# Libraries Unlimited Board initial responses to specific questions in Devon County Council's public consultation

Libraries Unlimited

**Q2. How satisfied are you with the library service in Devon?**

We are extremely proud of the staff and the service that is provided. Presuming this question is about the library service before the reductions in funding that have resulted in the temporary opening hours we have the following comments to make:

- We believe the model of commissioning an external charity to operate the library service continues to be the best way forwards. An independent charity can make savings, raise funding and respond to opportunities faster. Libraries Unlimited have been focused on providing a thriving library service without all the distractions that come from being part of a larger organisation.

- Libraries have a tangible impact on wellbeing, loneliness, physical and mental health, job creation, the local economy, education, school readiness and community cohesion. They are a vital service that must be maintained, therefore a restoration of their funding needs to be seriously considered.

- The stock budget is held by DCC and managed by Libraries Unlimited. It does not go as far as it used to as publishers have increased their costs significantly whilst the stock budget has been frozen for many years. eBooks are more expensive than physical books per issue and the pressure to stretch budgets to continue to offer services in both formats is considerable. Our staff are working with partners nationally to try and influence this with publishers. We believe the stock fund needs to be increased.

# Libraries Unlimited Board initial responses to specific questions in Devon County Council's public consultation

**Q12. The proposal contains new standardised core weekly hours across the 50 libraries in Devon. Do you support the new proposed hours across the library network?**

Some libraries will see more significant changes than others. Overall the opening hours proposal is reasonable based on need and resources. It is right to prioritise Saturdays. We already have seven libraries staffed 6 hours a week so whilst this is a small amount of hours, we know even these minimal hours can provide an essential service to a community.

**Q13. We propose to group libraries by area and structured opening hours so that at least one library is available in the area for you to use Monday - Saturday. Do you agree with this approach?**

This is sensible, we know many people use multiple libraries depending on when they are open so seeking to have a library open each weekday in each group area is positive.

**Q16. The proposal also contains examples of ideas to extend opening hours such as open access, community-managed libraries and greater use of volunteers in the library network. Would you support this part of the proposal?**

- We believe retaining a county wide library service provider is the most effective way to both deliver services and ensure communities benefit from county wide initiatives e.g. Reading challenges, National Portfolio Organisation funded events, climate events and partnerships with publishers. If building costs or staff costs can be covered by local organisations (e.g. parish or town councils or regular philanthropy) these are best done in partnership with Libraries Unlimited rather than operating the library entirely independently.

# Libraries Unlimited Board initial responses to specific questions in Devon County Council's public consultation

- Open Access technology and the use of volunteers should be scaled up but should not be viewed as a replacement for staffed opening hours and therefore should not be considered part of the statutory service.

- We are proud at Libraries Unlimited to have recruited, trained and supported over 700 volunteers, with volunteer hours now at higher than pre-pandemic levels. We are confident we can build on this.

**Q 18. Would you support the introduction of community-managed libraries?**

We believe this would fragment the service and whilst it may save the council money it will still need to be funded by the tax payer through other sources such as town or parish council precepts or donations. We do not support this proposal.

**Q20. The proposal under consultation is based on retaining the network of 50 staffed libraries operating 52 weeks throughout the year. To help shape future thinking, please indicate your level of support for further evaluation of each option.**

- 48 weeks a year: We do not support removing the library service by up to one month per year. We do not see how this would work practically and result in a financial saving.

- We believe trained staff are required for a thriving library service. Volunteers have a significant role to play, but ultimately do not replace staffed libraries.

# Libraries Unlimited Board initial responses to specific questions in Devon County Council's public consultation

- Community bookshelves can be entirely run by volunteers, but are an addition to a statutory library service as they are primarily transactional for the borrowing of books rather than a thriving statutory library with well managed stock and all the cultural, educational, economic and health activities that libraries provide.

- We strongly oppose all of the options in Q20.

**Other points of note for supporters of Libraries:**

- Decisions will not be made about the future until DCC's cabinet meeting in April 2026, at the earliest, as the results from the consultation will need to be taken into consideration.

- This consultation is focused on what DCC can fund. If you are able to provide a regular source of funding (for example for other services that we can deliver through the library network or to fund staffing or staffed visits to schools or even in kind by providing/donating a venue free of charge) then please do contact us directly by emailing letstalk@librariesunlimited.org.uk or donating through our website.