



Broadclyst Parish Council  
GROWING OUR COMMUNITY

Broadclyst Parish Council  
19 New Buildings  
Broadclyst  
Exeter  
EX5 3EX  
08/07/2018

Devon Mobile Library & Outreach Consultation,  
Exeter Library,  
Castle Street,  
Exeter  
EX4 3PQ.

Dear Sirs

**Ref: Devon Mobile Library and Outreach Service Consultation 2018**

Thank you for consulting Broadclyst Parish Council on the future shape of Devon's mobile library and outreach services; the Council broadly supports the stated aim to 'design services that meet the needs of even more people, and will encourage a wider range of people to make good use of library services', however this merits careful and sensitive consideration which is not solely decided on a Cost-Benefit Analysis basis.

It is easy to report how money is spent, but it is often difficult to prove if it was spent effectively; Budget-pressure and falling user statistics require library-providers to work harder to justify expenditures such as renovations or expansion; this is where evaluation comes into play. As Nyström (a library consultant) and Sjögren (an academic librarian), the Swedish authors of "An Evaluation of the Benefits and Value of Libraries" attest, "Libraries are now, perhaps more than ever, focused on their survival and future role in a rapidly changing society", suggesting the need to define the value of libraries, and that the need for evaluation is a crucial part of service-delivery planning. However, in their definition of benefit assessment, Nyström and Sjögren caution that "it is not possible to describe reality by using numbers."

The consultation document<sup>1</sup> cites a noticeable drop in mobile library usage since 14/15, and raises concerns that its aging fleet of 4 library vehicles will cost over £300,000 to replace/update. When stated in a public consultation document, £300,000 sounds a lot of money, but let's put those figures into context. DCC's 2018/19 precept of £382,118,036.23<sup>2</sup> when calculated over the agreed collection tax base of 287,049.96 gave a 18/19 Council Tax Band D of £1,331.19. When the £300,000 is added to the 19/20 budget and calculated as an indicative approximation using the 2018/19 tax base, it equates to an additional £1.05 per Band D property per year, or can be expressed as a precept percentage increase of 0.078%. DCC's Tax Base will increase as housing developments across Devon continue to be delivered, so the actual cost to the Council Tax payer by the time the 2019/20 budget is set will be proportionally less.

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<sup>1</sup> As downloaded from <https://new.devon.gov.uk/haveyoursay/consultations/devon-library-outreach-service/>

<sup>2</sup> Figures used taken from Key Table 2 – Precept and Council Tax; Revenue Budget Book 2018/19 (p.14), available at <https://new.devon.gov.uk/finance-and-budget/budgets/>

Value is generally defined in different ways, including economic, social, and cultural. Some policymakers and the public at large underestimate the benefits of public libraries (Saxon and McDougall, 2012). Research on public libraries reveals that the benefits are enjoyed not only by users, but also by non-users (SGS Economics & Planning, 2011); evidence which is not restricted to static libraries. The knowledge that a service will be indefinitely accessible creates what is known as an 'option value'; although an individual may not use a mobile library, they offer an 'option-value', reflecting individual perceptions of how public libraries contribute to the basic and essential elements of a local community. Saxena and McDougall (2012) associate 'legacy value' with libraries, where individuals and communities value maintaining public library services so that future generations might benefit from their existence. This cultural and historical legacy stems from the feeling of obligation and responsibility towards future generations, particularly in places where there is perceived community value and interest in meeting community needs.

In civic institutions like libraries, people routinely exchange "social capital", as such settings encourage social connection by providing a social focus in which people interact. Quoted in Bolyard's (2014) report on 'The Values of Libraries', James Gee notes that people "can each get different things" from affinity spaces that not only provide "an important form of social affiliation" but also constitute "places where effective learning occurs" outside formal education.

Unfortunately, the demographic breakdown of service users is not given in the consultation document, it is not unreasonable to presume that the current users of the mobile library service fall into one or more of the following brackets: elderly, disabled, vulnerable, non-drivers; the social connectivity created by the mobile library is of utmost importance to these users. Whilst nobody would dispute the desire to provide an efficient service, care is needed that the most vulnerable people in society are not disenfranchised in the haste to re-shape Devon's outreach library service. We trust the consultation responses will provide an opportunity to enhance and further develop this multi-valuable community service, and not to argue the case to withdraw or further centralise the service.

Yours Sincerely

Angie Hurren (Mrs)  
Principal, Society of Local Council Clerks  
Broadclyst Parish Council Clerk