

Local Development Framework Briefing Paper Library Strategy



Devon County Council's advice to Local Planning Authorities.

This is one of a series of briefing papers prepared by Devon County Council to assist the preparation of Local Development Documents.

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Local Planning Authorities are requested to take the following matters into account in preparing their Local Development Frameworks and other documents by including policies that:

- 1. Set out the requirements for a library network reflecting the pattern of main Devon Towns as identified in the Community Strategy plus those that are considered to be isolated from other settlements. (see Section 3a)***

- 2. Recognise that libraries will provide a tiered range of services which is in keeping with the size of population served, ranging from Central libraries in Exeter and Barnstaple, to main town libraries and smaller community libraries. (see Section 3b)***

- 3. Make provision for new and replacement libraries in accordance with Devon County Council's Library Strategy. (see Section 3c)***

- 3. Seek contributions from development, where appropriate, to provide for new and replacement libraries (see Section 3d)***

Partnership Working

Devon County Council wishes to work in partnership with District Councils, in further developing the above policy areas with colleagues and other organisations and would wish to be fully involved in any discussion relating to them.

1. Introduction

The County Council has a statutory responsibility as a Library authority to provide a “*comprehensive and efficient*” library service, as laid down in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

The Department of Culture, Media and Sports, provides guidance on the overall objectives of the service in its Framework for the Future document of 2003. It also oversees the Public Library Standards by which the service performance is judged and the CPA Performance indicators which are used to assess the service contribution for the score for the Culture Block.

The service in Devon is currently provided through 56 static library buildings, some of which are in shared premises, 11 mobile library vehicles, a housebound service in partnership with WRVS and a service to the three prisons in the county operated on behalf of the Home Office. Library use statistics are set out in Appendix 1.

2. Vision and objectives for the period to 2021 and beyond

The Library Service is seeking, through its Strategic Review, to restructure and modernise to be better placed over the next decade or so to provide services which ‘add value’ by encouraging a wider range and number of people across Devon to use libraries. With the changing requirements of library users and the need to reflect the priorities in the Devon Strategic Plan, the time is now right to look at the future of these services for the 21st Century.

3. Issues to be addressed

a) Geographical Spread of Libraries

The geographical spread of the Library Services in Devon has remained largely unaltered for over 30 years, although there has been significant investment in library facilities at locations such as Barnstaple, Dartmouth, Tavistock, Tiverton and Torrington.

During that time population distribution has changed markedly. Information technology, internet services and e-enabled services (for example online renewals and reservations, and library-based IT amenities) have changed the way that information and facilities are accessed.

The Audit Commission Best Value Inspector's report, the subsequent Library Strategic Review and the IDeA Peer Review all indicated that whilst progress was being made to improve the library and information service, its geographical spread is uneven and resources are delivered to an outdated historic pattern.

There are a number of libraries which are:

- Inadequate or poorly located and in need of replacement.
- Less well used whether because of their location or because they serve a small population catchments.
- Limited in opening hours which means that assets such as book stock and computers are not cost effective.

There is a need to make provision for a library network to reflecting the pattern of main Devon Towns as identified in the Devon Structure Plan / Devon Community Strategy plus those that are considered to be isolated from other settlements.

b) The need to provide a tiered range of services.

It is not appropriate to make the to make the same level of provision throughout the County Recognise that libraries will provide a tiered range of services which is in keeping with the size of population served, ranging from Central libraries in Exeter and Barnstaple, to main town libraries and smaller community libraries.

c) The provision for new and replacement libraries

Locations for new and replacement libraries needs to be provided for in Local Development Documents and suitable sites to be identified for such uses. The co-location of such libraries, with appropriate alternative services or facilities, should also be considered as a possible option. Devon County Council's Library Strategy currently (October 2006) includes the provision for new or replacement libraries at:

- Sherford,
- Cranbrook,
- Cullompton,
- Exmouth,
- Okehampton,
- Princetown,
- Totnes.

Library proposals in Ivybridge, South Molton and Ottery St Mary are currently being progressed.

d) Seek contribution from development

In locations where new development needs access to library facilities, provision should be made in the Local Development Documents for development contributions to provide for new and expanded library services.

3. Partnership Working

Devon County Council wishes to work in partnership with District Councils, in further developing the above policy areas with colleagues and other organisations and would wish to be fully involved in any discussion relating to them.

Library use Statistics

Devon's Library service:

- Issue nearly 5 million items,
- Receive nearly 4 million visits and
- Deal with 750,000 enquires annually.
- Provide 340 public access computers across the county and these register 40,000 sessions per month.

Library issues, in common with other authorities have been decreasing; this decline has been slower in Devon, possibly because of the age profile of the community.

Library Visits however have been steadily increasing since the introduction of the public access computers and the opening of a number of modern, well located new library premises. The computers have also changed the library user profile so that more young people are making use of the facilities.

The introduction of online services such as renewals, reservations and information provision has also seen an increase in take up and it is possible that the development and promotion of these services will have a negative effect on the number of physical visits in the future.