Libraries Engagement with Children and Young People
Executive Summary

Ann Lemming
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Introduction

This report summarises library services offer to children and young people across Essex, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and North Kent.

The research draws on structured interviews with the nine library services - Bedford, Central Bedfordshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, Luton, Medway, Southend and Thurrock - and the three remaining schools' library services in the region - Bedford, Essex and Luton.

This research was conducted from July to October 2012 during which time many services had experienced or were going through restructures along with other departments in their authorities. They have the challenge of sustaining their core offer to children and young people within new structures, with reduced staffing and diminishing budgets.

Library provision for 0 – 19 year olds

Libraries offer a rich core service provision for children and young people with a wide range of initiatives and activities that range from national campaigns to locally devised activities.

In the current climate, library services are working hard to sustain their core services to children and young people. A wide offer is available although primarily concentrated on Early Years and primary aged children as they are seen as an easier group to engage. This has been compounded by the loss of children and young people specialists within the library services.

The table (to the right) shows a summary of the core service provision to children and young people:

Support for literacy is very strong for pre-school and Early Years children and their families through Bookstart, Booktime, Story Times and Rhymetimes. Primary school children's literacy is also well supported through Chatterbooks reading groups, class visits and the Summer Reading Challenge. Reading groups are offered to 11-14s by most services but the offer to 14-19s is much reduced.

There is a strong information offer for children and young people. Primary school children can learn how to use a library through class visits. Libraries have invested in a wide range of on-line information resources that are freely available to library members. These resources are available and used by young people for homework. Library services report that they are well used although no specific data for use by children and young people was available. Some services also offer homework support in libraries or on-line.

Service planning

Library service planning is linked to the local authorities' objectives. These are used as a broad framework for library services to develop specific services.

Most library services in the region keep records of numbers attending events for children and young people. However the information that is gathered is not necessarily used to target or develop new services for children and young people or to demonstrate the impact of services on children and young people in the local community.

The practice of using data for targeting services to groups is patchy across the region although library staff know their areas well and use this knowledge to provide extra input where it is required.

Some services have library staff with a specific outreach role although most are finding this work more difficult to sustain than before while recognising its importance in promoting services to young people and attracting funding.

An additional aspect of service planning for libraries is that there is a growing expectation that they will be income generators. Libraries have a need to be more commercially minded and there is a need to develop these skills in current library staff.

Consultation

Libraries have used several channels for consulting with young people including Youth Parliaments/Cabinets, the Youth Service, Young People's forums, community groups, National Citizens Service and volunteers. Topics they have consulted on commonly are book selection, service changes and library refurbishments.

Most services expressed a wish to consult more with children and young people and to develop the use of on-line and social media for consultation. Libraries have difficulty with consulting with children and young people who are not library users.

Libraries work with schools

All library services in the ROH Bridge area offer a range of services to schools.

There are three school library services in the area – Essex, Luton and Bedford (also serving Central Bedfordshire). Its service is usually differentiated from the public library service in its offer to schools by the fact that it primarily supports formal learning and it provides bulk loans to teachers whereas the public library service primarily supports informal learning and supports the individual learner.

Summary of the core service provision to children and young people (Dec 2012)

Activity	Offered by library services	0-5	5-7	7-11	11-14	14-19
Bookstart	9	9				
Booktime	8	6	2			
Chatterbooks	6	1		6	1	
Class visits	9	5	8	9	5	2
Homework support	7		3	7	7	2
Online reference resources	9	2	4	8	8	7
Reading groups (other than Chatterbooks)	8			3	8	3
Recommended reads	5	5	4	4	4	3
Rhymetime/Storytime						
Summer Reading Challange	9	4	9	9	6	2

The main thrust of libraries work with schools is to promote a love of books by children and young people. All library services offer class visits to schools, mostly for early years, primary, lower and middle schools but there are some visits by Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils. Most library services have contacts with special schools and PRUs in their area. Library staff also make visits to schools, primarily to primary, lower and middle schools to promote the Summer Reading Challenge.

Many services find building relationships with schools difficult, especially with secondary and upper schools. Local library staff have individual links with head teachers and literacy coordinators but few services attend formal head teachers or literacy coordinators meetings, although many think this would be helpful in promoting services and in planning to meet schools' needs.

The main link for secondary schools is through the school librarian and in some cases the English department. Few library services have links with colleges or universities and where there have been attempts to work with these tiers of education they have not be very successful. Some services actively promote services to schools and have outreach workers for this.

Some of barriers to libraries engaging with secondary schools have been articulated in terms of communication – libraries underselling themselves to schools and not providing comprehensive evidence on the impact of libraries on school age children and young people. Libraries need to understand and promote their worth as well as develop a more commercial skills set, encouraging schools to pay for additional services.

Libraries are keen to develop the following provision with schools; programmes of events, after school activity, reading groups, literary festivals, virtual study guides and on-line support for parents.

Volunteering

All library services offer volunteering opportunities to young people. Volunteering schemes are more established in some libraries than others but all are committed to giving a quality experience to the young people involved and an opportunity to work alongside regular staff. Volunteering is also a potential useful vehicle for effectively engaging the 14-19age-group.

The most popular reason cited for recruiting volunteers is to support the Summer Reading Challenge. Since 2010 The Reading Agency (TRA) has supported library services in offering volunteering opportunities for the Summer Reading Challenge. This has been very successful and the TRA are continuing to develop this programme. Its recommendations for going forward are that;

- the scheme should include accreditation

- year round volunteering opportunities in libraries are created

- libraries integrate volunteering opportunities into all programmes of libraries' work with young people.

Varying forms of accreditation are currently provided for volunteers and some have expressed an interest in exploring how to incorporate Bronze Arts Award.

While library services are very clear that young volunteers are not used for the delivery of core services, most are keen to expand volunteering in some way whether it be by increasing the numbers of volunteers, widening the age range and/or diversity or extending opportunities throughout the year.

Some services would also like to recruit volunteers for reading group support, peer support in homework clubs, for Storytelling and Rhymetime and social media development. There is also an aspiration that volunteering should be a developmental process and that libraries work with volunteers to increase their skills and knowledge.

Networks and Partnerships

There is a wide variety of activities in libraries that are developed and delivered with assistance from partner organisations. Some of these are long standing and others operate on a more ad hoc basis. Examples given of partnerships demonstrated how the library service offer can be enhanced through these relationships.

For library services, partnerships have to be beneficial to the aims of the library service or the overall objectives of their local authority. They also have to be deliverable within the capacity of the library staff.

Many services reported that due to restructuring in their authorities and budget cuts some partnership opportunities have reduced; the shrinkage of arts development teams and the Youth Service were referred to by several library services. Some services have found their links with Children's Centres have diminished and want to re-establish this successful partnership.

All services have links with the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL), the Society of Chief Librarians (SCL), and The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (Cilip). Some also mentioned school librarian networks, the Children's Reading Partnership and local community networks.

All services are keen to be introduced to appropriate networks and communities that have the same agenda as libraries for promoting literacy and reading activities with children and young people, including head teacher forums, publishers and youth services.

Digital Media

Libraries are strong advocates for digital media and have developed online catalogues and service websites, given access to computers in libraries and support for using computers. However the offer has generally been developed for adults and not with children and young people in mind.

All services expressed a strong desire to use social media more creatively with young people, recognising that they are a receptive audience for this style of communication and that this is a key resource in attracting this age group to use libraries.

Despite a willingness to use new media there is an expressed lack of skill and expertise amongst library staff and managers in this area. TRA has produced a report on developing the use of digital media in libraries to develop audiences for reading *(Libraries and Digital, TRA March 2011)* their findings included:

•	Lack of staff skills is a major barrier to engaging users online

•	A lack of strong and engaging digital content is limiting interest from young people

•	Libraries would welcome support from The Reading Agency with an online platform for young people to engage with creative reading and writing

•	Access to creative reading opportunities and book recommendation websites for children is patchy.

The National Scene

In March 2012, Cilip published a survey entitled 'Eye of the Storm', to provide more robust data on library services than had appeared in the media and a current overview of public library services in the financial year 2011-2012. Its findings include that:

•	There was a total net loss of over £39 million from total revenue expenditure compared with 2010-11

•	80% have reduced or expect to reduce the number of staff. 25% of the lost posts are reported to be at professional level

•	60% of respondents reported a reduction in their expenditure on materials

•	16 of the responding authorities reported library closures and just under a third reported reduction in mobile library services

•	The number of library opening hours per week has reduced by 3,000 in 2011-12 for responding authorities

•	Over two thirds of respondent library authorities are actively considering alternative methods of governance and service delivery. Community managed libraries, setting up trusts and partnership working were the most frequently mentioned.

Cilip concludes that in some cases the cuts are disproportionate and will create long-term negative impacts on local communities and the support that libraries give to families, literacy and digital access.

The Institute has followed this with another survey 'A Changing Landscape' in December 2012 based on feedback from library authorities for 2012-2013.

The survey that reinforces the trend of reductions in opening hours, staffing and revenue expenditure the increasing numbers of community managed libraries and the co-location of libraries with other local services. There is a strong trend towards looking at alternative methods of governance and service delivery with 50% of respondents currently looking at or actively developing new models.

In 2011 Arts Council England (ACE) took over responsibility for supporting and developing libraries. Envisioning Libraries of the Future (ELF) is a programme of research and debate that ACE is undertaking to develop a long term vision for public libraries in England. The core purpose of libraries looks likely to remain the same for the next ten years. What will change will be the social and technological context that libraries will work in and the means of delivering libraries' core purpose.

A further ACE initiative is the Grants for the Arts funding that is making £6 million available from 2012 to 2015 for projects that stimulate ambitious and innovative partnerships between libraries and artist and/or arts organisations.

Library structures and governance

Although the structures that libraries work within and issues of governance were not a focus of the survey of libraries in the ROH Bridge area there was incidental feedback from library services on this topic and a variety of models in place and / or in development.

Luton Libraries is part of a Cultural Trust – Luton Culture - set up in 2008 to provide a range of cultural services for the local community and learning bodies.

Luton Libraries is part of this Trust and benefits from working alongside Museum and Arts services.

Library services that are part of a local authority express a preference for being within a directorate that is responsible either for education, children's or cultural services. Essex Libraries sits within a local authority but has developed a trading arm that sells support and expertise to other library services. Libraries Traded Services can provide specific services such as event and activity management, staffing restructuring, back office support for IT and library systems or alternatively a library service can totally outsource their operations to Essex Libraries Traded Services as Slough Libraries have done.

An interesting model that has developed outside the ROH Bridge area is in Suffolk where the library service now operates as an Industrial and Provident Society (ISP). An ISP is an organisation conducting an industry, business or trade, either as a co-operative or for the benefit of the community. The new service is expected to generate income but has access to funding streams that were not available to libraries as part of the local authority.

At present there are no examples of community run libraries in the ROH Bridge area although this is likely to become a more widespread solution to library services budgetary pressures.

Recommendations

In most cases recommendations relate to the majority of library services in the ROH Bridge region. Where there are instances of a service that would benefit particularly from a recommendation they are listed.

1. ROH Bridge can be instrumental in re-establishing and building new relevant networks and brokering new relationships that will support and develop library services work with children and young people. Library services are particularly interested in developing closer relationships with schools and head teachers' groups.

2. In some services there is a perceived lack of confidence in working with young people. Services have lost roles that specialise in delivering services to young people and support from Youth Services has diminished. ROH Bridge could offer a training programme for staff on working with young people based on a course available through the TRA.

3. Opportunities for young people to take part in volunteering in libraries are increasing. The experience of the TRA in developing volunteering in libraries could be used in introducing the Arts Award to this sector. Bridge

organisations and TRA should work together to ensure a clear and accessible volunteering offer to young people that can be easily administered by libraries.

4. There is an aspiration in library services to make better use of digital and social media. ROH Bridge and Bridge organisations generally could have a role to work alongside the TRA to support libraries in this area. This could include:

    More inclusive and interactive websites for children and young people

    Opportunities for children and young people to have input into developing and creating content

    Library staff skills development

    Support for online platform for creative reading and writing

    Sharing good practice across Bridge regions.

5. Many library services will continue to experience financial pressures. They will need to make strong arguments for funding for their services to children and young people and present evidence of the positive effect libraries can produce for this group. ROH Bridge can have input into establishing:

    Relevant and effective information gathering and recording of activities for children and young people

    Producing case studies

    Use of information to target services

    Support in finding funding opportunities and using information to attract funding from the local authority and other sources

    An evaluation pack for the region as used by Essex.

6. Ensure that the support offer of both ROH Bridge and the TRA for volunteering and digital media for children and young people are consistent and cooperative and give a clear message to libraries on how Arts Award and My Voice will work alongside each other.

7. Consider support for the development of generic packs for class visits and look at how these can be made more creative and interactive including through co-production.

8. ROH Bridge should do more to explain how Arts Award can be part of library services' offer and how the award dovetails into and expands the library offer to young people.

9. A strength of libraries is their venues throughout the community. A further recommendation is therefore to look at ways that libraries and ROH Bridge can work to make these the focus of culture and creativity for children and young people and explore opportunities for creating income.

10. ROH Bridge could provide support to libraries and their partners in making applications to Grants for the Arts and in making suggestions for suitable partners for libraries to work with. Services who are looking for help in this area are Luton, Central Bedfordshire, Thurrock, Bedford and Medway.

11. During the course of this survey there have been many examples of well delivered and innovative projects. However, several services have said that they often do not evaluate these projects thoroughly and so do not formalise their learning and also lose the opportunity to publicise their successes formally. A way forward may be for ROH Bridge to support libraries to set evaluation criteria for any projects that are funded through ACE and to ensure that evaluation is rigorous. This would set a standard for evaluation of other library projects. Luton Libraries is especially interested in this.