Proposal for change to deliver the new service offer for: Library Service

Library Service
Corporate Plan Priority: 2
Directorate: Directorate of Environment & Neighbourhood Services (DENS)
Date: July 2015

Saving: ✓ Growth: 
Revenue: Capital: *

* allied invest to save one off capital investment proposed

PART A - The Proposal

1. The proposal is to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STOP</td>
<td>providing all or part of a service</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ REDUCE</td>
<td>the level of service we provide</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ CONTINUE</td>
<td>the service and CHANGE how it is provided to reduce cost</td>
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Generate ADDITIONAL INCOME

INCREASE the service level or provide a NEW service

2. Outline of the proposed change

Context
Under the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act the Council is obliged to provide a ‘comprehensive and efficient service’ for all individuals who live, work or study within the borough. Reading Borough Council currently delivers this through 7 public library service points across the borough, including a central library; a recent offer of e-books which can be downloaded online; through a mobile library; and a Toy Library based in Southcote. The service offers a comprehensive range of services over and above the provision of free books and information specified in the 1964 Act.
Emphasis is placed on services to disabled, vulnerable, older residents; to meet the diverse needs of Reading’s multi-cultural community; and to support families, the under 5s and improving literacy and attainment. The focus of our service is to offer both universal services for all and services and activities which help to ‘narrow the gap’ and meet the Council’s wider strategic priorities.

**Underpinning Principles**
Library services can be delivered in new and creative ways which engage and serve communities. The approach will be different in each local authority and should reflect local needs and aspiration.

In order to meet the challenge of continuing to deliver a ‘comprehensive and efficient’ library service as required under the 1964 Act, we need to re-evaluate the meaning of ‘comprehensive and efficient’ in Reading in 2015, in the context of the changing needs and aspirations of our communities.

It is therefore proposed that the whole library service is reviewed and transformed on the basis of objective criteria with the aim of saving in the region of £600,000 by 2017/18, assuming such a saving to be consistent with the Council’s legal duties.

Options for a new service offer will need to derive from a robust and detailed needs analysis (by area/segmenting communities of interest and need) and the input of those living, working and studying in the borough through a comprehensive consultation programme. The process is likely to require circa 10 months to approval of a future model plus time to implement which will depend on the options supported.

The needs analysis, service review and consultation will inform members’ decisions and a view as to what would constitute a ‘comprehensive and efficient service’ for Reading. The desired level of savings may or may not be achievable, depending on the outcomes of these processes.

Subject to these processes, it is presently considered that the key propositions underpinning Reading’s proposed approach to delivering a modern library service fit for the future, within constrained budgets, should be as follows:

- To preserve or enhance services which benefit the most vulnerable, those with specific needs, children and young people;
- To retain the central library as the hub of the network, whatever other changes may be made;
- To review the current library service network using objective criteria, to determine an appropriate neighbourhood offer;
- To co-locate services where possible to encourage people to access a greater range of resources, help and support in welcoming and well-used public buildings;
- To ensure that free public access to IT is maintained in a range of community locations to support an increasingly digital society.
Reading Borough Council is not alone in its efforts to seek to deliver savings from within the library service. In recent years, a large number of local authorities have begun to explore a range of opportunities to deliver such savings, including:

- Delivering back-office efficiencies
- Providing services digitally
- Co-locating library services with other local services
- Using library services to deliver other service outcomes and priorities
- Volunteer-run libraries, co-delivering services with community groups, and increasing the use of volunteers
- Making better use of self-service technologies
- Sharing services
- Reducing opening hours
- Closing branch libraries

Future change and service offer:

Subject to the processes summarised above which will inform proposals, it is currently considered that the following features of a future service offer may be desirable.

It is presently considered that, whatever changes may be made to the current service offer, the Library Service should operate from the Central Library as a ‘community and learning hub’ and the hub of the service network. The Central Library offers a place to study, research and learn in an accessible and stimulating environment, with both designated quiet areas and zoned areas where group activities can take place. Located in the centre of Reading with excellent transport connectivity to surrounding neighbourhoods, Central Library serves the wider Reading area which is geographically compact. In addition to traditional library services, the hub also now hosts a range of organisations providing a complementary offer of support to improve skills and employment prospects; IT and digital media skills, with ‘digital volunteers’ on hand to help people get online and make the most of new technology; and access to a wider range of information. The Central Library now offers improved free wi-fi on all floors.

It is presently considered that the Council should maintain a neighbourhood library ‘offer’, the location, nature and opening hours of the service points of which will be informed by a full analysis of needs, performance and costs. Where appropriate libraries would be co-located with other services in community hubs.

A number of authorities have reduced service points but instigated ‘neighbourhood collections’ in local community buildings which offer a smaller selection of books for adults and children to browse, and allow local people to pick up and drop off books which they have borrowed. Consideration will be given to this and other options.

Work is commencing to improve the library service web presence and ensure
that content is easily navigable and user-friendly.

Books can be reserved online from the libraries catalogue, which now provides enhanced content including book covers, synopses and reviews. Books can also be ordered over the telephone or in person from a library branch and could be collected from other access points as above, if these were created. There is currently a charge for reservation of items online.

E-books can be borrowed for free for 21 days from Reading’s ‘e-Library’ - this offers a growing range of fiction, non-fiction and children’s books including some best-selling titles and authors, available to read online, on a smart-phone or tablet and some e-readers. In the same way that the library has to purchase books, it also has to purchase e-books and hence the number of e-books that can be ‘borrowed’ at any time is limited in the same way as hard-copy books.

It is presently considered that all service points should benefit from new self-serve technology, offering an efficient service for service users and making the best use of staff and resources. Self-service machines would allow customers to borrow, renew and return books and to pay fines. This would, depending on the model adopted and the service in a given area, allow staff to provide more help to those that need it; enable staffing reductions in community hubs with shared reception facilities; and could allow the provision of unstaffed neighbourhood collections in other public buildings. This would require a one off capital investment and a small revenue support charge thereafter.

The Council would wish to maintain a mobile library to provide a home visiting service to the elderly and those with restricted mobility, including stops at sheltered and extra care housing, residential and nursing homes. This service can also provide community stops in selected neighbourhoods.

The Council would also wish for libraries to continue working with partners to provide a range of activities and events, to enhance quality of life, increase accessibility of services and tackle priority outcomes such as reducing isolation for older people, supporting adult and children’s literacy, and improving public health. Recent additions include Community Savings And Loans and Children’s Centres outreach activities.

Consideration will be given to increasing the use of volunteers, including to potentially extend opening hours where this is sustainable. Reading Libraries have always used volunteers and this has been increasing. Volunteers assist with rhyme times, delivering the mobile library service, running activities, supporting the Summer reading scheme for children, local studies collection cataloguing and research, and with the toy library. There is scope to further increase the use of volunteers in adding value to the library offer, and it is presently considered that any new staffing structure should reflect the need to support and resource this.

The Council’s public access IT offer across libraries is currently being upgraded and improved. It is presently considered that public access IT
should continue to be offered from the Central Library and retained in neighbourhood locations but might be re-sited within alternate community settings.

The current toy library is based in Southcote. This effectively limits access for those reliant on public transport based in other areas of the borough. The Council sees this service review as an opportunity to explore options to develop a more accessible toy library service to improve reach and take-up - especially in deprived areas as this is an under-used resource.

3. Impact on residents, businesses and other organisations:

The latest data available shows that over 21,326 members of the public are active library borrowers (that is, they have borrowed in the past year). The Central Library accounts for circa half of all items borrowed. Beyond borrowing from the libraries collections, including books and e-books, other most common uses of the library are to access the public IT network and to read daily newspapers.

Impact cannot be fully appraised until proposals are developed following needs analysis and consultation. Impacts will depend on the options proposed and how these are implemented. However, examples of potential impacts could include:

- **Reduced opening hours** - more limited access to the service including public IT network, study space and other services.

- **Reduced service points** - if unmitigated, impacts could include:
  - Increased travel times and costs for some
  - Reduced availability of quiet study space at local level for students, schoolchildren and others
  - Agencies offering advice or activities in branches might be Impacted

- **Changes to location of public internet/IT points** - reduced or increased access may result.

- **Changes** could impact on residents living out of borough but utilising Reading libraries, particularly into West Berkshire.

- **Positive benefits** could also result from new models and ways of working - such as a wider service offer through diversification of activity or co-location; increased opportunities from partnership working.
4. Impact on other services we provide

- There may be a desire to provide space for neighbourhood collections in a number of community buildings, for adults and children to browse and collect/drop-off books which they have borrowed.
- There may be a requirement to provide off-site storage space for any displaced stock, mobile library service and toy library collection potentially in the event of a reduction in service points or if branches are co-located in other community buildings.
- Children’s Centre staff are based in and deliver a service from Tilehurst library currently and run activities from Battle library on a Wednesday.
- See staffing below.

5. Impact on staff

Where co-locating services/developing a community hub model is possible, then some rationalisation and reduction in staff could be achieved with the introduction of a common reception or customer help-desk covering a range of services, supported by self-service technology for borrowing and returning library books and the payment of any fines.

The introduction of self-service technology and a move to increase co-location would both mean that library assistant roles would change.

| Existing no. of staff: | 72 |
| FTE:                    | 37.4 |

Reductions in staff would be predicated on the options agreed. However, it is considered that there could be a significant reduction in staffing levels.

| The number of FTE that might be lost is: | Not yet determined |
| The number of posts that might be lost is: | Not yet determined |
6. Resources and support needed to make the change

**Legal advice** - In designing a consultation process the Council will be mindful among other matters of the lessons from the Secretary of State’s intervention in the Wirral in 2009 when the council was deemed to be in breach of the 1964 Act, and subsequent case law.

**Project Management and Analytical Support** - Support planning and completing both the detailed needs assessment and public consultation.

**HR** - the scale of change involved may necessitate a wholesale staffing restructure as well as significant job losses. Increased use of volunteers would need to be managed within a clear policy framework.

**Finance** - principally support in relation to modelling staffing structures and disaggregating corporate costs.

**Property Services** - support in relation to evaluating options for relocating services/developing community hubs; valuation of assets; identifying running costs and maintenance liabilities over the medium-long term.

7. Indicative timescale and major milestones

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<th>Date (estimates)</th>
<th>Milestones</th>
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<tr>
<td>July - Sept 2015</td>
<td>• Comprehensive desk-based needs analysis</td>
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| Sept 2015        | • Policy Committee approval for Phase One consultation programme and questionnaire - seeking views on library services and information on usage to inform a review and reorganisation of the service.  
                  • Policy Committee approve consultation document including publication of desktop analysis |
| Oct-Nov 2015     | • 6 week initial public consultation |
| Nov-Dec 2015     | • Analysis of consultation responses  
                  • Development of Library Service vision/strategic framework  
                  • Development of options for change/mitigating measures within the strategic framework |
| January-March 2016 | • 12 week programme of consultation on vision and options with staff, service users and partner organisations to inform final proposals to the Administration |
| April-May 2016   | • Analysis of consultation responses |
Further development of a preferred option for approval by Council

| June 2016 - onwards | Implementation of new library offer  
|                      | Staff restructure proposals and consultation |

8. Risks and Opportunities

- Risk that the proposal is (successfully) judicially challenged
- Risk that the comprehensive needs assessment does not result in the identification of changes sufficient to deliver the desired level of saving
- Opportunity to increase the use of volunteers to maintain a range of targeted activities both in libraries and in other community venues, and to potentially increase opening hours.
- Opportunity through co-location of services and/or through developing neighbourhood collections to reach a demographic not currently accessing library services.
- Opportunity to improve self-service technology for customers and make more effective use of staff resource.
- Opportunity to increase take-up of the toy library service through alternative delivery model.

9. Dependencies

- Implementation of Self-Service RFID technology - not all aspects of potential change would be contingent on this (e.g.: reducing opening hours could be delivered without introducing self-service technology); however, some would be and implementing RFID in those cases would enable a greater degree of flexibility in developing a ‘future-proofed’ service.

- Increased off-site library storage capacity for displaced stock:
  - if branches close/the offer is scaled-down
  - if the mobile library service is displaced
  - if the toy library collection is displaced or there is a desire to relocate/deliver a different model

- Outcome of public consultation

- Outcome of Asset Management Review could impact on the options available
10. Initial Equality Impact Assessment

The best solutions come from the best processes. This is the learning so far from the Future Libraries Programme which states that transformation or rationalisation ‘must be underpinned by a thorough analysis of people’s needs and councils must be able to demonstrate that those needs will continue to be met from the rationalised service. In terms of defining need, it is both the needs of the population as a whole and the specific needs of particular groups such as children, older people, and those experiencing social and economic deprivation that need to be analysed and addressed.’

This approach requires a strong commitment to collecting data and developing a model of service provision that best meets these needs within the context of the overall envelope of resources available. In determining the shape of the service the key drivers should be an overarching strategy and needs assessment.

A full and detailed assessment of needs is proposed to inform the development of options. This will need to assess the needs of specific groups and deprived communities and understand fully the extent and range of services offered by the service currently. Consideration will need to particularly be given to the impact of service changes, reductions or closures on different groups within the community including vulnerable groups and those with protected characteristics. This will include issues around accessibility of the services.

The Library Management System does not facilitate a demographic breakdown of members/borrowers, which makes analysis of users by protected characteristic very difficult. Some information can be gleaned from issues analysis. For instance last year there were 16,553 large print issues from all libraries plus 12,215 from mobile services. Stock amounts by category can also be provided.

Equality Impacts and potential mitigations - headlines:

As stated above, the impacts on different groups and mitigations possible will vary according to the option(s) proposed and will need to be fully considered in appraising options and at the time decisions are taken.

For instance, the closure of a branch could impact disproportionately on the elderly; those reliant on public transport; minority ethnic groups and particularly those speaking English as an Additional Language, and those on low incomes. For example:

- There is potential for any closures to limit access to foreign language materials for certain ethnic minority groups. There is also potential for adverse impact where there are options for closures in areas with high BME populations, where cultural barriers may mean such groups are less likely to engage in library services if they become harder to access.

- Library closures could limit access for some service users with disabilities and frail older people by extending journey times to access their nearest
service point which will need to be taken into consideration.

- Parents and children, and especially those in deprived areas, could have more limited access on similar grounds. In particular, parents reliant on public transport could incur additional costs in accessing a library and this could, for those on low incomes, be a very real limitation on access.

Impacts and mitigations should be considered in partnership with voluntary, community and faith groups and alternate arrangements could be made to ensure local access for instance through a neighbourhood collection.

Examples of potential mitigations include:
- free or discounted travel on public transport for older people and those with disabilities;
- neighbourhood collections could ensure continuing local access to a selection of books including foreign language, large print and talking books;
- if the mobile library continued to provide an outreach service this could be reviewed as part of considering impact and mitigations on vulnerable groups;
- the potential continuation of other matters might also be relevant in considering mitigation measures e.g. the free gifting of books to babies via Health Visitors under the Bookstart scheme; the Summer Reading Challenge for younger children (which could be linked to Children’s Centres as participants tend to be primary school age); and
- regular story times and baby rhyme time sessions.

Impacts and mitigations should be considered in partnership with relevant community representatives, voluntary, community and faith groups.

It is anticipated that the needs analysis research accompanying consultation should include profiling the community by protected characteristics. Identified impacts on protected groups will naturally inform the proposals. In seeking so far as reasonably possible to minimise any differential adverse impact on any one section of the community, the Council will consult thoroughly with service users, staff, trade unions and partners. Consultation methodology will ensure that voices in all parts of the community are heard and representation from different sections of the community will be monitored through consultation.

11. Consultation and Communications plans:

The review of the library service will involve extensive communication and consultation activity in order to ensure that all stakeholder groups understand the options and have a say.

It is proposed that the review takes place across two phases:
- **Phase One** would be focused on research and analysing available
data on needs and usage, through consultation with the public, staff and partners, as well as through desk-based research.

- **Phase Two** would focus upon the development of options and mitigation measures that would allow Reading Borough Council to provide a ‘comprehensive and efficient’ library service, within a reduced budget envelope. These options would subsequently form the focus of a period of consultation with staff, customers (users and non-users) and partners, the results of which will be taken into account in a decision by Members.

**Proposal for Phase One of the Review and Consultation**

The Council proposes to undertake a review of the current library service network using objective criteria to be agreed.

The first phase of the review will include:
- desktop research and needs analysis, and
- a first phase open consultation

**Desktop analysis:** Key elements are detailed below:

a) **Library branch profiles:** A separate profile will be produced for each library service point. Performance data will be available for each service point as part of the accompanying information. This will include visitor numbers, usage and a unit costing derived from transactions.

b) **Overall service performance:** When considering changes to the library network, it is necessary to give consideration to the efficiency of the service as a whole as well as individual service points.

c) **Community Profiles:** To support the review of the library network, it will be important to understand the characteristics and needs of the communities currently served by each library. Community profiles will be developed for each geographical catchment area. Work is currently underway to identify suitable community catchment areas for the libraries.

d) **Equality Impact Assessment:** An assessment of need will be carried out on groups within communities potentially affected by any changes - to include the needs of older and disabled people; those who are unemployed or on low incomes; children and young people; those reliant on public transport; and Reading’s diverse ethnic communities and cultures.

The desktop analysis will be made available as part of the consultation.

**Phase One Consultation:** It is also proposed that a comprehensive and multi format programme of consultation be developed to involve:

- Staff and volunteers
• Public: users and non-users of the services
• Partners and stakeholders e.g. children’s centres, schools, voluntary agencies.

An initial consultation questionnaire will capture information from members of the public on usage of the service and their needs. It will also ask:

• for other suggestions as to how the service can be delivered differently or more efficiently given the necessity to save money;
• how the library service may be improved and have greater impact so as to engage those not currently utilising library services.

The questionnaire will be made available on the Council’s website, in hard copy format on request and to housebound customers with an offer to assist in its completion.

Staff consultation: Staff will need to be fully consulted in developing proposals and their knowledge of the customers and service will be important in understanding and mitigating potential impacts

12. Legal Implications

Local government has the statutory responsibility for providing and funding library services under the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act.

The Council is mindful of the lessons from the Secretary of State’s intervention in the Wirral in 2009 when the council was deemed to be in breach of the 1964 Act. The subsequent report by Sue Charteris ‘The Local Inquiry into the Public Library Service Provided by Wirral Metropolitan Borough gave indications of how the council should, in that lay inspector’s view, have consulted communities in the Wirral:

• The council was in breach of its statutory duties because it failed to make an assessment of local needs therefore it could not identify reasonable options to meet needs;
• The requirements for older and disabled people, unemployed and those living in deprived areas not taken into account;
• The council was not able to demonstrate it had regard for meeting general requirements of children;
• The council took a decision to close 11 libraries in the absence of a strategic plan for or review of the Library Service
• The decision was made without a clear understanding of the extent and range of services which are core, not add on;
• There was a further breach in relation to needs of deprived communities;
• The council displayed a ‘lack of logic’ around closure decisions.

The Council is also mindful, however, that the Wirral report does not have
authoritative legal status as such, and that it will need to comply with the principles emerging from more recent case law, including R(Green) v Gloucestershire County Council [2011] EWHC 2687 (Admin); R(Bailey) v London Borough of Brent [2011] EWCA Civ 1586 and [2011] EWHC 2572 (Admin); R(Williams) v Surrey County Council [2012] EWHC 867 (QB); and R(Draper) v Lincolnshire County Council [2014] EWHC 2388 (Admin). These cases principally concern the duty in s.7 of the 1964 Act, the scope of an authority’s consultation responsibilities when revising their library services, and the nature of an authority’s duty under s.149 of the Equality Act 2010 in this context.

13.a Financial implications - net change to service budget in each year

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<tr>
<th>£’000’s</th>
<th>Savings</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Growth/Costs</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>2015/16</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>-£</td>
<td>£</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016/17</td>
<td>£</td>
<td>£</td>
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<td>2017/18</td>
<td>£ 600 k</td>
<td>£</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>£</td>
<td>-£</td>
<td>£ 600 k</td>
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13.b One off project costs and income (not included in above)

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<th>£’000’s</th>
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<tr>
<td>2015/16</td>
<td>Capital Costs -£</td>
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<td>Capital Receipts £</td>
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<td>Estimate of redundancy costs -£</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Estimate of resource costs to deliver -£</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sub-total £</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016/17</td>
<td>Capital Costs -£ 250 k *(i)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Capital Receipts £</td>
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<td>2017/18</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sub-total £</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
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(i) Capital investment in self-serve technology to enable implementation of neighbourhood collections within community settings (un-staffed by Library assistants), and effective use of remaining staff in branches. This will support the creation of a flexible service fit for the future and requires a one-off investment, to include:

- RFID Tags inserted in all library lending stock
- Staff workstations which activate the tags
- Self-service terminals
• Exit security systems

PART B - Service Context

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<tr>
<td>LIBRARY SERVICE</td>
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<td>£1.42m</td>
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<tr>
<th>15. Savings already agreed for 16/17 and 17/18 £’000’s</th>
<th>16/17</th>
<th>17/18</th>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<th>16. Benchmarking - Performance and Cost</th>
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<td>Reading has fewer service points per 100,000 population than the national or nearest neighbour comparator group averages. However, it is similar when compared to areas with comparable population densities, and occupies a tightly bounded geographical area. The Welsh Public Library Standards 2014 suggest that for population densities greater than 20 persons per hectare (Reading is 38 pph) at least 95% of households should be within 2 miles of a static service point.</td>
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Based on the CIPFA 2013-14 data (14/15 data is not yet available):
- Reading is just above the comparator group average for active borrowers and visits per 1,000 population but top of its comparator group for issues (which is an indicator of workload and demand on stock)
- Expenditure per 1,000 population is just below the group average
- Reading has longer opening hours than comparator libraries
- Reading makes use of volunteers and this is an opportunity to grow participation with volunteers representing 3.8% of ‘hours worked’ which is in line with the national average but below comparator group average of 5.1% hours worked.
- 56% of comparators also have a mobile library service
- Reading is significantly below average for the number of branches with wifi.