counterculture

Library Transformation Digital Review

Durham County Council

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1. Executive summary

This report sets out the challenges, issues and opportunities facing Durham County Council (DCC) as it works to understand how digital, in all its forms, can be used to transform County Durham Libraries' service offer and the way it is delivered internally. This document is written within a landscape of wider organisational changes and uncertainties including an ongoing library staff restructure and the absence of a current library strategy.

The report offers four phases that cover the next five years and begins in Phase 1 with the development of a comprehensive roadmap. This roadmap and the digital transformation it will bring must be considered in response to an overarching strategy for the libraries which needs to form a key component of activity during this phase. The new strategy will need to be guided by a shared set of values, serve the Council's and County Durham Libraries' priorities and reflect the needs of the residents and communities the libraries serve.

County Durham Libraries' digital goals are to:

- Expand access

- Improve and enhance services

- Deliver innovation and improvements

- Optimise investment and resources

- Maximise data to inform decision making and drive change

County Durham Libraries will do this by:

- Developing a solid digital and technological infrastructure for our libraries.

- Building digital confidence, literacy and skills for our staff.

- Being ambitious and applying best practice in our digital work.

- Bringing the library to our users through technology.

- Building connection and interaction with our communities.

- Supporting our users to bridge the digital poverty divide.

- Supporting innovation, testing and learning through appropriate technology for staff and communities.

- Using data to inform a review of services and resources and responding to communities' needs.

Like many library services, the digital capacity of DCC and its staff teams are a work in progress. Building the digital confidence, literacy and skills of the team and its leadership are a vital foundation for the scale of change this report sets out.

Breaking activity into phases allows for an iterative approach, with the commissioning and building of new services not taking place until Phase 2 when the roadmap is complete. Phase 3 is for implementation and embedding of the new systems and Phase 4 for reviewing the impact and progress and prioritising the next steps.

Phase1: 2024   **Phase 2: 2025**   **Phase 3: 2026**   **Phase 4: 2027-29**

| Develop a Rodmap | Commission & Build | Implement and Embed | Review, Evaluate and Refresh Priorities |

The approach suggested places an emphasis on getting the digital basics right first, as this will provide the necessary technical infrastructure, understanding and evidence that will provide a robust foundation for the future. Critical to this foundation is the simultaneous development of new digital tools and faculties, alongside the development of the staff to ensure people have the skills and confidence to master the new systems and workflows that will be created.

The report draws on best practice from within the library sector and is informed by a small staff and customer consultation. Each phase builds on the existing evidence and data so that the library team can work together to understand and build the right measures of success against their own strategy and priorities.

The potential positive impact of the transformation this report covers will make it possible for County Durham Libraries to offer its communities a digital library service for the future.

Summary of phased approach

Phase 1: Develop a roadmap	
Timeframe: Six months to one year **Focus**: Aligning thinking. Plan and prepare for delivery of the transformation, focus on the priority areas.	**Actions, inputs, outputs** • Develop values and priorities that sit alongside the new library strategy • Consider where initial 'quick wins' might be developed to build confidence of customers and staff • Review staff skills, structure, and capacity for the transformation • Design a change management plan and communications plan for staff and customers • Build a business case for investment • Explore opportunities for partnerships, internal and external • Agree the specifications for a new LMS • Examine supplier frameworks • Carry out soft market testing of products • Continue to review excellence in the sector and opportunities for learning and development.

Phase 2: Commission and build	
Timeframe: one year **Focus**: Making things happen. Commission and build the infrastructure for transformation and launch a programme of staff digital skills development.	**Actions, inputs, outputs** • Secure funding and investment • Build the specifications required for new systems • Undertake a procurement process • Commission supplier(s) • Implement a programme of staff training across digital systems and services • Develop partnerships, internal and external.

Phase 3: Implement and embed	
Timeframe: *Nine months to one year* *Focus*: *Implementing new systems and technology and embedding the change with customers and staff across the service.*	***Actions, inputs, outputs*** • *Test, implement and embed the new technology and services* • *Deliver staff training on the new LMS* • *Launch the new LMS and front facing platform.*

Phase 4: Review, evaluate and refresh priorities	
Timeframe: *One to two years* **Focus**: *Depending upon staff skills and capacity, as well and partnership working and funding, further phases should look to bring additional innovation in customer experience and services.*	***Actions, inputs, outputs*** • *Pause, review and evaluate progress to date* • *Analyse data and other reporting methods to aid evaluation* • *Revisit values, purposes and priorities of the library strategy and ways in which further digital developments can support delivery and outcomes* • *Celebrate successes and achievements to date* • *Review data collection methods and KPIs to ensure fit for purpose* • *Refresh, reframe and establish priorities for remaining one or two years* • *Plan for next digital strategy.*

2. Introduction

In 2020-22 Counterculture carried out a libraries' needs assessment for Durham County Council (DCC) and produced a clear evidence-based understanding of how the library service within County Durham could respond to the changing needs of the community and better shape provision for future users, in line with best practice. This commission formed the first phase of the Council's extensive consultation on libraries. One of the key recommendations from the needs assessment was for a review of the digital services and to develop a digital strategy. In Summer 2023 Counterculture was commissioned to deliver this second phase project, to review the use of technology and the online presence for County Durham Libraries, and to produce a digital framework for the service which includes a clear digital strategy encompassing both operational and service delivery needs and digital content.

2.1 Objectives

The specific objectives for this phase were to identify:

- The investment needed for a digital infrastructure to enable the modernisation, transformation and expansion of provision and access to DCC library services.

- The investment needed in digital operational technology including but not limited to a Library App, Self-Service options, online payments.

- The requirements and options for a library website so that the service is brought up to the same standard as other library services across England.

The strategy should ensure a vibrant digital offer, providing increased relevance to existing customers and an understanding of how this can attract new customers. The review and strategy should consider how library services can experiment with and expand the digital offer. Underpinning the strategy should be a consideration of the staff and customer skills needed to support an enhanced and ever-changing digital environment.

This work must take a long-term approach to digital infrastructure and innovation, moving towards platforms and ways of working that can continue to develop and adapt as technologies and needs change.

The technology should also respond to the opportunity for data collection and communications that will enhance customers' experience of the library service.

2.2   Scope

The digital strategy encompasses all software, devices and equipment that can be used to access, deliver, record and communicate library services, within and out with the physical library spaces. This includes but is not limited to Library Management Systems (LMS), Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology, self-service machines, Open+ technology, computers, printers, photocopiers, loanable devices, public access Wi-Fi, contactless and online payments, eBooks and eResources, library apps, augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) tools, technology repair, digital skills learning, maker spaces, virtual events, websites, social media, digital screens, and data collection.

The strategy is designed to support digital transformation across all library services in County Durham. As the first digital strategy for County Durham Libraries, it has been created with a five-year term in mind to set the direction of travel for the future.

3. Methodology

3.1   Desk research

Counterculture carried out an analysis of the current digital services and infrastructure. This included:

- Reviewing existing policies and strategies, including DCC's Digital Strategy, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's (DCMS) Digital Strategy 2022, the Digital Universal Library Offer, DCMS Culture is Digital policy and recommendations.

- Reviewing data on digital use, digital needs and recommendations identified in County Durham Libraries Needs Assessment report, as well as updated or other relevant data and documentation produced since this work was completed. This included reports on computer use and Wi-Fi use in County Durham Libraries.

- Producing a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) matrix based on user feedback that focuses on operational and service delivery needs, as well as customer needs and content.

- Mapping and reviewing the digital platforms, tools and services in use, suppliers and contract arrangements, and an options analysis for alternatives where appropriate.

- A comparator analysis within the libraries sector to provide a benchmark of potential digital solutions and activities and the investment needed.

- Reviewing digital marketing, communications and brand building with existing and new customers in mind.

- Understanding existing staff skills and reviewing of sector evidence for digital skills in libraries.

3.2 Stakeholder engagement

Desk research accompanied an online focus group with customers and one with staff, as well as online one-to-one interviews with key stakeholders. These activities built on the engagement carried out during the needs assessment, which included a survey, seven in person and five online sessions with the public, and two sessions with staff. During this earlier engagement, respondents were asked which digital services they use and what they would like to see offered in the future. The feedback was presented in the needs assessment report (pages 54-57) and should be read in conjunction with this document. Further discussions in this phase of work, although limited to a very small sample, were designed to inform understanding of best practice, expectations, aspirations and potential issues for the digital strategy and ensure relevance of the proposed framework.

Customer focus group

An online customer focus group was promoted through libraries to encourage users to share their thoughts on the current digital offer and how it could be strengthened. Only one person joined the discussion and was asked about the digital library services that they, their families and communities are aware of and use most often, which digital services work well, what improvements could be made, other digital services County Durham Libraries should consider, and what digital skills customers might need.

Feedback was collected from customers who declined the invitation to join the session. They explained that they were not comfortable using QR codes, weblinks, nor videocall platforms to access the virtual focus group. They said that they would like more support in libraries for customers struggling to use technology.

Staff focus group

A similar session was held for library staff to share their experiences and views on the digital services currently available and the potential for an expanded offer in the future. Staff were asked about the current strengths and weakness of the digital services, what improvements could be made, customers' and communities greatest digital needs, other inspiring digital assets that County Durham Libraries should consider, the skills and support staff might need to be able to make the most of an improved digital offer, the challenges in delivering a vibrant digital offer, and their vision for the digital services in 5 to 10 years. 11 library staff members attended the session.

Stakeholder, sector and supplier interviews

Interviews were carried out with a range of external stakeholders leading prominent work in digital developments and skills in public libraries. These included:

- Dave Lloyd, Lead for the Universal Library Offer: Digital & Information and Service Development Manager, Coventry Libraries

- Jill Brown, Digital Grants Manager, Library On

- Jo Cornish, Chief Development Officer, CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals)

- Amy Hearn Digital Inclusion Manager, 100% Digital Leeds

- Greg Stringer, Principal Librarian: Development, Leeds Libraries

- Liam Garnett, Senior Libraries for Digital, Leeds Libraries.

Research and conversations focussed on examples of best practice and innovation, funding opportunities, skills and training for staff and the public.

Internally, DCC's corporate marketing and communications lead shared insights into the strengths and weaknesses of current digital communications tools and practices and the libraries project team were interviewed individually as needed and provided additional data, insights, and information.

In addition, interviews and conversations took place with a range of suppliers including Axiell, SirsiDynix, Innovative, ESS, Civica, Nexbib and Lyngsoe.

4. National context

"Public libraries are helping people with no or low digital skills access essential services every single day."

Isobel Hunter, CEO, Libraries Connected

4.1   Universal Library Offers

The Universal Library Offers, developed by Libraries Connected, demonstrate the power of public libraries to enrich the lives of individuals and their communities as a streamlined and consistent framework. The framework ensures that the offers remain central to the role and aim of Libraries Connected to support the core public library offer and to drive library innovation and development. A valuable range of practical tools, guidance and resources are available on the Libraries Connected website which link to each individual offer. The current Universal Library offers are centred on:

- **Reading** - Engage, Imagine, Discover.

- **Information and Digital - Inform, Inspire, Innovate.** Through the Information and Digital Offer libraries provide quality information and digital support. Libraries enable individuals and communities to develop learning skills to find answers and to inform life choices. The offer helps children and adults to engage and feel safe online. It ensures resources and opportunities are accessible and it embraces creative and innovative technology.

- **Culture and Creativity** - Explore, Create, Participate.

- **Health and Wellbeing** - Healthier, Happier, Connected.

Two additional offers underpin all four of the Universal Offers:

- **The Children's Promise**, developed with The Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL), ensures that children are actively involved in decisions about the services that affect them as well as being offered opportunities to volunteer.

- **Vision and Print Impaired People's Promise**, developed with Share the Vision, ensures public libraries offer a fully accessible library service, comprising a collection of accessible reading materials and information in physical or digital forms.

4.2　Digital Inclusion

Defining digital inclusion

The University of Liverpool defines the Minimum Digital Living Standard as:

"A minimum digital standard of living includes, but is more than, having accessible internet, adequate equipment, and the skills, knowledge and support people need. It is about being able to communicate, connect and engage with opportunities safely and with confidence." [1]

Communications and Digital Committee report on Digital Exclusion

A report from Parliament's Communications and Digital Committee on Digital Exclusion, published in June 2023, found that:

"there are significant geographical variations in digital access. Despite progress on broadband and mobile rollout in recent years, rural areas remain more likely to face difficulties accessing a decent internet connection." The report recognised that "the shift towards digital by default public services has not been accompanied by commensurate support for those who struggle with digital access. Libraries and community organisations have taken on additional responsibilities to fill these gaps, but without sufficient resources and training. And that "The Government's digital inclusion strategy refresh should include support for place-based in-person initiatives to help those who cannot navigate online access to essential services. This could include boosting the role of libraries, community centres and local amenities as inclusion hubs, in partnership with businesses."

The Lloyds Bank Consumer Digital Index 2022, commissioned by the bank on behalf of the Department for Education, shows that the North East has the second lowest digital capabilities but was the region that had made the most progress in the previous 12 months. 10% of adults who cannot do any of the 26 Life Tasks (the tasks are based around Communicating, Handling Information and Content, Transacting, Problem Solving and Being Safe and Legal Online) are likely to live in the North East. Data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) from 2019 classified 12.2 per cent of the population in the North East as "internet non-users", compared with 7 per cent for London.

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[1] Minimum Digital Living Standard www.mdls.org.uk

Digital inclusion in libraries in England

A report from the Good Things Foundation in collaboration with Libraries Connected in June 20023 on <u>Digital inclusion in libraries in England</u> found that in the UK, around 10 million adults lack foundation level digital skills, around 2 million households have no home internet access, and at least 2 million households struggle to afford broadband or mobile data connectivity. (Sources cited in Digital Nation 2022).
The report highlights the vital role that libraries play in *"the ecosystem of digital inclusion support in communities"* but that *"provision varies between and within library services."* Limited staff, volunteers, funding and outdated IT infrastructure were seen to limit what libraries can offer and over half of library services did not have a digital inclusion strategy. Partnerships and collaboration are seen as key to reaching communities or meeting specific needs.

The report makes several recommendations for national and local government, for library services, for the Good Things Foundation and for Libraries Connected.

The recommendations for library services were to:

- Use the [Framework for Digital Inclusion in Libraries](#) to identify whether / how to evolve the service's digital inclusion offer.

- Develop a digital inclusion strategy – if not already in place – to set a clear direction for delivery and partnerships.

- Use funding opportunities (such as Arts Council England's (ACE) National Lottery Project Grants programme) to evolve and embed digital inclusion provision.

- Partner with community organisations and others – locally and nationally – and coordinate efforts on digital inclusion, playing to respective strengths. [2]

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[2] https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/insights/digital-inclusion-in-libraries-in-england/

Framework for thinking about digital inclusion strategy and delivery

The framework describes five areas of library services' and branches work on digital inclusion. It aims to support libraries in their strategic thinking about, and advocacy for, the role they play alongside others in closing the digital divide. For each of the five areas, there is a practice note that looks in more depth at what's involved.

Local ecosystem – place-based partnerships
e.g. relationships/partnerships with local authority, with voluntary and community sector, referrals/signposting, providing space, convening/being willing to convene with others

Digital Inclusion Support Offer
e.g. skills provision, digital support, access to connectivity and devices in the library/outside

Skills & Empowerment	Data Connectivity	Devices
- Independent learning in the library - Bespoke learning: 1-2-1 support or drop-ins - Supported learning in groups and classes - Training library staff in core digital skills - Training volunteers to be digital champions - Training staff and public in safeguarding, privacy and security online - Employability support - Financial inclusion - Health and wellbeing - Referrals and signposting to services - Support for small businesses	- Use of public WiFi while in the library - Free mobile data (National Databank) - Info, help or provision with mobile data and home broadband ('mesh networks') - Able to connect with services that are inaccessible or clunky to use on mobile phones - Up-to-date library computers with latest browser - Computers and software that assure safeguarding, privacy and security	- Use of desktops or tablets while in the library - Loaned devices for home use - Gifted devices for home use - Access to specialist kit (e.g. for designing games, video editing) - Charging points for people's own devices - Safeguarding, privacy and security measures to make loaned and gifted devices safe

Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI)
Ensuring equity, diversity and inclusion is embedded in work on skills, connectivity, devices

5. County Durham context

5.1 Library network

County Durham Libraries provides a physical and digital offer across 39 libraries, 12 of which are town centre-based, 9 of which are co-located in other venues, including leisure centres, and 27 are smaller community-based, a full list of libraries can be found [here](). In addition to the physical buildings an accessible and inclusive service is provided into communities via the Mobile Library service, Book Bus and Books on Wheels. Each library has a range of resources available including books, computers, printing, Wi-Fi, events and activities, local history, and health zones. Membership of the library is free and open to all and almost all services are free at the point of access.

5.2 Current digital services

Current infrastructure and offer

County Durham Libraries' current digital and technology infrastructure consists of several core and add on systems either built in house or from sector suppliers.

The Library Management System is central to the infrastructure. The current system, Halcyon, is an inhouse solution which has now reached its limits. Other in-house infrastructure includes self-service machines, in operation at two libraries, which staff report is poorly used, and an in-house PC booking and print solutions system. Typically, library services adopt these technologies via service specialist suppliers who offer advanced or additional functionality than County Durham Libraries' current systems, and support with maintenance.

County Durham Libraries' public digital offer, Library Online, enables customers to join the library, browse the library catalogue, request items, check for new titles and reading recommendations, purchase second-hand book stock, access their library accounts and book a public access internet PC in any library. In addition, it provides access to a wide range of digital resources including eBooks, eAudiobooks through Bolinda's BorrowBox; eMagazines, eNewspapers and eComics, which have been provided through Overdrive's Libby but are now being trialled on BorrowBox; as well as a range of eResources including Ancestry, British Standards Online, Encyclopaedia Britannica Online and Oxford Online. County Durham Libraries' current offer in respect of eBooks and eResources is consistent with comparators within the sector and there is a good range of content available.

In addition to the software, every library also offers free access to computers, currently ChromeBoxes, Wi-Fi, and printing and photocopying for which users are charged a small fee. Printing procedures are designed to ensure confidentiality of the documents.

The closure of libraries during the pandemic saw a surge in access and demand for digital resources and services. In response, the budget for digital materials, eBooks, eAudiobooks, eMagazines was increased and a new subscription to eNewspapers was introduced. Providers also enabled customers to access services from their home devices and with a temporary library card that were previously only available on library computers, such as Ancestry. The library service pivoted its events and activities offer online from Summer 2020 onwards, and delivered author talks, crafts and artist sessions, quizzes, and an online reading group through online platforms. Local creatives were supported and a new digital suite of online professionally curated activities such as craft and storytelling sessions were created.

In 2023, there is only one online book group and all other activities and events have reverted to in person delivery. County Durham Libraries continues to trial new digital programmes for its customers. Most recently it tested Featherbed Tales, a digital story sharing service. Public take up has been very low, however, and the licence will not be renewed.

Digital use

Library use data in Figure 1 below shows an overall decline in computer use across County Durham Libraries, although the last two years show the number of users increasing after the drop off during the pandemic.

Computer Use
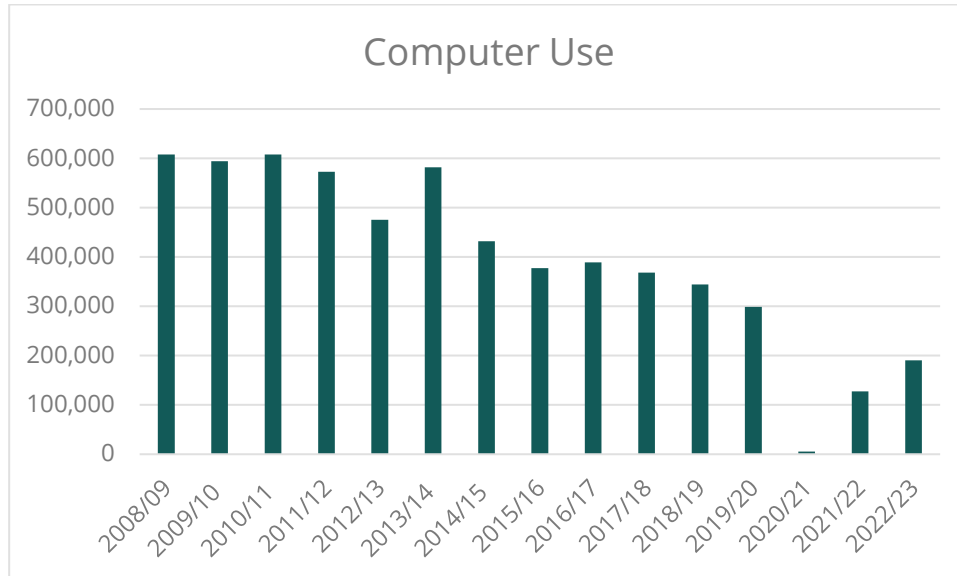
Figure 2 shows an example of the maximum number of client users of DCC's public Wi-Fi in several libraries. This snapshot records use at 14:00, a popular time, on 4 July 2023. This captures an average number of people using their own devices in the libraries. It would be worth comparing this data for a number of days over several months or at different times of the day to better understand trends and needs.

Number of Wif-Fi connections
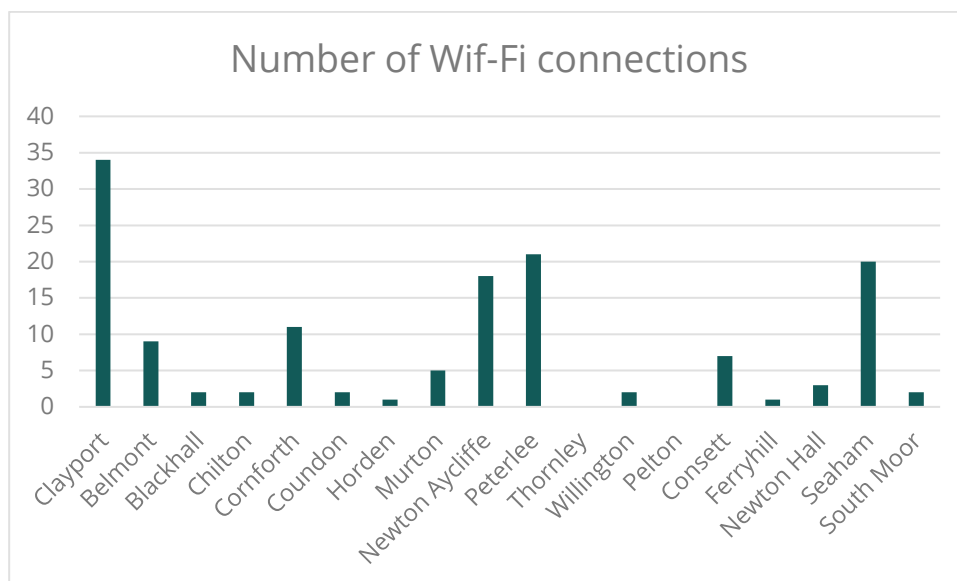
Figure 3 shows the actual number of users of Borrowbox's eBooks and eAudiobooks over the last five years and County Durham Libraries target for 2023-24. It reflects a general increase in digital borrowing.

Figure 3: Number of borrowers of digital resources, data from DCC
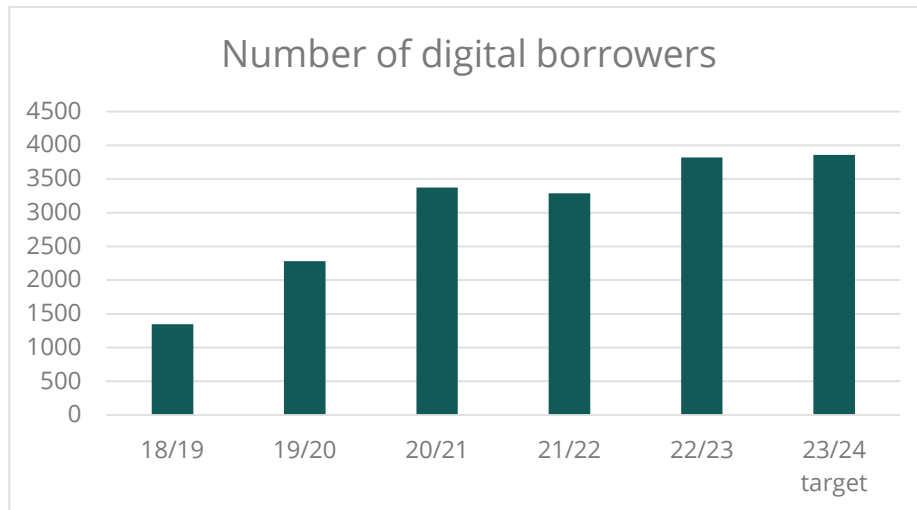
Year-on-year figures below show customer use of BorrowBox is increasing across all areas.

Figure 4: Year-on-year customer use of BorrowBox, data from Bolinda

eAudio loans			eBook loans			ePress Loans			Total loans		
Jul-22	Jul-23	Variance	Jul-22	Jul-23	Variance	Jul-22	Jul-23	Variance	Jul-22	Jul-23	Variance
7,470	8,856	19%	7,854	8,233	5%	0	3679	100%	15,324	20,768	36%

Total registered users			Active users			Average loans per active user		
Jul-22	Jul-23	Variance	Jul-22	Jul-23	Variance	Jul-22	Jul-23	Variance
13,050	15,990	23%	3,250	4,043	24%	4.72	5.14	9%

It is difficult to compare use across eResources due to the way the different providers count 'uses', 'hits', 'sessions', 'views' and 'unique access' but rough comparisons of annual figures show that Ancestry and eMagazines are the most popular with Who's Who and Oxford Reference the least used. As recent additions to the BorrowBox suite, more robust data on eNewspapers and eMagazines will be available within the next year.

5.3 Digital communications

Internal communications

DCC uses Microsoft Outlook and Teams to communicate amongst staff.

Website

The https://www.durham.gov.uk/libraries webpages provide information about how to access all the physical and digital library services, activities, learning and resources. Every library has its own page with information about opening hours, events and activities, the resources available and how to find the library. DCC uses Google Analytics to monitor use and performance of these pages.

The webpage content is managed by DCC's corporate communications team, and each library sends ad hoc requests to the central team with the updates and information they would like published.

Short videos are posted on occasion on the County Durham Libraries' Facebook pages and the Council's YouTube channel or Libraries Online channel. The corporate communications team acknowledged the benefit of using videos to provide important information for the public, particularly when trusted and knowledgeable librarians are speaking. The informational videos average 100-300 views each.

Social media

In early 2020, County Durham Libraries launched their own Facebook and Twitter accounts, ensuring they were able to provide up to date information on their services during the pandemic and to launch new initiatives, online events and activities.

The library service continues to use Facebook predominantly and has 1.8k followers (population 522k). It also uses X (formerly Twitter) and has 254 followers. This is lower than other local authority library services on Facebook, for example, Lancashire Libraries has 8.3k followers (population 1.5m), Suffolk Libraries has 6.2k (population 760k) and Norfolk Libraries 9.1k (population 916k).

The content on Facebook is frequent and varied, with contributions from all 39 libraries. It also links with the social media accounts of partners such as Durham Book Festival and Lumiere Festival. Library staff manage the social media activity, outside of corporate communications.

There needs to be further clarity and communication across corporate and library teams to ensure a shared understanding of roles, responsibilities and permissions

when managing library social media accounts as there is some uncertainty amongst library staff about what can be done.

Despite this, corporate communications considers libraries' social media accounts as a "beacon" for the rest of DCC. "*They do it really well: the tone of voice, the understanding of the offer. They show expertise. They're the best example of a Council service.*"

Digital screens

Library staff can request for information to be displayed upon digital screens in their library. Requests should be directed to DCC's Culture, Sport and Tourism digital screen manager but often are sent to corporate communications instead. There is some confusion about which digital communications need to be approved or actioned centrally and which can be arranged directly.

Templates are available for the digital screens and other communications, but they are reported to be *"successful and not successful with equal measure".*

Data collection

DCC has approximately 15,000 email addresses on a bespoke marketing platform, similar to Mailchimp. The Council is in the process of acquiring a bespoke event booking system, modelled on Eventbrite. These new systems are expected to enable DCC to store data more securely and to target communications to specific interest groups.

Currently, an organisational review of how data is captured and analysed across a range of hardware, software, systems and online platforms is underway with an ambition to establish a central repository of data for DCC and the creation of a dashboard of reporting.

5.4 Libraries and digital deprivation

County Durham's Poverty Action Plan 2022-2026 recognises that:

> "*The ability to interact digitally is essential to addressing social and economic inequalities and levelling up our communities. Many of the cheapest ways of accessing goods and services are only available online. Mainstream banking has been removed from many of our highstreets, especially in rural areas, and many educational courses and job applications are restricted to online access. In addition, people who are not using online services can lack a voice and visibility*

in the modern world, as government services and democracy increasingly move online.

However, some people can afford neither the equipment nor the broadband required to get online. When the pandemic hit in March 2020, around 51% of households with an income of less than £10,000 had home internet access, compared to 90% of households with an income of more than £40,000. Even when poorer households were physically able to access the internet, they were less likely to have the skills to utilise it. In rural areas levels, digital inclusion may be further reduced by poorer quality broadband and mobile connections."[3]

The Council's Action Plan sets the objective to identify interventions that will develop digital skills, provide access to connectivity and access to devices.

In addition, County Durham's Inclusive Economic Strategy reports that:

There is currently a lack of fast and reliable broadband in the county, where 53.1% of premises have access to ultrafast broadband compared to 71.5% nationally, with poor connectivity particularly in rural areas. There is high risk of digital exclusion in parts of Chester-le-Street, Seaham, Peterlee, Newton Aycliffe, and south of Barnard Castle.[4]

There may be a greater community reliance on libraries' connectivity in these areas. This could explain the high use of the Wi-Fi in these libraries shown in Figure 2 on page 14 of this report.

Table 1 overleaf has been taken from the needs assessment report and indicates for each of Durham's 63 wards: its total population; the percentage of that population living in LSOAs (Lower-Layer Super Output Areas) that fall within the top 10% and 30% most deprived nationally; and the libraries located within that ward (if any). These are also ranked with 1 being the ward(s) with largest population / highest levels of overall deprivation. This may give an indication of areas with the greatest digital deprivation.

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[3] https://democracy.durham.gov.uk/documents/s153930/Poverty%20Action%20Strategy%20and%20Plan%20-%20Cabinet%20-%20April%202022.pdf

[4] https://countydurhampartnership.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/County-Durham-Inclusive-Economic-Strategy-2022-2035-2.pdf, p34

Table1: Ward profiles. Source: ONS data via Durham Insight.

Ref	Ward	Total estimated population - persons all ages (2020)		% of resident population living in top 10% most deprived areas nationally		% of resident population living in top 30% most deprived areas nationally		Libraries in Ward
		Value	Ranking Order	Value	Ranking Order	Value	Ranking Order	
1	Annfield Plain	8,227	30	0.00%	26	78.30%	15	Annfield Plain
2	Aycliffe East	8,281	28	0.00%	26	49.10%	28	Newton Aycliffe
3	Aycliffe North and Middridge	10,717	13	20.20%	12	20.20%	49	-
4	Aycliffe West	7,969	39	45.20%	4	100.00%	1	-
5	Barnard Castle East	8,532	25	0.00%	26	0.00%	56	Barnard Castle
6	Barnard Castle West	8,539	24	0.00%	26	0.00%	56	-
7	Belmont	14,730	2	12.30%	22	27.40%	43	Belmont
8	Benfieldside	8,200	32	0.00%	26	10.40%	53	-
9	Bishop Auckland Town	7,861	43	0.00%	26	59.60%	21	Bishop Auckland, Woodhouse C
10	Bishop Middleham and Cornfo	3,669	61	0.00%	26	65.50%	19	Cornforth
11	Blackhalls	7,871	41	31.10%	9	74.50%	16	Blackhall
12	Brandon	10,300	14	0.00%	26	30.70%	41	Brandon
13	Burnopfield and Dipton	8,193	33	0.00%	26	19.40%	50	-
14	Chester-le-Street East	3,909	59	0.00%	26	0.00%	56	-
15	Chester-le-Street North	3,899	60	0.00%	26	42.40%	33	-
16	Chester-le-Street South	7,516	47	0.00%	26	22.80%	46	-
17	Chester-le-Street West Central	7,931	40	20.20%	12	81.30%	13	Chester le Street
18	Chilton	4,441	55	0.00%	26	44.80%	31	Chilton
19	Consett North	7,868	42	0.00%	26	36.60%	36	Consett
20	Consett South	5,610	53	0.00%	26	33.00%	38	-
21	Coundon	4,417	56	32.40%	8	68.90%	18	Coundon
22	Coxhoe	12,514	8	0.00%	26	44.70%	32	Bowburn
23	Craghead and South Moor	8,428	27	16.30%	16	100.00%	1	-
24	Crook	12,374	9	12.60%	21	50.10%	26	Crook
25	Dawdon	8,826	20	0.00%	26	69.30%	17	Seaham
26	Deerness	12,803	7	14.00%	18	39.40%	34	Esh Winning
27	Delves Lane	8,638	22	0.00%	26	25.50%	45	-
28	Deneside	7,085	51	36.80%	6	79.60%	14	-
29	Durham South	2,200	63	0.00%	26	0.00%	56	-
30	Easington	7,629	45	13.90%	20	63.20%	20	Easington Colliery
31	Elvet and Gilesgate	12,245	10	0.00%	26	0.40%	54	Durham Clayport
32	Esh and Witton Gilbert	8,172	35	0.00%	26	22.20%	47	Langley Park
33	Evenwood	8,208	31	0.00%	26	47.10%	30	-
34	Ferryhill	10,798	12	11.50%	23	88.90%	10	Ferryhill
35	Framwellgate and Newton Hall	14,597	3	0.00%	26	0.00%	56	Newton Hall
36	Horden	7,397	48	61.70%	2	100.00%	1	Horden
37	Lanchester	7,620	46	0.00%	26	22.00%	48	Lanchester
38	Leadgate and Medomsley	8,866	19	0.00%	26	50.00%	27	-
39	Lumley	7,280	49	0.00%	26	19.30%	51	-
40	Murton	8,017	37	20.80%	11	57.30%	23	Murton
41	Neville's Cross	16,042	1	0.00%	26	0.00%	56	-
42	North Lodge	3,464	62	0.00%	26	0.00%	56	-
43	Passfield	4,338	57	32.90%	7	36.10%	37	-
44	Pelton	13,062	6	0.00%	26	37.60%	35	Pelton
45	Peterlee East	7,209	50	70.30%	1	100.00%	1	Peterlee
46	Peterlee West	8,187	34	0.00%	26	83.40%	12	-
47	Sacriston	7,697	44	0.00%	26	27.00%	44	Sacriston
48	Seaham	7,011	52	0.00%	26	0.00%	56	-
49	Sedgefield	8,239	29	0.00%	26	16.10%	52	Sedgefield
50	Sherburn	8,500	26	14.00%	18	31.50%	40	-
51	Shildon and Dene Valley	13,364	4	37.40%	5	100.00%	1	Shildon
52	Shotton and South Hetton	9,394	16	16.30%	16	100.00%	1	Shotton
53	Spennymoor	11,273	11	17.60%	14	54.80%	25	-
54	Stanley	8,968	18	16.90%	15	89.20%	9	South Moor
55	Tanfield	8,057	36	0.00%	26	32.50%	39	Stanley
56	Tow Law	4,687	54	0.00%	26	100.00%	1	-
57	Trimdon and Thornley	13,207	5	9.50%	24	88.90%	10	Thornley, Trimdon
58	Tudhoe	9,398	15	8.80%	25	58.00%	22	Spennymoor
59	Weardale	7,980	38	0.00%	26	0.20%	55	Wolsingham
60	West Auckland	8,821	21	0.00%	26	48.90%	29	-
61	Willington and Hunwick	9,000	17	30.60%	10	30.60%	42	Willington
62	Wingate	4,332	58	0.00%	26	57.20%	24	Wingate
63	Woodhouse Close	8,542	23	54.20%	3	100.00%	1	-
	TOTAL	533,149		10.60%		46.90%		

5.5   County Durham Libraries strategy and vision

This digital strategy will complement the development of other local and national strategies.

DCC is in the process of writing a strategy for County Durham Libraries, building on the work which took place in Phase 1 of the libraries needs assessment. The following principles have been identified as key components of the service they will deliver.

County Durham Libraries are:

- People-centred

- Inclusive and diverse

- Place-based and relevant

- Improving and widening engagement

- Improving literacy and the joy of reading

- Celebrating their role as community assets

Durham County Council Digital Strategy 2023-2028

The [five-year strategy](#) sets out the Councils commitments to connect County Durham's communities and shows DCC's recognition of the importance of digital assets in community cohesion, health and wellbeing, partnerships and service delivery.

Vision

Digital Durham: innovative technology, customer focused, empowered communities.

Ambition

To be a modern digital Council, by putting technology and information at the heart of everything we do understanding the community we serve and supporting the achievement of Council Priorities.

This will be delivered through three themes:

Digital Customer: improve access to our services and information through technology and be responsive to customers' needs.

Digital Council: equipping staff with the digital skills and technology to deliver services effectively and efficiently.

Digital Community: improving digital infrastructure and connectivity, providing people and businesses with the skills and technology needed to enhance their lives.[5]

The strategy includes a commitment to *'equipping staff with the digital skills and technology required to deliver services effectively and efficiently'* and another commitment *'to facilitate and support a programme of digital inclusion initiatives for residents to gain digital skills, confidence and motivation'*. These plans could benefit both library staff and customers and there is a potential role for County Durham Libraries in delivering structured digital inclusion programmes for its communities.

The County Durham Vision 2035

DCC's Digital Strategy supports The County Durham Vision 2035 which sets out shared ambitions for the county, including the economy, safety, the environment and health and wellbeing.

The Inclusive Economic Strategy 2022-35, Climate Change Strategy 2022-2024, and Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-25 all reference the importance of digital technology in delivering efficient and secure services to Durham County residents, including creating digital community hubs, developing skills for employment and ensuring residents can access health and wellbeing support digitally. County Durham Libraries are well placed to provide significant support for these initiatives.

6. Library staff and customer SWOT analysis

During the focus groups conversations, library staff and customers set out their perception of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for County Durham Libraries' digital offer. The contributions made by these groups gave an insight into their direct experiences, awareness and perspectives and helped to identify gaps in shared understanding about the digital services.

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[5] https://www.durham.gov.uk/media/42162/Digital-Strategy-Consultation/pdf/DigitalStrategyConsultation.pdf?m=638188752503730000

Strengths

- Booking PCs, logging on and off and clearing data is done with ease.

- BorrowBox is well used and liked.

- Printing, photocopying and scanning is good quality.

- Email and text notifications about reservations are appreciated by customers.

- Ancestry subscriptions are well used.

- Library Online can be easily accessed with only the borrower number and surname.

Weaknesses

- Chromebox PCs are unfamiliar to most and customers need a lot of support using them. Staff have not received training on Chromebox. There is limited knowledge of how to access Microsoft applications and using the Google Suite is challenging for those who don't use it regularly. It requires people to have a Gmail account, which, in turn, requires a mobile phone for authentication. Chrome extensions cause many problems for document saving, sharing and printing and staff have to find work arounds, which is time consuming and creates a poor customer experience.

- Printing from the PCs is perceived as not user friendly, with too many steps. Customers can't print directly from their phones or tablets.

- The multifunctional devices (MFDs) that print, scan and photocopy are not known to be serviced. Staff have not received training on the MFDs and recognised that there are some faults they don't know how to fix and many functions they are not using to their full potential.

- There are no facilities for contactless or online payments. Customers expect digital payments now and many don't carry cash.

- Some staff commented on the unreliable Wi-Fi and poor phone signal in a few libraries, which can mean that services are slow and systems crash. This is frustrating for both staff and customers.

- Each of the 39 libraries has a separate webpage which makes it difficult for customers to find and compare library information or activities and events.

- BorrowBox's author search isn't optimised which means the search results are broad, making it difficult for users to find a specific author. There are also some popular authors and titles missing from the app.

- There is limited use across social media platforms beyond Facebook. More use would help libraries reach new audiences and keep updated on trends and influential digital communities, such as BookTok.

Opportunities

- Provision of **staff training and development** was the predominant theme. Staff would like training on ChromeBoxes, Ancestry and other eResources, Microsoft Teams, and any new devices, equipment, systems and programmes. Customers frequently ask for help using their own devices and staff feel a knowledge of all operating systems across PCs, Macs and smartphones would be beneficial, as well as how to access the Microsoft suite of applications. The training should extend to casual staff as well as permanent staff.

- **Training for the public** on different operating systems and devices would help them use their own technology, as well as build confidence on digital basics such as searching and navigating websites and digital banking, and widely used platforms such as Zoom. The training should also include promotion and use of the libraries' digital services and eResources.

- **An automated system for customers to book PCs**, log on using their library card, and have a time limit, would make it easier to manage and monitor computer usage.

- **Wireless printing** would enable people to print directly from their phone without needing to log on to a computer, set up a Gmail account or remember their passwords. There is also interest in 3D printers and training on how to use them. Libraries could offer high quality printing of photographs, as Boots does. GDPR compliant use of generic library email addresses would allow people to send documents to library staff to print if other options are not functioning.

- **A library app** for people's phones and tablets could allow people to access their account, make reservations, make payments and link to BorrowBox. A member of staff commented, "it would keep people in mind of their library."

Staff access to data collected by the apps would support reporting.

- **All digital systems should be integrated and self-service** where possible so that customers can confidently use platforms and devices without support from staff. They ought to be user-friendly, intuitive and secure.

- **Touchscreens** should be installed, where possible. Many people are more comfortable with using touchscreens than keyboards and mice. A touchscreen with apps for the eResources would enable and encourage more people to access them. Adding an app for Council services could also provide customers with easy access to information, bus timetables and local events.

- **Staff could carry a tablet** as they move about the library to deal with enquiries or order books. This could help manage queues at the desk.

- **Administrative forms could be digitised**. For example, new customers could accept the library Terms and Conditions on a digital form and submit it via the LMS. This would save time, postage, paper and storage for paper copies sent to Seven Hills.

- **An LMS that supports a family membership card** would make it much easier to link family members and copy relevant details, such as their address.

- **A single events calendar** covering activities at all 39 libraries would allow customers to easily search for events in any library. If one activity if fully booked or at a time that doesn't suit, they could find the same activity at another library nearby. Having an integrated booking system would also allow customers to reserve places at author talks or other popular activities.

- **Better promotion of eResources** through communications tools and platforms would increase their use.

- **Phone charging points** would make it easy for people relying on their phones to stay in touch, for example, young people who need to contact home or rough sleepers contacting emergency housing.

- **Reviewing the quality of the technology accessories for sale** (USB sticks, phone chargers, headphones etc) could bring in more income but it is likely to be modest due to other available sources for these items.

- **In five years, staff would like to see** more virtual events; a broader range of eBooks and eAudiobooks; AI generated personalised recommendations; gaming or learning equipment that brings more young people into the library.

Threats

- Keeping up with constantly changing technology and digital environments.

- Protecting budget for staff training when finances are stretched.

- The staff capacity needed to engage with, train and deliver the transformation, and to keep up with sector developments.

- Securing the additional capital and revenue investment needed to deliver digital transformation.

- Meeting the digital divide and digital inclusion challenges faced by residents of County Durham.

7. Benchmarking, innovation and case studies

The examples and case studies provided in this section are from a broad range of rural and urban library services across the UK and offer ideas and information from across the sector. The library services referenced serve differing population sizes with varying needs and provide services across a range of libraries in terms of size, number and mixed models of community and local authority run. Whilst it is acknowledged that some of these may not be direct comparators for County Durham Libraries it is hoped that they provide a useful source of information when considering where investment and innovation are most needed and best placed.

7.1   Basic digital offers case studies

Sutton Libraries

As a member of the Libraries Consortium, Sutton Libraries uses [Discover LMS](#) for customer-facing services. The pages are customisable so customers can set their preferences for the type of information and reading materials they would like to see. There are several search filters so that results can be more specific and books in a series are linked. AI is integrated to make personalised reading recommendations. Customers are also able to book, pay for and share events online and they can opt-in

to library marketing and access blog posts.

Newcastle Libraries

[The Discover platform](#) has an extensive search which accesses information in other resource lists and from the internet. It also allows more customer account functionality such as linking family accounts and displaying library card numbers as barcodes which can be stored on a smartphone.

Gateshead Libraries

[Digital activities](#) are integrated throughout activities for all ages at Gateshead Libraries. Their schools' offer is designed for students and teachers at Key Stage 1 and 2 and include sessions on coding Green Screen, Microbits and Raspberry Pi. An early years' offer is also available for under-fives using interactive play with electronic toys. Life Skills sessions help people of all ages get the most from their time online, including guidance on shopping online securely, using comparison websites for switching utilities, and booking online appointments. Libraries also provide practical sessions on using apps that can help with mindfulness and relaxation.

7.2 Innovation case studies

These examples and case studies show innovative digital services operating in libraries across the sector, alongside information on services which are being adapted more widely as part of a core library service delivery offer.

Piloting, testing and trying some of these examples would enable County Durham Libraries to evolve and develop their digital offer, enabling the service to meet customers' needs and expectations and move closer towards a sector wide standard for delivery.

Digital Making

The Lab – Gloucestershire Libraries

Gloucestershire Libraries has introduced library innovation labs and located them in each of their six districts. The Labs are described as *"friendly community spaces, offering accessible digital skills development for all ages and abilities and are designed to build confidence and skills and connect businesses, schools, and entrepreneurs with the digital."* They provide access to a range of kit, equipment and experiences including:

- 360° immersive film

- 3D design, print, scanning and prototyping

- Coding and micro-computers

- Virtual and augmented reality

- Advanced digital design and animation

- Full Adobe Creative Suite

- A design studio for digital design, 3D modelling and animation

- Oculus Quest VR headsets

- Podcast recording equipment

- 360° cameras and editing software

- Micro-computers and programmable robots

The new Gloucestershire Libraries Strategy 2023-2028 highlights the services commitment to digital and to growing their network of innovation labs so that libraries can continue to support customers to grow their skills and confidence around digital and technology.

Creator Spaces, Hertfordshire Libraries

Hertfordshire Libraries has introduced CreatorSpaces at six libraries across the country. These are promoted as a "*Space in the library to get creative. From coding to knitting - learn a new skill or practice an old one*".

Customers are offered a range of equipment and software to test, try and experiment with, including:

- iMacs, PCs, Chromebooks and tablets

- 3D printer and rendering software

- digital cutter for craft projects

- digital sewing and embroidery machines

- Adobe Creative Cloud suite, Final Cut Pro and Logic Pro

- colour printer, photocopier, laminator and digital screen
- VR (Oculus Rift)

- Green Screen

Taster sessions are offered, for a small fee, to introduce customers in an informal way to using the equipment and to give people the opportunity to learn new skills and practice in a supported environment. In addition, they also run craft groups for adults for a small fee.

CreatorSpaces also provide volunteering opportunities and support small businesses and entrepreneurs looking to prototype, develop products, access design software and host meetings.

A smaller scale *CreatorSpace Out of the Box* offer enables some aspects of the offer around technology and fun to be delivered in other libraries who don't have a permanent CreatorSpace.

Fab Lab Devon – Imagine, Invent, Create.

The Fab Lab at Exeter Library was the first to open in a public library in the UK in May 2014. A second Fab Lab was opened in Barnstaple Library in 2018. Fab Lab Devon delivers digital making courses for the public, schools and businesses with the aim of the widening awareness of digital making techniques, processes and opportunities for everybody. Through hands on learning, using open-source tools and by providing open access the Fab Labs enable staff and customers to enhance their digital skills, try new technologies and change digital consumers into digital makers.

Digital Spaces, Coventry Libraries

Coventry Libraries developed a Digital Spaces at Coventry Libraries offer across libraries. Immersive audio and VR experiences are available for everyone to try new technologies and explore the future of how people will connect, create and share. Supported with funding from ACE and working in partnership with the BFI and The Space, the library service has worked with local artists and creatives to develop projects with digital at their heart, producing podcasts, audio and visual creations, running digital photography sessions and audio recording workshops with residents

around projects focused on their local communities. Other projects have produced blogs, short films, feature length radio documentaries and immersive exhibitions.

7.3   Digital skills

Leeds Libraries Digital Support programme

To ensure those with low digital engagement aren't left behind, to provide equity of access to technology and skills development, and to inspire next generations, Leeds Libraries has developed a nationally recognised digital programme, Learn in the Library, that supports the computing curriculum, develops people's digital skills, provides free access to technology and the internet through public PC access, tablet lending and sim gifting, and helps people to self-manage their health and wellbeing.

A summary of Leeds Libraries free #Digital121 support programme

- telephone helpline for support with any digital enquiries

- access to computers and Wi-Fi in all 34 libraries

- tablet lending at selected libraries

- data gifting at selected libraries as part of the National Databank
- skills development sessions, including weekly *Digital Drop-ins* at several community libraries and *First Steps with Digital sessions* for complete beginners

- support from staff trained as Digital Champions

- The Leeds Libraries Online Learning Platform supports users to develop their digital skills, whether they are getting to grips with going online or just wanting to take the next step in developing essential digital skills for life or for work. Staff can also access training through the platform to make sure they are up to date with support for the digital offer.

Leeds Libraries Creative digital offer includes:

- **Studio12** a digital media project for people aged 16–30. It provides free access to a production studio, training, accredited qualifications and an Industry Panel of creative professionals. Studio12 is run by Leeds Central Library, the space houses a fully equipped studio with a wide range of multimedia, video, photography, music equipment and software packages. People accessing Studio12 are encouraged and supported to work towards attaining an

accredited qualification though NOCN and Arts Award in Audio Visual Media Production. Studio12 work is showcased at live events in the city centre and to a global audience on the web.

- **Code Clubs** offer easy-to-follow projects which will help young people to learn a variety of coding languages by making games, robots, animations, and websites in a supportive environment.

- A community **Creatorspace** based at Compton Road Community Hub and Library.

LIBRARIES AT THE CENTRE OF A COMMUNITY BASED APPROACH

BARRIER	MODEL	ACTION	INPUT	OUTPUT
Motivation	Identifying need	Identifying when a person would potentially benefit from digital inclusion support	300+ Digital Champions across the network:	Digitally enabled, engaged and inspired Leeds citizens
	Signposting to support	Telling people about digital inclusion support available.	All staff across community hubs and library sites cross referring for digital support – blue badge, school place applications, NHS app, etc.	
	Championing digital	Positive conversations, person centred, looking for easy wins, focussed on benefits, modelling –motivation.	Targeted support, e.g. health	
	Embedding digital	Maximising opportunities for exposure to and opportunities to engage with digital -confidence.	Every service has a digital component that adds value to the library experience; some are only available digitally	
Skills	Providing skills support	One-to-one or group, planned sessions or ad hoc, formal or informal, workforce or peer support.	#Digital121 : Help line / Digital drop ins / First steps / Next steps / Niche academy tutorials	
Access	Providing connectivity	Providing access to wifi in a building, equipment in a building, loaning/gifting equipment, gifting data.	700 public access PCs, Hublets / Tablet Lending scheme, Free wi-fi, Printing	

The community hub and library is:

- already working with and in the community
- the community's trusted place, where the community already go to get support

The community hub and library staff team are:

- people who the community trust
- trained to support the needs of the community
- understand the needs and issues of the community
- already support digital inclusion in the community

100% Digital Leeds

The 100% Digital Leeds programme is led by the digital inclusion team in the Integrated Digital Service (IDS) at Leeds City Council and Leeds Health and Care Partnership NHS West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board. Their remit is to work with partners across the city – third sector, public sector, health and care – to strengthen digital inclusion infrastructure in communities and increase access, engagement, and participation so that everyone in Leeds can have equal opportunity to use digital tools, technology, and services in the right way for them.

The service has a close relationship with libraries as one of their main delivery partners across the city. Over the last year, the 100% Digital Leeds team has invited library colleagues to join digital inclusion workstreams, networks and steering groups for Arts in Care Homes Day, Digital Health Hubs, Arts and Culture Digital Inclusion Network, Older People's Digital Inclusion Network, and more.

The 100% Digital Leeds team were funded by the Local Government Association's Digital Pathfinders Programme to produce Digital Inclusion Toolkit, a community-based approach to digital inclusion model that can be adopted by any local authority to create their own digital inclusion programme.

As part of the Leeds Digital Festival in September 2023 they will be hosting a number of events including Tackling data poverty in Leeds: a community-based approach to gifting SIMs.

The Glass Box, Somerset Libraries

The Glass Box is a digital skills hub in Taunton and part of Somerset Libraries. It was set up in 2016 to showcase new technology, help the community to develop digital skills and provide space for learning and collaboration. With funding from Somerset County Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council and with support from organisations such as Digital Taunton and Code Club South West, The Glass Box works with education, business and community groups to offer workshops, events and a Digital Skills Academy. It also offers 3D scanning and printing, a library podcast, a range of information and storytelling videos on YouTube, device loaning, software test and try, and a databank scheme.

7.4   Digital reader development and audience engagement

Bookflicks

Facilitated by Rural Media, BookFlicks is a youth-led project helping young people make & share creative content about the books they love and upskilling and inspiring libraries to use social media as an innovate way to engage with younger audiences nationally. The project worked directly with those aged 13-30 years old, watching and understanding the way they interact with social media, both as users and as content creators. It has engaged with library staff across the country to understand the ways their communities interact and the unique challenges they face. A toolkit has now been produced outlining different ways to engage with the BookFlicks project. The aim of the toolkit is to enable libraries to understand how to promote books and the love of reading via social media, how to cultivate new audiences and inclusivity, and how to inspire readers to share their books suggestions. It offers tried and tested

techniques to get started. The team has also run 'how-to' workshops in libraries across the UK, teaching participants to create TikTok content and get it seen by the biggest audiences.

BookTok

Library services are using BookTok channels to engage with customers around reading and promotion of reading for pleasure. BookTok users create engaging content which discusses, reviews, promotes and recommends books across different genres and age groups. Libraries include links to the books on their online catalogues or through their eBook providers, encouraging customers to reserve the books they are interested in. East Riding, Middlesborough and Cambridgeshire Libraries are some of the services engaging with BookTok.

7.5 Self- service library systems

A range of new technologies are available to improve efficiency, accuracy and security in libraries.

Self-Service Checkout

Self-service technology which supports customers to access core library functions such as issuing, returning, renewing and reservation of stock as well as checking accounts and paying charges is a well-established part of core operational delivery across UK public libraries. The market has changed and developed considerably in recent years with several suppliers providing similar products such as standalone self-service kiosks and desktop self-service technology. Some systems and suppliers also offer integration with websites, library management systems and other digital suppliers which enables customers to access events, receive reading recommendations, pay charges and find and download digital titles. Suppliers include: Nexbib, Bibliotheca, d-tech, Lyngsoe.

Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) software technology

RFID technology improves the speed and accuracy of circulation and shelving functions, freeing library staff to provide direct service to customers. Investment in RFID technology is a prerequisite of a modern self-service offer in libraries. Library stock suppliers will provide RFID tagging to new stock at an additional cost per item. A project to retrospectively make current DCC stock RFID compliant would be needed if

this were to be adopted alongside self-service technology in County Durham Libraries.

Smart returns shelves

This technology uses RFID software to instantly return items placed on them as customers enter the library. Customers simply place the item/s directly onto the shelf and their items will automatically be discharged from their account without the need to queue or for staff intervention. Books are then immediately available to be shelved or borrowed by the next customer.

Smart reservations shelves

Management of reserved stock is a key part of the day-to-day activities in libraries. Currently staff intervention is required to manage the process of notifying customers, administrating and arranging items for collection. RFID technology is used with smart reservation shelves which enable staff to place items onto the shelves and customers will be notified without the need for staff involvement that their item is available for collection. The need for paper-based administration is removed, and items no longer need to be placed on shelves in alphabetical order or collection date order. Customers are automatically informed of the location of their item for collection and by scanning their library card upon collection the item is automatically issued to their account.

7.6   PC and printing solutions

Self-Service printing, scanning and copying

Increasingly customers want an easy way to print, scan and copy their documents without the need for staff support or to log on to public access PCs. As a result, cloud based self-service printing solutions are more in demand and more common in libraries across England. Technology such as Princh and Surfbox allow customers to print, scan and copy without the need for accounts or passwords and enable customers to use their own devices. They require no additional apps or software and offer integrated ePayment facilities.

PC booking and printing solutions

Access to public access PCs remains a core part of the public library offer. Management and supporting customers to book, log on, use and print from public access PCs takes up a considerable amount of staff time. There are a range of software solutions available which support libraries to administer and manage access,

bookings and session control, offer printing solutions, and enable CIPFA compliant admin and reporting. The market leader is Netloan which is, for example, used by Kent, Newham and Hertfordshire Libraries. Other suppliers include Insight Media.

7.7 Device loaning

Hublet is a self-service tablet solution, which delivers digital content to customers within library buildings, increasing digital access safely and securely. It offers fast and secure loaning and returning of tablets with content which has been tailored to the library service offer, with no personal data stored.

A docking station holding three or six tablets is located in the library which simultaneously charges the devices and clears data post use. Customers scan their library card to release a tablet which has been preloaded with content including the library website, eBooks, eMagazines and other eResources. The tablets can only be used within the library and are locked down if removed from the library building.

Some library services are offering Hublets as a way of increasing access to digital resources, freeing up space as they can be taken anywhere within the library building and providing more privacy than traditional PCs.

Middlesbrough, Newcastle and Northamptonshire Library services are current users of Hublets. In the UK the exclusive supplier of Hublets is Lyngsoe systems.

7.8 Extending library access

Open Library, Open+, Open Access, Extended Access Technology

Open Access technology, also known in the sector as Open+, Open Library, or Extended Access Technology is a system that allows libraries to provide more flexible hours, making them more accessible to the community without the need for staff to be present. Designed to complement staffed library hours, it can be implemented in different ways to meet various library service models, from extending access to an entire library or only a section of it, providing full self-service resources, or reservations / book collection only. It supports libraries to have the flexibility to extend access in the way that best meets the needs of their community and space.

The market leader is Bibliotheca who have a fully customisable solution already in use at over 850 libraries. First introduced in libraries in Scandinavia, in the UK it is used extensively in Peterborough, Leicestershire and Barnet Libraries and a growing number of other library services. Other suppliers include Nextbib.

Libraries Connected will be running a webinar on this topic early in October 2023.

LibCabinet

Lyngsoe offers a product called the LibCabinet™ which has been used by some library services to bring a library offer to locations which don't have a permanent library. For example, Aberdeenshire Libraries have placed them in rural locations around the county. The Cabinet holds up to more than 200 items for a 'mini library' offer with 24/7 access. Transparent doors are equipped with an electronic lock that can be opened by presenting a library card to a card reader (or using a touch screen). A customer then takes a book, closes the door and receives a receipt telling them when the item needs to be returned. Books can be returned following a similar process.

7.9   Intelligent data driven visitor counting

Understanding who is visiting your library and when is an integral part of customer delivery data. Typically, libraries have relied on unsophisticated technology to monitor and support this data, which is unable to differentiate between adults and children, for example, or where groups are entering a building. This means that visitor data is often inaccurate and unreliable. Examples of more reliable solutions include Nexbib's Nex.Count, currently in operation at Merton Libraries, which adopts technology from retail and claims to offer 99% accuracy. It enables differentiation between adults, children and groups visiting buildings and provides data in real time so that an accurate picture of usage hour by hour can be clearly seen. As a cloud-based system visitor data can be accessed locally and centrally, indicating the busiest and quietest time which could help to inform strategic decisions about opening hours and staffing rotas. A similar example is CountIT from D-tech.

8. A digital approach: tools, values and principles

8.1   The value of digital literacy in supporting change

The digital infrastructure is one aspect of a digital strategy, but a successful digital transformation relies on people. Building a digitally fluent workforce and a digitally mature relationship with an audience requires a leadership team that is informed, reflective, responsive and active around digital. To achieve this, it is necessary to build the digital confidence and literacy of the whole staff team and leadership.

Digitally literate leadership is the foundation of digital maturity for any organisation and is necessary in any digital transformation plans. It is vital in helping understand what to act on and what to reject. These decisions should always relate back to the libraries mission, vision and objectives in specific ways. Digital literacy is about

understanding the many new ways of doing things, new business models, new ways of working and new ways of delivering services. It is about libraries' processes as much as their systems, and about people as much as any hardware/software.

Digitally literate leaders do not need to learn digital skills, they don't need to know how to code, livestream or structure a database. They need to understand the value of having a team who can do these things; a team who can create digital products and services that are fit for purpose, who can manage the digital systems needed to sustain those products and services, and who can use them in smart ways that illustrate impact. They need to value digital enough to understand that it touches all areas of their organisation's activities, internally and externally, from its financial systems to its collection management, from its social media to its educational events.

Through both valuing and understanding digital, the leadership teams can begin to question and explore the most appropriate way for their libraries to exploit digital technologies to fulfil their mission and objectives. It is also invaluable in allowing them to map out the resourcing requirements needed to support their ambitions and plans.

The impact on organisational rhythms and workflow brought about by digital transformation should not be underestimated. Significant time and resources will need to be set aside to implement the changes being considered and to support staff. Key to this will be building the digital literacy and confidence of the whole team.

It can be useful to think about digital transformation and capacity building as a journey: beginning with little and learning and developing as progress is made. There are always unexpected events, and the environment is constantly shifting but, as understanding (and literacy) grows, so does confidence. Building the digital capacity of libraries through the development of its staff is the most sustainable way to improve the impact of the libraries digital output, support the positive digital change needed and become fitter for the future.

Culture24 and Europeana produced a Guide to Digital Transformation in Cultural Heritage. The Guide offers definitions, recommendations and starting points that could be useful to help frame an approach to digital transformation. These can be worked through with County Durham Libraries staff and used to frame workshops or to form discussion and strategic planning with leadership.

8.2   Shared values as a foundation for change

County Durham Libraries may find it useful to work through and apply The Digital Culture Charter. The Charter is one part of The Digital Culture Compass, a useful

online resource to help cultural organisations approach, assess and improve their digital activities. It was commissioned by ACE and The National Heritage Lottery Fund as part of the UK Government's *Culture is Digital* initiative. It was developed by a partnership of organisations who understand and work with digital and culture every day.

The Charter is a set of guiding principles designed so that cultural leaders – directors, trustees or senior managers – can make and communicate a commitment to approaching digital activities in ways that are led by core values, centred on people's needs and responsive to change.

The three principles in the charter are:

- **Be values-led**

    o   Be purposeful so we better serve our mission

    o   Be inclusive so we widen participation

    o   Be ethical so we protect everyone's interests

- **Be people-centred**

    o   Understand people so we can better meet their needs

    o   Collaborate and communicate so we widen our reach and impact

    o   Grow skills and confidence so we empower people

- **Be responsive to our context**

    o   Focus so we are effective

    o   Adapt and evolve so we are resilient

Across DCC and County Durham Libraries there are various existing policy and strategy documents that also contain values and principles. It could be useful to consider how those in the Charter relate, with a view to harmonising them into a simple set of shared values to help steer this strategy.

Shared values that are understood and articulated across a team are a necessary foundation for any kind of change or transformation. It is recommended that they are

used as the foundation for the proposed approach and actions outlined in this report.

8.3   A digitally focussed organisation

Digital basics first

Any kind of digital capacity building should be focussed on getting the basics right. Through our conversations with library staff and sector specialists, along with our research into the current state of play, there is still some way to go in getting these basics right for County Durham Libraries.

These basics could be defined to include:

- A responsive, up-to-date website that is fully accessible to AAA standards and covers the basic visitor information needed by most web visitors.

- An active, conversational social media presence that has personality to match County Durham Libraries brand on the most relevant platforms.

- A flexible content management system able to catalogue, search, retrieve and manage digital assets.

- Regular collection and interrogation of web and social analytics and agreement about the fundamental goals of each and their value.

- Basic Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) around name, key visitor attractions or online content.

- Claiming and monitoring County Durham Libraries on Google Business

- A system for email newsletter sign-up and management that is GDPR compliant.

- Internal communications system for team members and volunteers that can support home and office working.

Many organisations are excited about and attracted to the idea of innovating with the latest technologies despite having little understanding of the complex skills and competencies needed to use, manage and create with them. But innovation digitally does not have to mean new. The simpler aspects of managing digital systems and infrastructure, or the commitment and resources necessary to ensure staff have the skills and capacity to use digital technologies and systems, can often take second

place but are significant when done well. For many it would be transformative to simply get the digital basics right.

Digital can often be fetishised as a solution to the cultural sector's problems, promising more innovation, increased revenue, better business models and wider audience reach. This digital dream is far more nuanced for cultural organisations who lack the digital skills, infrastructure and capacity to know how to understand the value of the latest technologies to their organisation. Over the last ten years, the pursuit of digital innovation amongst cultural organisations is littered with more failures than successes. When considering any kind of investment in a technology driven project (such as the current trend of AI or VR work in the sector), County Durham Libraries needs to ask, if a particular digital experience is the answer, what was the question?

A Digital Basics First approach might include sharing and interrogating the analytics of the current Council website pages, along with data from Library Online, plus auditing social channels to discover what is and isn't working and what are people saying. Using data already available will help to make more informed decisions and identify areas for improvement.

Benchmarking digital maturity

Alongside the Charter, the Digital Culture Compass also has the digital progress Tracker which is a self-assessment tool that can help identify how digitally mature an organisation is and how it is adapting to and integrating digital assets. Building use of the Tracker into workflow on a regular basis can help plan and develop digital activities in a more strategic way.

The Tracker divides an organisation's activities into 12 areas which include Strategy and Governance; Cultural Programme; Places and Spaces; Marketing and Communications; HR; IT; and Finance and Operations. The user can select which areas are applicable and then, in each area, assess the digital elements of between five and 10 different activities, using a consistent five-point scale. These activities might include use of technology, creative content, data, processes or ways of working.

The comprehensive scale of the Tracker means it can look daunting, but it is easy to look at one area at a time, such as Governance or Enterprise. If County Durham Libraries can commit to working through those areas that are relevant, it will increase understanding of where the organisation needs more resources and skills and, as such, can inform training strategies.

Assessing current skill level and the role of digital champions

Alongside the Charter and the Tracker, County Durham Libraries can better understand how its staff and volunteers currently use digital, audit their digital attitudes and skills, and identify opportunities for improving the digital confidence, skills and capabilities of the staff more fully. The DASH Survey is a free service, developed by National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) that allows organisations to gather this information to identify strategic priorities and future funding requirements. It can reveal gaps where training or confidence building activities can be brought in and may also reveal strengths and skills that County Durham Libraries may not know already exist within the team.

Existing skills within the team may not be anything to do with someone's formal role at a library but come from their private life (gamer, vlogger, ancestry expert, artist, selling online etc). They could they be invited to share their digital expertise with others as part of a general digital confidence building session. This can be a great way to open opportunities for skills sharing sessions that can help to boost confidence and understanding.

Understanding digital culture, the changes in user behaviours, keeping up with new technologies and platforms and analysing data takes time. It can be difficult for staff to know where to start. A digital champion can be a person from any role in an organisation, regardless of organisational structure, who can display their own good digital leadership. It may be one person or a small group who become the champions to tackle the changes needed in digital skills, mindsets and systems inside the organisation.

Digital Champions are already included in the Council's own digital strategy and so would be an obvious extension for the libraries. The Digital Buddies scheme already in place in many libraries is similar but is designed to provide help to members of the public rather than staff (see section 9.4).

Digital Champions or buddy schemes are powerful ways to utilise existing staff or volunteer expertise. They also help to build a more robust digital capacity inside the library and develop a more structured community library offer.

9. Identified needs and potential solutions

9.1   Mapping, research and options for digital tools, platforms and services

The following table provides information, suggestions and indicative costings for consideration in relation to the development or replacement of existing solutions, as well as information on some of the current range of innovative tools and technology available. This links with the information provided in section 7.

A selective range of suppliers were interviewed as part of the research and mapping stage. Information contained in this table will need to be tested further through DCC's existing procurement frameworks and soft marketing testing options which will provide a more detailed range of costings from a more extensive range of suppliers.

Description	Current status	Suppliers	Costs	Notes and considerations
Library Management System. Acts as the CRM, stock database and collections catalogue for whole service. Supports essential delivery functions including stock management (issues, returns, renewals). Essential to the day to day running of the service.	Current system is Halcyon, an inhouse system. Halcyon is now at end of life creating a need to procure a new modern system with additional services and benefits.	Axiell Civica ESS – Library Management Cloud Innovative SiriDynix	**ESS Library Management Cloud.** Illustrative costs: Annual LMC subscription c.£25-£30k per annum. Deployment package of professional services to set up the environment, transfer-in data and provide onboarding training c. £30-£40k, depending on the volumes of data, skills analysis for training purposes etc. ESS offer a packaged price,	Considerations include procurement fees, implementations fees, ongoing maintenance, data cleansing costs, training costs (supplier and DCC costs to release staff for a comprehensive training programme) project management fees (specific PM role for overseeing PM and implementation to go live stage

| | | | no surprises and complete confidence for no project cost overruns.

Innovative
Product is called Polaris. No price given. Indicated pricing would be based on population.

Axiell
Products are Spark and Arena, with Arena the front facing platform. Indicative pricing is c.£15k for initial capital costs and annual costs of c.£24k to £34k depending on exact specification and requirements.

Current clients include Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, Darlington Borough Council, East Riding, Plymouth and Coventry Libraries. | and beyond for a period of 6 to 12 months).

Most suppliers offer managed services and access to an App as well as a front facing platform (website) for customers.

Frameworks: Suppliers are on different frameworks and not all suppliers appear to be on a single framework. Frameworks referenced by suppliers include ESPO, YPS, CCS, G-Cloud. |

			SirsiDynix – Costs are based on annual issues and number of staff users. Indicative one-off costs for implementation are c. £30,000 depending on the options chosen. Annual costs: c.£65,000 based on all options being chosen and annual issues of 1-2million, plus 100 staff users or c. £45,000 based on 50 staff users and annual issues of 500k to 1 million. Current customers include Sunderland, London Libraries Consortium, Inspire Nottingham, Rutland and Derbyshire. They are the largest LMS provider in the UK. **Civica –** Product is called Spydus. A new version in development will mean that clients will automatically receive updates as released. Costings are based on	

			population and their framework pricing. £63,000 p.a. with a £38,000 one off set up cost. This is an SAS style price so would include all upgrades, full cloud hosting and support. This is off-the-shelf pricing so is open for negotiation depending on actual needs. Currently the second largest LMS supplier in England. Stockton, Northumberland and Hartlepool are customers.	
Library App A fully LMS integrated app which supports push notifications for reservations, marketing, and loans, eBook and eResources content integration, library service information, integrated social media feeds, reading trackers, and can also act as a self-	Currently no provision.	Solus	**Solus App** **Appears to be the market leader and most used.** £2,500 implementation and £2,500 annual fee excluding the cost for self-service. The Self-service functionality is an additional £2,500 annually for the first 5 branches, and then £400	Most commonly used is the Solus App as a number of LMS providers partners with Solus including Axiell and SirsiDynix. SirsiDynix are looking to develop their own app independent of Solus. Some library services have the self-service functionality at larger branches only or at

service app for the issuing and returning of items and removal of RFID tagging.			annually for each additional branch.	branches which may have Open Access hours in place. Services currently using library apps include Sunderland, West Sussex, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Merton and Cambridgeshire.
Self-Service Checkout. Self-Service Kiosks/Stations which enable customers to borrow, return, and renew items. Additional functionality allows customers to check library accounts, make payments (cash/card). Can use RFID, EM or barcode technology.	In house system which offers the option for issue and return only via a barcode scanner linked to a standalone terminal. Currently available in 2 locations - Chester Le Street and Crook libraries. Anecdotally considered to be poorly used due to position in libraries (hidden), lack of customer awareness, prominence of customer desks. Data on actual usage since 2020 is unavailable. From 2018-	Lyngsoe Nexbib D-Tech Bibliotheca	**Lyngsoe** *Phoenix Kiosk*- £4500 + VAT plus install £950 per day, depends on quantity & locations. These are in use at Halton, Middlesbrough, Worcestershire, Oldham and Cambridgeshire Libraries *Tabletop Kiosk*- £3600 + VAT plus receipt printer if required at £690 + VAT, plus install £950 per day.	Pricing will vary depending on quantities purchased. Some suppliers will offer additional discounts on multiple purchases. Other supporting kit and equipment may be required, e.g., return bins, trolleys etc.

	2020 usage was mainly below 10% of overall transactions.		*Classic Self-Service Unit*- £4250 + VAT plus install £950 per day.	
			Nexbib	
			Standalone Kiosks - £3000-£3,500 per kiosk.	
			Desktop model – under £3000 per unit.	
			Plus, maintenance and support contract at £390 p.a.	
			Bibliotheca	
			RFID standalone kiosk with touchscreen and item detection (cash and card payment) - £7,995.	
			RFID standalone kiosk with cash payments only. £6495.	
			RFID standalone kiosk with card payment only. £5,495	

			RIFD desktop terminal with card and cash payments - £6,995 Tiered maintenance costs, depends on number of kiosks: £650 (standard), £900 (advanced), £2,500 (premium). Additional costs for training, project management and supplementary hardware.	
RFID technology Improves the speed and accuracy of circulation and shelving functions, thereby freeing library staff to provide direct service to customers. Investment in RFID technology is a prerequisite of modern self-service offers in libraries.	Not currently adopted. No current supplier.	Nexbib Bibliotheca Library stock supplier	**Bibliotheca** RFID Tags for books - £0.16 (depending on quantities) RFID tags for CDs - £0.20 Average price for a staff tag pad £545.00	Library stock suppliers will provide RFID tagging to new stock at an additional cost per item. A project to retrospectively make current stock RFID compliant would need to be considered. Suppliers of self-service kiosks also provide RFID technology and additional kit which

				support tagging of books and other resources.
Self-Service Printing Cloud based self-service printing solutions enables customers to print, scan and copy without the need for accounts or passwords and to use their own devices. They require no additional apps or software and offer integrated ePayment facilities.	Not currently available. Printing solution is managed inhouse by DCC IT department. Staff commented that they are frequently called upon to support printing and release prints.	Princh Surfbox Insight Media	**Surfbox** Three different kiosk types ranging from £1,650 to £2,400 per kiosk. Plus £495 annual subscription for software, £300 commissioning and set up fee and £200 annual maintenance fee. NAYAX card payment charges £10 per month and 2.95% processing fee.	Surfbox is in widely in use across Irish libraries, In York, Blackburn and East Riding.
Hublet Hublet is a self-service tablet solution, which delivers digital content to customers within library buildings, increasing digital access safely and securely. It offers fast and secure loaning and returning of tablets with content which has been tailored to the library service offer, with no personal data stored.	n/a	Lyngsoe	£11950 + VAT plus install £950 per day	

Wi-Fi Publicly accessible Wi-Fi	Available free of charge in all libraries. Currently managed in house by IT services. Some libraries opt to limit Wi-Fi overnight when the library is closed to prevent people lurking outside and anti-social behaviour.			
Public Access PCs	Chromebooks are used for the free public access PC provision. This is managed in house by DCC IT department. Bookings are currently managed inhouse via the Library Online webpage/website			
PC booking and print solutions. Software solutions which support libraries to administer and manage access, bookings and session control, offer printing solutions, and enable CIPFA compliant admin and reporting.	Current inhouse solution.	Netloan Insight Media		The market leader is Netloan which is, for example, used by Kent, Newham and Hertfordshire Libraries. Other suppliers include Insight Media which is used in Devon Libraries.

Open Library / Open Plus / Open Access / Extended Access technology Open Access technology allows libraries to provide more flexible hours, making them more accessible to the community without the need for staff to be present.	n/a	Lyngsoe Nexbib Bibliotheca	**Lyngsoe** Product is called *Self Operated Library.* Indicative cost for a small Library approx. £10-15k, large Library approx. £20-30K- site surveys would need to be conducted to confirm detailed costing. **Nexbib** Product is called *Open Library.* Indicative cost is £8k per single story library. Subject to site survey.	Already in use at over 850 libraries including a number in the UK - Kent, Gloucestershire, Barnet, and Northern Ireland libraries all use this solution.
Collection Management Tools. Collection /Stock Performance Management tools which supports libraries in the selection, promotion, cataloguing and management of stock.	County Durham Libraries was an early adopter of Collection HQ (previously SmartSM) and have been using collection management tools and software since approx. 2003. The service was previously a Collection HQ development	Collection HQ Nexbib - Nex.Inventory A mobile solution for up-to-date stock management and precise inventory directly at	**Collection HQ** £15,000 p.a. Multiyear discounts available	Collection HQ is the most widely used tool on the market. Other products are available which help with the day-to-day housekeeping and management of stock.

| | partner which enables a direct influence on iterations in design and functionality with the supplier. The team is keen to become a development partner again. Collection HQ is currently used as standalone product and does not make use of integration with the current LMS. Service does not currently use dynamic stock.

Bibliographic tools are subscribed to including: Unity used for searching for inter-library loan books. It also feeds into worldcat.org, £3,000 p.a.

Bookdata, a comprehensive bibliographic data provider for books, used to trace new books and add records to the catalogue in the correct MARC format, £3,000. | the shelf.

Lynsgoe – Intelligent Materials Management Solution | | |

	Catalogue metadata is through BDS ltd, £5,300 p.a.			
Intelligent data driven visitor counting. Hardware and software solutions which support accurate real time data counting of visitors to library buildings. As a cloud-based system visitor data can be accessed locally and centrally.	All libraries were fitted with digital counters in the mid-2000s with the exception of Clayport which has a digital door counter. They are no longer used due to the significant margin of error in the data. Libraries currently rely on manual counts.	Nexbib D-Tech Bibliotheca	**Nexbib** Product is called Nex.Count – circa under £1,000 per library	Nexbib's Nex.Count, currently in operation at Merton Libraries.
Smart return shelves. Uses RFID software to instantly return items placed on them as customers enter the library.	Not applicable.	Lyngsoe	**Lyngsoe** £12,850 + VAT plus install £950 per day.	
Smart Reservation Shelves. RFID technology with smart reservation shelves to enable staff to place items on the shelves and customers will be automatically notified.	Not applicable.	Lyngsoe Nexbib	**Lyngsoe** Intelligent Hold Shelf - £12,850 + VAT plus install £950 per day.	
LibCabinet	Not applicable.	Lyngsoe	**Lyngsoe**	

			£15,995 + VAT per cabinet plus install £950 per day.	
eBooks	Current provider is Borrowbox/Bolinda. Approx. 9467 E-Books, 5751 e-Audiobooks form part of the current offer.			Borrowbox/Bolinda and Overdrive/Libby are the market leaders in the UK with most library services subscribing to content supplied by either or both suppliers.
eMagazines	Currently in the process of moving supplier from Overdrive/ Libby to Bolinda/Borrow box following the trial of a small amount of magazine subscriptions taken with Bolinda from September 2022.			Borrowbox/Bolinda and Overdrive/Libby are the market leaders in the UK with most library services subscribing to content supplied by either or both suppliers.

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brings a mini library offer to locations which don't have a permanent library. Transparent doors are equipped with an electronic lock that can be opened by presenting a library card to a card reader (or using a touch screen).

	Currently approx. 5000 titles available.			
eNewspapers	Currently considering moving supplier from Overdrive/Libby to Borrowbox/Bolinda. Taking a six-month trial with Borrowbox from September 2023.			Borrowbox/Bolinda and Overdrive/Libby are the market leaders in the UK with most library services subscribing to content supplied by either or both suppliers.
eResources.	Current offer is mainly focussed on reference resources following a decision to remove printed reference collections and move to online delivery. Current resources: Oxford online Encyclopaedia Britannica, British Standards Ancestry library edition, Featherbed tales Current suppliers: OUP, EB, BSI, ProQuest.			Most library services continue to provide an E-Resources offer to sit alongside their print collections. The number of subscriptions and range of databases varies from service to service depending on available budgets, service priorities and community usage and need.

	Annual subscriptions.			
Events online	Events moved online during COVID-19. Provision has now primarily stopped as events return to being delivered in libraries.			
ePayments (online and in libraries)	Currently no provision to take payments online via the website or LMS. Currently no provision to take card payments in libraries.			The introduction of self-service kiosks could facilitate payments for reservations and other charges when added to library accounts on the LMS. Other solutions could include card payment machines at library desks facilitated by staff and linking with existing systems within other DCC services for receipt of payments online.

9.2   Skills and training

In its Digital Strategy, DCC has an ambition to be a Digital Council who will equip staff with the digital skills and technology to deliver services effectively and efficiently. County Durham Libraries has an opportunity to tap into opportunities offered across the Council as its Digital Strategy is recognised and to ensure that a comprehensive training and support programme is put into place which builds on the work recommended in Section 8 of this document.

Specific training on new digital technology and systems will be a vital part of the evolving digital strategy and framework for libraries in the coming months and years and will be key to ensuring the strategy's success, building customer confidence in new technologies and services, delivering a good modern standard of customer service, and in bringing the service to the same level as other library services in the sector.

The introduction of a new LMS, for example, and the move across to a windows-based cloud-based system will require a significant in-house training programme, working with the supplier, and could be an opportunity to test the Digital Champions model and train the trainer type approach to cascading training and development opportunities.

9.3   Digital skills for staff

As previously outlined, it is essential that existing staff are trained and confident in all aspects of digital service delivery from the LMS to guiding someone in the use of the latest technology. Training in the use of new technologies will be a priority area and will have a significant impact across all libraries.

A workstream to consider how a mixture of in-house, partnership and outsourced training and development activities can be delivered needs to be taken forward. For some staff this may be a requirement to refresh or update existing skills, for others it will be a fundamental shift in developing new skill sets. There is potential to develop a resource pack of induction and training materials for the libraries team which can be used for both existing and new staff.

Some training and development opportunities outlined below are available at nil or small cost. There are other cost-effective ways in which training and development could be delivered. These include:

- Utilising the training and development opportunities available within DCC.

- Working in partnership with others to share skills and costs.

- Building training costs into funding applications as part of a wider bid.

- Working with other libraries in the North East to share their training resources and costs.

Sector support and training

There are lots of sector training and development programmes and resources provided at low or nil cost. Both CILIP and Libraries Connected provide online training and development platforms with a range of modules encompassing topics including digital, media and information skills.

CILIP can also be commissioned to provide bespoke training programmes for library services and can also carry out training needs analysis. Examples of some of the current programmes and opportunities are set out below.

Digital Leadership for Libraries – CILIP

CILIP is a good source of training and development workshops and programmes, most recently launching Digital Leadership for Libraries. Digital Leadership for Libraries is a free, online learning course comprised of five open-access, modules created for public library workers, volunteers and apprentices. The modules are intended to create engagement with the principles and values of being a digital leader in public libraries, unlocking the potential for all public library workers, and their services, to be confident digital leaders. Modules include Digital Leadership, Digital Creativity, Data Stewardship, Digital Impact and Digital Marketing. The modules are designed as short bursts of training with further links and resources which can continue to be explored in more depth as required. There is a strong focus on building staff confidence and playfulness around digital, and although it is titled Digital Leadership it has been designed for staff at all levels. There is no need to be a CILIP member to access the course.

CILIP Libraries Rewired Conference: Libraries, knowledge and information in a time of disruptive change - Friday 10 November 2023, London

CILIP is hosting a new conference dedicated to exploring digital transformation in the sector. It is designed to connect tech-curious colleagues, solutions providers and thought-leaders on all things digital and to explore and encourage innovation in the sector, offering staff the opportunity to have a play with what's on offer. The

programme will explore data, AI, digital creativity, library technology, digital rights and the skills, leadership and change management processes required to keep pace with fast-moving developments in the digital landscape. Further details are here: - https://librariesrewired.org.uk/

CILIP specialist skills and knowledge training for library staff

CILIP is currently running a series of online training sessions for Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) staff in 2023. The programme has a limited number of places available for non GLL staff. Remaining topics include social media for public libraries, supporting customers to discover their past using online ancestry tools, and eBooks and eMagazines. CILIP has a full range of events and training opportunities.

Libraries Connected e-learning platform

Libraries Connected is committed to ensuring that people who work in libraries have access to the skills and information they need to deliver a high-quality service for their local community. The LC online learning platform offers a range of courses including modules on Digital, Media and Information Skills. These modules have been developed by the Information and Digital Universal Library Offer group as part of their work on media literacy and digital skills development. They aim to give library staff and volunteers the skills and knowledge needed to provide effective digital and media literacy support to communities and library users.

Key Digital skills - This module enables staff to refresh and update their knowledge to support customers in developing their digital skills. It has been designed around the Government's Essential Digital Skills framework and the recently identified learning needs of library staff. It gives resources and guidance on how to search effectively and work confidently with users whose digital skills are low.

Media and Information Literacy - This module introduces the five principles of DCMS' Online Media Literacy Strategy and focuses on understanding how to use the internet safely and make informed decisions, equipping staff with skills and knowledge to share with library users.

LibraryOn development opportunities

A Community of Practice is being developed by the LibraryOn team in relation to the £1.1m LibraryOn grants programme in England that supports public libraries to improve their online presence and discoverability. The Community of Practice will share learnings from the successful projects in the coming months with opportunities

for all library services to take part and hear more about individual projects. There will also be workshops and sharing from practitioners on related topics. An unconference at the British Library in March 2024 will present projects, keynote speakers and practical hands-on sessions all related to digital technology. Further details of opportunities will be published in the LibraryOn newsletter which has a free sign up via their [website](#).

Digital Unite

[Digital Unite](#) is a social enterprise focused on supporting organisations with issues linked to digital inclusion. It uses a digital champions model to provide structure and frameworks which help deliver digital inclusion strategies. The Digital Champions programme trains staff and volunteers in organisations to get the confidence, skills and resources they need to support digital skills development. The Champions then cascade the learnings. Digital Unite currently offers a free digital essentials course so staff and volunteers can test the training. They also offer a range of free technology guides which can be embedded into an organisational website.

NLHF Digital Heritage Hub

Although designed to target the most pressing digital questions asked by small/medium sized heritage organisations, this resource hub was created as part of NLHF's Digital Skills for Heritage initiative and has a lot of useful free resources. The section on [Digital Engagement](#) may be of particular interest as it offers support around:

- digital marketing and communications

- websites, email and social media

- fundraising and eCommerce

- recruiting and working with digital volunteers

- online events and activities

- accessibility, inclusion and sustainability

- analytics, visitor data and segmentation

9.4   Digital skills offer for the public

The needs assessment revealed that over 40% of non-users of libraries thought that it was important for County Durham Libraries to help people to get online and improve their digital skills. They wanted to see libraries offering more digital literacy and skills classes. For example, how to use various software, programming for young people and how to stay safe online. There was a sense that more technology-based events would attract young people and an overall feeling that there is lack of awareness about digital and online services.

The needs assessment also showed that for existing customers the library service should be considering how it can better respond to customer needs (particularly those not currently using the service) as technology shifts and changes. Customers wanted to be able to test and try new technologies in libraries and develop and expand their skills in these areas.

Signposting

Signposting to available resources support could be a valuable way of supporting customers. As a starting point, the County Durham Libraries website could provide a specific section with details of authorised sources of information and links for people looking to develop their digital skills. Lancashire Libraries would be a good model.

Delivery through partners and volunteers

There is an opportunity to work with volunteers and partners to support customers on their digital inclusion journey. ACE commissioned the Good Things Foundation to put together a practical checklist, Promoting Digital Inclusion with the Arts and Cultural Sector and Beyond which can be used to help organisations identify what more they could be doing to promote digital inclusion and includes a section on building capacity and working in partnership.

Learn My Way

Learn My Way from the Good Things Foundation is a website of free online learning for beginners, helping to develop digital skills to make the most of the online world.

Volunteers

Volunteers can provide additional skills and capacity and are used by library services across the country to extend opening hours, provide additional services and enhance customer experience.

There is an opportunity for County Durham Libraries to grow an exciting volunteer offer focussed around digital and technology. The current volunteer scheme, Digital Buddies, is run in Newton Aycliffe, Consett, Belmont, Coundon, Chester le Street, and at Clayport (supported by Durham University students). Some libraries recently lost their digital volunteers, some report that they are not required, and other libraries recognise the need for volunteer support and are in the process of recruiting. Previous partnerships with AGE UK to provide basic digital support at Belmont Library ended when the charity wanted to introduce a nominal charge to customers.

Digital Buddies assist library customers with any basic IT queries, for example setting up emails, helping to print or shop online, using Microsoft Office, applying for jobs or accessing websites. Some customers are supported to use the public access computers and other customers bring in their own laptops, mobile phone or tablets. Library staff report that they are very grateful when support from a digital volunteer is available as they can spend more time supporting the customer.

DCC is undertaking a volunteer audit for the entire service to ensure that up-to-date statuses of volunteers are recorded.
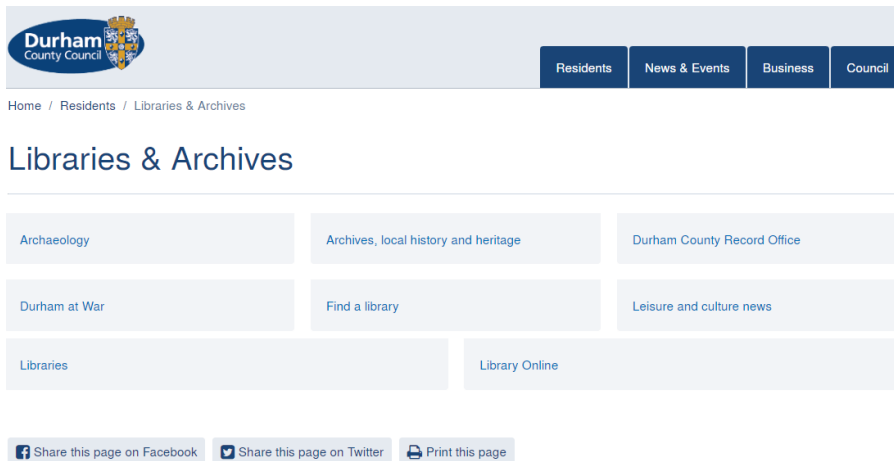
Similar Digital Buddy schemes are in place across a number of library services in England, including Surrey Library, North Sommerset, Woking Library, Cambridgeshire County Council and North Yorkshire Libraries.

9.5 Online user experience

County Durham Libraries does not yet have a clearly defined online brand, logo or style and there is little consistency across the various platforms. There is also confusion when doing an internet search or on social platforms for 'County Durham Libraries' due to the existence of libraries in Durham in the USA and the Durham University Library in the UK.

The main library website sits under Durham County Council's site and shares the branding and corporate style. These pages on the various library/archive sites and services provide up-to-date information and good functionality but generally lack images and personality.

For visitors to this top-level page, access to information requires numerous clicks through different levels of navigation. In addition, there may be potential confusion around what kind of content to expect when you click on terms such as 'find a library', 'libraries' or 'libraries online'.
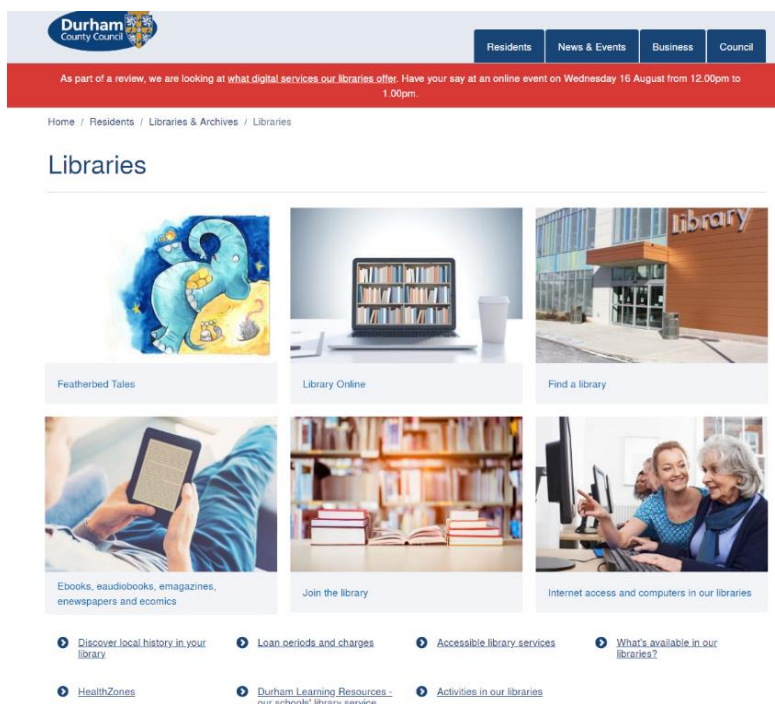
There is also another landing page for libraries but this functions as another navigation tool rather than a compelling destination. Some of the images feel like stock photographs and there is a missed opportunity to create a personality unique to County Durham Libraries.

There are individual pages for each library with useful information about location, opening times and regular activities but these are all uniform and without much individual personality or editorial.

A good example of how County Durham Libraries might simplify their user journey can be seen by looking at Norfolk Library's main landing page. They combine information and links to all of their services into one destination page that uses simple language such as 'Borrow', 'Visit', 'Join', 'What's On', 'Libraries newsletter', 'Follow us on social media' etc. Their use of imagery is also personalised, local and feels authentic.

In any future redesign, it would be worth testing the use language and navigation with the public and using images that resonate with local communities. Providing visitors with more individualised editorial about the different library sites would be worth exploring, with consideration given to the resources required to create and update the content.

There is a nice example from Manchester University Library of a 'Find a library' search page that combines different ways to search or discover the various different locations such as a list, photographs of each specific location and a map.

9.6   Branding

Branding across online assets lacks a single, recognisable identity. Library Online has neutral, underdeveloped branding, unconnected to DCC's corporate branding.
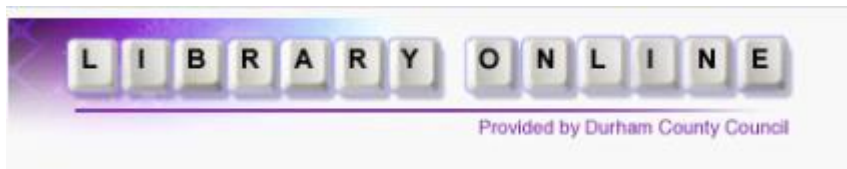
The two social media platforms used by County Durham Libraries use a different branding again. The black, white and yellow palette is used on printed materials in the physical libraries but not yet reflected on library webpages.

The adoption of a new LMS and website offers County Durham Libraries a perfect moment to rethink its online branding. The opportunity exists to create an identity that reflects its values, is rooted in its purpose and has user clarity and appeal.

The Government's design principles offer an excellent place to start when planning any online service and has examples of how the principles have already been put into practice by other public bodies.

The ambition for branding should be to create a consistent look and feel across all online platforms (web and social) and ensure that this ties in with any physical branding on site, and in email communications or marketing. Production of a brand guideline document to be shared across all library sites could be a useful tool here. Libraries Connected have a [good example of a comprehensive branding guideline document.](#)

9.7   Social media content

Once work on the brand has been completed, it would be useful to work on a simple social media strategy that can reflect the brand guidelines and values and help staff across all library sites to create appropriate and compelling content and increase followers.

A nice example of an actively engaged Facebook page can be seen from [Norfolk Libraries and Information Service Facebook page](#) (9.1k followers). This page adopts the usual informational style posts about library activities and what's on (similar to what can be seen on Durham County Libraries Facebook page), but it combines this with more playful content and questions.

Whilst informational based broadcast style posts can be useful, more comments or interactions are elicited from users through open questions. For example, Norfolk posts regularly on a Friday asking followers creative questions like "which fictional world from a book would you most like to visit?" They also link in with current events such as the women's world cup or the release of the new Barbie film to draw users into more conversational comments and interactions.

9.8   Data capture

As the digital transformation progresses it will be critical for County Durham Libraries to review and analyse data across the digital assets regularly and systematically and to implement a set of KPIs, linked with the library strategy and its priorities, and a robust reporting procedure. This will identify where digital services are being well used and those that are not, which will inform programme and service decisions as well as targets, KPIs and ambitions. This will also ensure that data will is readily available as an evidence base for identifying need and for use in funding applications and business cases.

Most digital systems provide access to a significant amount and range of data. The key is to be able to identify and understand what is most useful to County Durham

Libraries to be able to demonstrate success against priorities, alongside where systems and services may be underperforming or having less impact.

The goal should be to be data informed, with a balance of being data driven, as not all measurements matter. For County Durham Libraries this means focussing on counting what counts and on being clear about the outcomes for a particular product or service. For example, simply counting the number of people following Facebook is a measure of reach, but if the priority is engagement with an audience then the real measure of success is to track conversations, interactions and comments. These numbers may be much lower than the total number of followers, but they are a better reflection of a qualitative response. Investment in a new Library Management System should ensure access to a better range of data to be collected (e.g., customer profile data) and more sophisticated reporting systems. Ongoing problems with current suppliers in respect of access to data (e.g., Overdrive) will be harder to resolve and will need a sector wide approach.

10. Funding and opportunities

In order to achieve the ambitions, set out in this report County Durham Libraries will require:

Capital investment funding – significant investment is crucial to replace dated hardware and software and to acquire and install the future facing infrastructure needed to support operational and delivery functions at the modern sector standard and continue be responsive and agile in a rapidly changing digital landscape.

Project funding – additional funding from external sources will support implementation of tools and equipment, increased digital presence, development of staff skills and digital inclusion services.

Additional recurrent funding – increased revenue to support maintenance and ongoing development of any new digital infrastructure and services may be required.

10.1 Internal council funding

Working with other parts of the council to deliver digital outcomes for customers and clients

As outlined in the needs assessment, decision makers often misunderstand the role and contribution of libraries to wider Council priorities and policies. Advocacy work undertaken by Kirklees and Suffolk Libraries demonstrates the potential for library

services to articulate how they are contributing to key agendas, including social isolation, children's aspiration and attainment, and economic and skills development. Libraries remain in a unique position, often as the last remaining DCC asset and presence within communities, where staff connect with local residents on a daily basis. Library staff have an insight into the needs of residents and communities of County Durham that is unparalleled elsewhere within the Council services. There is an opportunity for libraries to work in closer collaboration with other commissioners, colleagues and departments to seek funding and partnerships to support residents in the use of digital and technology to deliver services and initiatives.

10.2 Project funding

Arts Council England

Let's Create (2020-2030) outlines ACE's commitment and actions towards culture and creativity responding to two key areas: the benefits of creativity and culture, particularly among children and young people, and improvements to talent development and retention.

Public libraries are described as a 'vital resource', delivering on the four national Universal Library Offers of reading, health and wellbeing, digital and information, and culture and creativity.

ACE is committed to increasing investment in public libraries over the next decade, recognising in *Let's Create* that public libraries are the *"most widespread and well-used cultural spaces, sitting at the heart of communities and often providing the first point of access to cultural activity."*[6]

Priority Places 2021-2024

As part of its delivery plan for 2021-2024 ACE has identified 54 priority places across England in which investment and engagement is too low, and the opportunity to effectively increase investment and engagement is high. County Durham is identified as both a Priority Place and a Levelling Up for Culture place.

Libraries Improvement Fund – supporting local innovation

The Libraries Improvement Fund has provided two rounds of funding to successful library services seeking to upgrade digital infrastructure and library buildings so they

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[6] Let's Create (2020-2030), pg 22

can respond to the changing ways people use them. The funding is provided by the DCMS and administered by ACE. The aims of the fund are to:

- Enable libraries to develop more flexible, more commercial spaces.

- Increase and improve digital access within communities.

- Connect libraries to their communities.

- Increase potential for transformation.

- Increase library use.

- Increase sustainability of libraries.

An initial round of successful bids, totalling £5 million, was announced in March 2022 with maximum bids of up to £500,000. A second round of successful bids was announced in February 2023 with a third round of bids closing in September 2023 with announcements due in March 2024.

Successful digital bids included:

- **Sefton Libraries** awarded £68,000 to create technology rooms at three libraries, designed to help refugees and isolated residents within the borough. The rooms will enable refugees and asylum seekers to access language courses, while also helping isolated residents connect digitally with distant family members. The Tech Rooms will also be available to small business owners and students across the borough.

- **City of London** awarded £230,000 to enable Artizan Street Library and Community Centre to incorporate a Maker Space, a special hub for digital design, craft and learning. Visitors will be able to print in 3D and, by using other equipment provided including electronic sewing machines and laptops, gain computer programming and textile skills. The project will also reshape the library space to enable local people to develop their own business ideas, learn new job skills and create networks. A new children's library, improved study space, and new shelving and furniture throughout will also be included.

- **Gloucestershire Libraries** awarded £250,000 to develop a flagship digital storytelling centre in a building currently not open to the public in Cheltenham. The new space will feature a digitally immersive reality room, outdoor sensory storytelling garden, a central hub for home educators in Gloucestershire and

flexible opening times using 'Open+' technology. They will also be offering the latest digital technologies for all ages with free facilities, training and support to help with literacy and learning skills.

- **Middlesbrough Libraries** awarded £240,000 to implement Wi-Fi Authentication and Wireless Cloud printing across the library network so that users can print direct from their own devices.

- **Wirral Libraries** awarded £145,000 to redevelop Birkenhead Library into a modern, flexible digital hub, providing a multi-purpose community space to learn, connect and work. The project will involve upgrades to Wi-Fi coverage, Wi-Fi printing, charging points, loanable tablets and improved self-service functionality to improve the overall user experience.

- **Reading Borough Council** awarded £62,000 for Tilehurst Library to enable the purchase of a tablet-lending kit for use within the library; setting up a digital device lending scheme so items like laptops can be borrowed for home use; investing in CCTV and intelligent systems to maximise access to the building and improving community meeting facilities.

National Lottery Project Grants

National Lottery Project Grants is the ACE open access programme for libraries, arts and museum projects. Typically, ACE receives a low level of applications from libraries and would welcome and encourage more libraries to submit applications for funding.

Applications can be made for grants for under £30,000 with decisions made in six to nine weeks, and for over £30,000 with decisions made within 14 weeks.

All libraries can apply to National Lottery Project Grants for new creative and cultural projects that focus on any of the disciplines that come under the Arts Council's remit: literature, visual arts, theatre, music, dance, and combined arts. In addition, local authority library services (as defined by the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964) can apply to National Lottery Project Grants for new activities that help them to deliver any of the four Universal Library Offers in a developmental way, including projects that do not focus on any of the disciplines in ACE's remit, listed above.

Project Grants for Libraries in support of the universal library offers, including digital and information, might look at areas such as staff skills, digital inclusion projects and testing and trying new technology and partnerships in libraries.

LibraryOn

The £1.1m LibraryOn grants programme offered funding for public libraries in England to improve their online presence and discoverability. The overall aim is to increase physical and digital footfall to public libraries by making it easier for the public to find, explore and access the range of services libraries offer. Projects could include:

- Upgrading existing websites

- Upgrading other online offers or services

- Piloting something brand new

Grants ranged from £10,000 to £70,000. In the North, 11 projects were funded including a new website for Sunderland Libraries to revitalise customer experience; a digital advertising campaign in Sefton; an animation and VR project working with young people in North Lincolnshire; a new library app in Kirklees and upgraded events booking for Gateshead.

Another round of funding is not certain, though it is possible and worth exploring.

10.3 Non-funding opportunities

Good Things Foundation

Good Things Foundation is a charity with a mission to "Fix the Digital Divide – For Good". A number of library services across the UK are working with them as part of the National Digital Inclusion Network and the National Data Bank initiatives.

National Digital Inclusion Network is made up of thousands of community partners in the UK, all working to tackle digital exclusion by delivering data, devices and digital skills training.

National Data Bank is providing free mobile data, texts and calls to 500,000 people in need via Good Things Foundation's network of community partners, in collaboration with Virgin Media, O2, Vodafone and Three. Community organisations, including libraries, can apply to access the databank, enabling them to provide data to people in their communities who need it. Current library services offering this include Coventry and Camden through LOTI.

The National Databank is open to community organisations who are members of Good Things Foundation's Online Centres Network, of which County Durham Libraries is already a part.

Recipients of data through the National Databank must be over18 years old and from a low-income household. Additionally, they must meet at least one of the following: have no access or insufficient access to the internet at home, and /or have no or insufficient access to the internet when away from the home, and/or cannot afford their existing monthly phone contract or top up. A person can then be given access to data for up to 12 months.

Invitations to community organisations to join the Data Bank are open now and there are a series of monthly Q&A session where organisations can find out more about what is involved.

In County Durham, Livin in Spennymoor is currently offering the service.

Digital Culture Network

The Digital Culture Network is part of ACE and is an initiative to increase the digital skills and capability of the arts and cultural sector. It provides practical help to the arts and culture sector with a focus on digital skills and leadership development.

Support available includes:

- Practical workshops and webinars to improve skills and engage with peers.

- Signposting to resources and training.

- Support with technology related funding opportunities.

- National and regional training days delivered with technology partners.

They also offer one-to-one support from a team of Tech Champions in a number of areas relevant to libraries including digital strategy and marketing, digital content creation, data analytics and insights, social media, email marketing, websites, digital accessibility and more. Free support is available to all creative and cultural organisations who are eligible for funding from ACE.

11. Digital framework

11.1 Overview

Digital technology enables the library service to connect with its users, to expand their horizons, skills, and knowledge, to sustain and expand access to services and to collaborate with partners on the delivery of services. In public libraries as in wider society, now and in the future, digital will drive more of what is done and delivered. Balancing a digital and physical library offer, which remains important to both customers and communities is going to be key.

This digital strategy describes and outlines what the library service plans to achieve and deliver in the next five years to meet its digital vision and goals. After a period of stasis in digital development and progression, introducing any change will be transformative for staff and customers. It will improve operations, interaction, visibility, promotion and experience across physical, digital and peripatetic services.

The following framework suggests what a set of digital goals for County Durham Libraries might look like pending further work on establishing a clear set of values and priorities, as set out in section 8. It should also be seen in the context of a wider County Durham Libraries Strategy which is currently in development.

County Durham Libraries' digital goals are to:

- Expand access

- Improve and enhance services

- Deliver innovation and improvements

- Optimise investment and resources

- Maximise data to inform decision making and drive change

County Durham Libraries will do this by:

- Developing a solid digital and technological infrastructure for our libraries.

- Building digital confidence, literacy and skills for our staff.

- Being ambitious and applying best practice in our digital work.

- Bringing the library to our users through technology.

- Building connection and interaction with our communities.

- Supporting our users to bridge the digital poverty divide.

- Supporting innovation, testing and learning through appropriate technology for staff and communities.

- Using data to inform a review of services and resources and responding to communities' needs.

11.2 Proposed priorities

The suggested priority areas for the digital strategy in the first five years are:

- A clear focus on building a solid infrastructure for the service including acquiring and implementing a new LMS and front facing platform, with a comprehensive training programme for staff on how to maximise the new system for improved systems and processes and benefits to customers.

- Acquiring, implementing and promoting self-service technology and equipment.

- Developing and delivering a comprehensive plan for staff training and development.

- Supporting customers to develop their digital skills and bridge the digital divide.

- Improving social media presence and audience reach and engagement.

Using the goals as a working framework alongside the research and findings outlined in this report, the proposed priorities have been structured into a set of clear recommendations and a number of phases for development and delivery.

11.3 Recommendations for next steps

1. **Focus on the foundations and getting the basics right** for improved customer experience and greater effectiveness for staff. This means acquiring, implementing and using with confidence hardware and software that will deliver a good modern standard of service, at the same level as other library services in the UK. Invest in core infrastructure and staff skills and training.

2. **Develop and set a limited number of initial goals and priorities as part of a phased approach** that will be reflected upon and iterated over the next five years. Prioritise the core needs of service delivery, which have been identified in this document. Focus on how digital tools and technology can improve internal systems and processes and external engagement, as well as bring efficiencies and cost savings or other benefits. Seek feedback from staff and customers at intervals to ensure changes are having the desired impact and that challenges are being addressed.

3. **Review staff capacity for delivering the transformation** and plan for contingency. It will require a lot of time in the preparation and implementation of new ways of working and, at the same time, there will be expectations for business as usual.

4. **Invest time in reviewing and discussing value and approach tools** such as the *Digital Culture Charter* and the *Guide to Digital Transformation in Cultural Heritage* with leaders and staff to agree a shared set of underlying principles that will frame the digital approach across the service now and in the future. This will inform strategic discussions and decision-making. The outcomes should align with wider values and principles applied across DCC's services.

5. No strategy stands alone. For overall success of the service, **the digital strategy should be tied to the library strategy** and contributing to delivery of the overall vision for the service. As the library strategy is developed, the digital strategy should be updated to reflect how it will enable and impact the key objectives for County Durham Libraries overall and key objectives for individual libraries.

6. Similarly, the library digital strategy should **support the Council's wider digital ambitions**. There are opportunities for County Durham Libraries to play a role in delivering other digital strategies and policies by working with partners or managing initiatives, such as Digital Champions, to help achieve DCC's vision for the County and for particular libraries to help target the people and communities who need more support with digital inclusion. County Durham Libraries should look across other Council digital services to ensure alignment with the broader digital offer.

7. **Measure the success of digital platforms and resources.** Establish consistent and regular monitoring of KPIs such as user journeys on webpages, social media activity, eResource popularity, public PC and Wi-Fi use, and other online operations in and for each library. This will give a clear indication of

what customers want and respond to and will inform decisions about what changes to make to optimise the digital offer.

8. **Seek investment to enable and sustain change.** This could come from within the Council by getting buy-in to goals and showing how the digital strategy supports wider priorities, as well as from local and national external providers highlighted in this document. Consideration should also be given to the need for investment in well-equipped and appropriately furnished spaces in physical libraries where digital services are offered.

9. **Be bold, ambitious and proactive in digital thinking**. Consider how County Durham Libraries could lead the way within DCC in the approach and application of digital activities. This might be through training opportunities for staff and communities, responding to customer needs in new ways, or seeking funding and partnerships that will enable change and deliver new services.

10. **Keep updated on market and sector developments**. Visit some of the case studies, suppliers and services highlighted in this document and learn from their experiences; build relationships with suppliers to understand how to make the most of the equipment and resources; attend conferences and training to build and share knowledge and to learn what technology is available now and what may be available in the near future; participate in networks to share knowledge across DCC and beyond and to discover funding opportunities.

11. **Consider moving away from developing in-house solutions** as these do not benefit from supplier updates or support and may omit the specialist features that other library services use. In-house solutions will take longer to develop and implement than readily available packages and are likely to reach end of life earlier. Technologies designed for the sector can offer several integrated systems, allowing for a single supplier to provide several platforms working together seamlessly, for example an LMS, an app and a front facing platform or website.

12. **Produce and promote clear guidance for staff about the processes, tools and templates for digital communications** with customers. These guidelines should clarify when and how corporate communications and other teams should be involved, how to use content effectively to engage and grow audiences across different platforms, and how to use branding and tone of voice to build trust and recognition for County Durham Libraries.

11.4 Phases for development and delivery

Phase 1 - Develop a roadmap

Phase 1 should align thinking to plan and prepare for delivery of the transformation, focussing on the priority areas.

This would involve:

- Developing values and priorities that sit alongside the new library strategy.

- Considering where initial 'quick wins' might be developed to build confidence of customers and staff.

- Reviewing staff skills, structure and capacity for the transformation.

- Designing a change management plan and communications plan for staff and customers.

- Building a business case for investment.

- Exploring opportunities for partnerships, internal and external.

- Examining supplier frameworks.

- Soft market testing products.

- Agreeing the specifications.

- Continuing to review excellence in the sector and opportunities for learning and development.

Expected timeframe: six months to one year.

Phase 2 – Commission and build

This phase progresses to making things happen, to commissioning and building the infrastructure needed for transformation and sees the launch of a programme of staff digital skills development.

It involves:

- Securing funding and investment.

- Building the specification.

- Undertaking a procurement process.

- Commissioning supplier(s).

- Implementing a programme of staff training across digital systems and services.

- Developing partnerships.

Expected timeframe: one year.

Phase 3 – Implement and embed

This phase will focus on implementing new systems and technology and embedding the change with customers and staff across the service.

It involves:

- Testing, implementing and embedding the new technology and services.

- Delivering staff training on the LMS.

- Launch of new LMS and front facing platform.

Expected timeframe: nine months to one year.

Phase 4 – Review, evaluate and refresh priorities

Depending upon staff skills and capacity, as well as partnership working and funding, further phases should look to bring additional innovation in customer experience and services.

This would involve:

- Time to pause, review and evaluate progress to date

- Analysis of data and other reporting methods to aid evaluation

- Revisiting values, purposes and priorities of the library strategy and ways in which further digital developments can support delivery and outcomes

- Celebrating successes and achievements to date

- Reviewing data collection methods and KPIs to ensure they are fit for purpose

- Refreshing, reframing and establishing priorities for the remaining one or two years

- Planning for next digital strategy

Expected timeframe: one to two years.

12. Costs

Investment is needed to support County Durham Libraries digital transformation. In particular, investment in digital operational technology, infrastructure and training.

The table in section 9 provides information on indicative costs for a range of digital tools, platforms and services that County Durham Libraries might consider adopting to enable the modernisation, transformation and expansion of digital provision and access to DCC Library services.

Other areas for consideration to a cost plan for the implementation of the digital strategy include:

- **Capacity** – staff time to lead, spec, prepare, commission and implement new systems and technology and to build business cases and write funding bids.

- **Project management** – internal library and wider DCC project management support.

- **Procurement and soft market testing** – internal library and wider DCC cost for procurement or soft market testing of products and suppliers.

- **Training and development** – including costs to release staff to attend training and develop their skills.

- **Branding, marketing and communications**

We recognise that some budgets will be held by the service itself, whilst others will be held centrally or by other DCC department.

13. Conclusion

This report has set out the needs, goals and actions for County Durham Libraries to develop a robust digital strategy for the next five years and into the future. The library strategy, yet to be developed, will underpin the digital approach and decisions about equipment and resources. Focussing on the core systems and changes will build a solid foundation for the development of a good quality digital presence and offer going forward. The recommendations, development and delivery phases and tools have been proposed in this context and should be considered to support development and delivery of the digital strategy.

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www.mdls.org.uk

14.2 Suppliers

The following is a list of suppliers referenced in this document. Contacts have been provided where known and all suppliers indicated they would welcome direct contact from County Durham Libraries. Existing procurement frameworks may include additional library suppliers to those provided and should supplement the list below.

Axiell https://www.axiell.com/uk/solutions/library-software/
Contact: Rebecka Höjeberg , Sales Manager. t. +44 115 900 8014, m. 07973628521, rebecka.hojeberg@axiell.co.uk

Bibliotheca https://www.bibliotheca.com/en-gb/solutions/extended-access/

Civica https://www.civica.com/en-gb/ Contact: Neil Barker, Account Manager, neil.barker@civica.co.uk. Tel: 07500866564

D-Tech https://d-techinternational.com/products/people-counting-2/

ESS Library Management Cloud
https://www.ess-readingcloud.co.uk/library-management-solution?utm_source=google&utm_medium=ppc&utm_campaign=brand+awareness&gclid=Cj0KCQjwi7GnBhDXARIsAFLvH4nn3yDR2M4puHaV_Yb8odG_ve41pzr64sNn_CIjFz_jGf1kOfkeomwaAnLyEALw_wcB
Contact: Susan Wignall, Business Development Manager, 44 (0) 7842 617921, Susan.Wignall@librarymanagementcloud.com

Innovative https://www.iii.com/products/polaris-ils/
Contact: James Baker, Sales Consultant UK & Ireland. james.baker1@clarivate.com

Insight Media https://www.insight-media.co.uk/

Lyngsoe https://lyngsoesystems.com/
Contact: Lynn Spokes, Account Manager, lys@lyngsoesystems.com, 07957354912.

Nexbib https://www.nexbib.com/en-US/open-library.html
Contact: Simon Peacock, Commercial Director UK and Ireland. Mobile: 07495602577, s.peacock@nexbib.com

Princh https://princh.com/library-printing-solution/

SirsiDynix https://www.sirsidynix.com/
Contact: Gary Martin, Business Development Director, SirsiDynix, Direct: +44 (0)1923 202918, Mobile: +44 (0)7712 196446, Gary.Martin@sirsidynix.com

Solus https://wp.sol.us/the-library-app/

Surfbox https://www.surfbox.ie/

counterculture