital by default public services or to develop the skills that are nowadays required to secure employment. As such, we believe libraries have a significant role to play in

phone 0845 458 8336
fax 0845 458 8337
web locality.org.uk
email info@locality.org.uk

33 Corsham Street, London N1 5DR

facilitating 'assisted digital' initiatives as well as in supporting basic skills development.

We also recognise the significant contribution that libraries make to a much wider range of social outcomes - for example, helping develop stronger communities, reducing isolation, supporting people into employment, supporting access to public services; these secondary benefits are considered particularly significant in rural areas as well as those that lack other community facilities.

Looking ahead, we believe there could be a role for libraries operating to support the 'sharing economy' and collaborative consumption, as physical institutions located at the very heart of communities¹. Moreover, as 'trusted spaces' that already facilitate access to a range of local services, libraries might also evolve to further support e-democracy and growing interest in open government as well as open policy making.

2. Is the current delivery of the public library service the most comprehensive and efficient?

The Public Libraries Act (1964) requires that councils provide a 'comprehensive and efficient library service'. We believe that this is right, and that they should continue to be held to this. But, in our view, that does not mean identikit solutions - there is always a need to take account of local circumstances and aspirations, and sometimes partnerships with community libraries will have a part to play in this.

Otherwise, our work to date indicates that the public library service remains comprehensive and efficient for those people who are able to travel to urban hubs where services are being protected and consolidated, whereas services appear less comprehensive and efficient for others on low incomes who previously benefited from access to smaller branch libraries and/or live in rurally isolated communities - leading to inequalities of access and an inconsistent service for some communities.

Specifically, our work points towards:

the comparable vulnerability of smaller libraries - the total number of community libraries which were either already operating or planned at the end of 2012 was over 425 - approximately 12 per cent of all public libraries in England. The research we undertook highlighted that it was mostly smaller library branches which tended to transfer to community library models. This necessarily means that the emphasis on community libraries is and will continue to be stronger in peri-urban and rural areas.

reduced financial resources - Increasingly limited local authority resources to support libraries are resulting in threats to services. Whilst those reduced resources can impact library services across different locality types, footfall in rural libraries tends to be lower and thus the case for continued spending on those services is more difficult to maintain as compared with larger urban libraries.

inadequate buildings - inadequate buildings is a point often raised in reviews of services and result in inefficient service as well as declining

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharing_economy

phone 0845 458 8336

fax 0845 458 8337

web locality.org.uk

email info@locality.org.uk

appeal amongst users. Inadequate library buildings are not an issue confined to rural areas - but combined with their usually lower footfall, the case for investment in redevelopment is considered more likely to stifle improvement.

Challenges of accessing library services in nearby areas due to public transport limitations - the Opening Hours Review noted the costs associated with public transport and the fact that public transport routes and timetables often make it impossible for those without access to a car to access the next nearest library (especially in the evenings).

Internet access for low income groups and in rural areas - poor access to broadband may mean that whilst digital technology can generate new approaches to service improvement and cost effectiveness in library provision, those approaches may not be available to low income and rural service users, underlining the importance of libraries in facilitating assisted digital initiatives as well as them being at the forefront of next generation broadband roll-out plans.

Comparative challenge of establishing community libraries in deprived settings - there are additional challenges where establishing community library services in urban /deprived areas and, for us, this points to the need for additional capacity building investment, organised at the national level, to help communities in such areas develop sustainable income generating models adjacent to publicly managed library services.

3. What is the role of community libraries in the delivery of a library offer?

Many community libraries, to date, while benefiting from important relationships with library authorities, are heavily reliant on volunteering and local donations, and this, by itself, is an essentially vulnerable model as well as one which will deliver less well in many deprived communities. We believe a more sustainable model of community libraries will flow from a combination of volunteer effort and donations with viable and effective 'enterprise' activities that are capable of generating revenues from activities adjacent to core library services (which should continue to remain free to users).

At present, only a minority of community libraries have incorporated social enterprise approaches into their operating model, but we believe that with the right kind of support this could grow significantly.

The community enterprise model, whereby local community organisations develop and deliver services, and seek to achieve business viability, has a long and honourable track record. Some of our members have proved sustainable for over 100 years, operating to this model. We publish an annual survey of our members which shows that despite the considerable financial pressures, our members by and large are proving pretty resilient even in very difficult economic times.

<http://locality.org.uk/members/member-survey-2013/>

With respect to community-run libraries, it is still very early, in terms of the range of different models which people are adopting, to be sure which will be most resilient in times to come. Nonetheless, we recognise that, especially in deprived

phone 0845 458 8336
fax 0845 458 8337
web locality.org.uk
email info@locality.org.uk

33 Corsham Street, London N1 5DR

areas, one or more of the following are usually necessary to ensure financial viability:

- an endowment fund,
- a transfer of assets capable of generating income,
- a continuing financial relationship with the library authority in the form of grants or contracts,
- access to professional staff and resources from the library authority,
- help and investment for the community group to develop associated income-generating enterprises.

From our point of view, community-run libraries are not about saving the public sector money - they are about providing a mix of services which local people want and which they can shape. We believe in the benefits of community ownership and community self-determination. So, where there are local community groups who want to try to play a part in running a library service, we will get behind them to the best of our abilities.

Do community run-libraries deliver as good a service as council-run libraries?

It is probably fair to say that council-run libraries are sometimes extremely good, sometimes relatively poor, so it is hard to make any comparison in general terms. In future, the questions will be whether community-run libraries can maintain or extend opening hours, whether they can maintain or increase visitor and book-borrowing numbers and types of people using the library service (against the current trend of decline in public libraries), and whether they can deliver other added value through related enterprise, volunteer activity, and community ownership. We think the early indications are promising, but they are still only early indications so far.²

Of course, we are by no means saying that ‘community libraries’ are our preferred model for library service delivery. Instead, we are saying that community-led libraries, wherever possible including community enterprise elements, should be a valuable part of the mix, to safeguard and enhance library services. That mix, in our view, stills mean essential roles for public library authorities - after all, our research for the Arts Council showed that the vast majority of community-run libraries are not stand-alone but rather an active partnership with the library authority retaining important functions.

More widely in respect of other statutory services, we believe that we absolutely need government - central and local - for public services. At the end of the day, as elected bodies, they are the democratically accountable safeguard. Their broad public interest role means that they should (for example) retain the strategic overview, protect the public, and ensure that provision is of the highest quality possible. That doesn’t mean that everything need be directly delivered by government. There is no absolute line here - we believe that the relationships and partnerships are best forged at a local level, responding to the fine grain of local knowledge.

² See, for example, <http://www.publiclibrariesnews.com/campaigning/trusts/trusts-pro/case-study-fresh-horizons-huddersfield> & <http://www.publiclibrariesnews.com/campaigning/volunteer-run-libraries/pros/successful-volunteer-libraries-croxteth-and-minchinhampton>

phone 0845 458 8336
fax 0845 458 8337
web locality.org.uk
email info@locality.org.uk

33 Corsham Street, London N1 5DR

Ultimately, then, we believe that a **mixed** library economy underpinned by the following principles is appropriate in the modern context:

- No library user to be left behind and no two-tier service permitted to emerge (e.g. equal investment in the digital development of statutory community libraries).
- Libraries as bastions of a “Community Right to Access Information, Knowledge, Public Open Data and E-Government”.
- Communities to have the freedoms and flexibilities to adapt library services in partnership with library authorities to the changing needs of the particular neighbourhoods in which they are operating.
- Library Authorities to have regard to Best Value Statutory Guidance - https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5945/1976926.pdf - when exploring the ‘decommissioning’ of library services as ‘unfunded transfer to community organisations’, and communities encouraged to exercise their Right to Challenge where ‘unfunded transfer’ is presented as the only alternative to ‘decommissioning’.
- Trust in communities which step up to the plate (e.g. long-term tenure/ownership of library assets to help them attract social investment).
- Communities encouraged to consider what added value contribution the library service can make as part of a better integrated package of public service provision in a locality - rather than operating in isolation - to encourage the establishment of resilient community enterprises capable of delivering significant and broad-ranging social impact into the future.

phone 0845 458 8336
fax 0845 458 8337
web locality.org.uk
email info@locality.org.uk

33 Corsham Street, London N1 5DR

A company limited by guarantee, registered in England no. 2787912. A registered charity no. 1036460