Libraries in lockdown: Scottish public libraries and their role in community cohesion and resilience during lockdown.

REID, P. and BLOICE, L.

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Libraries in Lockdown

Scottish Public Libraries and their role in community cohesion and resilience during lockdown

Peter Reid & Lyndsay Bloice

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, we are extremely grateful to all those who participated in the interviews for this research. We will not name them as they are attributed here anonymously but they know who they are and, it is fair to say, they are the cornerstone of this research. We must thank Pamela Tulloch, the Chief Executive Officer of the Scottish Library and Information Council, for being enabling SLIC to be a partner in the project and for her time and unfailing support at various points in the study. We wish to thank Andrew Olney, the chair of the Association of Public Libraries in Scotland (APLS) for his help and assistance. Our grateful thanks go to Catherine Jeromson of Shetland Library and her daughter Evie for allowing us permission to use their photograph on the front cover. Our thanks go to Dr Catherine Gilmore and Dr Sharon Brookshaw of AHRC for their guidance and support.

About the authors

Professor Peter Reid is professor of librarianship at the School of Creative and Cultural Business at Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen. He previously created (with Caroline Whitehead) *How good is our public library service?* the quality standards used in Scotland's public libraries. He is a past President of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland.

Lyndsay Bloice is a research assistant at the School of Creative and Cultural Business at Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen. She holds a Masters degree in Library and Information Science and has worked on a large number of European-funded research projects.

Picture Credits

All screenshots of social media included in this report were captured as part of the data collection for this research project. The image on the front cover is courtesy of Catherine Jeromson of Shetland Library. The map of Scotland's local authority areas comes from the Scottish Government website at https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-local-government-finance-statistics-slgfs-2018-19/pages/9/

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Executive Summary

This research has been conducted by Professor Peter Reid and Lyndsay Bloice of Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen in conjunction with the Scottish Library and Information and Council. It has been funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

The research examines Scottish Public Libraries and their response to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-21 and in particular the way in which they have, through their digital offering, helped to support community resilience and cohesion. The research also explores the issues that library services have had to contend with during lockdown.

The methods deployed in this study included the gathering and analysing of social media and other web-based content from library services over the months March-September 2020 (amounting to over four thousands snips of content) and 19 interviews with service managers.

Findings are presented in respect of the lessons to be learned from the closure of physical services and the migration to digital only provision, the contribution made to supporting communities, health and wellbeing, the importance of the balance of physical and digital library services, around governance models for library services, and the process of reopening services.

Recommendations are offered around the need for a national conversation about digital content provision in public libraries and the exploration of possibilities of a national approach, the role libraries have as digital enablers (in supporting effort to overcome the digital divide in society), the crucial nature of continued strong advocacy for public libraries, the importance of the library as a physical space, and on how to maintain the flexibility, agility and autonomy which emerged during lockdown.

Preface

They see to it that even children can make use of the rich collections; that readers can read publicly-owned books at home; they regard as the pride and glory of a public library, not the number of rarities it contains, the number of sixteenth-century editions or tenth-century manuscripts, but the extent to which books are distributed among the people, the number of new readers enrolled, the speed with which the demand for any book is met, the number of books issued to be read at home, the number of children attracted to reading and to the use of the library.

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN 1913[1]

We got this research wrong. A startling admission for academics to open their report with perhaps. We entitled it Libraries in Lockdown; that was wrong. We ought to have entitled it Librarians in Lockdown, and probably, in our heart of hearts, we knew that, all those months ago when the research was proposed. For it is unquestionably, undeniably the people in Scotland's public libraries who made all the difference. It was they who migrated their offering online, they who found solutions to problems they had never had to consider before, they who were redeployed to other important functions, they who worried and cared endlessly about their users and their communities. Services only exist because people make them happen.

This research has also been fun. Important, but also fun; and not just because, in the best librarian traditions, there were lots of photos of cats on the social media posts that we looked at. It was fun because we were working with an engaged and collegiate community of professionals who were very willing to share what they had done; a community that gave realistic assessments about things that went well, and things that did not; and because they wanted the wider library world to learn from the events of 2020. This research looks at Scotland but it affords lessons and learning more widely.

There are interesting results here about how libraries did respond, the challenges that they encountered and issues that are likely to remain well beyond the end of the pandemic. The difference which exists across Scotland is also depicted in this report. Some of the issues are variations on themes that have existed in the past, and some are new, being derived entirely from the circumstance of lockdown. That

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[1] Lenin, VI. What can be done for public education? Рабочая правда [*Rabochaya Pravda*] No. 5, 18 July 1913.
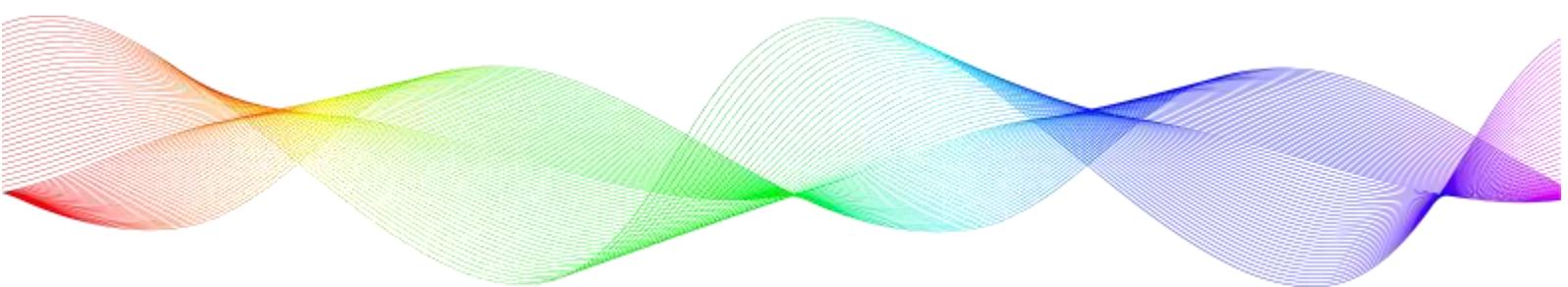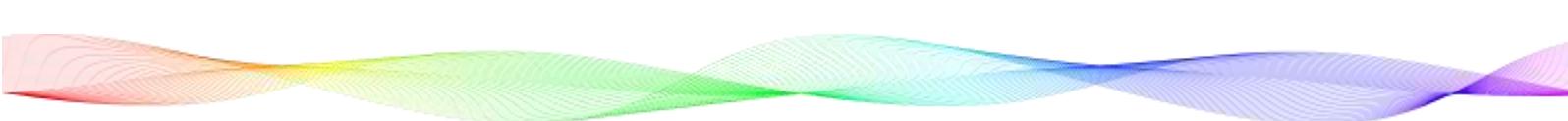
said, there is strong evidence throughout about the contributions that libraries have made to their communities. Indeed, it is the closeness of libraries to the people that they serve and the understanding they have of their communities that have been most evident in the research.

We wish to express our sincere thanks to all of those who gave up time to be interviewed for this research. It was interesting to observe that many of them said that they had enjoyed the opportunity to speak about what their services had been doing, and that the interview was the first real opportunity they had to stop and think about it, and to reflect. That they found it useful was a bonus as far as we were concerned.

Peter Reid & Lyndsay Bloice
ABERDEEN, MARCH 2021
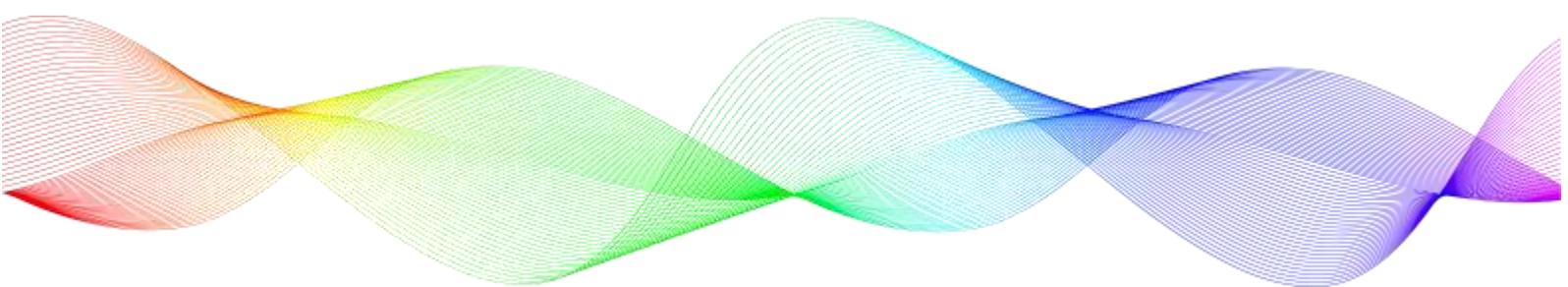
Introduction

This research examines the role that Scottish public libraries have played during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns, and how they have helped to support community cohesion and resilience. The research has been funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) as part of their scheme to provide response to the pandemic of 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic has probably resulted in the most profound challenges for the global community since the Second World War with the whole world impacted by it to some degree. The focus of research has, rightly, been on the scientific and medical disciplines for the development of vaccines and remedies.

There is not, however, one single part of society which has been left unaffected by the pandemic and by the lockdowns and social distancing restrictions. The cultural sector which relies so heavily on participation and engagement in physical spaces has been particularly badly affected, analogous in many respects with the impacts felt by the retail and hospitality sectors.

Scotland's public libraries are one of the most visible and accessible parts of the nation's cultural landscape. They are to be found across the country, in cities, towns and villages, close to the people who use them. From Shetland in the north to Wigtown in the south, they are often among the most visible piece of cultural infrastructure within a community. They represent a free, trusted civic space providing access to reading materials and so much else. Their closure because of lockdown from March 2020 represented the biggest upheaval and greatest challenge to them in their one hundred and seventy years of existence.[2]

This research, therefore, examines how they responded to this unparalleled situation, and how they maintained their close relationship with the communities they serve. The research explores what difference they made, how they reached vulnerable groups, how they help to support health and wellbeing, what they themselves learned, and how their management practices adapted. It presents voices from Scottish libraries during 2020.

The opening words of *A Culture Strategy for Scotland* states: 'Scotland is a place where culture is valued, protected and nurtured. Culture is woven through everyday life, shapes and is shaped by society, and its transformative potential is experienced by everyone'.[3] In 2020, public libraries in Scotland were absent in their traditional forms but this study attempts to shine a light on how they continued to play a part weaving culture through everyday life.

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[2] Greater than either of the World Wars, when they remained opened.
[3] A Culture Strategy for Scotland https://www.gov.scot/publications/culture-strategy-scotland/pages/1/
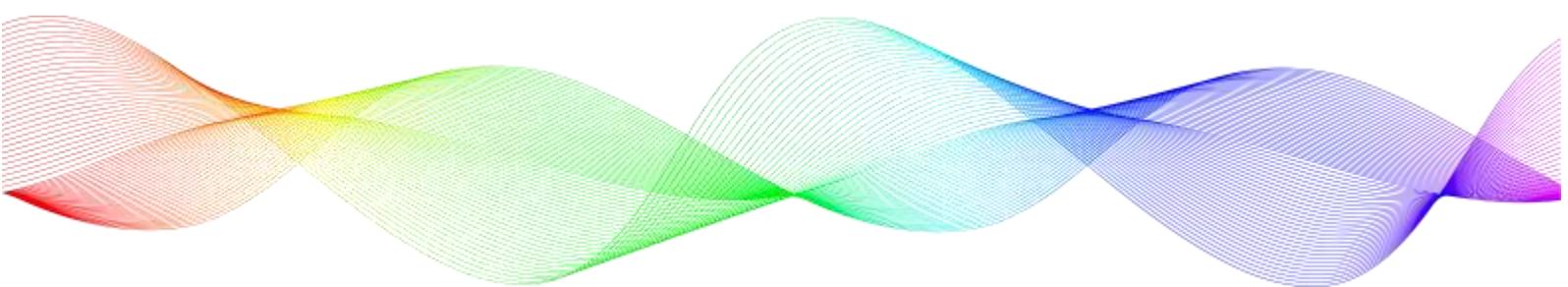
Background

Our libraries are often the hub of a local community - providing access to information and resources that people would otherwise not have.

NICOLA STURGEON 2015

Examination of the impact of public libraries is not new. Since the inception of the modern public library movement in the 1850s, evaluating their impact has been part of the landscape (Shirley, 1947: 327)[4]. Toyne and Usherwood (2001: 149)[5] highlighted the necessity 'to consider the impact [of libraries] on individuals or groups in the community' and not just to measure what is measurable and consequently often miss what is important. Goulding, (2006:4).[6] noted, despite the public being generally predisposed to and broadly positive about libraries, many commentators, socially, politically and economically, portray them as either being at crisis point or of lacking relevance to contemporary society because of a jaundiced and out-dated perception of what it is they do. The lockdown period presents an opportunity to look at the relevance of libraries to contemporary society during a time of national and global challenge.

This research focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on Scotland's public libraries, and how they have coped with, and responded to, the events of 2020 given status as highly-trusted, free and universal public spaces. The Scottish public library context provides enough critical mass to study and draw out key findings without being too large and unwieldy (an examination, within the same timescales, of the entire United Kingdom with its varying governance, funding and public policy models) would have had been more difficult.

During lockdown, the Scottish Book Trust recruited people living in Scotland to a panel in order to record their experiences of reading. The results of this research were published in November 2020 in a report entitled *Reading in Scotland: reading over lockdown.*[7] This research emphasises the strong connections which exist (and are well-known to exist) between reading and wellbeing, how reading can help overcome isolation, as well as access to, and choice of, reading materials. It found that 98% of their panellists agreed (85% strongly) that reading supported their wellbeing and equally strong evidence from their participants that reading had been important in times of stress or anxiety.

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[4] Shirley GW (1947). William Ewart: Library Pioneer", *Library Review*, 11(4): 324-327.
[5] Toyne J and Usherwood, B (2001) *Checking the Books: The Value and Impact of Public Library Book Reading*. Sheffield: Department of Information Studies, University of Sheffield.
[6] Goulding A (2006), *Public Libraries in the 21st Century: Defining Services and Debating the Future*. Gower, Aldershot.
[7] Reading in Scotland: reading in lockdown. Report by the Scottish Book Trust. Available at
https://www.scottishbooktrust.com/uploads/store/mediaupload/3552/file/Reading%20in%20Scotland%20-%20reading%20under%20lockdown%20FINAL.pdf
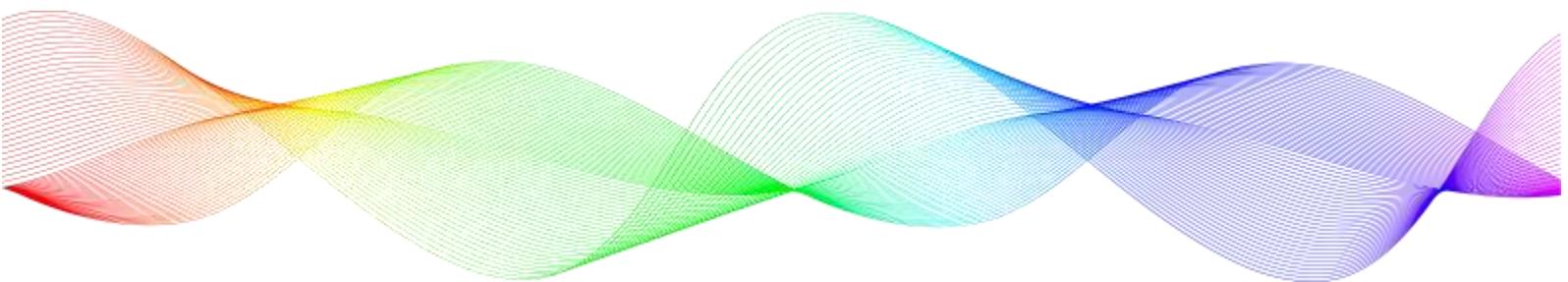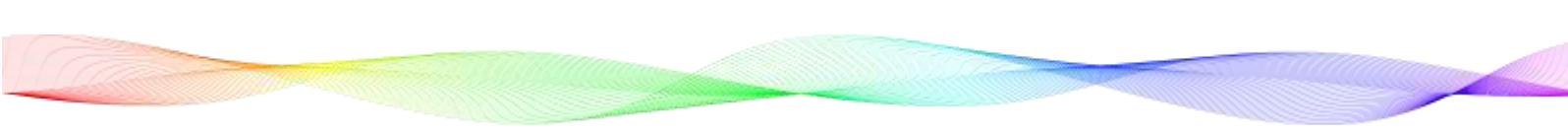
Ambition and Opportunity, the national strategy for public libraries in Scotland, links its six strategic aims to the Scottish Government's key national outcomes. By examining the role that public libraries have played during lockdown, this research seeks to inform those national outcomes in health and wellbeing, addressing inequalities, developing a better educated, more skilled, more successful population, and delivering high quality, continually improving, public services.

Aims and objectives

The aim of this research has been to evaluate critically the response of public libraries in Scotland to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

This was underpinned by the following objectives:
- To examine how libraries evolved in terms of providing digital and remote only services;
- To identify and explore how (individual) staff autonomy in remote and online working environments fosters creativity and innovation in service delivery;
- To examine how Scottish public libraries, through their remote, online provision, have helped foster and support community resilience (in terms of social, cultural and health wellbeing);
- To evaluate the opinions and perceptions of the library services about their activities (including consideration of those socially or technological isolated who might have been "out of reach");
- To consider the above aspects in the context of differing governance models (e.g. direct local authority management and / or arm's length cultural and leisure trusts);
- To inform policy- and decision-makers (in both cultural and broader public policy spheres) about issues of resilience and governance in library service delivery and identify examples of good practice.

It is acknowledged that, in a perfect situation, full engagement with end-users of library services would be desirable. This was not, however, conceived of as a user study. Whilst it is possible, to a degree, for research of this nature to gather commentary from end users through social media and other online platforms, it would likely still not address those who are most socially disadvantaged and may have had limited access services online. Important other research is being conducted into the perceptions of users and non-users with regard to public library provision. The recent Carnegie Trust report *Making a Difference: Libraries, Lockdown and Looking Ahead*[8] has made a valuable contribution exploring perceptions across the whole of the United Kingdom. Subsequent follow-up research may be able to examine and address some of these and other issues, in particular, canvassing the public on their use of library services during the pandemic.

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[8] Making a Difference: Libraries, Lockdown and Looking Ahead
https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/making-a-difference-libraries-lockdown-and-looking-ahead/
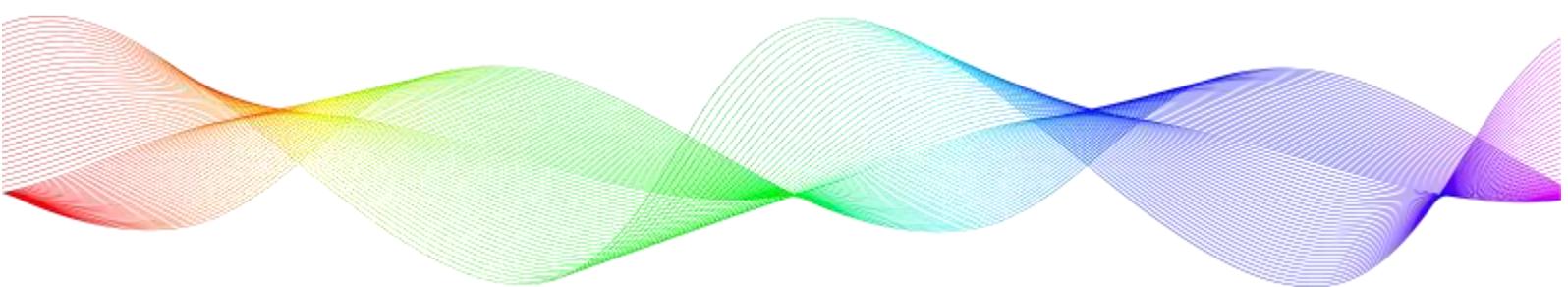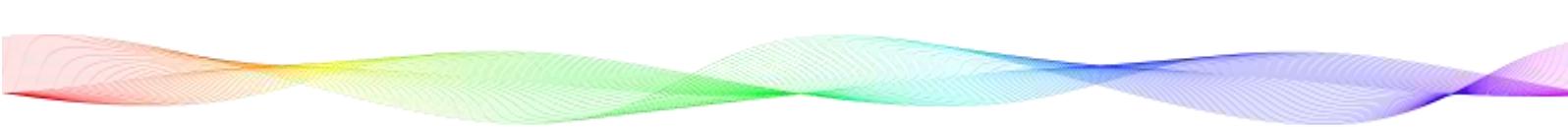
This research complements the work undertaken by the Carnegie UK Trust, and provides a fresh look at the events of 2020 by supplementing heads of service interviews and survey with an extensive social media and web-presence analysis putting a spotlight on the Scottish context in particular. As such, a critical part of this research, is the social media data and analysis which picks up on the main mode of communication for library services during lockdown, and while physical buildings remained closed or restricted. While some library services were able to run telephone lines and redeploy staff to hubs, in most cases there was a period where email and social media was the only way for library staff to communicate and the only avenue for the public to reach out to their local library.

The interviews conducted as part of this research largely support the findings of the Carnegie UK Trust reports. This is unsurprising given that both asked similar questions of staff in similar roles in the sector (albeit, the Carnegie UK Trust research had a broader UK-wide scope). Similarly, both our study and the Carnegie UK Trust study made use of survey to gain more insight into activities during lockdown. This study has sought to cover two main elements, asking services (in interviews and survey) about what they did during lockdown, but also capturing and analysing the evidence of this activity. In other words, not only does this research detail the story of the lockdown from the perspectives of heads of service in Scottish public libraries, but it also supplies a narrative around the public-facing results of that period.
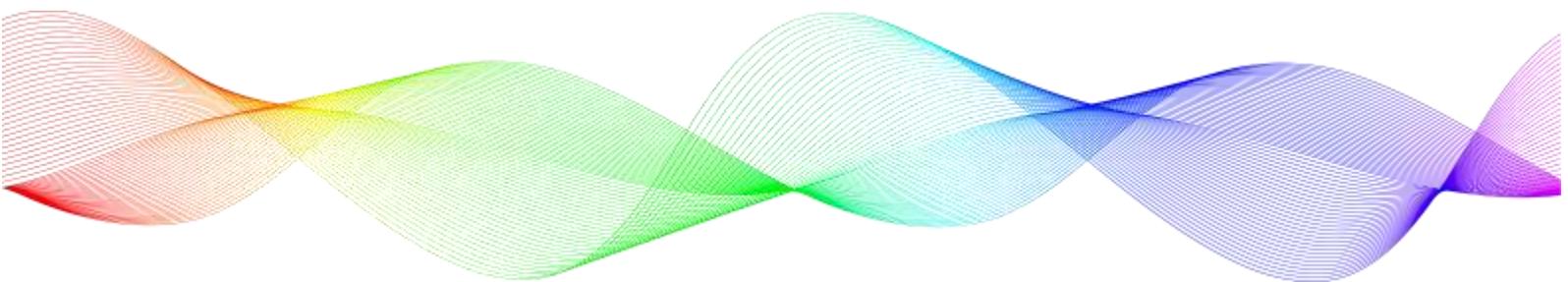
Scottish public libraries: context

A library outranks any other one thing a community can do to benefit its people. It is a never failing spring in the desert.

ANDREW CARNEGIE

Throughout the nineteenth century, the movement for social and political reform gathered momentum and a strong but not universally-supported campaign in favour of the provision of free public libraries emerged. The fundamental principle which this movement held to was universal access to books and to reading materials, not just for those wealthy enough to afford to have their own collections or to pay for membership of subscription libraries. In 1853, the Public Libraries (Scotland) Act was passed which allowed burghs to raise the rate by 1d and to spend the revenue generated on library and museum buildings as well as collections for them. The Scottish Act enabled saw libraries core principle being 'for the Instruction and Recreation of the People'.

Scotland's public library landscape was immeasurably altered and enhanced through the generosity of Andrew Carnegie and thanks to him, the period from the mid-1880s through to the First World War, became a felicitous time for public libraries. Carnegie said at the opening of one of his libraries 'we must trust that this library is to grow in usefulness year after year and prove one of the most potent agencies for the good of the people for all time to come'. Carnegie had the torch, a beacon of light, as a decorative device in many of his libraries. It is not an exaggeration to say that they continue to be beacons of light, open to all, accessible to everyone, offering endless possibilities for socially-inclusive life-long learning (and doing so decades before those terms became recognised).

Scotland's public libraries remain a statutory service under the terms Local Government Act 1994 which incorporates and consolidates the existing legislation,[9] and which states 'a local authority shall have a duty to secure the provision of adequate library facilities for all persons resident in their area'. The word 'adequate' has, on occasions, been the source of some debate but attempts to pin it down are undesirable because of the nature of different services, communities and geographical locations. When the *How good is our public library service* framework was developed in 2013 it sought to support and inform what adequate provision of universal public libraries services throughout Scotland might look like without providing prescriptive definitions. The framework noted that 'an adequate service is delivered through a planned strategic network of public libraries reflecting core functions' and these core functions were listed as:

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[9] Namely, the Public Libraries Consolidation (Scotland) Act 1887, the Public Libraries (Scotland) Act 1955, and the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.
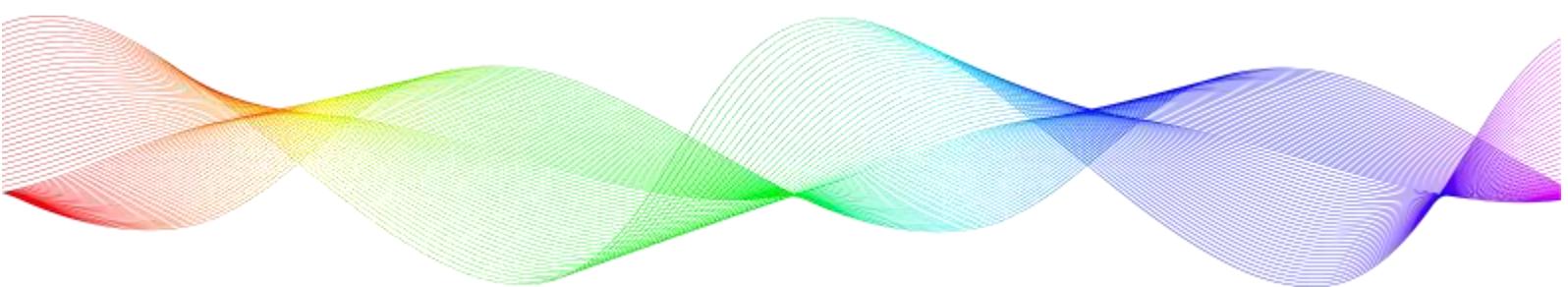
- Providing universal access to hardcopy and electronic resources which is free, consistent and customer focussed;
- Enabling access to resources for reading, information and learning;
- Creating social capital by encouraging community involvement and community-based activity;
- Helping to minimise social and digital exclusion;
- Supporting learning and information needs in the information society and knowledge economy;
- Promoting access to Scotland's cultural heritage and promoting cultural and creative activities;
- Encouraging the public to pursue individual interests;
- Promoting social justice, civic engagement and democracy;
- Working in partnership with other agencies and organisations to offer value added services;
- Strategic network provision.

Scotland's public libraries continue to play an important part in communities across the country. They are accessible, neutral public spaces (a point repeatedly emphasised by interviewees in this research) which enhance and enrich the lives of much of Scotland's population. Carnegie UK Trust published *Shining a light: the future of public libraries across the UK and Ireland*[10] based on research conducted in 2016. This report found that both library usage and the value attached by the public to libraries in their communities was highest in Scotland and Ireland. They have undergone enormous change with the advent of the internet and digital delivery, but consistent with previous times of challenge, they have adapted and changed. Providing books, developing literacy, encouraging life-long learning, offering digital services – libraries continue to be never cultural beacons of light within communities.

More recent Carnegie UK Trust research found that around three in ten people in the UK engaged with public library services during lockdown[11] for a range of services including digital resources. Additionally, 60% of those who engaged with library services highlighted a range of benefits beyond digital offerings, aided by the libraries efforts to tackle digital exclusion through access to devices, and saw positive impacts on wellbeing generally, and support around feeling connected to community and dealing with loneliness. However, they found that 49% of Scottish people who took part in their study used the public library in the 12 months prior to lockdown, versus 23% during lockdown (the UK equivalent percentages are 52% use

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[10] Carnegie UK Trust, (2017). *Shining a light: the future of public libraries across the UK and Ireland* available at https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/shining-a-light/

[11] Carnegie UK Trust (2020). *Making a Difference: Libraries, Lockdown and Looking Ahead* available at: https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie_uk_trust/2020/10/13090335/Overarching-report-Making-a-Difference-1.pdf

prior to lockdown, and 29% during)[12], suggesting that there may have been a sharper drop in use of Public Library services in Scotland during lockdown, or at least, this appears to be the case in the sample population of the study.

In terms of engagement with services after lockdown, there was also a lower percentage of Scottish respondents who felt that public libraries would be a 'safe space that is accessible to everyone and is free of charge' after lockdown (28% Scottish respondents, versus 36% for the UK, 32% Northern Ireland, 33% Wales, and 37% England). In a similar vein, fewer Scottish respondents indicated that they felt the physical spaces would be a 'safe environment to chat and connect with staff and others in the community' post lockdown (27% in Scotland, versus 34% UK, 30% NI, 35% Wales and 35% England). The percentage of Scottish respondents who felt that they would engage with public libraries after lockdown for digital reading material was noticeably lower (36% Scotland against 45% UK-wide, 40% Northern Ireland, 39% Wales, and 46% in England) while physical reading material was around the same as Northern Ireland and Wales, although lower than the average (33% Scotland, against 39% UK-wide, 31% Northern Ireland, 32% Wales and 41% England). Finally, in how respondents would engage with services post lockdown, physical access to both 'Support to develop skills' (Scotland 21%, against the UK-wide average of 35%) and 'Health and wellbeing support' (23% Scotland, against 32% UK-wide) were lower in Scotland.

It is unclear if the respondents felt that there were alternatives to public libraries in in Scotland for access to a safe public space, connecting with others locally, and getting skills, health, and wellbeing support in their community. Perhaps the issue might be more to do with perceptions of what a public library offers, based on past experiences of the services, how libraries are marketed, or may simply the individual needs of the respondents. This is interesting given the opinions of managers who emphasised the public library as a 'safe public space'. However, it is important to note that notions of 'safe spaces' have gained a different meaning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Regardless, the Carnegie UK Trust research indicates that while there is an overall national picture of access to, and use of, services across the nations; in Scotland, there are perhaps particular concerns from the public around the accessibility and use of physical spaces run by public libraries, access to and use of digital reading material, and access to skills, health and wellbeing support which have implications for the sector moving forward, and as such we have made these a particular focus of the analysis in this research.

Key dates and timescales

This research project ran from June to December 2020. The scope of the project was to examine the period of the first UK-wide lockdown commencing, as announced by the Prime Minister, on 23 March 2020. The period covered in the

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[12] Carnegie UK Trust (2020) *Public poll background report*, available at: https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie_uk_trust/2020/10/13090411/Public-Omnibus-Making-a-Difference-1.pdf
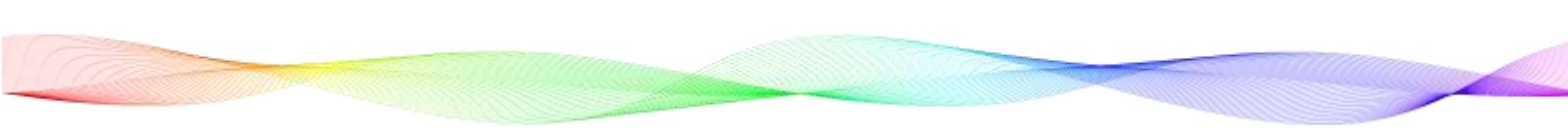
study is, therefore from 23 March to 16 December 2020. The social media data analysis principally covered the period March-September 2020 (with any exceptions to this noted in the text). The interviews largely took place in October and November (again with any exceptions noted in the text).
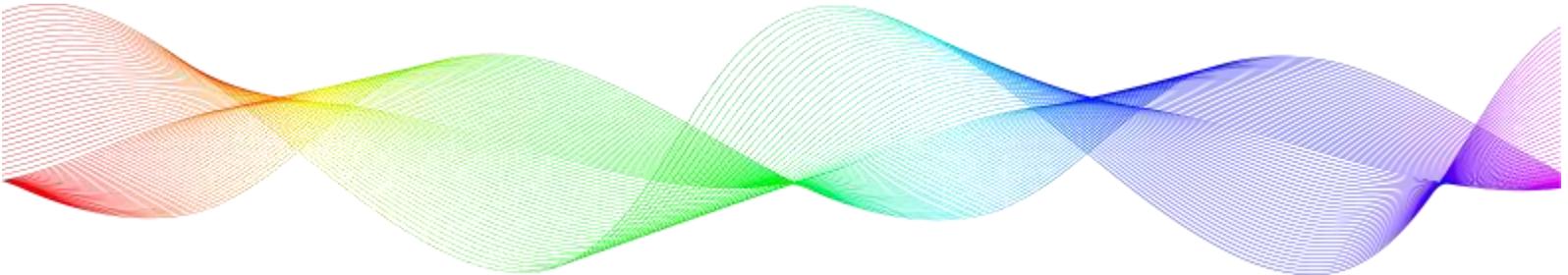
Methodology

The following section outlines both the overarching research approach and philosophy as well as providing, step-by-step, an outline of the techniques used for data collection and analysis. Consideration is also given to the ethical aspects of the research together with discussion of limitations to the study.

Research philosophy

The research philosophy for this study was primarily within an exploratory and inductive paradigm. Stebbins (2001) said that 'social science exploration is a broad-ranging, purposive, systematic prearranged undertaking designed to maximise the discovery of generalisations leading to description and understanding'.[13] Exploratory studies have been widely deployed in library science[14] and is useful in ensuring library science academics (not working as library practitioners) are open-minded to the things that they observe in professional practice.

We approached this research with open-mindedness, and with no preconceived ideas about the role that public libraries had played other than the knowledge that they *had* played a role in their communities and that this was part of a need to sustain resilience and cohesion. Beyond that, we had no hypothesis; the Carnegie work on the UK libraries in lockdown had not been published until after the completion of the social media data collection and near the end of the interviews. We have relied on an inductive approach where the evidence gathered (the data we have collected) has enabled us to form views and opinions on the subject in question. We did not approach this research seeking to test prior theories or hypotheses. These exploratory and inductive approaches allowed us to be open and creative in order to gain the most amount of insight on a subject. In the context of this study, such insight was obtained by:

- a review of literature;
- informal qualitative approaches including the systematic gathering of social media content during the period of lockdown; and,
- formal qualitative approaches including the in-depth interview with library service managers and the execution of a survey to gain insight into digital provision.

Data collection

There were three principal stands of data collection utilised during this study, social media analysis, interviews and survey and these are now outlined.

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[13] Stebbins, R. (2001). *Exploratory Research in the Social Sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
[14] And has been particularly well-used to facilitate studies of social media and libraries; see, for example, the work of Noa Aharony (2010) Twitter Use in Libraries: An Exploratory Analysis, Journal of Web Librarianship, 4(4), 333-350, or "Facebook use in libraries: an exploratory analysis", *Aslib Proceedings*,64(4), pp. 358-372.

Social media

The first stage in the methodology was the gathering of content from websites and social media platforms. All thirty-two local authority areas were examined, taking in those library services in direct council control as well as those in trusts.

Local Authority Boundaries

1. Aberdeen City
2. Aberdeenshire
3. Angus
4. Argyll and Bute
5. City of Edinburgh
6. Clackmannanshire
7. Dumfries and Galloway
8. Dundee City
9. East Ayrshire
10. East Dunbartonshire
11. East Lothian
12. East Renfrewshire
13. Falkirk
14. Fife
15. Glasgow City
16. Highland
17. Inverclyde
18. Midlothian
19. Moray
20. Na h-Eileanan an Iar
21. North Ayrshire
22. North Lanarkshire
23. Orkney Islands
24. Perth and Kinross
25. Renfrewshire
26. Scottish Borders
27. Shetland Islands
28. South Ayrshire
29. South Lanarkshire
30. Stirling
31. West Dunbartonshire
32. West Lothian

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Scale: 1:2,910,000

Scottish Government GI Science & Analysis Team, March 2019. job66161sl

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-local-government-finance-statistics-slgfs-2018-19/pages/9/

While it was beyond the scope of this project to gather and analyse every social media post and online interaction on every platform run by every authority area over the period, every effort was made to gather a wide representative sample. The online presence for each authority area was snipped and analysed, noting where there had been limitations in getting pages updated (for example, specific COVID-19 pages detailing the service response, or new opening hours or click and collect). Understandably, social media channels saw more timely information appear about closures, re-openings and other service changes as we progressed from lockdown into more relaxed rules over the summer.

Over 4,000 snips of content were harvested for the period March-September 2020. Online content was examined in respect of lending, eBooks and audio books, newspapers or magazines, closures and reopening of services. Key themes which were sought (see appendix one) included the delivery of BookBug, training or learning, social activities, local history, schooling, children, mental health, physical health, diet, business or economic support. Social media data were drawn from Facebook or Twitter principally, with other platforms (most commonly YouTube channels or blogs, and library service apps) also being examined; Instagram accounts were also looked at, although in most cases these were relatively uncommon and not particularly developed.

When searching for social media channels run by the library services, every effort was made to establish which of those were most commonly used (for example, Facebook was dominant, but others preferred Twitter), and also to capture snapshots of activity on other platforms such as YouTube (which was used more as a repository for video content, then shared on other social media channels).

It should also be noted that there was a range of models in terms of social media strategy and use which may make direct comparison difficult. For example, some services only had access to council- or trust-wide social media channels and so gauging specific library service activity on these channels was more problematic. Some shared social media channels not with the whole council or trust, but with a group of similar departments or services such as 'libraries, museums and archives' or 'culture'.

Within local authority areas, some smaller areas had their own 'libraries' social media channels, and in some cases each branch had a Facebook page. Usually, in these cases, there was an overarching account for the wider area which would share the local content from the branch channels. It did not become necessary to snip both Twitter and Facebook posts for all services, as most chose a dominant channel, and then shared content from that one to the other (for example posting everything on Facebook and only highlights on Twitter). It was sometimes noted that there was a disparity between the effort being demonstrated in promoting services on social media and the relatively modest number of followers and therefore being more dependent on followers to share in order to reach wider audiences, but such is the nature of social media.

Despite these limitations and considerations, the snips provided a good understanding of the type and range of activities being undertaken and shared, as well as how the adaptations to services were being communicated on these channels. These data provide an insight into the public-facing side of Scottish Public Libraries, at a time when buildings were closed and normal channels of communication with the wider community were limited. It was also interesting to note *how* services chose to use these channels to cater to their perceived audiences in different ways.

Interviews

The social media analysis then informed the selection of interviewees to give a broad cross-section of coverage (urban, rural, large, small, local authority run or in cultural and / or leisure trusts). Nineteen interviews were carried out with heads of service across both local authorities and trusts. An interview with one further local authority was requested but no reply was received. The interview questions can be found in appendix two. All of the interviews lasted for approximately one hour and were conducted by both investigators (one was undertaken by the principal investigator alone). Detailed notes were taken by the co-investigator and all the interviews were recorded and transcribed. After the fifteenth interview it was apparent that the interviewing was reaching saturation point. Whilst the research could have gone on indefinitely ascertaining slightly different or creative things that individual library services had done, the substantive answers to the main questions about the challenges of lockdown and the reintroduction of services were becoming largely similar. It was therefore decided to draw the interviews to a conclusion after the nineteenth.

Survey

A short survey of all library services was distributed through Scottish Library and Information Council and Association of Public Libraries to all services asking for details around uptake of digital services during lockdown. This yielded 19 responses (with 11 being from local authorities or trusts which had not been included in the interview process). In total, therefore, 26 of 32 (81%) local authority areas provided data directly either through interviews or the survey. Consequently, a broadly generalisable picture was possible. Six authorities responded to neither request (including one both to a request for an interview as well as to the survey).

Data analysis

For the social media data, there were several stages to the analysis. The snips were captured using the Microsoft 'Snip & Sketch' tool. The content of these snips was then examined and entered into a table which covered all local authority areas and the key themes and activities identified at the outset of the project and which were mentioned previously. A blank template of the table can be found in appendix one. All of the interviews were conducted via Zoom or Teams with their inbuilt ability to provide transcription. As both the principal investigator and the co-

investigator were present during the interviews (save for one), extensive notes were taken of each. All elements were drawn on for the analysis – using manual coding – which identified the key themes and issues. These then formed the outline structure for this report.

Ethical considerations

The ethical aspects associated with the research were considered at all stages from the point that proposal for funding was being developed, through the development and implementation of the approaches to data gathering, in conducting the interviews and in the data analysis stages. These considerations included particularly issues of confidentiality and anonymity in the interviews. Equality and Diversity issues were considered prior to the commencement of the project and were reviewed at each significant milestone. The Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment can be found in Appendix 3.

Additionally, there were also ethical considerations when gathering data from social media accounts. Social media platforms have Terms of Service (ToS) which often restrict the collection of large numbers of posts. Each platform has different ToS and these are changing over time as social media companies react to privacy issues. For example, it has historically been very easy to auto-scrape posts (using a third party tool or software to gather collections of posts) from Twitter accounts (up to a certain number of tweets) using tools such as Twitonomy, as Twitter's ToS allows for this and states that all Tweets are in the public domain[15]. Facebook and Facebook-owned Instagram have tightened restrictions on automated scraping, especially after the Cambridge Analytica scandal[16]. This leaves researchers with only manual 'scroll-and-snip' method which is labour intensive and limits the number of posts a project can reasonably cover.

There are also issues around the ethics of gathering social media posts without the explicit permission of the account owner. The typical and widely accepted approach is to aim to 'do no harm'[17] and consider the implications for library services when featuring snips of their social media posts in this report. As with the interview quotes, the authors of this report have erred on the side of caution and consulted library services where social media snips have been used wherever there was concern about the impact of their inclusion.

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[15] See https://twitter.com/en/tos
[16] In 2018, Cambridge Analytica (CA) exploited a loophole in the Terms of Service (ToS) for Facebook's API (Application Program Interface), which allows 3rd parties to access user data. Millions of users who filled in a survey on the Facebook platform found that CA harvested their profiles without their consent and used them for political advertising purposes. This led to a severe restriction on access to Facebook and Instagram data, and the environment in which we are operating today in terms of accessing social media data on these platforms for research. But, it's important to note that even before the scandal, both Facebook and Instagram already had more restrictive ToS than other social media platforms. Facebook and Instagram have always been considered to be more akin to closed communities (or 'private networks' as noted in The Sage Social Media Handbook, Laestadius, 2018) and users' privacy more closely guarded on those platforms.
[17] Again, The Sage Social Media Handbook (Laestadius, 2018) is helpful on this matter, but researchers must bear in mind that social media platforms are fast-moving and much of the information in this textbook is already out-of-date.

'A moveable feast': limitations of the study

Inevitably, given how quickly events have changed since 23 March 2020, the research presents a snapshot of activities. However, it is an extremely important snapshot. By and large, library services – alongside virtually every other type of organisation – were not prepared for a full closure of their services. They had many admirable contingencies in place for other types of emergency situation (such as fires or floods) but little in place for the complete (physical) closure of their services. As one interview put it 'we'd never lived through a pandemic before'. In many respects, this is what makes the Spring-Summer lockdown most interesting to study from a research perspective because we witnessed, real-time, how they responded and reacted (with lessons learned and applied in subsequent regional or national lockdowns later in 2020 and in the first quarter of 2021).

It is interesting to speculate the extent to which lessons from March to July 2020 have afforded lessons for those subsequent lockdowns (at least one of our interviewees said to us subsequently they suspected that lessons had not been learned as so much has, by necessity, been reactive). That said, whole new ways of working have been developed, and developed very quickly, and necessity has been the mother of invention. It is hoped, therefore, that this report presenting a broader picture covering the whole of Scotland can, perhaps, facilitate learning across all of Scotland's thirty-two library services.

Going into lockdown

Closing the doors felt like the last hurrah. It was just awful.

LIBRARY SERVICE MANAGER 2020[18]

Introduction

Throughout January and February 2020 the threat posed by the COVID-19 became evident around the world and, by March, countries across Europe were moving towards some form of national lockdown. A more cautious approach was adopted in the United Kingdom but, by the second week of March, it was apparent that the situation was deteriorating. The events of the weeks beginning Monday 16 March and Monday 23 March 2020 were explored in some detail in the interviews with service manager giving a picture of how public libraries prepared and responded.

Wed 18 March 2020	Fri 20 March 2020	Mon 23 March 2020
First Minister announces closure of schools from Friday 20 March	Closure of schools	Prime Minister announces full national lockdown

On Wednesday 18 March, the First Minister announced that all nurseries and schools would close from the end of the day on the following Friday (20 March). On the evening of Monday 23 March, the Prime Minister announced on television the implementation of a full national lockdown across the whole United Kingdom. Many libraries services could, in the words of one interviewee, 'see clearly what was coming' during those first weeks in March and were taking whatever steps they could to prepare as best they could.

How libraries responded

The events of the week beginning 16 March 2020 (prior to lockdown) were particularly interesting. Although services could see what was coming many were anxious to keep their libraries open as long as possible:

> We were reluctant to close too early. We took the decision to maintain core sites as long as possible for those that really needed it. We got very busy when it became clear closure would happen. We didn't close until 23 March. At that point we had still been maintaining seven or eight libraries.[19]

However, all services were very clear about the tough conversations they were having to have. Despite the laudable desire to stay open as long possible, services

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[18] From interview data.
[19] Throughout this report interview data is presented as anonymised commentary.

recognised the reality of the situation. The head of a largely urban library service summed this up:

> Towards the end of the week before lockdown, we were having very serious discussions about where we were going. These were hard discussions. What we do is valuable, but were we going to be more of a health risk? We have an impact on people's lives but we're not a life-saving organisation. No matter how much people engage with us and need our services, we felt that we didn't have much choice but to close.

Following the announcement by the First Minister on 18 March that schools across Scotland would shut from the following Friday, library services, both council-run and in trust, took decisions about closure. For at least one service, the closure of schools became the catalyst which led to them to shut all their libraries:

> They [the council] asked us to close libraries before lockdown, mainly because four are located in schools and they knew they would be closed. We couldn't have mixed messages that some had closed and some not. We were probably one of the first services to take the decision to shut but the feedback was positive from customers.

A number planned to shut from Thursday 19 March, (Orkney, for example, sent staff home at lunchtime that day). Others found themselves encountering staffing issues which brought closure decisions forward:

> On the Thursday attendance was poor, then on Friday it became clear we wouldn't be able to staff the libraries. Staff were nervous about risks and had family responsibilities. We had planned to close after the Friday, but we weren't able to open the doors at all on that day.

As closure became inevitable, many services went out of their way to assist users:

> We were inundated. We had nothing left, the shelves were cleared. We let people borrow what they wanted, 20 books, whatever they could get their hands on.

Despite the strong desire of some to keep library services open as long as possible, staff wellbeing was a paramount concern:

> Staff wellbeing was the Rubicon that I wouldn't cross. That was paramount. It had to be staff wellbeing first, but they were *really* upset that they were being sent home and the libraries were being closed. Just get your coat and go home. That was hard.

> It was a case of considering customers and communities at the same time as considering the anxieties and personal circumstances of staff.

This strong sense of serving the community was evident across every interview conducted, and the sense of disbelief from staff that all the libraries could be closed emerged very clearly:

> It wasn't so much denial of events as complete disbelief that the entire library service could *actually* shut down. It came as quite a shock.

Like most organisation, Scotland's public libraries found themselves in 'unknown territory'. Despite extensive emergency or contingency planning (both at library and organisational levels) 'nothing prepared us for this'. One head of service remarked:

> We were in unknown territory; contingencies were for flooding or fire, but those are for one location. There was nothing for this level of shutdown. Even though we knew it was coming, it came as real shock to close *everything*.

Moray Council Libraries and Information Services
19 March ·

Due to the COVID-19 situation all Moray Libraries will temporarily close from the end of the day on Friday 20 March.
Elgin Library will close at 5pm rather than its usual closing time of 8pm.
Sorry for any inconvenience.

SORRY

😊😊♡ 27   7 comments 33 shares

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ➡ Share
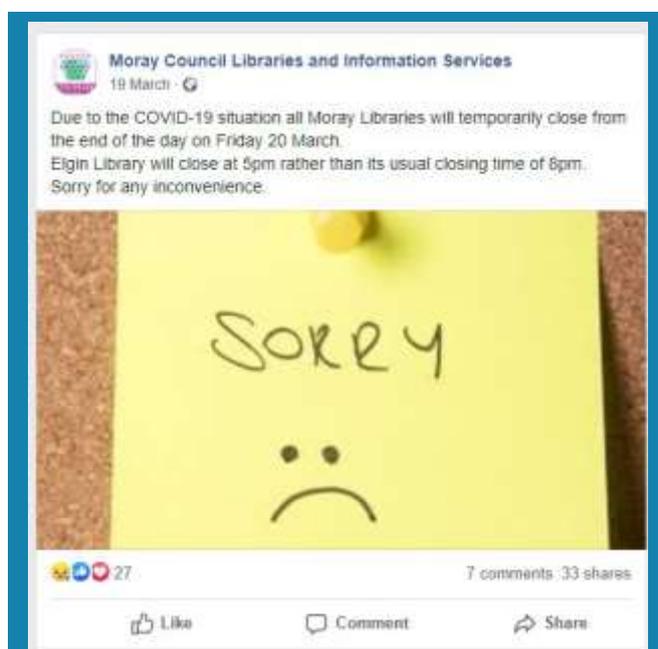
The speed of events meant some services found themselves on the back foot but this was common across all parts of both the public and private sectors with such unprecedented circumstances:

> The decision was taken to close all libraries but with almost with no notice. There were issues communicating with staff and to the public. It was difficult to get senior manager approval to get communications out to staff, and the public needed to know what we were doing. It was very rushed but there's no script for a pandemic.

That period of disbelief and shock was a very short-lived hiatus with the majority of public library services, both in local authorities and in trusts, being able to move swiftly. One local authority library service manager observed:

> It was really good for the libraries that we are part of a strong directorate. When we knew lockdown was on the cards we made sure staff had [remote] email access, we got devices to staff where possible, the systems staff really helped with that. We were not completely prepared, but we at least were able to make sure staff could get into email and had devices.

Another manager, this time in a trust, noted:

> We've got a lean structure with more operational responsibilities, it meant that I had to move into a directive style of communication across the board.

There was however, inevitably, a very mixed response in those early days. The picture across authorities and trusts was variable in terms of the preparedness for running services from home. Some had implemented Microsoft Team or Basecamp or other remote working platforms previously, others had not. One manager said:

> There was a quick shift to communicating with people at home, of course frontline library staff aren't tooled up with working-at-home kit, but we were fortunate that we had invested in Basecamp accessed by people using own email address and so they didn't need their council address. It gave us a platform to communicate.

However, a number of other service managers highlighted a different picture:

> This authority was not set up for working from home, they didn't have laptops, or VPN and it took a long time to get equipment to get it going.

Another noted:

> This authority had never supported working from home.

A third commented:

> At that point we didn't even have access to our emails or anything. It was pretty much two or three weeks of nothing.

A sense of frustration did emerge from those interviewees who felt their organisations lacked preparedness, with a number commenting about how aware they were of other places that seemed to have been better organised and were more able to 'hit the ground running'. It is, however, important to reiterate the point made above by one of the interviewees that there was 'no script for a pandemic'. One manager found there were almost insurmountable challenges in keeping the service going in the early weeks because of issues with remote access to IT systems. This manager came up with their own solution – sneaking into the building when out for their exercise to process things that were proving problematic remotely:

> The thing I'm most proud of is being a little wily rat, sneaking into the building to do things like processing memberships when I was out for my 'hour of exercise'.

As services moved more fully to be online only, a number of issues emerged; sometimes these were specific to the public library context, sometimes they were

organisational issues. Again, these resulted in a mixed response within local authorities and trusts. One head of service observed:

> We refreshed online services, and highlighted them, and did a promotional video. It was fortunate that March is year end and we had a fund sitting there, we were using it for large print and talking books. A benefactor's gift was transferred to eBooks and eAudio; we moved to BorrowBox, and increased users. EBooks and eAudio were very popular, 700% increase over two months. We were fortunate we could do that.

Another service, with the largest e-content in Scotland, commented:

> We already had a strong virtual presence. We took away all restrictions around online joining. We have always had relatively high digital issues and we have a big collection.

The flexibility and responsiveness of staff was repeatedly praised by heads of service in those early days:

> For me it's one of the things with the public library staff is how amazingly flexible and adaptable they were. They moved out of their normal roles, say managing stock selection or young people's services, or reader development, and were suddenly dealing with mental health, loneliness, food requirements, and prescriptions.

The same head of service observed some issues that were very common in all types of organisations as they learned to work remotely:

> The council had moved to Office 365 before, thank God, because without that we couldn't have done what we needed to do. But there was stress about all the communications so we decided that daily email with all the managers' stuff in it rather than email after email after email. The number of channels was stressful, text, emails, Teams, Zoom calls, overload!

That sense of communication and media overload because of the use of multiple channels, often in a scattergun fashion according to an individual's preferences, has emerged as a point of learning for many organisations:

> People couldn't remember which channel someone sent something on. That would be a lesson for the future to agree a platform and use it.

Another head of service spoke, however, about the flip-side of this and about the role that library staff assumed, across the organisation, in supporting the adoption of technology like Microsoft Teams:

> Library staff tend to be more familiar with digital things, some staff were familiar with Teams, but others were not. Library staff tend to be organised with information and it came naturally. They got to grips with it but some were nervous. But library staff so good at what they do, so flexible in doing things, they did such an amazing job learning it all and helping others.

For other authorities and trust the situation was more difficult. One rural authority noted:

> There were a lot of directives about what we need to do. But actual practical help was non-existent. We're used to getting on with things so we just coped. The council wanted everyone at home and nothing open. They acted as if the council was office work only, not about frontline services.

Another small, rural authority noted the challenges which beset them around technology and, particularly significantly, the length of time to resolve things:

> Now we're further down the line[20] we are supposed to be getting [MS] Teams so that should help us. Our video-conferencing is only suitable for meetings, not for screen sharing [so no good for] trying to support essential skills and IT skills learning remotely. The video-conferencing wasn't up to the job. Some staff have used Zoom, and various other to get that to work for the learner.

Several heads of service spoke about the initial issues associated with having all of their staff at home. One noted:

> Most of our staff cannot work from home, they don't have the technology, they have nothing to do as they are mostly customer facing.

Another added:

> We were under-prepared in terms of emergency actions. We had frontline staff at home who didn't have meaningful work to do at that point. People had to start using their own kit and we had to work really hard on getting kit out to people who were deployed to the emergency stuff. We were supported by the council's digital team but inevitably their focus was on health and social care and we were far down the list [of priorities]. So, we

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[20] This comment was made in October, seven months after the first lockdown was initiated.

were trying to find any old bits of kit and old laptops. It became a daily conversation.

A further two managers offered these observations:

> As a line manager, it was deciding what they could do working from home. Trying to find legitimate tasks for them to do, when you're a customer service assistant your job is to interact with the public.

> A lot of managers' work was supporting the staff but whilst busily trying to plan what to do for customers. The *main thing* was what can we do for customers, and how can we use the staff time as well as we could to support that. We were pro-active and our ICT department were fantastic. Everybody was adaptable and moved quickly.

Public library staff across many authorities were redeployed to communication centres, call handling and community hubs. Many were engaged in what can be described, in the words of one head of services as 'kindness projects', delivering people's medicine, sorting out money problems, delivering shopping, walking dogs and many other activities[21]. The same head of service observed:

> Library staff were the ideal people to have a chat [to try to] deal with social isolation, we're already so good at getting to the bottom of what people's problems when they are in need.

Repeatedly, managers spoke about the importance of reaching out to the vulnerable and isolated (which is more fully covered in the Supporting Communities section). One manager said:

> We knew there was a need to target vulnerable people, such as books for kids who were at the children's hospital. We partnered with the delivery of food parcels, and with people at kids' charities. We restarted housebound service. Supporting the most vulnerable in the community.

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[21] Redeployment and other community-based activities involving public library service staff are further addressed in the section on Supporting Communities.

However, the situation was sometimes materially different for those library service in culture or leisure trusts. A manager in a trust, where staff were furloughed, highlighted some of their early issues:

> Until everyone was furloughed, they were still doing things like recording BookBug, but once we were furloughed this couldn't continue. We had a bank of content but we burned through that quickly. Some were furloughed at the end of March, some at the end of April. When staff were furloughed it was a little bit like the Phoney War, nothing happened. I didn't have staff who were sitting at home working, they were sitting at home being paid not to work.

A manager in another trust explained:

> The trust wanted to furlough as many as possible because of exposure in the leisure side. Libraries don't make money they cost us money. Other services were different. The plan was that we would furlough anyone who could not work from home.

Another added:

> We were one of the first trusts to go down the route of furlough. Ninety five percent of staff went to furlough. Five percent of staff left looking at how to sustain services and engage [with the] community. The biggest challenge was losing a lot of staff at that point. We had [x] staff still employed and we prioritised how to sustain and develop online offer.

The public face of going into lockdown

The previous section outlined discussions that were taking place and decisions that were being made behind the scenes, as councils, trusts, and their library service staff responded to a rapidly changing situation. The web and social media analysis shows how decisions about closure and service changes were communicated with the public. Every service posted a closure notice giving details for when their library buildings would close. Many also noted that updates would be posted on the website and or social media going forwards and that any loaned material would be renewed automatically.

Some services were able to offer a telephone contact number which would be staffed during office hours and/or an email address. However, as can be seen in the snips below, it was not always possible to run telephone lines and respond to email accounts in the ways that had been possible previously. The interviews revealed that issues around staffing, access to email accounts and telephone lines and inadequate IT structure, plus focus by councils and trusts on other parts of the organisation all impacted upon the ability for library services to maintain contact points.

Decision to close was obviously not taken lightly by the services and most sought to reassure the public that, although the buildings themselves were shut, a service would still be available, albeit in a digital form. Some explicitly stated that they were aware of inequality issues raised through closure of the library service (see snip below), and that it had factored into the decision-making.
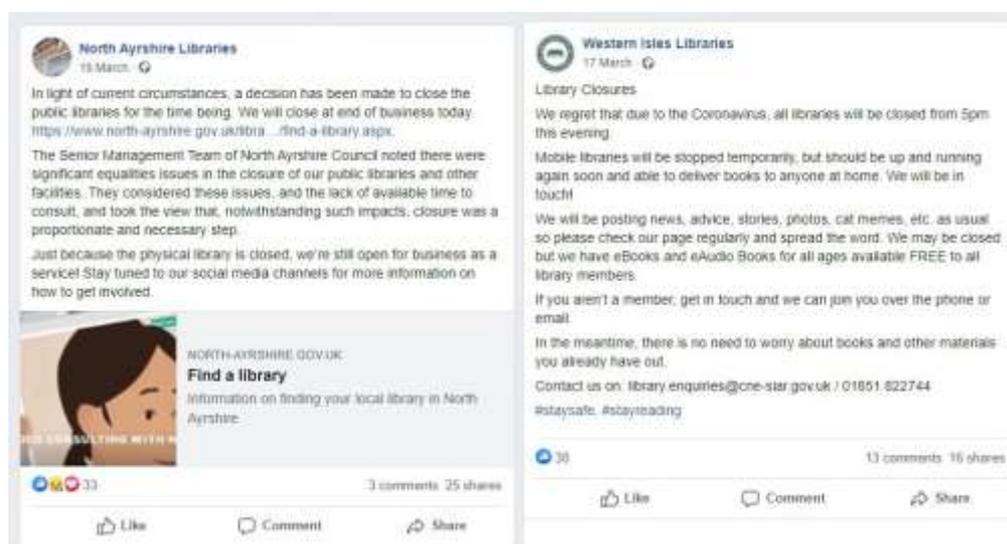
Some acknowledged that some parts of the service simply could not be moved online, and there was a very real need to get these services back running as soon as was possible under the new restrictions. The mobile library and home delivery services in particular were seen a priority for reinstatement by many.

Most library services made good use of social media to get the word out about building closures. However, it was evident that some were unable to change the content of their websites quickly (some remain intact with no mention of the pandemic), and often a banner at the top of the main council or trust pages was the only indication of changed circumstances. Library services in some local authorities appeared to be able to very quickly pull together detailed and dedicated pages on their website outlining their own digital offerings and new online activities alongside external resources for a wide range of needs including home-schooling and mental health.

Summary

The evidence presented above highlights a number of key issues. Libraries like every other part of the public sector had to respond as best they could to an extremely fast moving situation. Some local authorities and trusts were well-positioned to cope with the move to remote home working and the delivery of services digitally. Others less so. The variability of this preparedness was also emblematic of a broader variability observed in other elements of this research.

There was a profound reluctance to close services even though managers were aware that it was both inevitable and necessary. In the week leading up to lockdown, concern about staff health and wellbeing was paramount. This coupled with the decision to close schools resulted in real challenges in keeping libraries open (both in terms of getting staff in and, perhaps more importantly, in terms of services being in shared physical premises). Although some library services stayed open until the announcement of the national lockdown, others had no alternative but to close the doors at some point the week before.

That closure was a profound culture shock for staff and managers alike. As is noted above, it was keenly felt and felt like the 'last hurrah'. For a service which is fundamentally about *access* more than anything else, it was counterintuitive and deeply unsettling. While many services had contingencies in place for the closure of individual branches if, for example, an 'Act of God' occurred, none had ever had to countenance the closure of all physical spaces. The interviewees all spoke about their deep reluctance to take that step and it is not over-stating it to say that it was traumatic.

Once decisions to close had been taken, there was a remarkable, strong and concerted effort across Scotland – in local authorities and trusts – to promote the digital offer. The guiding principle in this, evident from a great many of the interviews, was 'what can we do for the customers?' This attitude, coupled with the strong belief in the library's ability to make positive impacts of the lives of individuals and communities, led many services to act swiftly and decisively with their online provision. There were naturally challenges and as has been noted some authorities were better prepared for home working than other, some struggled to get the right equipment to the right people, staff were often redeployed to other services and in other instances furloughed altogether. In the early weeks, some reported that there
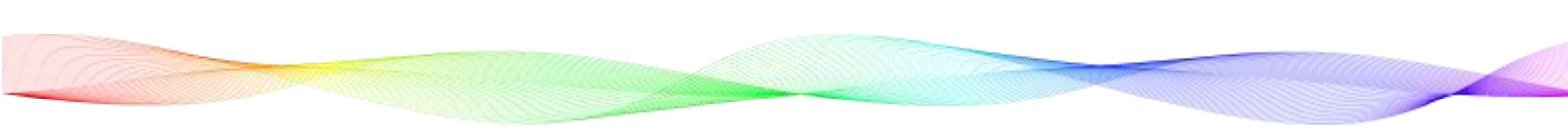
seemed to be more about 'directives than practical help'. That said, most services were functioning well relatively quickly. That they were was down in no small part to staff adaptability and managerial agility.

Going digital

When digital transformation is done right, it is like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly, but when done wrong, all you have is a really fast caterpillar.

GEORGE WESTERMAN 2018 [22]

Introduction

The move to a digital-only service was sudden and swift for all of Scotland's public libraries. The significance of this was not lost on the library service managers and the consequences of library closures and migration online for those digitally excluded and disadvantaged communities were uppermost in all of their minds during lockdown. Carnegie UK Trust in the *Learning from Lockdown* report highlighted that 'since the outbreak of COVID-19, the scale of digital exclusion in the UK has been exposed and exacerbated beyond previous understanding'.[23]

People would sit outside the library for the WiFi. Around one in five households in this area have no internet. People were worried, and felt isolated because everybody moved services and communication online, and yet those people didn't have smartphones or access. We were thinking what more can we do to support those people; we had to be digital enablers.

The quote opposite, from the head of a large urban public library services, reminds us about this digital divide. Collecting data around access to the internet and digital technology can be difficult. Some studies suggest that the rate of home internet access in Scotland is around 88%.[24] The Ofcom Technology Tracker 2020,[25] looking at the period immediately prior to lockdown, however, suggested that as many as 17% of Scottish households do not have home internet access. This figure rises to 58% of households in the lowest income brackets, less than £15,590 per annum (this figure is consistent in both the Scottish Household Survey and the Ofcom's Technology Tracker). Ofcom also found that 28% of Scottish households did not have PC, laptop or tablet equipment.

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[22] Westerman G. Research Scientist Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sloan Initiative on the Digital Economy.
[23] Carnegie UK Trust (2020). *Learning from lockdown.* https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie_uk_trust/2020/10/14161948/Carnegie-Learning-from-lockdown-Report-FINAL.pdf
[24] Scottish Household Survey, 2018. https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-people-annual-report-results-2018-scottish-household-survey/
[25] Ofcom Technology Tracker, 2020. https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0037/194878/technology-tracker-2020-uk-data-tables.pdf [QE2: Do you or does anyone in your household have access to the internet at HOME (via any device, e.g. PC, mobile phone etc)?]

Social media

Social media was one of the most important and widely-used tools for public libraries during lockdown. It facilitated immediate communication and reach, both of which were particularly important in the early days of lockdown when some library services were struggling to get staff remote access to other organisational or library-specific software. Given this, Facebook and Twitter in particular were very significant. Two issues did emerge in this regard however. Firstly, many library services have relatively low numbers of followers of their social media presence (there are notable exceptions) and therefore rely on the sharing of content for wider reach. Sharing of content from libraries was high in the evidence snipped as part of this research and so, consequently, reach was good. Secondly, in some organisations there is still a tension about 'corporate control' of social media, a point evident in some interviewees' responses to questions.

This was not the case in every service by any stretch, but it did occur. One interviewee noted that 'we are particularly fortunate because we [the library] have control of the website and the social media [for the whole trust]'; another noted: 'there is a tension with corporate about social media but we've won that argument before'. However, some other services were not in this position, and perhaps do not share the same sense of a battle having been won. There was evidence of some libraries feeling hampered by strong corporatist approaches being adopted to both website and social media. One interviewee commented: 'our Facebook content is not engaging. They schedule content so there's not the spontaneity. Our content is corporate and cautious. That's the IT department and the council and it feels sometimes like we don't have a voice'.

As noted previously, public libraries were varied in their use of social media and their access to accounts. There was a wide range of activity online during the period analysed, with some accounts featuring dozens of posts per day, but as expected, there was a degree of similarity in the content developed and shared posts, with some notable exceptions where more innovative video content or podcast was shared. One head of service noted:

> The social media side of things was important, our guy is really good, and kept our profile high. He was given almost *carte blanche*. He organised the haikus, jigsaws, Lego challenges, as well as delving into the archives. He had to come in to access the website and did that off his own back. Not everyone looks at social media of course so we worked with the council newsletters too.

Public library services mostly posted content about their own and related services, and this was unsurprising. As Canty (2012) mentions, in his analysis of social media use in public libraries: 'social media can be powerful information dissemination tools and offer a way for libraries to promote their activities, resources and services while

allowing a two-way dialogue with stakeholders'[26]. At that time, his work highlighted that the libraries in his sample were using different social media channels for different functions. Canty's analysis focused on large, single libraries such as the National Library of Scotland or the Library of Congress, but it is interesting to note that he found that libraries used different social media channels in a distinctive way. For example, 'a feature of all the Facebook sites is that…there would seem to be little crossover between the corporate Facebook pages and the librarian's personal Facebook activity' whereas 'Twitter which often blurs the lines between personal and corporate' and also that 'the tone taken in blogs varies from the formal to the informal' and use of other channels (e.g.YouTube) were mixed.

In contrast, our data shows that public libraries in Scotland in 2020 were not necessarily adopting different channels for different purposes, rather that they were using the same channels but in different ways. It became clear when capturing and analysing the social media posts that there were distinctive patterns in how services used social media accounts during the pandemic, and that they had developed distinctive social media 'personality types'.

Some of this appeared to be in response to the circumstances; for example, staff working from home, or not being able to communicate with patrons in their usual manner. Others appear to be the result of the service's established social media practice prior to the pandemic. It would be interesting to explore, in further research, whether these social media 'personalities' changed prior to the pandemic and whether they have endured beyond the analysis period of this project. While there is no right or wrong way to use social media, and much of this will depend on available resources and staff skills, there were clear distinctions in how the accounts were utilised which gave them a particular 'personality'. The breakdown of these personalities is as follows:

- Famous accounts

Long-established library social media accounts which have international audiences. As such, the primary focus of these accounts was to post relevant content according to what was trending on that platform at that moment, which tended to be of more international relevance or meme content intended to be shared widely

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[26] Canty, N. (2012). Social Media in Libraries: It's Like, Complicated. Alexandria, 23(2), 41–54. Available at https://doi.org/10.7227/ALX.23.2.4

- ### A day in the life
  These were primarily focused on posts from librarians and other service staff detailing their time at home during lockdown, including lunchtime reads and recipes, for example. The main aim was to connect with patrons in a manner which would be similar to day-to-day interactions when patrons would visit physical library buildings and talk with staff.

- ### Chatty channels
  Similar to the previous category, but with less focus on the staff themselves and more focus on engaging with followers through discussion topics, games, quizzes and the like. These approaches demonstrated high levels of engagement and chat, and the obligatory images of cats.

- ### The info-push
  A social media account where the focus was on disseminating information about the service rather than specifically engaging with followers. This was often a 'personality type' posting several times a day about new eBooks, opening hours (when re-opening became possible) and more general council guidance with a strong corporate tone to the posts. Accounts focusing on this tended to have low engagement, and sometimes did not respond to patron comments, and so here it would appear two-way dialogue was not a priority.

- ### Customised content
  Rather than retweet or share links, this type of account saw a focus on customised content, with story videos, crafts, quizzes, and the like all

being made by local library service staff rather than shared from other sites. There was a distinctive local feel to these channels, with plenty of engagement with followers.

Of course, most channels featured something of all five categories to a certain degree, and some straddled two or more, but there were marked differences in the follower counts, like counts, and comment counts based on the above categories. There was no clear 'one size fits all' approach to social media which could be said to be suitable for adoption by all of the thirty-two local authority areas; this is not surprising given the varied demographics and social media use amongst patrons and local communities, as well as the resources available to services and staff.

27
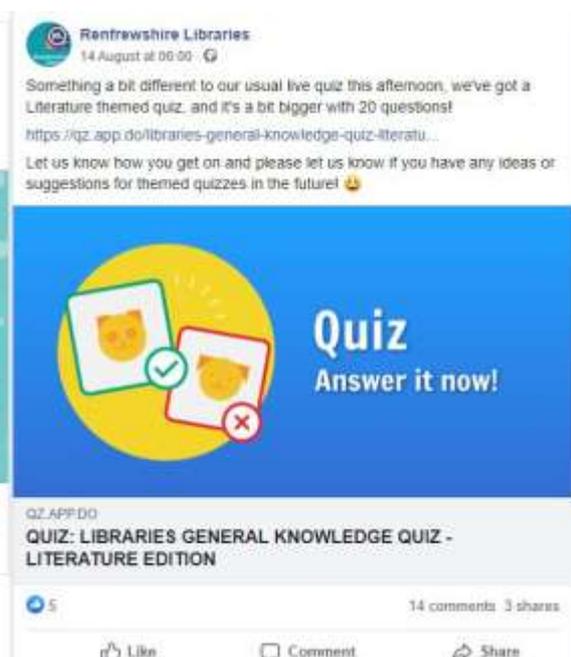
Webpages

At the outset of the research, the aim was to capture not only social media activity, but to examine how webpages were used to reflect the new offerings of libraries as they were compelled to do things differently. Much of the 'snipping' from library websites was completed in June 2020, and it became evident that many library services did not have the capacity (or perhaps autonomy) to enable them to refresh the webpages to reflect current circumstances. Some managed to draw together incredibly detailed information targeted at specific groups, signposting them to resources both within and without the library. An example of this might be specific resources for parents who were home-schooling children.
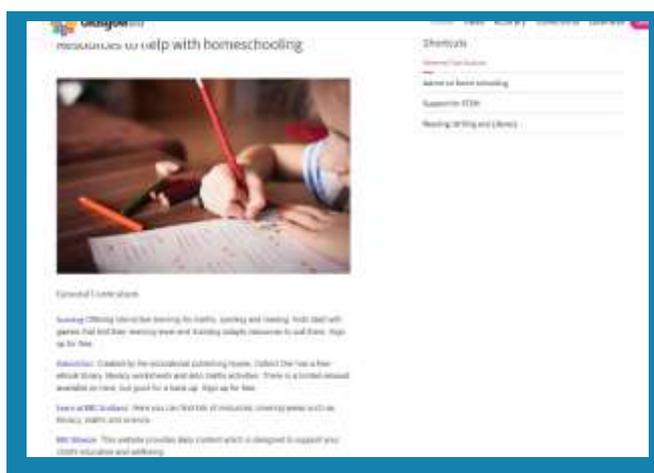
For many others, the webspace remained largely unchanged, some with old information about activities and classes which were no longer running (such as BookBug sessions or IT training) and opening-hours which no longer applicable. In some cases, only by clicking a banner or header message would visitors be redirected to generic COVID-19 FAQ pages which applied to the council or trust as a whole. However, some services successfully managed to overhaul their webpages in order to direct library users towards their digital offerings and to signpost other resources. Sometimes this took the form of a 'rebrand', with some space made, temporarily, into a 'Library Online' or 'Lockdown Library' portal or series of pages.

Western Isles Libraries
27 May

Limited time only!
YOUR LOCKDOWN LIBRARY
Visit our NEW website for lots of online tips and ideas for all ages!

ACTIVITIES, VIDEOS, READING GROUPS, THEATRE, CLASSES
BOokbug, COMPETITIONS, STORYTIMES & LOTS MORE...

www.cne-siar.gov.uk/yourlockdownlibrary

It should be noted, given the importance of digital during the research period, how difficult it was sometimes to locate the webpages of a library service (from the council front page) and to establish whether there were social media channels associated with that service. Sometimes, the library webpages were buried under countless menu headers on a council website, or appeared to be very sparsely used or updated. It required further searching to find the social media channels of the services, as many did not provide links to these from their webpages. This does beg questions about how easy it would be for the average community user to find and navigate these online spaces, and indeed, how easy it would be for those who perhaps were forced to look for their library online for the first time due to lockdown.
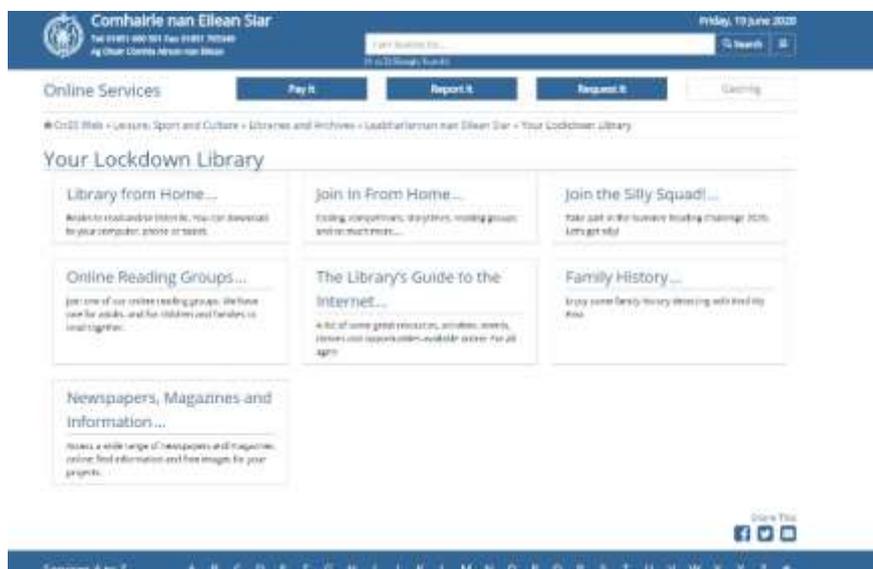
There were some good examples of webpages being populated with timely and pertinent information, but generally, the web-presence of many public libraries appeared lacklustre and under-utilised. Perhaps there is a valid reasoning behind this; some had vibrant social media channels and it may be the case that services

felt they could reach their community more easily through these platforms and that this would likely be the first port of call for users. However, it is somewhat depressing that libraries which are digital enablers in most communities have their own web-presence constrained quite so severely by corporate templates devised elsewhere.

However, given that the digital became much more important during lockdown when the physical was closed, and will continue to be a major part of the public library offer, now would be the time for services to re-examine their online spaces. Where services are looking at how their physical spaces can best be utilised to serve the community, there is similar work to be done with the digital spaces.

eBooks and eAudio

Although many library services were well-prepared and had invested significantly in their digital provision (eBooks, eAudio, online magazines and newspapers) as well as access to databases and other resources in recent years, the background context of digital participation cannot be forgotten. Library services such as Aberdeenshire (with over 17,800 eBooks), Glasgow (with around 13,000), or Edinburgh (with around 11,300) were in a good position from the very start of lockdown; many other services were sitting within the range of 2,000 to 7,000.

Inevitably, however, as services moved to a digital sphere, there were major increases in borrowing of eBooks and eAudio across the sector. The smallest increase noted (for eBooks) was 39% in one large rural authority, through to 304% in a smaller rural authority. The second figure, however, was for the month of July 2020 when normally figures may normally be expected to drop so the comparison increase (from the same month in the previous year) may need to be viewed through that lens. Nevertheless, the increases reported by library services speak for themselves with, for example, North Ayrshire up 144%, South Lanarkshire 118%, Orkney 202%, Renfrewshire 83%, and Stirling 200%. Comparison across services in terms of the increase in borrowing of eBooks and eAudio is difficult because of the different ways in which this has been measured, what time period in previous years it has been compared to, and because some services had moved to new online providers. That said, all authorities and trust reported increases, in many cases considerable ones. Heads of service variously remarked:

> EBooks went through the roof.

> E-lending went up by big percentages every week. We had to increase stock even though budgets were difficult. Realistically, we just had to buy stuff because of this.

> The uptake of eBook and digital magazines was substantial. Demand was far outstripping supply especially for eBooks. We didn't have enough copies and waiting lists were running into months, but we were able to augment the collection. We could have spent thousands and still not satisfied the demand.

One head of service found that the appetite waned both as lockdown began to ease and as digital fatigue began to set in:

> The peak for eBooks and eAudio was in April. Then in May everyone got sick of it. Too much digital.

Another head of service (in a trust) explained the nuance behind the increased figures for eBooks and eAudio:

> There has been steady growth in e-library offer but the age profile of e-resources use absolutely matches the in-person use. It's still the over sixties and the under fifteens. We thought we might capture the middle ground with virtual, but it seems not. Our uplift in e-resources use was from a low base, and it doesn't compare with physical. We saw a lot of the increase happen in April and May, but then it really dropped and the second half of May went back to a more normal pattern.

However, this is not widely seen in the data with increases being sustained beyond the summer period. Some, however, were in a weaker position; one service had a downbeat assessment:

> Low issues because the collection is small and we'd never invested.

Another small, rural service commented:

> The budget is still so tiny, and we never got any extra budget for eBooks, so [after lockdown] we had to sacrifice physical budget.

In some library services there was, perhaps, something of a self-fulfilling prophesy where online provision was weaker:

> We don't have e-magazines. We got a month free for PressReader but not enough people used it to justify the costs.

In a number of library services, there was evidence of a 'chicken-and-egg' situation in that they had not had resources to invest in digital, and therefore had relatively small collections which they then struggled to promote and consequently witnessed lower levels of uptake. Another service (admittedly bigger, with greater resources of staff and budget, and with stronger marketing) noted how successful PressReader had been with their users, but yet still noted that:

> People couldn't believe, in spite of our past marketing, that they could get the papers online through the library.

Even in library services where there was a strong digital offering, heads of service pointed out some of the other challenges:

> Online is expensive for libraries. It will be a struggle to get to even 50% digital. A national platform for public libraries is maybe the answer; a national consortium for eBooks perhaps, but government must have a role to play in setting that up.

Others commented:

> It would be great if we could make our buck go further. We need a purchasing model to get a more a comprehensive offer, so that you don't need to live in a certain area to get a title. That would be a huge step forward; it would be fantastic, 50,000 titles instead of 5,000.

> It's expensive…..and eAudio is more expensive. Without significant increase in funding, it's not going to meet expectations. Much of our target audience is people who are not able to spend money at Amazon.

A number of interviewees spoke about the desirability of exploring the potential for better digital solutions for the provision of eBooks and eAudio across the country and whether a single national offering would be advantageous. They did, however, all acknowledge the issues and challenges that such a move would present. Nonetheless, there was strong feeling that having the discussion would be worthwhile even if proved to be difficult to implement. The challenges of it, around budgeting, purchasing and platforms were mentioned by a number of participants. One manager in saying 'a consistent model would be good but we'd be reluctant to move away from BorrowBox' highlighted the issues around reaching consensus.

Wider, societal issues about the switch to digital were also explored in discussions around eBooks and eAudio. One head of service in an urban area drew out some of these wider points:

> What's been driven home is the digital divide and inequality in [place mentioned] is even more profound in the last 6 months, the digital cost to families of being connected. A lot of families have a phone but filling in forms on a phone doesn't work.

BookBug online

Online BookBug sessions have been one very visible way which library services could attempt to maintain a personal connection during lockdown and they have received much attention. A number of heads of service highlighted that online BookBug (either live online or pre-recorded) had been an important mechanism for staff to develop their skills and that producing BookBug films would make them step outside their natural comfort zones, as well as reaching out to users:

Staff were sometimes nervous in the earlier videos, but then you saw them growing and blossoming.

Another head of service also highlighted innovations created through doing BookBug online:

Bookbug live events worked really well and we hope to continue in the future. It allowed us to reach different audiences. We were approached by a big [music] festival in our area which had a slot because they were online too, so we had a BookBug session through their platform. It was a great way to reach more audiences.

Although virtually every service highlighted that BookBug online worked well and was appreciated, many heads of service noted that, no matter how good a virtual offering it was, it was a poor substitute for real BookBug sessions in a physical library:

We had staff doing BookBug online and that was great; but there were lots of comments about actual sessions being really missed. It's an example of something that does need to be in person.

The digital side of things is crucial but it is also the activities and events that happen in the library space. Stuff for children, like BookBug, or author events, they have more of a learning and educational slant. Online stuff is not suitable for everyone.

The Shetland Gruffalo: case study
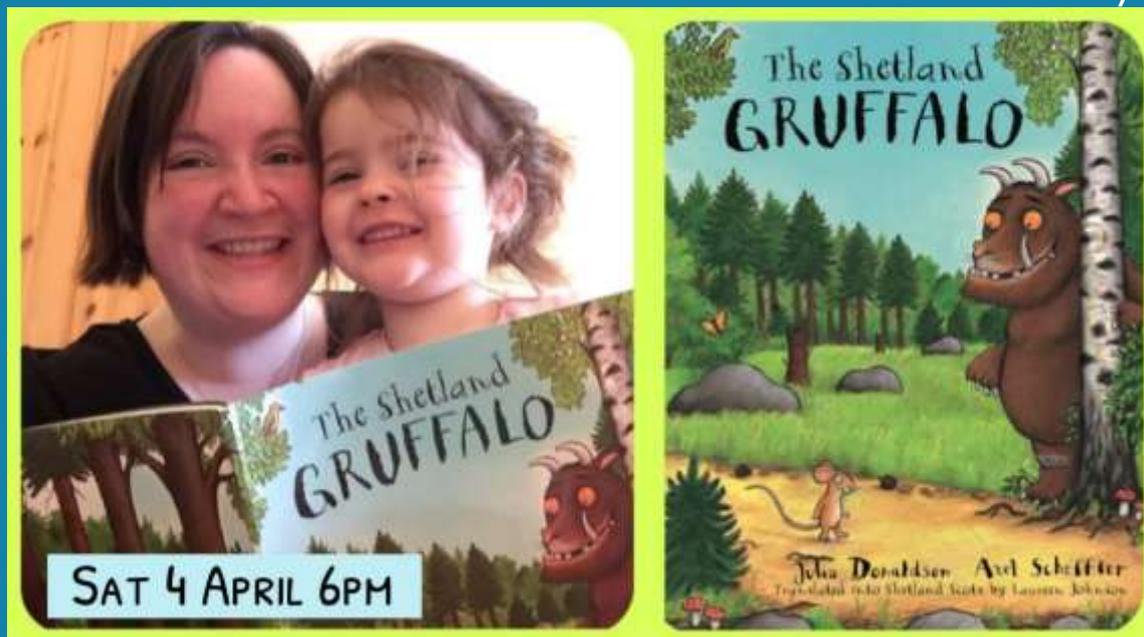
Shetland Library took a creative and distinctive approach to BookBug and storytime sessions with Catherine Jeromson recruiting her husband and daughter for starring roles. *"It was having to combine childcare with working from home, so doing something that was work but also entertaining for my child was a good use of my time. There were so many good online storytime sessions and normal BookBugs, I thought that just doing regular storytime was too similar so, to put our own spin on it, we did our own Shetland dialect. We wanted to do more of a dialect offering before lockdown and here was a chance"*.[28]

Other online activities and content

In addition to BookBug sessions, libraries also sought to move other activities and content online. Storytimes in general were popular, with videos and readings for a range of age groups, including chapter readings of books for adults, poetry, local author readings and more. There were also some good examples of content which reaches audiences who might struggle to read in print format or who speak a language other than English.

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[28] Image by kind permission of Catherine Jeromson and Shetland Library.

Many library services also attempted to adapt their existing book groups or reading clubs to enable members to chat about books while the physical premises were closed. Some tried Zoom meetings to replace the in-person group meetings. Others tried to stimulate discussion on their social media pages directly, encouraging followers to comment and discuss a book in the comments section. Services sought to replace existing clubs, and also reach out to groups which were perhaps more disadvantaged by the lockdown restrictions and which may respond well to moving online, such as teenagers or secondary school pupils. There were a number of book groups for younger readers which saw parents post their children's thoughts about the book.

Other popular online or social media content was for activities or crafts, most often couched as activity to keep children (and adults) entertained while in lockdown, or to assist with home-schooling while schools were closed or when they had restricted attendance. These were laudable efforts but the reach and impact of them does require further investigation.

Skills training and learning opportunities was also another area where libraries attempted to adapt to a digital mode of delivery. Some made use of video conferencing technology to run sessions, while others ran a video series or produced guides on IT skills. Most shared external resources for learning new skills or training and some directed library members to online learning opportunities that the library already ran pre-pandemic.[29]

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[29] Some further examples of this are to be found in the section about Supporting Communities.

CPKLibraries
28 May

Cooped up at home?

Want to learn about using modern technology?

Did you know that Digital Unite have created an extensive collection of easy-to-use learning guides?

From computer basics and email to digital photography and social networking. Find out more: http://ow.ly/CvGQ50zF3C8

CULTUREPK.ORG.UK
On Line Learning Guides - Culture Perth and Kinross
Free computer guides from Digital Unite An extensive collection of learnin...

1 comment 5 shares

North Ayrshire Libraries
22 July

CEIS

VENUE ZOOM	TIME	WORKSHOP	TRAINERS
03.08.20	11.00 – 12.00	Applications	Robin
04.08.20	14.00 – 15.00	Elevator Pitch	Helen
06.08.20	11.00 – 12.00	Interview Skills	Robin
06.08.20	14.00 – 15.00	STAR Technique	Helen
07.08.20	11.00 – 12.00	CV's	Kevin
10.08.20	11.00 – 12.00	Video Interviews	Joan
11.08.20	11.00 – 12.00	Confidence	Joan
12.08.20	11.00 – 12.00	Resilience	Helen
13.08.20	11.00 – 12.00	Applications	Lindsay
14.08.20	11.00 – 12.00	Elevator Pitch	Helen
19.08.20	11.00 – 12.00	Interview Skills	Helen
19.08.20	14.00 – 15.00	STAR Technique	Joan
20.08.20	10.00 – 11.00	CV's	Kevin
20.08.20	11.30 – 12.30	Video Interviews	Joan
21.08.20	11.00 – 12.00	Confidence	Joan
24.08.20	11.00 – 12.00	Resilience	Joan
26.08.20	11.00 – 12.00	Applications	Robin
26.08.20	11.00 – 12.00	Elevator Pitch	Joan
27.08.20	11.00 – 12.00	Interview Skills	Lindsay
27.08.20	14.00 – 15.00	STAR Technique	Joan
28.08.20	11.00 – 12.00	CV's	Kevin
28.08.20	10.00 – 11.00	Video Interviews	Joan
31.08.20	10.00 – 11.00	Confidence	Joan
31.08.20	11.30 – 12.30	Resilience	Joan

If you have any clients who require or would prefer one to one, then please

Ancestry was made freely available for a time over the summer of 2020, with many library patrons being able to use their library account details to access the service at home, where previously Ancestry had only been available on the library PCs or by private individual subscription. Many libraries reported dramatic increases in use because of this more open and flexible access. Aberdeenshire (as will be seen at the end of this section) had a 1093% increase in use of Ancestry. It is important to bear in mind, however, that such statistics are based on comparison with previous years when *in situ* restrictions for some digital services may have been in place and that many of the providers who facilitated wider access to their content did so for limited periods during lockdown.[30]

Summary

The 'move to online' was not so much a wholesale change in direction as emphasising more strongly an offer that was already there. Library services have been expanding and developing their digital provision for many years (and not just in terms of the lending of eBooks or eAudio). The lockdown and the closure of the physical spaces did, however, bring this into sharp relief as it suddenly became the principal offering available from the library to the public at large. Gone, overnight, were all the community events, activities, groups that the library as a physical space is normally able to offer. The Carnegie UK Trust found that 2 in 5 (39%) of those who engaged with public library services during lockdown participated in online

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[30] This was common in many countries where particular digital resources were opened up for remote access without paywalls, subscriptions or memberships. Denmark's digitised newspaper archive being an example.

activities[31], which is significant when we consider that many services were running with a much-reduced workforce and that a great number of these activities had likely never been delivered online prior to the lockdown.

With this focus on digital content and provision, a number of things became apparent. Firstly and perhaps most importantly, it shone a new light on the digital divide between the technology haves and have nots in wider society. Library services were acutely aware of this before lockdown, given their understanding of the people who use their PCs and why, but running a 'digital only' service strongly reinforced this. As one service manager said 'what's been driven home is the digital divide and inequality here and that it has been even more profound in the last 6 months'. A number of interviewees spoke of people who would be on the steps of (closed) library buildings because, from outside, they could still access the WiFi during lockdown. Secondly, although development of digital services has been part of direction of travel for public libraries from many years, the data gathered in this research does point to variable levels of investment in e-content. The numbers of eBooks and eAudio varies significant from library service to library service and many interviewees highlighted that there needs to be a wider national conversation about this in the future.

The focus on digital did not necessarily find library services wanting and the increase in use, new members signed up and creative forms of engagement are commendable. It is unsurprising that virtually all library services were able to report significant increases in the lending of eBooks and eAudio. In some cases, the percentage increases were remarkable. Two important points need to be considered, however, in relation to this. Firstly, the percentage increases were measuring uptake compared to previous years when all the other library services and activities were also available and so measurements may be against a relatively low base. The second and related point is the importance of continuing to measure (and compare) this both in terms of the later lockdowns and when a greater sense of normality returns. To an extent, there was a sense of 'there was no alternative' during lockdown (and certainly not for those who were not in position to buy eBooks themselves). Some services did report that enthusiasm for, and uptake of, eBooks and eAudio began to wane as society opened up but that picture cannot be generalised across the board. Allied to this there are further avenues for research to be considered around the demographics of those who embraced eBooks and eAudio during March-June 2020 and whether they represented – as one head of service said – largely the traditional library demographic or whether in fact greater reach was achieved.

Libraries generally made excellent use of social media platforms (particularly Facebook and Twitter) to share information and content with imaginative approaches particularly around BookBug and other video content. Services

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[31] Carnegie UK Trust (2020). *Making a Difference: Libraries, Lockdown and Looking Ahead* available at: https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie_uk_trust/2020/10/13090335/Overarching-report-Making-a-Difference-1.pdf

recognised that these could only 'go so far' but they did make a valuable contribution in reaching out to different constituencies. A number of services highlighted the time that video content takes to create but felt that, because of necessity, staff had developed and, in many cases, upskilled themselves making these new types of content. Corporate tensions with organisation IT departments did occur on occasions but relatively infrequently with many reporting very positive relationship with central IT teams. The corporate management of social media accounts in some authorities was problematic, and in others, website style, visibility and updating were also difficult.

Just as the 'move to online' shone a light on the wider digital divide in society, so too did it underline – strongly and forcefully – the importance of the physical spaces that had been temporarily lost to all library services. Many interviewees spoke about the importance of the digital, their pride in the online content that that their staff teams were creating and promoting and the absolute necessity of it given the circumstances. However, interviewees repeatedly reinforced how vital libraries are as *physical spaces* were communities come together. The strength of feeling about his is evident later in the section dealing physical and digital spaces.

Aberdeenshire: case study

"We were fortunate having control over the website, and the same with social media. It was all done by library staff. Content was always there. We felt that the information was there and it was clear and easy to find. We absolutely wanted to focus on customer journey, on the website searchability was key. We tried to make everything we could simpler.

"We had dedicated staff to work on the content on the website, social media and our YouTube channel. We had to be successful online. The website and social media figures were huge. Online membership went with hundreds joining.

"It was a crazy shift. We have always invested money on the digital side but despite promoting it people didn't realise what we had until lockdown. We moved all buying to digital provision.

17,955* - Freegal Transactions
12% GROWTH

550* - Digital Membership Signups
194% GROWTH

* The usage figures displayed are a combined total for June, July & August 2020. The % is the change in usage between Period 1 (June, July & August 2019) with Period 2 (June, July & August 2020).

33,636* - Overdrive Issues
69% GROWTH

640* - RB Digital Audio Book Issues
233% GROWTH

Measure of Change

101% GROWTH
16,941* - RB Digital Magazines Issues

1093% GROWTH
34,832* - Ancestry Searches

400% GROWTH
233,448* - Press Reader Connections

Live Life Aberdeenshire infographic: comparison of digital trends June-August 2019 with June-August 2020. (Reproduced courtesy of Live Life Aberdeenshire).

Supporting communities

Bad libraries only build collections. Good libraries build services.
Great libraries build communities.

<p style="text-align:right">R DAVID LANKES 2012 [32]</p>

Introduction

R David Lankes's maxim mentioned above is much-quoted and has particular resonance in the context of this research. During the first COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, libraries were faced with two differing approaches to building and serving communities. On the one hand they had to continue to provide their own services to the community through digital means, and on the other they identified diverse ways in which library staff – through redeployment to other public services – could aid community wellbeing, resilience and cohesion.

Communities and their demographics

The following section explores the way in which the library services themselves sought to support their communities directly and the how staff from libraries were redeployed to support other essential services during lockdown. Scotland's thirty-two local authorities cover large urban areas to small rural ones with every mix and permutation in between. There are twenty-nine mainland local authorities and three island councils (Orkney, Shetland and Western Isles). Collectively, Scotland's local authorities spend over £19 billion each year and employ over 240,000 people (almost 10% of the total Scottish workforce).[33]

The following table [34] outlines the populations, area and density of Scotland's local authority areas (the ranking in column one is by population size).

Rank [35]	Council area	Population	Area (km^2)	Density (per km^2)
8	**Aberdeen**	227,560	185.7	1,225
6	**Aberdeenshire**	261,470	6,313	41
17	**Angus**	116,040	2,182	53
27	**Argyll and Bute**	86,260	6,909	12
29	**Clackmannanshire**	51,400	159.0	323
13	**Dumfries and Galloway**	148,790	6,427	23

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[32] Lankes RD. Expect more: demanding better library services for today's complex world. CreateSpace, 2012.
[33] https://www.cosla.gov.uk/about-cosla.
[34] Based on 2019 mid-year estimates from NRS.
[35] Ranking based on population size.

14	Dundee	148,750	59.83	2,486
20	East Dunbartonshire	108,330	174.5	621
21	East Lothian	105,790	679.2	156
23	East Renfrewshire	95,170	174.2	546
2	Edinburgh	518,500	263.4	1,969
16	East Ayrshire	121,840	1,262	97
11	Falkirk	160,340	297.4	539
3	Fife	371,910	1,325	281
1	Glasgow	626,410	174.7	3,586
7	Highland	235,540	25,657	9
28	Inverclyde	78,150	160.5	487
25	Midlothian	91,340	353.7	258
22	Moray	95,520	2,238	43
30	Na h-Eileanan Siar	26,830	3,059	9
15	North Ayrshire	135,280	885.4	153
4	North Lanarkshire	340,180	469.9	724
32	Orkney Islands	22,190	988.8	22
12	Perth and Kinross	151,290	5,286	29
10	Renfrewshire	177,790	261.5	680
18	Scottish Borders	115,270	4,732	24
31	Shetland Islands	22,990	1,468	16
19	South Ayrshire	112,550	1,222	92
5	South Lanarkshire	319,020	1,772	180
24	Stirling	94,330	2,187	43
26	West Dunbartonshire	89,130	158.8	561
9	West Lothian	182,140	427.7	426

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SMID)[36] is the standard tool used by the Scottish Government to show areas with relatively high levels of deprivation. The most recent report was published on 28 January 2020, just ahead of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. SIMD shows where Scotland's most deprived areas are so that services and agencies can identify areas where their work can, potentially have the biggest impacts. The index is described as being a relative measure of

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[36] Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation full interactive datasets at https://simd.scot/

deprivation across small areas in Scotland and looks at multiple deprivation. It is important to stress that 'deprived' does not just mean 'poor' or 'low income', it can mean people have fewer resources and opportunities to access, for example, health and education or other public services. The index divides the country into data zones (6,976 of them), with roughly equal population sizes (approximately of 700 to 800 residents) from the most deprived to the least. Indicators are examined to measure different aspects of deprivation in each data zone, such as pupil attainment, distance from a GP surgery, crime and unemployment. The focus on small areas enables identification of which factors are at play there, such as poor housing, limited public transport or lack of good education. All council areas in Scotland have areas of relatively higher deprivation and data around the elements within SIMD are important factors for library services in planning and shaping their activities and services.
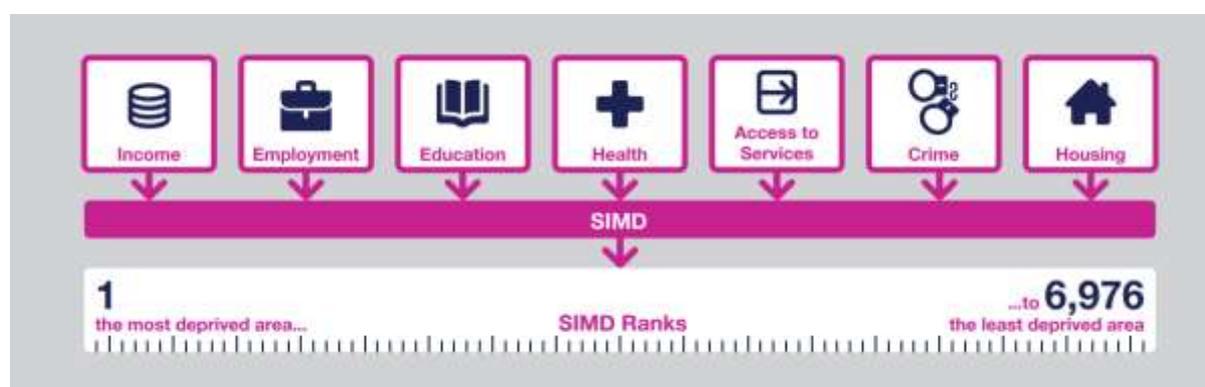
Data elements in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. [37]

Library staff supporting essential services

Library staff across Scotland, particularly those normally at the frontline for whom working at home was more difficult, were often redeployed to support other essential services. It was widely noted in the interviews that the skills library staff have in communicating with people, their empathy, and the knowledge they have of their communities, were valuable in redeployment. This also came through as a key theme in the Carnegie UK Trust research, which found that 'some of the specialist outreach services implemented by local authorities in lockdown required or mirrored the core skill set that library staff deployed day-to-day pre-Covid-19'.[38] However, they also noted an issue raised by our interviewees about recognition of the role of the library service in supporting communities in emergency situations such as pandemics, and the lack of understanding around the role of libraries in supporting members of the community. Redeployed staff did whatever was needed of them to support communities within the restrictions placed on them.

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[37] Infographic from *Introducing The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020*. Available at https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-index-multiple-deprivation-2020/pages/5/
[38] Carnegie UK Trust (2020). *Making a Difference: Libraries, Lockdown and Looking Ahead* available at: https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie_uk_trust/2020/10/13090335/Overarching-report-Making-a-Difference-1.pdf

One manager in a mixed urban-rural service highlighted that library staff redeployed to other services were, through their work there, contributing to wellbeing:

> Some staff went to help organise the foodbank – they needed help with ordering systems to manage the tons of foods. So library staff moved out of normal role doing stock selection or young people services, or reader development, and were dealing with food requirements, mental health, loneliness, or prescriptions.

In a number of local authorities, library staff covered telephone lines in community hubs. One head of service reiterated the point about the skills and attributes of library staff, saying:

> They used the library staff for the phone lines in the hub. Our staff were so good at that because they are so used to speaking to people. It was just right to have couthie characters from the branches on the phone lines.

One rural library service which is well-known for its closeness to its community initiated their own direct telephoning, the description of which is profound. The service manager explained:

> Phone calls were so important and were good, rewarding work for staff at home. We knew lots of people who were not on anyone else's radar, so we tried to contact them. We phoned our mobile customers, our talking newspapers customers, we phoned the people who used learning centre frequently, and got staff to check they were ok. One man said we were the first people who'd rung him in three weeks. We said to staff 'chat to them and ask them how they're doing, gauge how they're getting on'. Some people had a really hard time, some people chatted for a long time. It wasn't just about getting books, it was a more about 'how are you getting on?'

Other library services pursued a similar community outreach strategy using telephone calls to reach isolated individuals:

> They loved having someone to speak to, having a person on the other end of the phone because not everyone is digital. If you've no capability to connect, not being able to go anywhere, you're very much out of the loop and isolated.

The importance of the library service in one community was brought home when:

> A home delivery service user passed away during lockdown, and we were one of the only contacts that they had.

The extent to which library services and their staff understood their communities and demonstrated to closeness to individual people has been evident throughout the research and is shown particularly clearly in the quotes above. It was often affecting to hear of the closeness of these relationships. There is nothing to say library services must do these things but the reality is that they function so well in communities across Scotland precisely because they have that close and empathetic understanding of the people they serve.

The willingness of staff to adapt to circumstance and to serve their communities in any way they could was highlighted by another head of service:

> Staff were so flexible in doing things, they did such an amazing job. I never said to any staff, you will go and do this or that. I asked them where their strengths were and if anyone said they couldn't cope, I found something else for them. These things were all emotionally draining. Working this way for two to three months was exhausting.

Many library staff in different services were deployed to assist in health and social care services, some assisted in sheltered housing schemes, others worked foodbanks (either in stock control roles or out delivering parcels), supporting prescription collection and delivery, helping to staff of childcare centres for keyworkers, working with education colleagues to support children's mental health and wellbeing.

Library services, with their professional knowledge and expertise in the management and organisation of data and information, also played a key role in some local authorities in simplifying processes to make essential services run more smoothly:

> Sharing data was a big thing, obviously within the protections for people, but we *needed* services to share data. We needed to know if someone is on a list to take food to them and to check up on them. 'What do we know about those households? Where is the data held?' We said 'what if we pulled all those data points together?' They thought it would take forever but they did it all in less than a week. There was a freeing up kind of attitude.

Library services were also proactive in trying to overcome digital divides in particular communities. One service spoke of some of their projects:

> We bought a thousand devices ourselves. We also worked with Connecting Scotland to work with people who were excluded from digital participation and were shielding or vulnerable. It was all about getting devices out there. We've got those digital skills and expertise in libraries.

One aspect which emerged clearly in interviewees was the way that libraries could, because of their closeness to the community 'keep an eye on' situations and

people. Frontline staff routinely 'looked out for' their patrons. The majority of library service managers interviewed who, by the very nature of their roles are removed from the 'issue desk frontline', still referred to specific individuals or groups about whose wellbeing they were anxious. This is a universal but perhaps unspoken and under-acknowledged part of the work of the library.

> We are concerned about the effects on young children and child protection issues for some kids who use our libraries. But there are also other issues, a rise in domestic abuse. It's made things worse for some people, where being at home is the risk; for most people there are worse things in their life than being at home but for some home isn't the safe space, it's the problem.

Similarly, the managers were well-networked into other parts of their organisations and were well aware of the community challenges which will face them after COVID-19. Mental health, social isolation, digital divide and the economic consequences were all mentioned frequently by interviews and this was evenly represented across the whole of Scotland in large and small services, urban and rural as well as those in both affluent and more disadvantaged communities. Two managers, both from relatively affluent areas spoke of this:

> We are a relatively well-off area really and often don't face the same hardships as other people. But there are *clearly*[39] inequalities. People don't all have WiFi or devices, and often there is a pretty basic misunderstanding that everyone has everything.

Another said:

> We are seeing increasing unemployment and benefits applications. There have been rises in areas of deprivation but also in areas we wouldn't normally expect, like [place mentioned], more affluent ones, for example. It is a different kind of hardship in some of these communities because they are not used to unemployment and benefits, they've never had to go to a foodbank before. There are also real challenges around mental health. There has been a higher rate of suicides here. The levels had been dropping before this. That's not much reported on, and [is] not visible.

Reaching communities

Interviewees highlighted the variety of groups they were attempting to reach. Services managers gave many different examples of these different constituencies which stretched right across society. One head of service highlighted their service's work to try to alleviate the social isolation which new mothers could feel during lockdown:

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[39] Interviewee's emphasis.

For many first-time mothers, for example, this [lockdown] has been a horrific experience. Many of them make social network as a parent by engaging with early-years library activities. We worked with Home-Start to deliver laptops to parents, to encourage them to access activities online and to build social bubbles online. They had no health visitors, no playgroups, and no parent groups. There was a small group where people were being excluded. They didn't know how to recreate the support networks digitally. People don't exclude deliberately but the response to lockdown has excluded many people.

Some services were very conscious that the digital push was only ever going to reach a proportion of users and important though their social media campaigns were that other and more personal approaches were also needed:

We had alternatives to social media; a couple of staff members phoning the home library people just to check in, just keeping in touch and making sure they were ok until we got the service up and running again.

Another commented about this:

We were conscious of the need for support to vulnerable people. A lot of services moved to telephone-based and we had to work through issues around that, for example some people needed interpreters and we really had to think through the tech for that. It is hard enough to explain digital access in person but over phone it's really challenging.

Another further example of what might be perceived to be a less visible group came from a trust:

We have a programme designed for men who have lost their partner. We got a proportion of those people to engage with us online but we knew that many of the people we wanted to engage with were not online; they didn't have broadband or a tablet. So we got more than four hundred to give out, refurbed kit. We identified is an issue; they were socially isolated, didn't have kit and didn't know how to reach out but we could.

Another example of this was in Moray where they migrated their weekly IT help hub online, with the Wednesday hub usually being for older people to come along to get support with their devices. The event very quickly became a social event. With the help of the library staff and volunteer, the users overcame their anxieties about technology and three of the participants spoke about their

experience in a video testimonial. This approach, mirrored by many other library services, served a useful role in helping to overcome isolation.

The nature of public libraries as a universal service, free at the point of use for everyone, was particularly evident during these discussions in the interviews. Service managers had a strong sense of this universal nature of their provision, as indeed did their whole staff teams, and the importance of trying to reach out to as many parts of society as they could. Inevitably, they acknowledged the challenged of this. One service manager highlighted some of the concerns that a number of others interviewed also spoke about, namely getting people back to the library:

> Some people will, necessarily, have found solutions to things they would have come to the library for, and I don't think we're going to get them back. But people at the most vulnerable groups couldn't fill in those gaps themselves and they didn't have the library to turn to. People would sit outside the library for WiFi. Around one in five households in this area with no internet. So the vulnerable or social isolated groups are quite big. We knew there were groups who felt worried and isolated because everybody else [had] moved online. Those people didn't have devices. We need to be digital enablers. There has to be a long term impact on what we do and how we do it.

Libraries and mental health

The positive impacts that reading for pleasure can have on health and wellbeing are well-documented and libraries have long been aware of this with much of their work being focused around these areas. The impacts of lockdown on the mental health and wellbeing of the communities that they serve was uppermost in the minds of virtually everyone interviewed in this research:

> The community feedback we're getting about mental health, particularly youth work, shows it's effected them severely.

Another said:

> There are major mental health concerns; much more visible poverty including food poverty which is a big issue and impacts on mental health, and of course digital poverty with people who aren't able to engage in online environment.

Across the social media analysis there was strong evidence of how library services were strongly aware of the mental health and wellbeing issues posed by lockdown and what they could attempt to do in order to alleviate them. Mental Health Awareness Week in May and Health Information week in July were both strongly pushed on social media across the country by virtually every library. However, libraries work in trying to support mental wellbeing transcended one week in May 2020 and was a constant theme across social media posts during the entirety of lockdown. Some ran sessions, other promoted locally-made videos and resources. Other highlighted a range of national resources and signposted places where followers could seek help and advice.
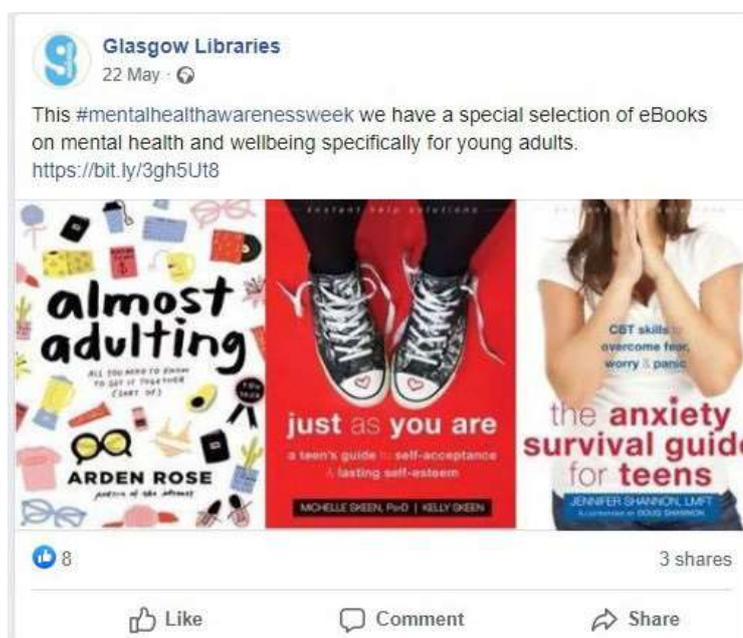
Many services took the opportunity to highlight the benefits of reading for wellbeing in their mental health posts and how staff were looking after their own mental health during lockdown.

The points made by interviewees in this respect echo the findings of the Scottish Book Trust research *Reading in Scotland: reading in lockdown* which showed that 98% agreed that reading supports their wellbeing; 97% agreed that reading helps them to relax, and that 92% agreed that reading has been important to them in times of stress or anxiety throughout their lives.

Heads of service gave a clear sense of how high a priority this was and also gave testimony about their concerns. Three stood out in particular; firstly, the head of large urban service:

> We're very conscious that we are in every community and we are part of the infrastructure that supports peoples' mental health, and access to services. The real fear we have is about overall mental health. You can see it on the wane because of the lack of programmes and social connection. For example, around literacy, there are an awful lot of people out there not getting the level of support they were getting, and their life challenges during lockdown will have almost certainly increased. We talk about how to get more people to access digital but if we drill down into the locations accessing digital, it's not those areas. We've targeted the re-opening of libraries in places that need the most support, the ones with the biggest social need.

Secondly, a manager in medium-sized rural authority:

> One overarching point was about what were and were not essential and priority services. No one beyond the library was identifying the potential for libraries to overcome the social isolation. Not being seen as service that has a place in an emergency like that was frustrating. We deal with human beings on a daily basis. The things we do are important for mental health, stimulating people creatively and intellectually, especially when people are locked in houses. But people [senior managers] just didn't see that potential.

Thirdly, the head of service in another urban local authority:

> Mental health is really suffering. I'm quite worried about the ability of [place mentioned] and our services. Working with education colleagues, we are

seeing young people with increased challenges around mental health; there have been higher rate of suicides here again after rates had been dropping.

A number of managers expressed frustrations similar to the comments above. The notion of not being seen as essential is in contrast to one of the comments of a panellist reported by the Scottish Book Trust in their report *Reading in Scotland: reading in lockdown* which observed: 'the library was one of my essential life services. After lockdown I will be delighted to get back'.[40] There was a sense of disappointment, perhaps even frustration, shown by a number of interviewees about the positive impacts that libraries can have on individuals were not recognised. One said:

> There was some apathy [organisationally]; a lack of understanding of the impacts the library have on communities; there was little understanding of role of libraries in supporting mental health and wellbeing issues.

It was widely acknowledged that the aftermath of COVID-19 and the various lockdowns will continue to pose challenges around mental health and wellbeing and that libraries have much to do in the future:

> Mental health will become an even bigger focus going forward.

Libraries and physical health

Physical health and fitness were also heavily promoted by all library services. A number of library services promoted work with Macmillan, recognising that enduring partnerships have been created between libraries and Macmillan (such as North Ayrshire and Glasgow). Services such as East Renfrewshire, Edinburgh, Fife, Glasgow and others all promoted Macmillan services and how their traditional drop-in events had moved online or to telephone or email support. Other services promoted information about their own local cancer support groups within their area.

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[40] Scottish Book Trust https://www.scottishbooktrust.com/articles/libraries

Fitness and physical health were promoted across virtually every service. This was not simply a case of passively promoting collections but included videos, podcasts and self-help. Argyll and Bute had their 'Couch to 5k', East Ayrshire had their Roon the Toon virtual 5k, and East Lothian drew on their own historic links to have their John Muir Virtual (Step) Challenge. Aberdeenshire had a 'Move it' section on their website (with a selection of content from elsewhere). Some trusts were able to draw on their leisure side to support these activities with, for example, online workouts. Healthy eating, recipes, cooking on budgets were all pushed across the sector.

Culture NL Libraries - North Lanarkshire's Libraries
25 May
Sign up by 12pm tomorrow to receive an invite to this presentation of the great work Macmillan in Lanarkshire do in the local area. Sign up here: https://bit.ly/3bW13tU

Macmillan in Lanarkshire Showcase
WEDNESDAY 27 MAY, 2.30PM

WED, 27 MAY
Macmillan in Lanarkshire Showcase
Online event
Literature

Like   Comment   Share

Gardens and gardening became important during lockdown for those fortunate enough to access to their own open space and a number of authorities promoted their gardening and horticulture resources as well as highlighting their positive contribution to wellbeing. Fife, for example, had a number of features in this respect including the Reluctant Gardener videos. Hi-vis projects for visually impaired audiences were promoted in a number of authorities including East Lothian and Orkney (where getting the talking newspaper service restarted swiftly was a service priority). Edinburgh City ran online workshops of people with long-term health conditions, and alongside other services specifically identified dyslexia-friendly resources.

Hearing aid batteries

It is perhaps not widely known outside the library sector or those for whom the service is vital, that many Scottish public library services provide a way for people to pick up hearing aid batteries. Many branch libraries provide this service. For example, in East Ayrshire their partnership with Action on Hearing Loss which offered local community drop-in service within East Ayrshire library branches, could no longer take place because of lockdown. However, the library service continued to make hearing aid batteries available by post after email the library. Stirling Libraries offered a similar service. Elsewhere distribution of hearing aid batteries returned to NHS Audiology departments.
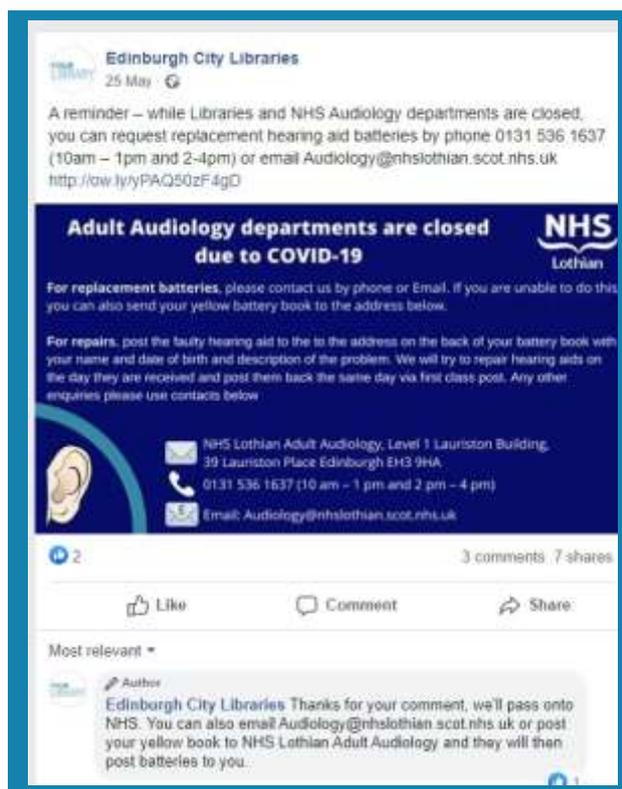
However, because of the lockdown this usual service has been disrupted and library services are now providing alternative ways for members of the public to receive hearing aid batteries through local audiology units. This was a disruption and a complication for many people used to collecting them from their local libraries. In Aberdeen, Dundee, East Ayrshire, East Lothian, Edinburgh, Falkirk, Fife, Midlothian, Perth and Kinross hearing aid battery provision all moved to NHS audiology. This is an important point because it is a crucial service performed by public libraries that is, perhaps, largely unknown more widely. As one interviewee said:

> It was only when it wasn't there and that the council realised we did it.

Summary

The final observation made above, that it was only when the (physical) library was not there, that people realised the importance of the things that they do. This was a recurring theme in many of the interviews conducted for this research and represented one of the universal themes to emerge strongly, namely the closeness to the communities which library services possess. As open and accessible public spaces, they provide a vast array of services and we have illustrated this with particular mention of the supply of heading aid batteries but others (such as blue badge parking permits, bus passes or hosting passport interviews) could equally have been mentioned.

One service manager queried during an interview whether libraries do 'too many things' and that sometimes things can get a bit lost or sometimes users might a bit bewildered by the range of 'stuff' that they do. Another interviewee said that it is not so much a case of difficult to reach people as difficult to access services. Whilst acknowledging that libraries must continue to reach out to people and that not everyone may be comfortable using them, they fulfil an important role as a hub for the community in accessing services, and the range of things they do is actually strength. It was only when libraries were not there that this was perhaps fully recognised. One head of service spoke of their council's dawning realisation of things (blue badges were the example given) done by the library that the parent organisation suddenly had to find alternative mechanisms for.

How libraries helped to support communities and their resilience to cope with the pandemic and the lockdown has been central to this research. Much of this comes back to the notion alluded to above about the libraries' fundamental closeness to the people they serve. One comment made in an interview particular stood out. One library service manager (in a local authority well-known for his closeness to its community) said that they 'knew people who were not on anyone else's radar' and so started using frontline staff to phone round regular users just to check that they were doing fine and to have a chat; it was not about pushing eBooks or service; it was just a chat, a chat to see how they were doing'.

The benefits of reading for mental health are well-known and have, timeously, also been addressed in parallel with this research by work undertaken by the Scottish Book Trust. Library services across Scotland made a concerted effort to support mental health and wellbeing during the lockdown. Indeed, it was one of those areas that we felt it would be unable to reach saturation point with when gathering the social media data because of the volume of activities and posts. Clearly, further work will be required, longitudinally, to determine what impacts this may or may not have had. Similarly, however, libraries developed creative ways to support physical health with activities and resources (their own and drawn from elsewhere).

An important aspect of supporting communities was addressed by many of the interviews and that related to the skills and attributes of the library service staff. These skills were *highly* valued across parent organisations. Partly this was down to their professional skills and expertise at organisation of information, processing data, managing stock and so on. However, it was also the soft skills, particularly

communication skills and ability to engage empathetically with people that were also highly prized. Library staff were well-suited to staff telephone helplines and public-facing roles in community hubs. This too is because libraries and their staff have that closeness to people and communities. 'We deal with human beings every day' one service manager said; another mentioned that library staff had been naturals on the phone lines: 'our staff were so good at that because they are so used to speaking to people. It was just right to have couthie characters from the branches on the phone lines'. These are important points and should not be underestimated. Library staff witness isolation, social disadvantage and wellbeing issues on a daily basis.

One final, slightly negative, point which requires making relates back to some of the issues mentioned above whereby there was a dawning recognition of things that the library service does. A number of interviews spoke of their frustration that, organisationally, they felt that there was little understanding of the role libraries play and, particularly, the role that they could play in an emergency situation. This, services considered, to be frustrating 'we are not an emergency service but we have a part to play in an emergency'. This suggests the enduring need for strong advocacy about what libraries do, and what they can do.
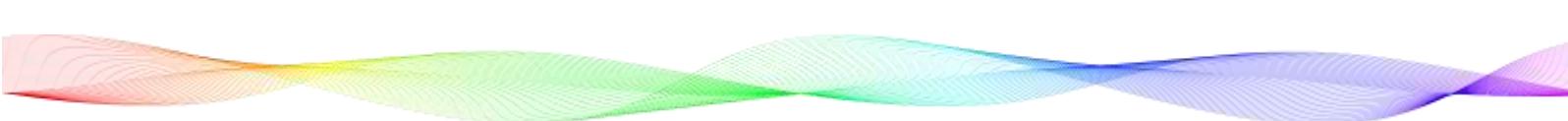
Physical spaces and digital spaces

It is nonsense to say that libraries aren't about the space.

LIBRARY SERVICE MANAGER 2020[41]

Introduction

The loss of the physical library spaces and the services they offered was keenly felt. As heads of service talked about this it was apparent there was a profound sense of disappointment at having to abandon all physical services because of the loss that represented to the communities that they serve. This was the paramount concern that was uppermost in the minds of managers – the impact on communities rather than the impact on the library service.

The importance of the physical space

Some of the evidence given by the interviewees in response to questions around the balance of physical and digital were amongst the most thoughtful and considered as following discussion highlights. There was a unanimous belief in the central importance of libraries as physical community spaces. One service manager said:

> It is nonsense to say that libraries aren't about the space. For so long we've positioned ourselves in the community, as safe spaces. It would be wrong thing to say we can just be virtual. What we need to be doing is developing the physical and digital to make it more accessible to people. Virtual has its place, but not at the expense of the physical space.

Another said:

> I respond with horror to anyone suggesting we lose the physical space. We've noticed that people are sick and tired with online everything. It's good and necessary but enthusiasm is waning. It doesn't fill the gap. Value libraries for being free, safe public spaces.

This strong and consistent belief in the enduring value of the library as a physical space within communities, articulated by many of the interviewees, in no way sought to diminish the importance of the digital offering or to play down the importance of a more blended *phygital* space moving forward. However, the notion of the library as a trusted or safe physical space was mentioned by virtually everyone:

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[41] From interview data.
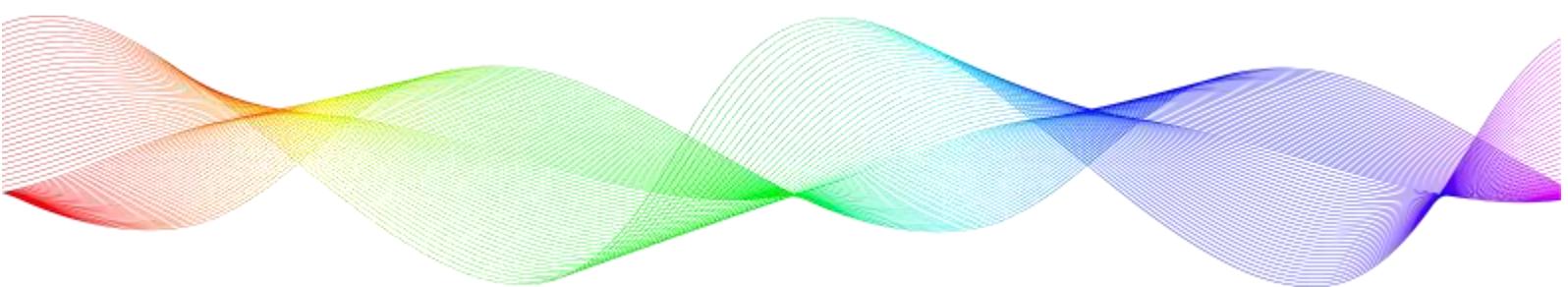
> We will never be able to go into a fully virtual environment for libraries. Libraries are about connecting with people, about ideas and opportunities. The environment *in* a library is very important. It is one of the few welcome public open spaces that you can go to, and you're unlikely to meet such a diverse range of people.

Another observed:

> You know me, I'm a techy, but I don't believe the digital side is more important than the physical side. We can't become people that live in silos and have everything delivered to us [digitally]. Society is doomed if that happens.

A third manager, this time in a large trust, describe a scenario that they believed represented the epitome of what the public library service is all about:

> We know people miss our physical services. People wanted to go in to get books but they wanted to speak to someone. Our philosophy is come on in, we're a welcoming space, come in anytime. We have one guy who comes in two or three times a week and uses the books but will also fall asleep in a chair and that's because we are his safe space. That's actually the epitome of what we are about, we are a safe, communal space. I've no idea what happened to that guy. I worry about him, and that can't be replicated digitally, of course it can't.

The head of large rural library services emphasised this in the context of the services libraries provide to their communities, saying:

> A vast amount of our business within our buildings relates to activities and events that bring our communities together, everything from Bookbug, Lego Clubs, book groups, to health and wellbeing events, to yoga, music sessions and so on. It's about being the cornerstone of communities, as well as books. The digital side is great in so far as it goes, but it just doesn't touch on those elements. In many of our rural communities, the library is the only place now where they have that community space, it is the one place they can go for community involvement.

The social and communal aspects of library space were also reinforced:

> The library is a very social thing, and we've not been able to offer that. The online is important but it is only supporting a fraction of the physical interactions that happen across the service.

Another said:

> We see that the digital stuff clearly has value but people want to get together and be communal. I envisage digital having a bigger role but it is not replacing physical services it is enhancing them.

A third remarked:

> We put ourselves in the heart of community because of the services we offer. Think about some of those people that come into the library to read the paper every day; that might be their only contact all day.

Two service managers, independently, made a remarkably similar point about their feelings towards the closure of the physical space. Both were discussing the (normal) use of their library service's PCs and the people who made most regular use of them:

> No browsing and no PC access – they're deep wounds for me.

> The fact no one could use our PCs from March…..that's an open sore.

However, some did expressed concerns that the absence of physical libraries for a prolonged period might have other damaging consequences for the libraries themselves. One head of service observed:

> Every day we remained shut was a gift to those who want to close libraries. No physical offer from March to July; what did you do during the pandemic? Just not enough.

One head of service summed up the concerns expressed by several:

> I *am* concerned because people can withdraw quite quickly and are difficult to get back. Yes, we've had the online things but overall that's a relatively small audience and not the same as the things we do in the physical space. There will be an impact of all of this when we can re-open fully. If we don't learn how to reach out to them again, then our figures are going to be low and that will be interpreted as a reason to shut us down. If we leave it too late people are just going to forget.

Phygital: the nature of future spaces

In all of the interviews there was a significant amount of discussion about the nature of library future spaces. The role which libraries play as digital enablers for their communities was touched upon by almost every interviewee. There was a strong sense that this function has perhaps not been fully appreciated up to now. There were equally strong opinions that libraries' role in being digital enablers must be strongly emphasised and that this is territory which the sector can play a key part in

and not just for and not just in communities which are perhaps victims of the digital divide. Phrases such as 'digital enabler' or 'digital facilitators' or 'digital champions' were mentioned across the interviews. Sometimes these concepts were tied to ideas associated with libraries being part of wider community hubs. One head of service encapsulated this both for the sector as a whole and for their own library service, saying:

> We [the sector as a whole] are actually in a good place to balance physical and digital. We need to think in terms of community hubs that include library space as part of it. Libraries fit into that vision easily. That's what we [the specific library service] are doing; but it won't necessarily be library as it looks now. There will be far more co-delivery. There might be childcare and everything in same building. Of course, we will still have book groups and everything else; there will always be the physical space, but it's going to become part of a greater whole with lots of services on one site. We'll have digital services, but getting balance between digital and physical is crucial. We need innovation and new things online, but not to detriment of traditional services.

The head of a large urban service also discussed the idea of libraries being a hub alongside other services:

> The library is a hub for other services that complement each other. They need to be the one-stop-shop for citizens.

This was echoed by another who reflected more generally on the public's ability to access services and what part the library may have to play in this:

> Sometimes I look at other services and think it's the wrong way round. It is about hard-to-access services, not hard-to-reach people. I think we understand that in libraries.

Another interviewee mentioned issues connected with the balance of digital and physical in the future and that eventual full reopening of physical libraries may impact of the ability to maintain innovative digital interactions:

> The pressure will be balancing digital work and physical services at the same time when libraries fully reopen. Some of the digital work can take a lot of time (filming stuff for example). Once libraries are fully open it will take away capacity of frontline staff to do those things. But there will be definite pressure to keep doing digital and there are things that we can do online that we perhaps don't need to do in physical spaces. But there will be pressure to keep up and innovate all the time.

There were a number of interviewees who spoke about specific digital innovations that they were considering:

> We are thinking about author events for example which we could charge for in the library and whether we can also have them streamed online. We are thinking about whether we can charge for them and how much and whether we can make that into something that public will buy into.

The place that the library can play in the future as a support to homeworking was highlighted by another, making reference to work already done in the establishment of co-working spaces:

> We need to think about homeworking as it moves forward. Some people may continue to work from home, but they need somewhere to print or get help, or hold a meeting. We can evolve into different types of spaces, like the co-working idea.

Reflection on spaces

There was widespread acknowledgement of both the importance of the digital offering (before, during and after lockdown) as well as the role that libraries play (and can play) in being digital enablers for their communities. There was also, however, as can be observed in the previous discussion, a strong sense of the physical space and the importance of that to communities and to delivering a modern library service. One head of service summed this up:

> The digital side of things is crucial. But the activities and events, the stuff for children, BookBug, author events, the activities for adults, tackling social isolation and loneliness, getting people into the space, it's been a real miss for us.

A number of heads of services reflected on what lockdown and the closure of physical libraries might mean in the medium term:

> Physical space is critical but maybe we won't have as many of them but we will be delivering a lot more from the spaces we do have. People talk about libraries as the community's living room; it's a space you can walk into, with no obligation and it's free. If you get the customer service right you can do almost anything.

Lockdown and subsequent reopening with all the issues associated with social distancing, often in small spaces, afforded many services an opportunity to reflect on their estate. The challenges of older buildings sometimes not in the right location, local authorities often having too many properties in their portfolios, and the nature of the service needed in the future were all mentioned by a number of interviewees. Some considered what this might mean for libraries:

> To be very truthful, no, we don't need all the physical spaces, I say that with reluctance, but some spaces have been saved beyond their useful life. The

need from the community has changed and opening hours may have been cut so that the service has, in reality, made itself redundant.

Another interviewee made a very similar point:

Deciding to save all buildings is not viable financially. We need to consider it very carefully; some libraries have such limited access that they've made themselves irrelevant.

However, some services did not necessarily believe that the number of their libraries would change in the immediate term:

Reviewing service points is not on our radar. We went through an exercise of streamlining a few years ago. We've already been through that. We have an exercise looking at where we are, but there are no obvious reason for reducing the amount of physical spaces. It might still happen of course, but not because of COVID-19 or lockdowns.

The head of one large rural authority remarked on how lockdown, the move to digital-only for several months, the ability to 'do things different' had led to reflection about the service as a whole, reminding them of important truths:

Every community is not the same, and we should not be delivering the same service in every place.

Another summed it up by saying:

If you actually look at what the public have missed it is the trusted safe space in the community. The Scottish Book Trust's research[42] shows that; users see it an essential service. People like that space, it fills so many functions for a community. Libraries we know are so much more than books, they're about people, and about communities.

Summary

This section of the report opens with a quote from one of the interviewees: 'it is nonsense to say that libraries aren't about the space'. Comments on this have been one of the two most strongly and consistently made points throughout the research (the other being about the dedication, imagination and flexibility of staff). To a certain extent, the evidence presented in this section speaks for itself and requires little in the way of summarising here. However, it is worth reiterating the strength of feeling that emerged across all interviews about this.

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[42] Reading in Scotland: reading in lockdown. Report by the Scottish Book Trust. Available at https://www.scottishbooktrust.com/uploads/store/mediaupload/3552/file/Reading%20in%20Scotland%20-%20reading%20under%20lockdown%20FINAL.pdf

Digital is undeniably important and will continue to play a crucial role in shaping the offer which public libraries make to the general public. There is a clear sense amongst library service managers that public libraries must continue to emphasise their role as digital enablers within their community and must be at the forefront of moves to transform Scotland into a fully digitally engaged nation. Going back to the advent of the People's Network and in all the years in between, public libraries have been there to make technology available, to assist with access, to support IT and digital upskilling and to seek, through their understanding of communities and outreach and engagement activities, to narrow the digital divide. As one manager said 'no browsing and no PC access – they're deep wounds for me'. These roles have been important to libraries in the last twenty years and will continue to be so in the future.

That said, there was universal acknowledgement that public libraries are, first and foremost, about safe and accessible spaces. Many of well-known phrases used to describe the fundamental ethos of a public library – free, trusted, safe, neutral, communal, public spaces – were mentioned by many, if not all, of the interviewees. That ethos runs deep and the delivery of the vision depends on physical spaces. It is also important, as many interviewees explained, not just because a physical library is a repository for books but because it acts as a place where the community comes together. A number of people talked about the diverse cross-section that could normally be found in a library building on any given day and that it is almost unlike another civic location.

Interviewees were clear that, emerging from lockdowns and from the pandemic, things will look differently; services which have been developed because of necessity may well continue (Click and Collect, being an example). They also know that in many respects expectations will be higher of both the digital and physical spaces and that this will pose challenges in terms of balancing activities and workloads moving forward. But, they are equally clear that this must be done. The word phygital – the hybrid of physical and digital – has been mentioned in a number of places in this report and was, indeed, used by some interviewees but there is a sense that library services need to work out what that actually means and what it looks like.

A number of interviewees acknowledged that there may be streamlining of service points for a number of reasons, not necessarily directly as a result of COVID-19, the lockdowns or the pandemics. However, the points which emerged most strongly in discussions around space was about just how important the physical space is in order to provide a rounded and meaningful public library service that is close to, and meeting the needs of, its community.
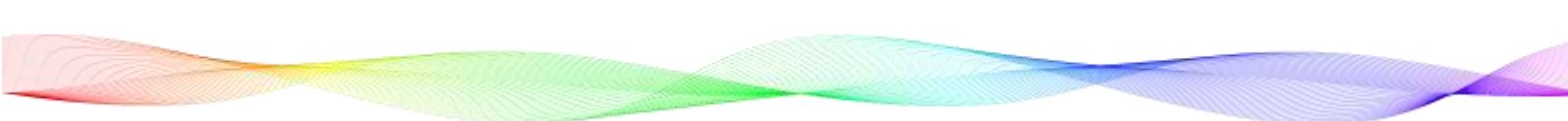
Governance models

The very existence of libraries affords the best evidence that we may yet have hope for the future.

TS ELIOT [43]

Introduction

An interesting aspects in examining the response of Scotland's public libraries has been doing so in the context of the different governance models which exist for their management. Over the last decade, just under half of Scotland's public library services have moved from direct local authority control into arm's length external organisation (ALEOs). Of Scotland's 32 public library services, seventeen are managed and run directly by local authorities with the remaining fifteen being managed as part of culture or culture and leisure trusts.[44]

Audit Scotland in its *How councils work* series explored the use of arm's-length external organisation (ALEOs) in 2011 and, in the years since then, a little under half of Scotland's public library services have migrated into arm's-length trusts (either culture, or culture and leisure). Audit Scotland highlighted that ALEOs may provide a mechanism to mitigate budgetary pressures, to reduce costs and to improve standards, although some may argue the reality in the intervening decade has been different. Audit Scotland noted:

> ALEOs may offer an alternative to more traditional 'in-house' or contract-based service delivery and usually take the form of companies or trusts. They are 'arm's-length' because the council retains a degree of control or influence, usually through a funding agreement, and 'external' because they have a separate identity to the council. ALEOs by their nature are one step removed from council control and, as a result, governance and financial arrangements can be complex. There is a risk service users and citizens have less input and influence over how services are provided. There is also the potential for conflicts between the interest of the council and the ALEO.[45]

The picture across Scotland with regard to furloughing staff varied from trust to trust. This depended on the nature of the trust and the balance of the cultural or leisure elements. Some trusts furloughed part of their staff complement, others furloughed the majority, and some managed to retain far higher proportions of their staff than

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[43] Attributed.
[44] Aberdeenshire, Angus, Argyll and Bute, Dundee, East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Falkirk, Fife, Glasgow, Highlands, North Lanarkshire, Perth and Kinross, Scottish Borders, and South Lanarkshire.
[45] https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2011/nr_110616_aleos.pdf
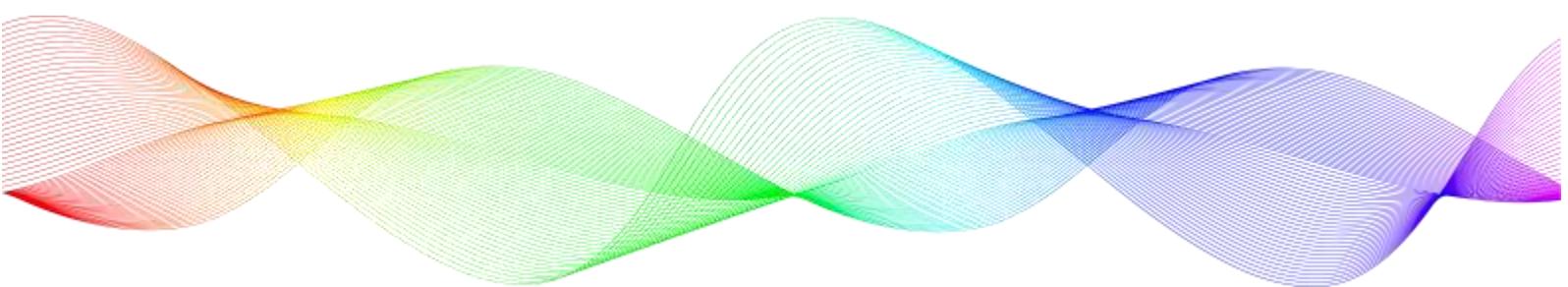
others. This meant that trusts were sometimes in a very different place from local-authority run library services where staff were not furloughed (but had been redeployed to other parts of the council). Inevitably, the funding models for trusts and in particular where they generate their income from played a role in decisions around retaining or furloughing staff.

Contrasting landscapes

It is fair to say that, just as with direct local authority control, the situation in trusts is variable. Some have weathered COVID-19 with remarkable resilience, others have certainly found it more challenging. Across both local authorities and trusts, there have been issues with ICT provision and access, staffing (both redeployment and furlough), approaches to service provision and issues of red-tape (although in the case of the latter one of the satisfying things observed in this study has been organisations ability to cut through this and work with agility).

Senior managers in seven trusts were interviewed as part of this research and they gave important insights into both their own service's responses and to the wider landscape in Scotland.

> The financial position of the trust is really perilous and challenging. The financial picture is so unknown and the financial impact will be big. It's obviously something we've never come across before. We're not coming to decisions as quickly as we would like. The way the statistics are going here, it is more likely we are going to go backwards and will see more closure. People see us as valuable and they need us and our pcs but it doesn't get into the discussions at the councils.

Another trust manager highlighted similar issues:

> We're in trouble. This year we have forecast to finish [x] million in the red. Part of it is the make-up of the budget and the amount that comes from the council. It's a financial catastrophe and furlough is only a drop in the ocean.

The same manager went on to highlight:

> The problem with library services as part of a trust is that we can't have our cake and eat it; when the trust is performing well, the library benefits from those good times, but when the trust is performing badly, libraries take part of the hit. Some trusts have library income ring-fenced. We're not one of them. The council want to cut a further [x] million. The council thinks purely in expenditure and has no concept that it's [the loss of] income generation that it's the problem.

A number of interviewees referred to the statutory requirement for local authorities to provide an 'adequate public library service' and what the consequences of this

might be for those services in trusts where their income-generating ability from other parts of their offering had been severely impaired or completely lost during lockdown. One interviewee went so far as to say:

> I hope that one thing that would come out of all of this is that libraries in trust would not be seen as viable. I'm really intrigued to see what happens in the next few months with some of trusts.

Another interviewee said:

> Many of the councils that have subcontracted, are having to bail them out. One trust I know is definitely going back to council and others are talking about it. I wonder if it is a sustainable model.

Although there was commentary around the statutory nature of the service in the context of income generating trusts, a number raised broader points about the statutory nature of public libraries:

> The statutory argument doesn't carry any weight. Horrendous things have happened, and the fact it is a statutory service doesn't seem to matter.

Another (in a local authority run service) said:

> Statutory means nothing here; they say that we could have one library open for one hour a week, and we'd fulfil the statutory duty.

The position of trusts, and media reports that a third of them may not be financially viable beyond six months, was raised in the Scottish Parliament on 12 August 2020 by Graham Simpson MSP during questions to the First Minister. The First Minister responded saying:

> This is a really challenging time for individuals and organisations in the culture and leisure sector. We will continue to do all that we can to support them. Obviously, it is the responsibility of individual local authorities to allocate funding based on needs and priorities, but we are working closely with partners—including the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Museums Galleries Scotland, and the Scottish Library and Information Council—to understand the specific circumstances that are faced in supporting culture and leisure trusts as they seek to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. We have already taken action to support local authorities during the pandemic, through both increased and front-loaded funding for councils. We have also made funding available in other ways to deliver financial support for the creative sector.[46]

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[46] First Minister's Question 12 August 2020 https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12736

The First Minister's response highlights one of the important points in this study, namely that provision is down to the decisions of individual local authorities; and those thirty-two individual ways of looking at priorities and funding which have shaped the responses to lockdown that we have examined. Other trusts – with different financial models with the local authority – reported a less worrying outlook:

> The trust is in not bad shape. It's not ideal of course. We lost all income generating potential but because of the nature of trust and the balance of income that comes from council, we can manage some of that loss. We're not going to get back to those income levels, and we know that the council will take money out of service level agreements. We do know though that we will have a service and almost all staff.

Another head of service (in a council-run library service) said:

> The perception is that libraries are always the first thing to be cut by councils but that's not true and they are not the first place they go for. By and large there's a lot of positive thinking around libraries.

Summary

It would be overstating the case to suggest that there has been a material difference in the way in which library services run directly by local authorities and those in arm's length trusts operated and responded during lockdown. Both models of service delivery performed remarkably and both categories encountered similar and also unique challenges.

Clearly, trusts that furloughed large proportions of their staff faced particular challenges in delivering services and this can be seen by some of the observations from interviewees. Particular difficulties were encountered in situations which library teams had been diminished to a small core making maintenance of the basic (digital) offer hard and constraining abilities to make more dynamic interventions. One manager in a trust that it had been very difficult for them to do the things that they would have liked to because of the number of staff, across the trust, that were on furlough. However, these challenges were not substantially more significant than those encountered by local authority-run library services where, for example, it had been difficult to equip staff for homeworking or where large numbers of the library team had been redeployed to other essential services.

It was, therefore, a variable picture as with many elements of this study. Some trusts have acknowledged their financial challenges, others are in a more robust position, reflecting the overall settlements they have with their local authority. Some trusts had a hard time, others performed very well (and, indeed, one was consistently in the vanguard of both digital content and managing reopening). Some directly-run local authority library services equally had a hard time and others performed excellently. The factors lying behind this are many and varied, including past approaches to, and investment in, digital (and not just digital in the library context),

the levels of autonomy and devolution given to services and staff, or the attitude towards the library service and the role that it plays in community and civic life.

It was disappointing to observe continuing anxieties in some service about how statutory provision is viewed. This came not from trusts but from local authority-run services. This was not widespread in the interviews but a significant minority of interviewees did mention it explicitly. The comment that 'statutory means nothing here' followed by an observation that, in the perception of the library service manager, the local authority might view one library being open for one hour a week as meeting the legal requirement for adequate provision of a library service, was profoundly unsatisfactory. Although such comments were made by only a small number of interviewees, it does reinforce the need to maintain advocacy for, and strong support of both the statutory requirement for local authorities to provide an public library service, and to reinforce what 'adequate provision' entails. There is a separate issue around the ability of some trusts to maintain adequate public library service provision when their (other) income generating activities have been so severely curtailed as has happened in the last year.

Different governance models did not, in themselves, result in significantly different levels of service. Rather, it was the multitude of other, different factors across all thirty-two local authority areas played a greater part. As has been discussed above, particularly, in the sections describing the process of going into lockdown and the migration of services to digital, each council and each trust has its own strengths and its own weakness. It was these, rather than governance models *per se*, which shaped and informed the ways public libraries across Scotland responded to lockdown.
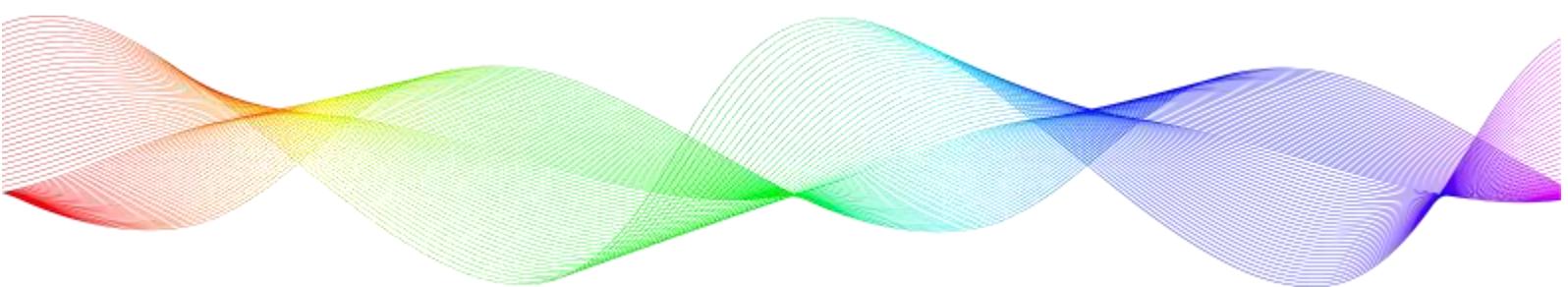
Reopening and beyond

The only thing that you absolutely have to know is the location of the library.

ALBERT EINSTEIN 1954

Introduction

The process of reopening libraries was neither easy nor straightforward for services. The announcement of the move to Phase 3 of the lockdown route map[47] was made by the First Minister and stated that libraries (along with museums and galleries) could reopen from Wednesday 15 July 2020 with strict physical distancing measures in place. There was, perhaps understandably, a perception or, indeed, an expectation from library users and other stakeholders that this meant all libraries would be reopened on or near the 15 July. Inevitably, this proved impossible for a multitude of different reasons but the pace and the variability of reopening across the country did lead to some negative comments on social media and sometimes critical questioning in the media, particularly in local newspapers. One interviewee, speaking of a service which had been slow to reopen said 'there has been a huge backlash [from the public] and it is a bit of a mess'.

The public face of reopening

On social media and webpages for library services, posts were aimed at keeping library users informed about the restarting of services and the reopening of buildings. A picture of Click and Collect roll-out (discussed later) was readily apparent from the social media data collection, but this was not as straightforward for reopening. The primary reason for this is the variability in terminology and a differing approach to what constituted a 'reopened' library service. Some services called the launch of their Click and Collect (or similar) service a 'reopening' while others took 'reopening' to mean that the buildings themselves were open for wider services, including browsing.

For a great many services, Click and Collect operated very differently from their usual offering, with library users being restricted to a collection point with

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[47] https://www.gov.scot/news/moving-to-phase-3-of-lockdown-route-map/

browsing not being permitted. Some explicitly stated although their library buildings were still technically 'closed', Click and Collect was available from the premises and called this a 'phased-reopening'. Therefore, it is difficult to show a timeline for reopening given that it meant different things to different services.

Despite these differences, there were many common aspects. Services posted notices on their social media in around mid-July explaining that while libraries were included in the Scottish Government roadmap to reopening and that they could open from the 15 July, many were not in a position to do so on that date, or even later in the month of July, for a wide range of reasons as mentioned in the interview responses.

Additionally, given the complexity of 'reopening' and a return to services - including the implementation of new services such as Click and Collect – most took care to explain carefully to library users which buildings were open, on which dates, and at which times, alongside updated information on pandemic precautions while on site. Some even made videos or other detailed guides, perhaps aware that there was some anxiety about returning to public spaces (a point echoed by Carnegie UK Trust report) and conforming to new safety guidance. As much was changing quickly, social media provided an outlet to keep communities up-to-date.

It became compulsory to wear a mask in shops in Scotland from the second week in July. Despite mask-wearing already being mandatory on public transport, this was a relatively new rule which required a change in behaviour by the public. As such, some libraries chose to focus their guidance on mask-wearing.

Bringing back physical services

The picture on reopening across the country was, perhaps, the most variable of any of the aspects observed in this research. One service stood out as having been very well prepared for reopening. This service had taken the English guidelines published by Libraries Connected[48] on 30 June 2020 and adapted them, reckoning that subsequent Scottish details would not be significantly different.

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[48] https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/news/new-guide-help-libraries-reopen

We started planning early because it gave staff in lockdown something to focus on. Giving people enough work activity and thinking time. We used lockdown to clear backlog of training and started [the process of] reopening with a huge staff survey which we used to shape our services. We chose larger buildings for easier social distances and worked with colleagues in estates. The guidance from Scotland for libraries came way too late so we used the English guidance and tweaked it. We picked hubs for size and geographical spread and developed a plan to open one library each fortnight from 15 July.

However, the challenges for library services in reopening from July 2021 should not be underestimated and a clear picture of these emerged from the interviews.

When Nicola Sturgeon announced that libraries could open, a lot of people expected this meant we would go back to normal. We had a lot of people making contact and the phone was ringing off the hook. It was hugely challenging. We hadn't been allowed to have staff in so we weren't ready, and there a lot of people who were phoning up who weren't happy. A lot of it came down to the limitations of the council policy and the interpretation of the guidelines, they didn't allow us to be in the building to prepare for this.

Another described as:

Like wading through treacle to get permission to get staff back into buildings.

A third remarked:

Early on, I was able to draft risk assessments. Although staff members were itching to get back there was still a lot of individual reassurance to be done. We started with home delivery and Click and Collect a few weeks before opening and so were building up to it gradually. It was, though, still a process of continuous change including moving the physical library around. But, it just seemed natural that we were going to open but we were nervous when we finally opened the doors on 27 July. Customers were quite careful and realised things had changed. That was important.

The particular needs of some communities were emphasised by a number of interviewees as being driving factors behind reopening in particular locations:

We targeted opening libraries in places that needed the most support, not the libraries with the most issues but the ones with the biggest social need, and by looking at the social demographics.

The announcement that library reopening had been sanctioned by the government did create a number of quite profound challenges across the sector. There was perhaps an expectation that that all libraries would reopen seamlessly

relatively soon after 15 July. There were, however, a multitude of factors which affected the abilities of services and trust to do this. In many cases services opted to offer Click and Collect or home delivery but not to allow physical browsing in the buildings. Libraries faced many issues:

> Before we could do anything we had to write committee papers to get approval. Up to the point that we went back into Tier 4, we had opened up nine and it was staged over 6-8 weeks. There was so much to think about, risk assessments, staff training, PPE, redesigning the libraries for directional travel, the installation of Perspex screens, shutting down toilets, isolation protocols for stock, protocols for home delivery, bubble arrangements for staff. The financial implications of taking someone off furlough were important as it was bringing back staff but not income.

Another head of service noted the co-location in schools:

> Some libraries have had to remain closed because the schools needed them for classrooms or for nursery. It's still ongoing now. One is only open 3.30-6.00pm because it is used during the day by the school.

The challenges of co-located services was picked up by other interviewee:

> Community libraries worked really well for us pre-lockdown, bringing together of the different services in one location. It worked in terms of engagement, joined-up services and footfall. The flipside of that has been that because they were joined with schools in many locations – in fact a large chunk of the library estate – it has been challenging to reopen. The libraries at [locations mentioned] posed real challenges as they are based in schools. We tried to do it in terms of geographical spread but the standalone libraries were far easier.

Service managers were naturally aware of the expectations of their local communities and that the factors which were sometimes slowed their ability to reopen were not necessarily widely understood and in some cases services were unable to explain the reasons; one head of service observed:

> There wasn't much of a steer from leaders about even thinking about reopening. This is a very cautious council.

Another commented:

> I think we're doing well now but there was a lot of waiting to see what other people are doing. We're not getting a lot of support from the council.

Organisational decision-making, particularly in trusts where staff had been furloughed led to a different series of issues:

> There were discussions about not bringing too many staff back from furlough. The unofficial policy was to try to maximise it, and keep as many staff on furlough. It was a barrier to what I wanted to do but the reasons for it were essential.

Water testing and legionella testing figured prominently in the preparedness for reopening. Many services had put measures in place to ensure that water was being checked and run regularly during lockdown but others had not managed this and the readiness of buildings in respect of this was mentioned by a large number of interviews with some highlighting organisational confusion. One head of service said:

> I had understood that if we ran the water regularly we wouldn't need the full testing; then I was told we would, it was devastating.

Another service reported:

> The properties guy said we couldn't have people back until full water testing was done, so click and collect was knocked back for 6 weeks because schools were the priority.

In spite of libraries having made exceptional use of social media and other digital platforms during the lockdown, a number of services encountered particular communication challenges at the point that reopening had been made possible:

> Our communication with customers was particular hard. They were desperate to see us open and we are (still) fielding an enormous number of enquiries about this and the answer is we don't know.

Another commented:

> We knew we wanted to communicate differently so created radio adverts. It was the first time we'd done that. We also made use of the council's communication channels and community newsletters. But some people were still surprised that we were open – you can't win with communication.

Services were very well aware of what one described as 'grumbles on social media' about reopening timescales (or the lack of them). They were acutely conscious of the community reaction and although many stated that 'people were happy to see us open when we were able to', they were aware that users were comparing services in other parts of the country, particularly if their own local library service was moving at slower pace:

> There were press articles about libraries not reopening and we were criticised about being slow to the table but there was a [council] reluctance to open some buildings.

Service managers across the country were also watching what other services were doing. The variability in reopening (as seen on the timeline later) was mentioned in many of the interviews. Although all managers understood the reason that might lie behind it, disappointment or even incredulity were sometimes expressed at the time of the interviews (October-November) about the slow pace in some other places. The caution in some places was evident by this remark:

> We're probably in a different place. We had started to reopen at beginning of October but then we were asked not to advance any services so we've tried to hold off. We're not ready yet. I'd rather put money into books and digital resources than endanger borrowers and our staff.

This observation, possibly better than any other, underlines the different and variable approaches across the country speaking as it does of early October when many other services had moved more quickly in July and August.

Many of the interviewees were optimistic when looking ahead:[49]

> I would like things to go back to normal, no one is under illusions that that can happen, maybe in December being able to open [location given], then leaving the smaller two closed until much further down the line.

Others pointed to the challenges which they could foresee emerging:

> Early years concern me. We had very few requests for books for children. I've been trying to have more crates delivered to schools and freebie books to children at [locations mentioned]. We've been working with the foodbank to get them to distribute picture books, and think we might have to do something with NHS or other services too.

Another manager spoke about:

> What's been driven home is the digital divide and inequality has been even more profound in the last six months.

Some others highlighted wider and, in some cases, strategic aspects, including:

> I think this will be seen as an opportunity to make changes and not just about a rationalisation of buildings but about a rethink for our library service.

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[49] This was November 2020 and, of course, a further lockdown commenced on 26 December 2020.

Education and health has been a priority but people see us as valuable and they need us and our PCs, but it doesn't get into the discussions at the councils.

Moving forward into full reopening is still very much a challenge.

Click and Collect

Called various names by various libraries, this involves a service whereby individuals can reserve books online or in some cases over the phone, and then pick them up in a designated slot. The exact terms of each service was variable and subject to change. Most offered only stock from one branch and a selection of books from chosen genres rather than the ability to select specific titles, but some managed to extend this to specific choices from the chosen branch. Issues around movement of stock from one branch to another, and the guidance on quarantining books for 72 hours added to stock movement issues.

The approximate dates for the introduction of this service in the authority areas are outlined overleaf. Sometimes this service was available in a few different library branches, in other cases only one location was offered initially and then this was extended more widely as more buildings re-opened. The graphic gives an overall picture of which areas offered this service and which were either unable to or chose not to. Most services also instigated a book drop-off box at the door while the buildings were closed. Some appeared to run no Click and Collect but instead continued their community outreach service for people with poor health or mobility issues and others had to use the digital resources or wait until they could reopen. Some services ran home delivery but not a wider click-and-collect service or mobile services. Some, including some trusts, had no Click and Collect or equivalent.

Click & Collect

July

Aberdeen
Aberdeenshire
Angus
Clackmannanshire
East Ayrshire
East Lothian
East Renfrewshire
Fife
Highland
Inverclyde
Midlothian

Orkney
Perth & Kinross
Renfrewshire
Scottish Borders
South Ayrshire
Stirling
South Lanarkshire
West
Dunbartonshire
West Lothian

*Note that Shetland introduced Click & Collect on 29th June.

Orkney Library & Archive
7 AM ·

We have an announcement!
The Library remains closed but next Monday (13th July) we're launching REQUEST & COLLECT - a new service to let our customers order the books they want and collect them safely from us.
More details and full instructions on how the service will operate will be posted later this week.

ORKNEY LIBRARY
Request
STARTS MONDAY 13TH JULY
Collect

August

East Dunbartonshire
Moray
North Ayrshire

North Ayrshire Libraries @NACLibraries · 30 Jul
Our new Call, Click and Collect service will be available from Monday 3 August.

You will be able to collect your items from the front door during your time slot

0:21 793 views

September

Dundee
Falkirk
Argyll & Bute
Na h-Eileanan Siar

**There appears to be no click and collect in the following areas: Dumfries & Galloway, North Lanarkshire, Edinburgh, Glasgow.

In a number of local authorities the launch of Click and Collect was the first resumption of a council service.

> We reopened on 20 July with Click and Collect in three main libraries. We were the first council service to be approved for a restart from static. But had to develop a business plan for why the library needs to be restarted.

Another head of service in a large rural area pointed to the organisational agility which was apparent as lockdown restrictions eased and how the implementation of Click and Collect was an example of this:

> If, in normal times, we had wanted to implement Click and Collect, we'd be have been still looking at in in two years. There has been quicker changes. Doing those things pre march would have taken such a long time. I do think behaviours have changed – if we can mobilise that quickly for things like introducing Click and Collect, then the rest of it is just an excuse really.

Some services reported issues with the provision of 'random bundles' of books through Click and Collect and that users were not particularly keen on this:

> We really had to take on-board what people were telling us about Click and Collect with random bundles.

Other services encountered more positive reactions:

> Staff have gone the extra mile for people through click and collect with genres, categories and so on, and most people were happy with choices.

One head of service gave a good overview of issues associated with Click and Collect and how they could see it developing:

> The council has been reluctant around Click and Collect, especially expanding it and reaching out into other communities. But anything we can provide flexibly for people is good. Click and Collect in some form is here to stay. But we have to balance it because the library is more than book service and if

people are not coming through the door they're missing out on participating and engaging with other things. In essence, it's an enhanced reservation service and we've been integrating it into the daily life of the library. It's allowing people to make a reservation in a different way and if people want the premium Click and Collect service, they might want to subscribe to that and it could become income generating. But it shouldn't doesn't prevent people coming in as usual.

Although not without issues, it was not uncommon to hear this overall summary of Click and Collect:

COVID-19 has given us the ability to take a step back and look at provision, and make changes. We thought click and collect would be difficult but it's been great.

Another noted:

For me, it's knocked libraries back by twenty years in term of the stuff we're not now allowed to do at the moment. Numbers seem healthy, but you're painfully aware that the book lending side of things is only part of the wider service that we deliver and sometimes we are not good at measuring those other things.

The head of service in a trust said:

It [closures] is a question already being asked. We have a number of buildings which are a significant cost. People value the local service but we might need to go into partnerships with more of a community hub model. The building costs are significant and budgets are precarious. No stone will be left unturned in looking at the budgets. Yet COVID-19 has given us a better chance of forming relationships, real partnerships with the communities to adapt the service

Summary

An expectation was perhaps created in the minds of the general public when it was announced that libraries could reopen from 15 July 2020 that all might do so. The reality was very different for a multitude of different reasons. A good many library services were well advanced with preparations for resuming services ahead of the announcement from the Scottish Government. Some had pre-empted the publication of guidance by looking at the English regulations which had been issued a little earlier and based decisions on the assumption that the two sets of guidelines would not be significantly different. This placed a number of services in a very good position to be up and running swiftly after 15 July.

The situation for a number of other services was more problematic. In some trusts, there were issues around bringing back staff from furlough particularly if income

generating parts of these trusts were still largely unable to reopen. In a number of local authority-run library services there were very practical issues around obtaining appropriate PPE or protective screens. Building and estates teams were often heavily involved and in a number of services issues associated with water testing in buildings slowed down the process of reopening libraries. Some buildings were simply unsuitable given social distancing regulations, or were co-located in a building with other council services or facilities and for whatever reason could not be reopened to the public.

One of the key issues was what 'reopening' actually meant. By and large the first steps taken were around providing a Click and Collect service rather than physical access to premises by end users. Detail protocols were required around this – perhaps more complex than users might assume – including quarantine time for returned stock, package and collection issues. Click and Collect was widely but not uniformly adopted. Some services opted not to offer this service. Others found it ran very smoothly and was popular. Some found early problems with it, particularly those services which opted to provide 'random bundles' to users which were generally not well-received and a number of services reported swiftly changing their approaches in response to feedback on this. The majority of services which implemented Click and Collect did so in July with some others coming on stream in August and some further ones in September.

Some council were extremely cautious about opening public spaces and showed a marked reluctance to agree to libraries being reopened and this was noted by a number of interviewees as being the case in their authority. Others, however, were pleased to report that the library service had been the first council service to resume something akin to a public-facing facility. However, as with so many aspects of this research, the picture was variable, perhaps even patchy, across the whole of Scotland. The interviewees were all very conscious of what library services in other areas were doing, what stage they had got to and, in some cases, viewed other areas with a degree of envy. However, as one interviewee noted, the same type of service should not be delivered in every place because the needs are different.

Despite this, a number of interviewees expressed frustrations about the slow pace and the variable coverage. Sometimes this was directed at their own organisation; sometimes it was directed at other services, whilst in both cases acknowledging the range of factors which contributed to the variable picture. What was less easy to handle was the public's reaction in places where reopening had been slower. Most often this took the form of comments or posts on social media but in others local newspaper ran stories questioning why libraries in a particular place were not open when they were in neighbouring authorities. Communication at this point was difficult for service managers and it was hard to convey the multiplicity of factors which had perhaps hindered reopening, especially if they were organisational drivers from council or trust.
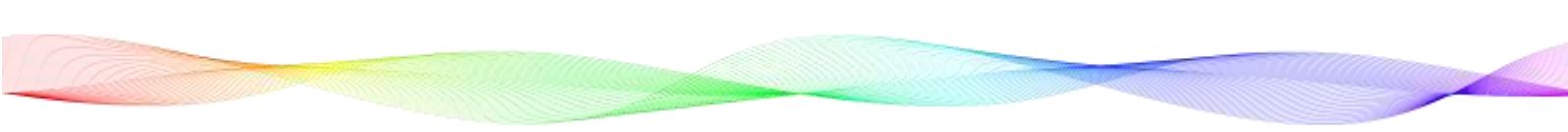
The implications of all of this were not lost on interviewees. A number of people said that the lockdown had given them an opportunity to consider new ways of doing things and that necessity had been the mother of invention. The fact, however, that some services had not reopened in a meaningful way by October was considered problematic for the sector as a whole. As outlined in the section above, a number of people speculated about the longer-term consequences of libraries having been closed for so long. Another concern expressed was about the ability to get back some of the constituencies of people. One head of service noted that some people will, out of necessity, have found ways to do things that they previously used the library for and that it may be hard to entice them back. It was also noted by a few interviewees that the longer libraries are closed, the harder this becomes.
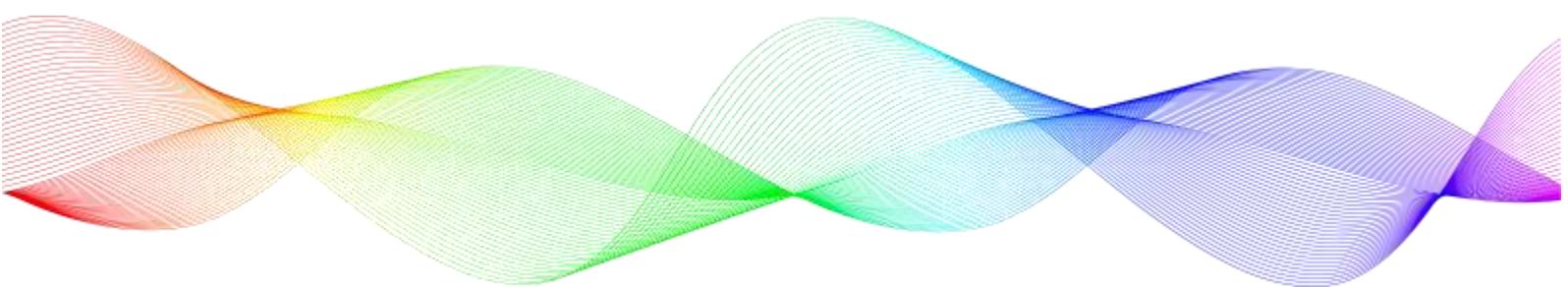
Conclusions and recommendations

Bloody amazing really. I can't get over how well the staff did.

<div align="right">LIBRARY SERVICE MANAGER 2020[50]</div>

Introduction

As has been mentioned in a number of places in this report, the thing that really stood out, particularly in the interviews, was the closeness to, and understanding of, the communities served by Scotland's public libraries. This should not come as any kind of surprise because that closeness and understanding is central to their approach to the delivery of services. This concluding section will draw together some of the key findings, and discuss them within the context of the overarching themes included in original objectives for the research.

There has, undeniably, been variability in the response of public library services across Scotland during the lockdown period. This relates to everything from the response to moving everything online, to the way in which services approached reopening, to the services that have been provided. However, across the board, it is fair and justified to say that all thirty-two services have responded well, despite the challenges, and some have responded magnificently with real imagination and forward-thinking creativity. The challenges which individual library services have encountered since March 2020 reflected many of the issues that they face in 'normal' times, finance, organisational commitment, community demographics, and staffing levels.

One of the aspects which stands out most strongly was the commitment and dedication of the staff across public libraries. Whether they remained working for the library service itself or were redeployed to other essential services, they pulled together and made the best of it. In the interviews, at the very end, we asked each interviewee what they were most proud about. The answer, in every case, was their staff, as the quotation above at the start of this section makes clear. One of the outstanding examples of this was from the library manager who, finding it impossible to process everything remotely because of IT-access issues from home became 'a little wily rat, sneaking into the building to do things like processing memberships when I was out for my 'hour of exercise''. A hundred times over this above-and-beyond approach could be replicated. Scotland's public libraries have done well but, as this report suggests, there is learning to be done too.

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[50] From interview data.
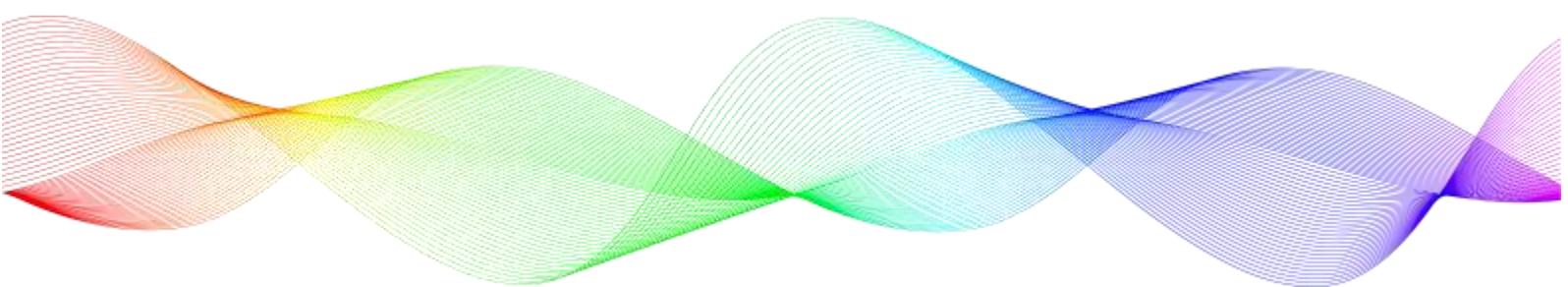
Evolution of digital services

The first objective of this research was to examine how libraries evolved in terms of providing digital and remote only services. It is important to say at the outset that libraries have had digital and remote services at the heart of their offering for the best part of twenty years but the advent of meaningful eBook and eAudio lending has afforded the opportunity for a step-change. The focus that lockdown placed on digital content and provision generally, and the data gathered in this research project in particular, has helped to make some of these things more visible.

Firstly and most importantly, it has strongly reinforced services' understanding of the extent of the digital divide within their communities and, by default, across Scotland as a whole. Library services were acutely aware of this before lockdown because they are often the first port-of-call for many of those people who do cannot afford the devices or the access. The idea that everyone is online and everyone has a tablet is a myth and libraries, in normal circumstances, see this first-hand every day. One interviewee spoke of the fact that users had been unable to access library PCs since as 'an open, sore wound' for them and this reflects the fact that those who the library to access digital often have no other means of doing. So the absence of the physical library during lockdown was a grievous loss for them. Libraries are very clearly digital enablers and agents for wider and more inclusive digital participation. In March 2021, the Scottish Government published its new digital strategy *A changing nation: how Scotland will thrive in a digital world*[51], although a higher level strategic document, it makes no mention of public libraries. The library community in Scotland does, therefore, need to continue to be vocal about its role both in supporting the digitally disadvantaged and in supporting the wider goals of a digitally engaged nation.

The second main observation around the 'move to digital' relates to the scope and provision of eBooks and eAudio. Just as physical libraries vary across the country in terms of their offering, so too does the e-lending offering. Variability is a natural consequence of running services which are tailored to the needs of individual communities and locations across thirty-two local authorities. However, variability is also a consequence of budgeting, finances and service priorities over a number of years. It is not necessarily bad. The data gathered in this research does point to highly variable levels of e-content, particularly around eBooks and eAudio. That is not to say for a moment that library services are wanting and we report only what we found. Services found there was a huge appetite for their eBooks, particularly during April, May and early June 2020 and that they could not always keep up with demand. Virtually every library service was able to report significant increases in the lending of eBooks and eAudio, and in some cases, the increases were remarkable. The summary to the section of the report on 'Going Digital' offers discussion of this. The differences in levels of provision of eBooks and eAudio from library service to library service were acknowledged by the interviewees and many

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[51] https://www.gov.scot/publications/a-changing-nation-how-scotland-will-thrive-in-a-digital-world/

spoke of the need to have a wider national conversation about this in the future which may include exploring possibilities for national platforms or procurement.

One of the most important findings about going digital was, ironically, the reverse; the importance of the physical space emerges perhaps as strongly as any finding in this research. Lockdown and the closure of all libraries brought sharply into focus the importance and value of the physical space; gone were all community events, activities, groups and gatherings that libraries are normally able to offer. Although this placed focus on the digital, it also highlighted the crucial nature of the communal civic space that is the public library. There is particularly eloquent testimony from library services manager across a number of sections in this report about the balance which must be struck, post pandemic, between physical and digital, and about how any hybrid 'phygital' model might be developed. However, the strongest testimony of all is about the absolute, irrevocable centrality of the physical space of the public library within communities.

While the importance of the physical presence for library services is not in question, the pandemic and ensuing focus on digital provision highlighted the need to think about digital presence. Given that the main website may be the first port-of-call for people looking for online resources or information, this research found that many of the library websites were difficult to locate and often did not link to the relevant social media channels. Even if the website is not the main focus and services have found that social media platforms are more effective for engagement, there is more work to be done to ensure that the digital spaces are easy to find, navigate and are well-managed.

While many services have been doing excellent work online for many years, the move into a blended delivery means every service will be *more* reliant on *all* its digital spaces. Just as physical space is carefully managed in order to support the needs of the community, the digital space must also be considered carefully and we have perhaps passed the point where the constraints of the council's website template are acceptable. As services produce more digital content (or blended content), these digital spaces will need to evolve to support those activities. Additionally, this content must be easy to find, and easy to navigate otherwise content will not reach its intended audience. It is recognised that while some services have dedicated digital staff for online content management, others are reliant on the skills of their staff who have a myriad of other responsibilities. Staff skill-sets and allocation of resource must reflect the ongoing importance to service of online, and as much attention must be paid to the management (and appeal, even allure) of digital spaces as physical ones.

Fostering creativity and innovation

This research also sought to identify and explore how staff across Scotland's public libraries had developed and fostered creativity and innovation whilst working remotely and online. An important aspect which this objective tried to explore was the extent to which staff – freed from some of the regular organisational constraints

– had autonomy to pursue different ways of doing things. It is fair to say that it would have been possible to go on *ad infinitum* seeking out examples on social media of new or innovative things done by individual library services.

One very important aspect of lockdown and the provision of services digitally which does need to be emphasised is the sense that it 'freed services up'. A number of interviewees noted that, despite the constantly shifting environment and the inevitable cautious bureaucracy, actually gave them considerable freedom to try new things. One manager said 'I never said no when people suggested trying something new'. Another observed that things which might, ordinarily, have taken two years to get approved became much easier to get agreement on and to implement. This degree of agility and autonomy was welcome both by managers and by their library staff. Society as a whole has undoubtedly learned a lot about working online and remotely, and much of that has focused on the pros and cons of the technology. What should not be overlooked, however, is that organisations have often looked critically at themselves and at their process, streamlining them or seeking to removal administrative obstacles. That this was done has been apparent in the library services examined in this research.

Click and Collect has, undeniably, been one of the significant innovations of the lockdown. Many library services were keen to point out that it was really an extension of the reservation facility under a new guise. It was also a necessity given the circumstances (though not for all library services). It is interesting to note that a number of managers said that had they been implementing such a scheme in 'normal circumstance' it would undoubtedly have taken longer and would have probably been more bureaucratic. Not all services implemented a Click and Collect service but the majority did and many of them will continue with it, in one form or another, beyond the pandemic.

An area where library services, alongside virtually all other cultural sector organisations, have learned a great deal is around the hosting of virtual events. It is fair to say that the consequences and implications of this for the future are still being fully considered. Across society, the move to virtual events widened audience participation and given events' organisers the potential for far greater reach and engagement. One interviewee spoke about author events and how important and popular they are as part of the physical library offer and whether some form of online presence for them in the future will be possible or, indeed, desirable given the importance of the communal space and the activities that take place there.

Across Scotland, there was robust evidence of the upskilling of library staff associated with the creation, development and promotion of new forms of digital content. This ranged from material to support health and wellbeing, storytelling and BookBug content, leisure activities such as garden, health eating, author or local history events. Service managers spoke of how they had observed their staff started off nervously, perhaps unwilling to appear on camera, but soon developed

confidence and expertise. This, in turn, led to the emergence of other creative ideas from the staff themselves. These are important points both for the skills base of library staff going forward and for services as they continue to consider methods of outreach and engagement.

There were numerous examples of this creativity and it would almost be invidious to particular one single out. One service partnered with a big local music festival which had also been compelled to move online. A BookBug slot was introduced into its programme helping to reach wider audience and significantly enhancing the profile of the library service. Another service created imaginative gardening content courtesy of the partner of a member of library staff. Distinctive content relating to community diversity also appeared, including dialect work in some places. Knitting was taught by one service as part of a 'Cosy Bosie' project to produce hats, gloves and scarves for local charity organisations.

Overall, the approach of services can be characterised by managers showing a real willingness to allow their staff teams to be as creative and imaginative in producing content as they could be. The autonomy staff gained and the agility created by breaking down organisation barriers are lessons to be taken forward.

Supporting communities and their resilience

At the heart of this research was the importance of investigating how Scottish public libraries helped foster and support community resilience in terms of social and health wellbeing). David Lankes's much quoted remark, mentioned earlier, that 'great libraries build communities' can, perhaps, be said to have been an underpinning motto for this element of the study. A fundamental strength of the public library is the fact that they are, as we mention, close to, and understanding of, their respective communities and this has been shown in manifold ways in this research.

The most cohesive of communities are still made up of individual human beings and libraries also demonstrate that individual and personal approach too. Three observations by managers in this regard particularly stand out. Indeed, it may be said that they provoked an emotional reaction when they were reported to us. One said 'we deal with human beings every day'. This showed an important point; liibraries must, of course, think about user groups and community profiles and service demographics, but fundamentally they know that they are offering an important service to individual human beings, for whom it can make a huge difference. This point should not be forgotten nor underestimated.

Secondly, another manager spoke of their concern about one individual user he knew about: 'we have one guy who comes in two or three times a week and uses the books but will also fall asleep in a chair and that's because we are his safe space. That's actually the epitome of what we are about, we are a safe, communal space. I've no idea what happened to that guy. I worry about him'. This is indeed the epitome of the safe public space that the library is.

The third observation came from the manager of a service which is widely acknowledged across Scotland for its close and personal connection with its community. They remarked: 'we knew people who were not on anyone else's radar' and so started using frontline staff to phone round regular users just to check that they were doing fine and to have a chat; it was not about pushing eBooks or the service; it was just a chat, a chat to see how they were doing'. This, like the other two quotes, speaks for itself

By these small, individual interactions libraries had with people, they helped fostered resilience, and supported their communities. This being quite in addition to the broader reach of some of their other activities, examples of which are given through the various sections of the report.

Those other activities included, for example, promoting the benefits of reading for wellbeing generally and supporting good mental health. Services made a concerted effort in those respects the lockdown and the volume of material posted on social media (and more important the reach of it through shares) coupled with borrowing statistics for eBook and eAudio are important indicators. Similarly, however, libraries developed many ways to support physical health with activities and resources (both their own and content drawn from elsewhere). Whether East Lothian's virtual John Muir Way or Fife's gardening podcasts, or Shetland's dialect BookBug sessions, imaginative and inclusive content was created and delivered.

However, it is important to balance this with the observation that a significant number of managers felt that the role libraries could play in an emergency situation such as the pandemic was not fully appreciated by the organisation of which they are a part. Messaging and advocacy about this certainly needs to continue and perhaps be renewed based on some of the evidence contained in this and other pieces of recent research.

It is often said that the most important asset of any organisation is its staff. This was very evident in this research and the contribution which library staff made more widely to the pandemic response should not be overlooked. They delivered medicines, helped manage stock in foodbanks, assisted in care homes, reached out the isolated and lonely, staffed childcare hubs for the children of keyworkers, and worked on telephone helplines. In these regards, library staff, with their strong background in individual customer care, excellent communication and organisational skills and, yes, sometimes their couthie style, were *highly* prized and valued across parent organisations.

Reflections of library services

Another of the principal building blocks for this research was to examine the opinions and perceptions of the library services about their own activities during the period of lockdown. The research was not conceived as a user study but rather as piece of reflective professional learning about contemporary public library

management. This shaped the approaches taken towards both data collection and data analysis. As Helyer points out, reflective work-based learning, if used effectively and purposefully, facilitates ongoing personal and professional learning, and creates and develops practitioners.[52] It was, therefore, hoped that undertaking the research would provide an opportunity for practitioners to reflect usefully, and be able to learn from it as they continue to shape and evolve their services for the future.

Subsequent to the round of interviews in October and November 2020, the research team has had contact with a number of those interviewees and with others in the public library sector that were not interviewed. There has been gratifying support for, and interest in this, the research. Some have queried the extent to which there *was* learning between the first lockdown (from 23 March 2020) to the second (from 26 December 2020). That is difficult to assess as we have not looked at the second lockdown. What is clear, however, is that library services collectively and their leaders have learned a great deal about what can and cannot be done in the digital sphere. They have also learned about overcoming challenges, cutting through 'red-tape', and how to deploy technology to reach out to different parts of the community. They have reinforced very strongly how 'bloody amazing' their staff is and how, with engaged autonomy, they can come up with ingenuous and imaginative ways to keep a public library service running and relevant.

All of Scotland's library services were engaged with one another during lockdown and beyond through the good offices of both the Association of Public Libraries Scotland (APLS) and the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC). Their coming together in this fashion was, by necessity, focussed on discussing approaches and recovery and finding their way collectively through uncharted territory. It did not, necessarily, afford them an opportunity for wider reflection and collective learning across the sector as a whole. This research has attempted to do that both in terms of allowing the voices of library services be heard, and in presenting analysis of their work and suggesting learning for public libraries beyond the pandemic.

The research was, as we note at the beginning, a snapshot of events during 2020. Events moved swiftly and regulations changed regularly. At times it felt, to use a hackneyed phrase, that the only certainty was uncertainty. This inevitably meant that for many if not all of the public library service managers across Scotland they had a year of intense work and pressure (which is not, as we write, yet over). The sense of running to stand still, information and demands coming from every direction, and keeping as many plates spinning as possible pervaded all of the interviews. A number of people said to us that the interview was the first real opportunity that they had to reflect back on what had been done and to try to

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[52] Helyer, R. 2015. Learning through reflection: the critical role of reflection in work-based learning (WBL). *Journal of Work-Applied Management* 7(1):15-27.

make sense of it as a whole. As we note previously, it was pleasing to hear this and to sense that they had found process of talking about what had been done beneficial. We can only hope that the final report lives up to the same level of usefulness.

Governance models

The research also set out to consider library service provision within the context of the differing governance models (direct local authority management or arm's length cultural and leisure trusts). The findings broadly suggest that different governance models did not, in themselves, result in significantly different levels of service, and it would be overstating the case to suggest that there were meaningfully different approaches between library services run directly by local authorities and those in trusts. Both models of service delivery performed remarkably well over the period of lockdown. The reality on the ground is that every service, irrespective of its form of governance, encountered challenges, some of these were common across the sector (such as frequently changing regulations), some were unique to the individual circumstances of places, communities or service points, and some were associated with their own organisational issues.

Rather, the multitude of other, different factors which are at play across all thirty-two local authority areas played a greater part. As discussed above (particularly, in the sections describing the process of going into lockdown and the migration of services to digital) each council and each trust has its own strengths and its own weaknesses. It was these, rather than governance models *per se*, which shaped and informed the ways public libraries across Scotland responded to lockdown

It was clear, however, that trusts where large proportions of staff were furloughed encountered particular challenges that were not replicated in local authority-run services. This was most evident when the staff team, tasked with operating the digital services, was reduced in number drastically; this also created challenges later in terms of preparing for reopening. In situations where this was case, it made aspects of continuing to provide a library offering more difficult as the interviewees have noted. It is important to stress that furloughing of staff varies significantly across trusts and there was no sense of a 'one size fits all' approach. This said, local authority-run services faced their own, different challenges including redeployment of staff and equipping people to work meaningfully from home amongst others.

The section dealing with the discussion of governance includes some not entirely encouraging observations from library service managers about prevailing views towards what statutory provision means. As noted before, this was not a *general* view but was expressed by a few managers and thus indicates an issues in some parts of the country. The comments about statutory provision came from local authority-run library services rather than trusts. In particular, the quote from one interviewee that 'statutory means nothing here' was disappointing to hear. This observation does reinforce the importance of continued advocacy on behalf of

public libraries and their place at the heart of communities, coupled with a strong professional sense of what adequate provision of public libraries should look like.

There is a different statutory issue around the ability of some trusts to maintain adequate public library service provision when their (other) income generating activities have been so severely curtailed as has happened in the last year. This was perhaps most clearly articulated by one of the interviewees who said 'the problem with library services as part of a trust is that we can't have our cake and eat it; when the trust is performing well, the library benefits from those good times, but when the trust is performing badly, libraries take part of the hit'. That 'hit' is interesting because it can render a statutory service dependent on income-generating leisure services or cultural programming, especially in trusts where the library income and spending is not ring-fenced. For as long as culture and leisure trusts exists this, together with the funding level agreements from local authorities, are likely to remain as issues. It is important to stress that the degree to which these are issues varies across trusts and that financial settlements and budget savings are issues right across the sector more widely.

It will be interesting to see what emerges from this in the coming years in terms of the shape and role of arm's length organisations and funding models for them. However, it will be equally interesting to see how local authorities respond to the inevitable financial pressures after the end of the pandemic. Time will tell.

Informing policy

The final objective of this research was to inform policy- and decision-makers (in both cultural and broader public policy spheres) about issues of resilience and governance in library service delivery and identify examples of good practice. It is hoped that this research presents an overview of the ways in which Scotland's public libraries have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown in 2020. It has to be acknowledged that, at the time of creating the original research proposal, it was not fully appreciated that further restrictions and lockdowns would happen during the remainder of 2020 and into 2021.

As noted in a number of places, those library service managers interviewed found that participation in the research afforded them an opportunity to reflect on what they and their wider service had done during 2020. Many of them appreciated this chance to 'step back' and said so during the interviews. For us, as academic researchers, this was useful and pleasing to hear.

In February 2021, the research team were invited to present interim results to the Public Library Strategy Advisory Group. The group, chaired by Jeanette Castle of University of West of Scotland, has been tasked by Scottish Government (through Scottish Library and Information Council) with creating a new national strategy for public libraries in Scotland following on from *Ambition and Opportunity*. This was a positive experience and the interim findings generated considerable interest which

we hope informs the deliberations of the group as they move towards the completion of the new national strategy.

Following on from this, in March 2021, the principal investigator was invited to present the findings to a meeting of the Association of Public Library Services (APLS) which brings together all of the thirty-two library services in Scotland. Many of the members of this group were people who had been interviewed as part of this research, and so the opportunity to present to them was valuable in terms of confirming the soundness of the analysis and the interpretation. After the presentation, members of APLS fed back on the value and importance of the research, the accuracy of the picture that it had captured, and the issues which need to be considered more fully in the future. One member of the group said that it had made them quite emotional to see the things that had been done across the country, and because it captured in an authentic way the voice of the sector during 2020.

We, perhaps, anticipated that it would be straightforward or at the least more straightforward to identify examples of best practice across the sector. There are some examples that we have talked about. However, the reality is that the best practice of all was the way in which most library services demonstrated their closeness to their own particular communities and how they responded according to those needs. It would be invidious, for example, to single out one online BookBug over another and say and say that it was best. However, more generally, the adoption of video content and streaming was very definitely an example of broad good practice. Digital skills and the confidence to do things new and imaginative have certainly increased across the whole public library sector in Scotland (amongst all levels of library staff) and these will undoubtedly be initiatives carried on beyond the end of the pandemic.

One element of good practice which really does require to be highlighted is the way in which managers encouraged, support and perhaps even gently cajoled their staff to stretch themselves, to try new things and to let their imagination run riot. Where creative and innovative content was developed it was done because staff had autonomy and backing to 'try something different'. This liberation was important and is, perhaps, an enduring legacy of the period. It is often said that managers like to pin things down whereas leaders like to set them free, and this was evident in the autonomy and encouragement given to staff.

The extent to which this research is useful in informing policy can only be observed in the weeks, months and years ahead. Nevertheless, we believe that it does offer an in-depth picture of how libraries responded and how library services saw themselves in 2020, as well as how their role and offerings may evolve after the pandemic.

Recommendations and looking to the future

In making recommendations at the end of this report we are conscious that practitioners actually do the things that we academic only speak about. They deal with the multitude of issues and situations on a daily basis that we perhaps only hypothesise about. In this spirit, we acknowledge that many of the things in this report are undoubtedly known to the professional community but hope that by looking broadly across Scotland we present a wider picture. Indeed, we hope that it also presents a picture which is recognisable in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and beyond, and that some of the lessons are transferable and applicable. In this spirit, we also offer the following recommendations:

- **Digital content and national platforms require a conversation.** The research highlighted the variable levels of eBook and eAudio provision across the thirty-two local authority areas in Scotland. This does, of course, reflect different priorities, demographics, and communities in exactly the same way as traditional hardcopy book stock does. A significant number of interviewees mentioned the need for a conversation to take place to see if something more collaborative could be achieved. It is important to recognise different procurement process, platforms and budgetary constraints and there is no obvious or easy solution. Nevertheless, the lockdown has shown the importance of e-lending services and an exploratory dialogue around this is a natural recommendation. This may be something to look at across the nation, with the Scottish Government having a role in the process, or it could take the form of smaller groups of local authorities or trusts coming together to share the burdens and benefits of digital content. Our recommendation is in line with the Carnegie UK Trust study which recommended that there may be a role for the UK Government to engender more cross-sector, national and even international collaboration to address the 'current e-lending ecosystem'[53]. There is perhaps a feeling that the current approach has led to a postcode lottery in terms of digital offerings, and that it places a heavy burden on the budgets of individual services. Despite the difficulties of a national approach, it would appear there could be significant benefits to exploring a more collaborative solution and having the conversation is important.

- **Libraries are digital enablers.** Interviewees often emphasised what most people know, namely that they are not just repositories for books. There is also some powerful testimony here about the digital divide and about how important libraries are for people who cannot otherwise meaningfully access or engage with the digital society. With government rightly stressing the importance of digital connectivity for the future of the nation – economically, educationally, socially and culturally – it is vital that the role of public libraries in providing access to equipment, WiFi and in helping people use technology

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[53] Carnegie UK Trust (2020). *Making a Difference: Libraries, Lockdown and Looking Ahead* available at: https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie_uk_trust/2020/10/13090335/Overarching-report-Making-a-Difference-1.pdf

effectively is properly understood. Highlighting the role of public libraries as digital enablers does involve advocacy (mentioned previously) but it goes beyond that; the digital role of libraries is absolutely part of their core function and offer.

- **Continued advocacy for libraries is crucial.** There are two principal areas in which this research recommends continued strong advocacy. The first relates specifically to what has been observed during the COVID-19 lockdown about the extent to which there is understanding of the role that libraries can and should play in an emergency. Libraries have a place in an emergency and this should be well understood. Their essential nature for many of their users was not perhaps as widely acknowledged (beyond the professional community) as it should be, and this requires strong promotion to decision-makers. Aligned to this the role that libraries and specifically reading play in supporting mental health and wellbeing; this must continue to be reinforced. The second area where continued advocacy is required is, perhaps, more general than just the lockdown situation and that relates to statutory provision and what constitutes an adequate library service. It was disturbing to hear some of the negative views reported about statutory provision. It is acknowledged that this was only in small minority of places but even a small number is unfortunate.

- **Physical spaces matter and they matter very profoundly.** Anyone who thought that the migration of library services to a (largely) online offer because of COVID-19 would lead to a digital only service in the future is wrong, misguided and poorly informed. The evidence gathered here shows that the services themselves long to get back to offering the communal, civic space that their users value. The physical spaces at the heart of communities are central to the public library brand and offering. There is very real need, moving forward, for the mix of digital and physical to be better understood and that a real sense of what a 'phygital' hybrid service looks like in practice has to be developed by the sector. This recommendation echoes the sentiments of the Carnegie UK Trust which called for a hybrid model of digital and physical service delivery and a look to developing standards for this. A large part of this work will also take the form of re-evaluating how public library services use their online spaces – with further work needed to ensure websites and social media are being used effectively to support the journey towards a truly 'phygital' service.

- **Maintaining the agility and flexibility created is important.** During lockdown public libraries – like every other organisation – had to find completely new ways of delivering their services. There were inevitably challenges and constraints but necessity is the mother of invention. There are very good examples of innovation and often this has been made possible because administrative barriers have come down, organisations and managers may have looked benevolently on doing things differently, and because many

individual members of staff had greater autonomy. This agility and flexibility has been important and, as far as possible, organisational or administrative barriers should not be reinstated after the pandemic is over.

When the idea behind this research was first conceived in the spring of 2020 Scotland had been in lockdown for a matter of weeks. There was a high level of anxiety about all aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the new way of working which everyone found themselves in. It was not fully understood or, indeed, anticipated that a year on further lockdowns would be necessary and that things had would not have 'returned to normal'. Much has happened in the weeks and months since the data collection for this study was completed. And, at the time of writing, libraries remain closed.

This research, therefore, offers a snapshot of service over a tumultuous period in 2020. There have been difficulties and complexities but there has also been much to commend and during this period Scotland's public libraries have played an important role in sustaining the communities that they serve.
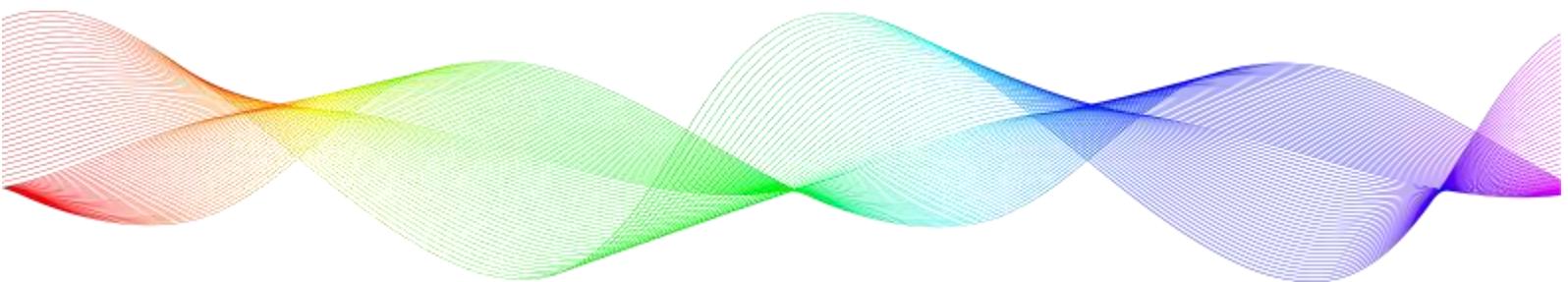
Appendix 1: social media analysis

LAA		Furloughed/ staff status	Lending	DIGITAL		SOCIAL MEDIA			SERVICES DELIVERED			
Authority	Model			E-Book/ E-audio	PressReader etc	Facebook	Twitter	Other	Activities	Bookbug	Training/learning	Social
			including delivery service						*Crafts etc*		**theory test/language learning etc*	*Quizzes etc*
Aberdeen	Council											
Aberdeenshire	Trust											
Angus	Trust											
Argyll and Bute	Trust											
Clackmannanshire	Council											
Dumfries and Galloway	Council											
Dundee	Trust											
East Ayrshire	Trust											
East Dunbartonshire	Trust											
East Lothian	Council											
East Renfrewshire	Trust											
Edinburgh	Council											
Falkirk	Trust											
Fife	Trust											
Glasgow	Trust											
Highland	Trust											
Inverclyde	Council											
Midlothian	Council											
Moray	Council											
Na h-Eileanan Siar	Council											
North Ayrshire	Council											
North Lanarkshire	Trust											
Orkney	Council											
Perth and Kinross	Trust											
Renfrewshire	Council											
Scottish Borders	Trust											
Shetland	Council											
South Ayrshire	Council											
South Lanarkshire	Trust											
Stirling	Council											
West Dunbartonshire	Council											
West Lothian	Council											

Social media analysis template part one

LAA		SUPPORTING					SHARING / PROMOTING RESOURCES				Observations on social media reach
Authority	Model	Local History/ local people	Schooling/ children	Mental Health	Physical Health/ food and diet	Business	Other	Adults	Children	Other	
		Includes sense of community			**gardening also*	**jobseeking, skills and business advice*					
Aberdeen	Council										
Aberdeenshire	Trust										
Angus	Trust										
Argyll and Bute	Trust										
Clackmannanshire	Council										
Dumfries and Galloway	Council										
Dundee	Trust										
East Ayrshire	Trust										
East Dunbartonshire	Trust										
East Lothian	Council										
East Renfrewshire	Trust										
Edinburgh	Council										
Falkirk	Trust										
Fife	Trust										
Glasgow	Trust										
Highland	Trust										
Inverclyde	Council										
Midlothian	Council										
Moray	Council										
Na h-Eileanan Siar	Council										
North Ayrshire	Council										
North Lanarkshire	Trust										
Orkney	Council										
Perth and Kinross	Trust										
Renfrewshire	Council										
Scottish Borders	Trust										
Shetland	Council										
South Ayrshire	Council										
South Lanarkshire	Trust										
Stirling	Council										
West Dunbartonshire	Council										
West Lothian	Council										

Social media analysis template part two

Appendix 2: interview questions

At the beginning of lockdown

1. Can you tell us briefly about the circumstances around the closure of the libraries in March?

2. What kind of emergency planning or contingencies had you in place for such an eventuality?

    a. [How successful do you think your contingencies were?]

    b. [Just thinking about contingencies, what have you learned from the events in late March or early April that would influence your approach to planning?]

3. What were the biggest challenges during the first month?

4. Were staff all deployed to work from home for the service, or where some deployed elsewhere, or furloughed?

Moving to a virtual service

5. Thinking about your websites and social media, how would you describe your online provision generally?

6. How would you describe your e-lending provision in particular?

7. Have there been particular trends over the period of lockdown?

8. What did you do to engage with communities and users?

Organisational challenges

9. How did the library service's response fit in with that of the wider organisation?

10. Where their wider organisational challenges (e.g. decisions taken by the council or the trust more generally) that impacted on the library?

    a. [What has been the impact of staff being furloughed?]

11. Has ICT infrastructure been adequate for the things the library service wanted to do?

12. Has the library service been at odds with the organisation at any point (for example, wanting to do something that was allowed or not possible technologically)?

13. Have your staff had more autonomy during lockdown, and if so what have they done?

14. Have your staff come up with new or innovative things?

Your communities

15. How would you characterise the impact of the lockdown on your particular communities? You might want to reflect on the nature of the places you service, for example, demographically, socially or economically?

16. Do you feel that your virtual service has reached out to all part of the community?

17. What do you think the implications are in connection with the disappearance of services that couldn't be run virtually (like outreach activities, the mobile service or the use of the physical library space)?

18. What do you think the impacts have been on the communities that you service?

19. Do you have hard evidence of the library service having made a positive contribution to communities during lockdown? If so, what sort of thing have you found, and if not, how might you try to gather such evidence?

Reopening

20. What position are you currently in today with regard to reopening?

21. What challenges emerged when it came to re-opening libraries?

22. What were community attitudes like about re-opening?

The future

23. How to you honestly rate what you've done over the lockdown?

24. What would you do differently or will do differently in the coming months as the pandemic continues?

25. What do think the challenges are for libraries as long as the pandemic continues and afterwards?

    a. [Do you think there may be people who think physical libraries are now less important?]

26. What is your frank opinion of the library service being in direct-council control / in a culture trust / in a leisure trust?

Finally

27. Beyond not being able to have libraries open, what is the thing that has most frustrated you during lockdown?

28. What have you done that you are most proud of?

Appendix 3: research equality statement

Background: Public libraries are predicated upon being safe and neutral public spaces which provide a universal service to all members of the community. Public libraries provide a highly-valued *universal* service to the people of Scotland: a service is about opening opportunities for everyone, irrespective of their background. It is linked with the promotion of literacy through the encouragement of reading and education, access to a wide range of information and knowledge, open to all, and all within safe, tolerant and neutral public space. This research adheres to those principles.

Formulation and assessment: The equality impact assessment for this research was carried out consonant with the Robert Gordon University's Research Governance Policy, the Equality Impact Assessment tool, with reference to the Equalities Act, the Concordat to Support Research Integrity and the wider Equality and Diversity policies of the university in respect of human resources.

All academic or research staff member, engaged in research activity, must apply equality and diversity principles to their research (including the avoidance of implicit biases) and treat individuals with dignity and respect. Research activities are subject to both equality and diversity principles and ethical research standards as outlined in the Research Ethics and Governance Policy. This includes ensuring that equality analysis is carried out for all new research activity in accordance with the University's arrangements and principles. The research project had Professor Sarah Pedersen (RGU's Equality and Diversity Champion for Gender) as an advisor for the duration of the entire project and she was consulted in the formulation of this equalities impact assessment.

The project will also adhere to the Concordat to Support Research Integrity.
> (1) Honesty in all aspects of research, including in the presentation of research goals, intentions and findings; in reporting on research methods and procedures; in gathering data; in using and acknowledging the work of other researchers; and in conveying valid interpretations and making justifiable claims based on research findings.
> (2) Rigour, in line with prevailing disciplinary norms and standards: in performing research and using appropriate methods; in adhering to an agreed protocol where appropriate; in drawing interpretations and conclusions from the research; and in communicating the results.
> (3) Transparency and open communication in declaring conflicts of interest; in the reporting of research data collection methods; in the analysis and interpretation of data; in making research findings widely available, which includes sharing negative results as appropriate; and in presenting the work to other researchers and to the general public.
> (4) Care and respect for all participants in and subjects of research, including humans, animals, the environment and cultural objects. Those engaged with

research must also show care and respect for the stewardship of research and scholarship for future generation.

Equality and Diversity in the context of this project: Central to the objectives of the research is the active intention to gather evidence which indicates the universal nature of services provided by public libraries during lockdown. **Equality and Diversity in the context of the research questions:** the research is predicated on gathering data about *all kinds* of activities and initiatives developed by Scottish public libraries during the lockdown period. In this respect, public libraries will replicated digital their fundamental premise of being 'universal service to the people of Scotland'. Public libraries operate both as agents of social change and as a key strand in the social safety net, providing essential lifelines to jobs, educational opportunity, literacy, health resources and access to government and community services for all, especially the least advantaged. Public libraries are neutral services for *all* members of the community, serving them without favour or discrimination and these approaches have been mirrored in this research.

Age – how services have evolved and been developed to cater for all age groups from the very young to the very old – with data collection instruments being cognisant of, and informed by, the demographic profile of Scotland and its constituent local authority areas.

Disability or Health – evidence of how public libraries have sought to target services to those with disability characteristics or particular health and medical concerns. This is consonant with Strategic Aim 4 of *Ambition and Opportunity* (the national strategy for public libraries in Scotland) which highlights their role in contributing to social wellbeing, tackling social isolation, inequality, disadvantage, fractured communities and ill health.

Race or ethnicity – evidence will be gathered about how public libraries have approached supporting BAME communities during lockdown, cognisant particularly of two key issues (firstly, the possible particular health risks to BAME communities, and the significance of the Black Lives Matters movement during the lockdown period). The BAME population in Scotland is around 4%, a smaller proportion than the United Kingdom as a whole and particular care was taken when considering generalisability or transferability of findings in this regard.

Sexual Orientation – public libraries have a long track-record in supporting the LGBTQI+ communities, particularly during the teenage years and they continue to do so. Evidence was sought of particular initiatives that library services have implemented for these communities. The same maybe said about Gender, gender identity or gender reassignment.

Faith and Belief – public libraries are traditionally neutral about and inclusive of all faith and belief communities without actively supporting or promoting one over another.

Nationality or origin – as with other protected characteristics, evidence was gathered about approaches services have taken for those whose origins is from outside the United Kingdom. In recent years, libraries have diversified services significantly to cater for such communities (with, anecdotally, one library services going from providing material in four languages to forty-eight in a ten year period).

Equality and Diversity in the context of the data collection and analysis: Gathering evidence about this range and diversity of the services, has been a positive benefit for this research project and therefore the data collection instruments were designed with this in mind, making reference to the characteristics and issues alluded to above. The subsequent interviews did not discriminate on any of the grounds noted above; a purposive sampling methodology was adopted to select interviewee from the management of Scottish public library services (that is to say, those people best placed to answer the questions and inform the research). Any elements of the research which involved data collection from users (although the project was not a 'user study' in the traditional sense as understood in the library science discipline) was as diverse and inclusive as possible.

Summary: as noted throughout, public libraries are safe, neutral and universal service, free at the point of use for all citizens. This project has been embedded within that philosophy and it has been of positive benefit to the research to gather, analyse and interpret the most inclusive and most diverse evidence available.