Open Libraries Pilot Service

2014-2016

Report of Libraries Development

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Local Government Management Agency

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Executive Summary

The Open Libraries service is an initiative under ‘Opportunities for All’, the national public library strategy 2013-2017. The Open Libraries approach has been in place in a number of European and other countries since 2004. It extends opening hours to library members during unstaffed hours while continuing to provide regular staffed periods for ongoing delivery of the service, supporting users and developing community engagement and programming.

In 2014, the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government allocated funding towards a pilot Open Libraries service. Three branches were approved for the pilot: Tullamore and Banagher Libraries, Co. Offaly and Tubbercurry Library, Co. Sligo. The objectives of the pilot were to –

- explore the potential of Open Libraries to extend access to the library service,
- consider the best model and good practice for the operation of Open Libraries in public libraries, and
- identify any barriers to implementation and successful operation of the service

Under the pilot, libraries were open from 8.00 until 22.00, seven days per week, to Open Libraries members aged 18 and over who signed up for the service. Staffing levels and staffed hours remained unchanged.

The pilot service went live in November 2014 following a period of equipment and facilities upgrade. On foot of an interim review, access to additional services, such as meeting spaces and toilet facilities, was also provided and membership was extended to members aged between 16 and 18 with parental consent.

Pilot Outcomes

Over 1,400 users (26% of members in Tullamore and Banagher) registered for Open Libraries membership in Offaly, with some 28,000 visits taking place outside of normal opening hours over the pilot period. In Tullamore in 2015, visits during Open Libraries hours accounted for 8.97% of all visits, in Banagher this figure was 27.32%. The higher percentage
of visits to Banagher reflects the significantly shorter hours of opening in this branch of 14 per week, in comparison to Tullamore Library, which is open for 37 hours per week. Some 8,600 library items were borrowed during Open Libraries hours across both Offaly branches (4.31% of all loans in Tullamore, 20.39% of all loans in Banagher). With increased hours of opening of 63% in Tullamore and 85% in Banagher, combined wifi usage in Tullamore and Banagher Libraries increased by over 100% compared to 2014 (from 47,745 to 100,131). During Christmas closed days 361 visits were recorded in Tullamore and 271 visits in Banagher and during the recent June Bank Holiday weekend 630 visits were recorded in Tullamore.

In Tubbercurry, 345 users registered for Open Libraries membership. A total of 4,317 visits were made through Open Library access, representing 20% of total visits to the library. Tubbercurry has a total membership of 1,579, with Open Library membership comprising 22% of the total. The pilot service has attracted hundreds of new users and the usage of the library on Sundays has been particularly popular. In Tubbercurry, 107 new members have joined the library service under Open Libraries to date, which represents 6.7% of total membership in Tubbercurry. In Offaly, 306 new members have joined the library service under Open Libraries to date, which represents 2% of total membership in Offaly.

Users have visited the pilot libraries for a variety of purposes, including for study, Wifi access, printing and borrowing items. Feedback from users and staff has been very positive. Overall, users seem to value the service more, respect the civic space and display a stronger sense of community ownership of the library.
Conclusions
The introduction of the Open Libraries in the three pilot branches has created a more flexible library service, providing extended access to the local population on a daily basis, including extended weekend opening. Users have adjusted well to using the new service and users’ reactions have been positive. The service provides greater flexibility and convenience for the local community, attracting hundreds of new users who had not previously, or recently, been library members. It has positioned the library service more strongly “as a community centre or hub, a place for information and ideas, somewhere to meet, open to all, free and welcoming.”

Pilot Recommendations

- Based on the data emerging from the pilot phase, it is recommended that – The Open Libraries service should be extended across the broader library service, in particular incorporating branches in a range of urban and rural locations and providing a geographical spread.
- All newly developed and refurbished libraries funded under the Library Capital Investment Programme should be required to incorporate Open Libraries capability and should be required to provide the Open Libraries service from first opening or reopening, as appropriate.
- There should be one countrywide model of the Open Libraries service in terms of opening times and services provided. Local variations on elements should be provided only in exceptional cases e.g. where additional security provisions may be required. The standard model should consist of-
  - Opening hours of 8.00 to 22.00, seven days per week, 365 days per year,
  - Automated access to the branch by library members via a membership card and pin code in unstaffed hours,
  - Minimum age of 16, with parental consent,
  - Open Libraries access membership included as part of all new membership issued to all applicants aged 16 or over,
  - User friendly application process for Open Library membership, and
  - Provision of self-service activities to include, but not limited to -
- Stock issue and return,
- Internet usage on PC and with wifi on own device,
- Printing,
- Photocopying,
- Studying / Reading spaces,
- Meeting facilities, and
- Access to toilet facilities

Finally, it is recommended that the title ‘Open Libraries’ should be changed to ‘My Open Library: Unlimited Access 8am – 10pm’ which describes the service more appropriately. The Open Libraries service constitutes an extension of the library service in terms of access to the library branch and to a number of public library services outside of staffed hours, however the title ‘Open Libraries’ does not reflect this and may be misleading. In Sweden, it is referred to as ‘More Open Libraries’ which is also a more accurate reflection of the initiative.
**Background**

The Open Libraries service offers extended opening hours to library members during unstaffed hours while continuing to provide the regular staffed times for ongoing delivery of the service, supporting users and developing community engagement and programming. During the extended opening hours, library services are available to the public on a self-service basis for borrowing and returning items, using the internet via library PCs or via Wifi using their own devices, browsing, printing, photocopying, individual study and community activities and meetings.

For many people, access to the library during business hours is not possible, and although most libraries open late at least once a week, this is not always sufficient for many people due to work and family commitments. In addition, there is often a requirement for study spaces outside staffed hours. The key feature of the Open Libraries service, therefore, is improved access to library services so that a larger number of people can avail of the range of library services outside staffed hours.

**International Evidence**

Experiences from other countries where Open Libraries has already been implemented, including Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Singapore and Taiwan, show that the Open Libraries service has been highly successful. This is supported by feedback from library staff and local communities and is demonstrated by greater satisfaction levels among users, increased visitor rates and the number of loans. All countries report that the Open Libraries service facilitates use of the library by greater numbers of individual users and families.

For example, in Denmark where the Open Libraries service is well established in 291 branches (65% of public library branches), those libraries that are open for longer hours attract a broader range of customers with significantly increased usage among 35–55 year old group, in particular, in the evenings and weekends. The Danish library services report that there has been a significant increase of the number of library visits since the introduction of the Open Libraries service and that in some branches over 50% of the loans occur during the extended hours. Research in highly urbanised areas in both Denmark and
Finland found that the Open Libraries service operates as successfully in these areas as in smaller rural towns. Since the service began, very few anti-social incidents have occurred and those that have were of a minor nature. There have also been fewer incidents during the extended hours than during the staffed hours.
Development of public library services and demand for increased opening hours

The Open Libraries service is an initiative under the national public library strategy 2013-2017, ‘Opportunities for All’, published in December 2013. Opportunities for All is a commitment by central and local the government to continued development of library services. The development of the national strategy involved wide consultation with library users of all ages, all other public library stakeholders and formal national public consultation to determine services people wanted from their local library.

The programme for the development outlined in the national strategy seeks to build on the investment in library services by central and local government over the past fifteen years, which investment has seen the opening of 145 new state-of-the-art libraries throughout the country and a substantial refurbishment programme for existing libraries. Nine new or refurbished libraries opened in 2014 and 2015.

The national library strategy recognises the continued need for the library as a community space and for the service to be available in as many centres of population as possible, meeting the demand for increased staffing and extended opening hours. An innovative service, Open Libraries forms part of the overall strategy to address this demand and grants members the freedom and flexibility to use the library at the hours that suit them best.
Open Libraries Pilot Service in Ireland

In 2014, the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government allocated funding for the development of the Open Libraries service on a pilot basis in the first instance. Successful applications were received from two local authorities, Offaly and Sligo County Councils. The funding provided by the Department was matched by the respective local authorities.

Preparatory work began on the Open Libraries pilots in late 2013. Implementation was delayed due to industrial relations issues and the pilot service went live in November 2014 in three library branches: Tubbercurry Library, Co. Sligo and Banagher and Tullamore Libraries. The pilot was originally scheduled to run for one year. On foot of the findings from the interim review, the pilot was extended by an additional three months to allow additional services to be incorporated and evaluated.

The objectives of the pilot were to –

- explore the potential of Open Libraries to extend access to the library service,
- consider the best model and good practice for the operation of Open Libraries in public libraries, and
- identify any barriers to implementation and successful operation of the service

Grant aid of up to €20,000 was provided to each of the three Open Libraries sites participating in the pilot phase. Additional funding was provided to the branches that were not already Radio-frequency identification (RFID) enabled, with €16,000 allocated to Banagher Library and €19,500 to Tubbercurry Library.
Implementation and Operation of the Open Libraries Pilot

The pilot examined the Open Libraries model in operation, which provided additional access for members of the public to library services outside of existing staffed hours. The three pilot Open Libraries services provided seven days per week opening hours, from 08:00 until 22:00. Staffing levels and staffed hours remained unchanged. During regular staffed times, library staff continued to provide expert professional services. The importance of retaining existing the staffed hours of service and the requirement for maintenance of staffed hours into the future remains. The role of staff in ensuring the continued delivery and development of the service, supporting users and developing community engagement and programming continues to be the core element of the library service to the public.

During the extended hours, library services were provided on a self-service basis for borrowing and returning items, browsing, studying, using the internet via library PCs or via Wifi, using printing services and community meeting space. At these times, users gained access to the library via an automated system by using their membership card and an authorised pin number.

Current, rapid developments in self-service technology have facilitated the introduction of the Open Libraries system. Self-service technology allows the efficient checkout and check-in by library users of all library materials, which are identified by a barcode. Feedback suggests that library users have found the self-issue system easy to use, with intuitive touch screen and step-by-step instructions provided.

Equipment Installed

- The equipment required to facilitate the service included – Door fitted with a lock release mechanism to enable access during extended hours,
- Bar-coded or RFID membership cards for all members who apply for the Open Libraries service,
- RFID/Barcode card reader and keypad installed outside the door with lock release mechanism,
• RFID/Barcode reader and keypad linked to the membership database and software installed which provides a simple management system to view user access during extended hours,
• Dome security camera at the entrance to record each user as they enter and other dome security cameras throughout the library,
• Good exterior and interior lighting with well-lit pathways as well as motion-activated lighting in necessary locations around the library,
• Upgraded or additional motion detectors,
• Clear notices displayed with emergency contact numbers and procedures, and
• Tracking equipment to record separately the number of visitors during staffed hours and during extended hours;

Queries or feedback facility for users was also provided and helped inform the review.

**Authentication and Authorisation Process**

The user’s RFID/bar-coded membership card is presented to the door entry system. The ID information is passed to the membership database to check the user is a member who has access to the Open Libraries service. The system prompts for the user’s PIN number, checking it against the database to enable authorisation. If the PIN number matches, an entry message is given and the door is opened.

**Sample Overview of Daily Structure**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>08:00</td>
<td>Lock releases (operated on a timer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equipment is powered up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lighting comes on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alarm and sensors turned off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00</td>
<td>Staff come on duty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Library operates as normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:00/20:00</td>
<td>Staff lock up private areas, close and lock any open windows and exit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monitoring cameras and door opening mechanisms turn on automatically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21:40</td>
<td>Loudspeaker alert to users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21:50</td>
<td>Loudspeaker alert and PCs, printers and user equipment powered off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22:00</td>
<td>Lights lowered/off, door locks, all remaining equipment powered off and security system activated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Staffed hours continue as prior to the introduction of the Open Libraries service. The staffed times below are for sample purposes. Loudspeaker alert times below are also notional and are decided locally.

**Security Provisions**

The operation of Open Libraries was developed in line with Irish Public Bodies Insurance guidelines, health and safety requirements and fire regulations. Technological and infrastructural requirements for the Open Libraries service include the provision of automatic doors, entrance control with trackers and associated software, RFID and self-service, security systems, loudspeakers, secured staff areas and, where necessary, some reconfiguration of the layout of the library for ease of monitoring. Potential for disturbance is mitigated and a sense of security strengthened through monitoring and surveillance technology, appropriate lighting, explicit information on the use of facilities and access restrictions for children.

Only library users who sign up for the service and have a membership card enabled for use on the automatic entrance system are able to enter the library during unstaffed hours. There is a one person, one card policy and regulations clearly state that any user entering the library with a membership card may not facilitate access to any other adult user. Children are welcome if accompanied by adults with access cards to the Open Libraries services. Adherence to these rules is monitored and tracked via the security system. As the doors are locked during the Open Libraries service, it is necessary for users to enter through an automated system using a library access card and a PIN code authorised by the library for verification of the user. Library users use their membership card with the automated entrance system in order to enter the library during unstaffed hours. Members were required to register separately for the Open Libraries service for the purposes of the pilot only.
Prior to the interim review, persons under 18 were not issued with their own Open Libraries access card to use the library during unstaffed hours, however, based on the demand for access to facilitate Leaving Certificate study, access to the service was extended to persons aged 16 and over with parental consent for the remainder of the pilot.

Prominently displayed evacuation guidelines and emergency contact information details are available around the library and security cameras were also installed both inside and outside the library.

**Enhanced Facilities**

To enhance the user experience some modifications were made to facilities to ensure a range of activities could be carried out, including studying, reading, meetings and club or community group activity.
Usage and User Feedback

User feedback, reports on the use of the service, and information on issues that arose and solutions implemented were received from the local authorities involved (see Appendix One).

User Feedback

Feedback from users was actively sought by the libraries. In Tubbercurry, staff elected to carry out face-to-face surveys of users, soliciting feedback from the Open Library members on a continual basis to ensure the service was operating satisfactorily. In Offaly, library staff sought and collected feedback on an ongoing basis throughout the pilot using a feedback book, email feedback and a comments box.

In line with international experience, the local authorities reported that the take-up increased continually over the pilot period. Feedback from users has been very positive, with users valuing the service highly and respecting the civic space that is provided to them during longer hours. Users felt that the library is now much more accessible for students, commuters, workers, students and families. It was observed that in each of the three branches, the local communities have felt much greater ownership of their local library where the Open Libraries service operates, as well as a sense of greater community protection of the library space and services. User feedback also indicates that the Open Libraries service is contributing to a much stronger sense of security and rejuvenation in the area of the town around the library with activity in the library and lights shining from the windows from early morning to late evening.

Pilot Performance

The pilot service has attracted hundreds of new users and the usage of the library on Sundays has been particularly popular. Overall, the branches reported increases in the number of loans and in visitor figures, as well as new members who would not have previously used the library. In Tubbercurry, 107 new members have joined the library service under Open Libraries to date, which represents 6.7% of total membership in
Tubbercurry. In Offaly, 306 new members have joined the library service under Open Libraries to date, which represents 2% of total membership in Offaly.

**Offaly**
Over 1,400 users (26% of members in Tullamore and Banagher) have now signed up for Open Libraries membership in Offaly. Users are accessing the library mainly for study, Wifi access, printing and borrowing items. Since the service began, 28,000 visits have taken place outside of normal opening hours.

In Tullamore in 2015, visits during Open Libraries hours accounted for 9% of all visits, in Banagher this figure was 27%. The higher percentage of visits to Banagher is a reflection of the significantly shorter staffed opening hours of 14 per week, as compared to 37 staffed opening hours in Tullamore Library. Some 8,600 library items were borrowed during Open Libraries hours across both branches (4% of all loans in Tullamore, 20% of all loans in Banagher). In accordance with the significantly increased hours of opening of 63% in Tullamore and 85% in Banagher, combined Wifi usage in Tullamore and Banagher Libraries increased by over 100% compared to 2014 (from 47,745 to 100,131).

During Christmas closed days 361 visits were recorded in Tullamore and 271 visits in Banagher and during the recent June Bank Holiday weekend 630 visits were recorded in Tullamore.

**Tubbercurry**
345 users (22% of members in Tubbercurry) have now signed up for Open Library membership in Tubbercurry. Since the service began, 4,317 visits have taken place through Open Libraries, representing 20% of total visits.

The performance of the Tubbercurry pilot was impacted by a number of external factors. Infrastructural issues regarding the roof of the library resulted in the closure of the library for a number of months in early 2015. Staff resource issues in summer 2015 also necessitated the closure of the Tubbercurry branch for a three week period.
On registering for Open Libraries membership, Sligo library service implemented a requirement for new Open Libraries members to complete a powerpoint presentation on health and safety issues. This proved to be a time consuming exercise from a staff perspective and Sligo recognised that it served as a barrier to membership. Following the interim review, this practice was discontinued.

Feedback from library staff
Library staff in the Open Libraries branches reported positive encouraging experiences with the service and there were few issues of concern over the 18 months of the pilot service. There were no anti-social or other incidents in any of the three branches and all users complied with the terms and conditions of use.

Staff in Offaly embraced the change and took on the responsibility. Involving staff in the change is key in addition to embedding Open Libraries as part of the normal service offer. In Tubbercury initially there was some level of anxiety in terms of how the service would operate in practice. This has, however, been dispelled since implementation and staff are very satisfied with the way in which Open Libraries has operated.

International Monitoring
Since the commencement of the Open Libraries service in Ireland, the LGMA has monitored and researched the effectiveness of Open Libraries approaches and services in other countries, including Denmark, Sweden and Finland, and has discussed the service with library staff in each of these countries.

Professional library visits by Libraries Development, LGMA and staff from interested Irish local authorities were made to libraries in Denmark in 2013 and early 2014 to learn about the service, the system requirements and to meet with staff to understand their experiences of the service. A follow-up study visit was conducted in October 2015 to libraries in both Denmark and Sweden to gain further information about the development of the service, any changes in processes or technologies, and experiences of Open Libraries located in highly urbanised areas and more complex locations.
Denmark

On foot of the most recent visit, it is evident that staff continue to report positive experiences with the Open Libraries service. The service has spread from small towns with close community engagement to highly urbanised areas in cities where several social challenges exist. The sense of responsibility remains high among users and problems of stock losses are no greater than in any other libraries that do not provide the service.

In 2015, 65% of public libraries were providing the Open Libraries service, a significant increase from 18% of branches in 2011. Over 40% of library members use an Open Libraries service and there is an average 23% growth in the number of visits following the introduction of an Open Libraries service in a branch. The service is particularly attractive to young people, with approximately a third of the users under the age of 35.

Due to the positive outcomes of the Open Libraries service, it is continuing to expand rapidly. For example, in Aarhus, the second largest city in Denmark, the number of branches providing the Open Libraries service increased from two in 2010 to 17 in 2015. The regular opening times in Aarhus libraries are between 7:00 and 22:00 and the age for access to the service is 14 years. While users report that they are very satisfied with the service, it was noted that some problems did arise initially with local young people causing disturbance in one branch in an area with a large immigrant community. To deal with the issue, library staff liaised with a number of the young people to arrange activities in the library for their peers and also collaborated with a local person to run a club for them. Staff also rearranged the layout of the branch to provide more space and light and also used lower shelving. They reported that in the years following these adjustments, there have been no further disturbances and that many of the young people have continued to attend the library activities. It was also noted that a number of clubs had begun since the introduction of the Open Libraries service, many provided by individuals in the local community such as homework clubs, gardening clubs and language clubs.

Sweden

In Sweden, the service is known as ‘More Open Libraries’. All municipalities are now providing the service in selected branches. In municipalities where the Open Libraries
service is well established, the majority of the branches are providing the service. Moreover, no incidents occurred during the unstaffed times despite limited security monitoring inside the library. In Lund Libraries, where staff continued to work during Open Libraries hours but were unavailable to the public, users presumed that staff were available and some confusion ensued.

A slightly different feature of user access during unstaffed hours was observed in Sweden where a small key-ring tag was used instead of a membership access card. The staff noted that users welcomed the key-ring tag as it facilitated being able to more regularly visit the library at unplanned times as they always had the access tag with them. Some branches in Lund libraries have trialled fingerprint technology on the automated doors for enabling access, however, staff reported that it was not completely successful and that they had reverted to the library tag.

Finland

The Open Libraries service has also been expanding in Finland. In Vantaa City Library Service, two branches have begun the Open Libraries service since January 2014, Point Library and Pähkinärinne Library. User feedback indicates that the service is regarded as exciting and useful. Prior to the service beginning in Point Library, there were between 118,000 and 134,000 annual visits. In the year following the introduction of Open Libraries, however, this figure increased to over 213,000 visitors, a 59% increase on the previous year. During the five month period June-November 2015, one third of visitors used the library during the Open Library hours. The most popular time to visit the branch was during the Sunday unstaffed times, while most new users tend to use the library during unstaffed hours for study, work and reading.

In the smaller Pähkinärinne Library branch, the increase in visitor numbers has been even more significant with a 257% increase in visitors during the first six months of service. These very significant increases in use are particularly notable given the current overall decrease in library use in Finland.
The Open Libraries service in both branches does not impact the regular staffed hours. Vantaa City Library Services are currently planning the opening of the service in its largest branch, Tikkurila Library which is located on 6,000m² over two floors, located in a busy area close to a railway station, and records half a million visitors to the branch each year.

Information was also gathered from staff in another region of Finland, Hämeenlinna. In Hämeenlinna Libraries, two of the seven branches have been providing the Open Libraries service since 2012. While the increase in usage has not been as significant as Vantaa City Libraries, there has been a continuing increase; in Hauho branch there was an increase from 24,473 to 26,174 visits between 2013 and 2014, and Jukola branch saw visits grow from 53,471 to 54,716 during the same period. This increase is significant given that visitor numbers in the other branches where Open Libraries does not operate has been decreasing. Similar to the Open Libraries services in other locations, there has been no reduction in the staffed hours since the introduction of the service. Staff also report that the feedback from users has been very positive and there have been no incidents in the three years since the service began.
Overview of Costs

The cost of implementing Open Libraries relates primarily to the set-up requirements. These include the installation of automatic doors, entrance control with trackers and associated software, RFID and self-service, monitoring and security systems, loudspeakers and some reconfiguration of the layout of the library for ease of monitoring. The technological cost of the Open Libraries system is approximately €15,000. Ongoing costs relate to maintenance of the equipment, maintenance of the software and hardware and energy costs.

In the larger libraries, most of the technology is in place already such as RFID and levels of existing security. The need for additional technology, however, varies according to the size of the branch and amount of stock.

The full cost of implementing the Open Libraries service in a branch, including the Open Libraries system, security upgrades and staff resources, ranges from €25,000 to €50,000, depending on the need to upgrade to RFID self-service.

Overview of approximate costs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purchase and installation of the Open Libraries system</td>
<td>€15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security / layout upgrades (vary according to existing systems already in place)</td>
<td>€10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where little security is already installed in the branch, upgrades include security/monitoring systems; public address security system; window locks; key pads; sensor alarms, lighting system; additional signage; secure and closed off staff areas, etc.</td>
<td>€18,000- €25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where RFID is not already implemented by the library service, the approximate cost for adding RFID ranges between €18,000 and €25,000, depending on the amount of stock.</td>
<td>€18,000- €25,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grant aid

The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government provided grant aid of €20,000 per pilot as a contribution towards the costs and supporting the implementation
of the Open Libraries service in the pilot authorities. Additional grant aid of €35,500 has also been provided for the implementation of RFID.
**Conclusion**

The primary objective of the Open Libraries service is to increase user access in library services, securing increased access from early morning to late evening and to serve needs in the community not being met by current opening hours.

Since its introduction in the three pilot branches, users have adjusted easily to using the new service and users’ reactions have been positive. The service has provided greater flexibility and convenience for the local community and has attracted significant numbers of new users who had not previously, or recently, been library members.

Due to enhanced access to the library, a greater sense of responsibility and ownership of the library has developed. The service has also strengthened the prominence of the library in the local area by providing the only non-commercial, indoor meeting place, welcoming to all and open daily from early morning to late evening.

Designed to meet users’ needs in a flexible way, there is potential to develop the Open Libraries service further. The opportunities afforded by technological developments in self-service facilities, automated systems along with electronic surveillance methods provide clear benefits for users and the wider community. The role of the library staff during the regular staffed hours also remains critical, to maintain the delivery of the service, support and engage users including children and families, and to ensure the ongoing development and promotion of the library’s core services.

The Open Libraries service has the potential to significantly transform the value to the public of the services and the civic space provided by local authorities.

While the pilot phase included only a small number of public libraries, the data gathered suggests that a broader roll-out of the service would be popular with users in other library authority areas and would show similarly positive results. Moreover, similar open library approaches in other countries have proven highly successful as evidenced in the international context. The service has expanded in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden. Indeed,
its introduction in Finland has seen a reversal in declining visitor numbers during that period.
Recommendations

- On the basis of the findings of the pilot study, as well as the international evidence, it is recommended that - The Open Libraries service should be extended to all library authority areas, in particular incorporating branches in a range of urban and rural locations and providing a geographical spread.

- All newly developed and refurbished libraries funded under the Library Capital Investment Programme should be developed with Open Libraries capability and should be required to provide the Open Libraries service from first opening or reopening, as appropriate.

- There should be a single standard model of Open Libraries service in terms of opening times and the services provided. There should be limited local variations, except in cases where additional security provisions may be required. The model should be based on -
  - Opening hours of 8:00 to 22:00, seven days per week, 365 days per year,
  - Automated access to the branch by library members via membership card and pin code in unstaffed hours,
  - Minimum age of 16, with parental consent,
  - Open Libraries access membership included as part of all new membership issued to all applicants aged 16 or over, with parental consent,
  - User friendly application process for Open Library membership,
  - Provision of self-service activities to include, but not limited to -
    - Stock issue and return,
    - Internet usage on PC and with Wifi on own device,
    - Printing,
    - Photocopying,
    - Studying and reading spaces,
    - Meeting facilities; and
    - Access to toilet facilities.

It is recommended that, in rolling out the initiative, the title ‘Open Libraries’ should be changed to ‘My Open Library’ which describes the service more appropriately. The Open
Libraries service constitutes an extension of the library service in terms of access to the library branch and to a number of public library services outside of staffed hours, however the title ‘Open Libraries’ does not reflect this and may be misleading. In Sweden, it is referred to as ‘More Open Libraries’ which is also a more accurate reflection of the initiative.
Appendix One: Reports from Pilots

Offaly County Library Service Report

The Open Libraries project is an innovative customer service delivery project which started as a pilot project in December 2014 funded by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government and Offaly County Council. It is currently operational in two public libraries in Offaly County Council – Banagher Community Library and Tullamore Central Library. The project provides for the public library to be open to the public from 8.00 a.m. to 10.00 p.m., seven days per week (98 hours a week). Innovative technology has been installed that allows users to access the buildings using their library card and PIN when staff are not present. Open Libraries extends the availability of library services to the public outside the existing staffed hours of service. During the regular staffed hours, library staff are available to provide expert and additional services, support users and develop community engagement.

The Open Libraries project aims to transform the use and value to the community of the services and the civic space provided by local libraries while also directly addressing community needs. In addition the project aims to strengthen the prominence of the library service in the local community by providing a town’s only non-commercial, in-door meeting place, welcoming to all and open daily from early morning to late evening.

The project also sets out to establish the best model for the operation of Open Libraries in public libraries in Ireland, to identify the barriers and serve as a driver for a standardised service as a whole and improve the way Public Libraries deliver services to the community.

The project is managed by the County Librarian, Offaly County Council reporting to Director of Services, Libraries and providing reports into Libraries Development, LGMA. Regular reports are provided to the stakeholders involved: Management Team, Offaly County Council, Elected Members and SPC members, Libraries Development, LGMA.

Open Libraries has transformed the use and value to the public of the services and the civic space provided by library authorities. Staff are released from the performance of the
previously time-consuming tasks around the issuing and returning of books and other stock to deliver a more user-focused and enhanced library service during staffed hours.

The rapid developments in self-service technology have made the introduction of Open Libraries possible. Self-service system technology provides an automated service which allows the efficient checkout and check-in by library users of all library materials which are identified by a barcode.

Open Libraries is an initiative under the new national public library strategy 2013-2017, ‘Opportunities for All’, published in December 2013. The national library strategy recognises the continued need for libraries as a community space and the demand for extended opening hours. Open Libraries forms part of an overall strategy to address this demand and gives the community the freedom to use the library at the hours that suit them best. Due to the popularity of this service, Offaly County Council will be applying for funding for additional Open Libraries sites in Offaly.

This innovative service grants library members the freedom to use the library at the hours that suit them best. Both Banagher and Tullamore Libraries are ideally located in the town square which are focal points for the community. During Open Libraries hours, Offaly Local Development Company and the Local Enterprise Office operate outreach services for employment supports and enterprise supports respectively.

**Statistics and Performance**

This service provides access to the library to members of the public who did not use it in the past. The feedback from customers is extremely positive, with users commenting that the library is now much more accessible for commuters, students and families. Users value the service and respect the civic space which is provided to them.

Over 1,300 users (26% of members in Tullamore and Banagher) have now signed up for Open Libraries membership and are accessing the library mainly for study, Wifi access, printing and borrowing items. Since the service began, 25,000 visits have taken place outside of normal opening hours. In Tullamore in 2015, visits during Open Libraries hours
accounted for 8.97% of all visits, in Banagher this figure was 27.32%. In 2015, 8586 library items were borrowed during Open Libraries hours (4.31% of all loans in Tullamore, 20.39% of all loans in Banagher). Combined Wifi usage in 2015 in Tullamore and Banagher Libraries increased by over 100% compared to 2014 (from 47,745 to 100,131).

**Funding**

Open Libraries is jointly funded by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG) and Offaly County council and is an initiative under the national public library strategy 2013-2017, ‘*Opportunities for All*’, published in December 2013.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of costs incurred by Offaly County Council</th>
<th>Costs</th>
<th>Grant - DECLG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self Service Access/hardware management software to control access control/lights/CCTV/alarms</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>40,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>RFID/Self service kiosk/Security gates</td>
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<td>16,000</td>
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<td>Staff/Project Management/Security</td>
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<td>ICT staff costs /firewall and SIP works/Security,Wifi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self service/mobile print/PC reservation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>80,950</strong></td>
<td><strong>56,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sligo County Library Service Report

The Open Libraries concept started in Denmark in Silkeborg Library in 2004. The definition of an Open Library is a library which apart from the staffed hours provides extended access hours whereby the citizen can enter the library by themselves and utilise automated services such as the reference sections, the self-check issue, the internet and printing services.

Staffed library hours in Tubbercurry Community Library are:

Tuesday: 12 p.m. to 7 p.m.
Wednesday to Friday: 9.30 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.
Saturdays 9.30 a.m. to 1.30 p.m.

“Open Libraries” hours in Tubbercurry Community Library are:

Outside of staffed hours outlined above are Monday to Sunday from 8.00 a.m. through to 10 p.m.

Implementation

The Library selected to host the pilot project in Co. Sligo was Tubbercurry Community Library. Tubbercurry Community Library serves a rural based population of approximately 10,000 and has a core urban population of 1,800. This Library was purpose built in 2003 as part of the Teach Laighne One Stop Shop which provides in addition to a library services a motor tax, County Council Area Office and various offices of the Health Service Executive.

“Teach Laighne houses Tubbercurry Library in a purpose-built space with additional accommodation provided in two terraced, two-storey houses, built c. 1860. The façade of the original buildings have been retained. Activities are placed around a central hall. The internal wall in the central hall is made of local limestone paving embedded with fossils. A glazed wall separates the library from the central hall. The building's undulating zinc roof mirrors the horizon line of the local landscape.” – Public Library Buildings; www.librarybuildings.ie; 7-10-15
From the description above it is realised that the Library is only part of a bigger local authority building and this is the reason that our experience is probably unique in the various pilot locations throughout Ireland. For example; the Alarm of the one-stop-shop was traditionally split into two zones whereas we now had to introduce a third zone specific for the library and ensure that the new software introduced would not interfere with the existing set up. This type of problem – where installing something new had to also dovetail with an existing set up - ran right throughout our set-up experience.

The technical aspects that had to be integrated are as follows;

(i) **Alarm**: adding an additional zone & ensuring software complemented existing zones
(ii) **Lighting**: ensuring software enabled automatic shutdown and restart
(iii) **CCTV**: internal cctv system preferred to adding to existing Teach Laighne CCTV system
(iv) **Self-service access**: ensuring Open+ door keypad access and opening mechanism works
(v) **Self-service Kiosk**: ensuring integration to existing LMS was fully operational
(vi) **Public PC & printing availability**: installation of Surfbox print solution to allow customers the ability to self-serve regarding printing from library and remotely.

By the beginning of November 2014 the technical staff along with the Library implementation team had fully tested the Open+ software going through a series of scenarios and were confident to ‘go live’ by Mid November 2014. Tubbercurry Community Library became the first library in Ireland to go live as an Open Library.

Library Staff also had to ensure that all documentation & procedures were modified to envelope ‘Open Libraries’ from a library point of view such as;

(i) Membership form
(ii) Internet Policy
(iii) Wifi Policy
(iv) Health & Safety procedure
Zero tolerance policy

We realised that certain issues would only appear after the launch date but were assured that the service support staff would be on hand via website and email to respond to any queries/problems in a prompt manner.

Launch

From the Launch date of mid November 2014 up until the present date May 2016, we have had relatively few problems. Teething problems with staff getting used to the new procedures and technology were quickly ironed out.

Statistics

Usage

As it currently stands there are 345 registered Tubbercurry library members who have signed up to use this increased service. This represents 22% of the total branch membership.

The Future

The Open Libraries pilot to date has proven to be very successful and once the implementation phase had been undertaken the work involved was relatively straightforward. There is a need to promote the concept of Open Libraries to the general public and a need to actively target members as the idea of the Open Libraries is relatively new to the general public in Ireland. Also the very fact that increased accessibility and flexibility are key benefits of the Open Libraries model means by its very essence it is potentially more attractive to those citizens who are not currently members due to the original opening hours perhaps being insufficient or unsuitable.

On a day to day basis there is still a requirement for staff to service the branch both on the ground and as part of the library network. Work on a daily basis is still being created for library staff by users both in the Open Libraries model and during the staffed hours. There has been a growing interest from third level students to utilise the facility for study purposes and the printing and internet services are proving popular.
Sligo County Council is currently rolling out RFID into all its branches and we hope that in the near future that the pilot may be extended to Ballymote Community Library.

Sligo Central Library stock has already been converted to RFID tagging in preparation for a proposed new Central library for Sligo.
Appendix Two: General areas for documentation during pilot extension

- Video surveillance notice(s)
- Provision and use of study facilities during extended hours
- Criteria being used for ascertaining a user’s eligibility for the Open Libraries access card
- Any groups/clubs using the library during unstaffed hours
  Impact on the surrounding urban area due to the Open Libraries service later in the evening
- Impact on the library’s electricity and heating costs etc.
- Access to the printer and photocopier
- Promotion of the Open Libraries service
- The issue of users not registered for the Open Libraries service tail-gating registered users on entry to the library (i.e. how big a problem and any measures for dealing with the issue)
- Procedures in place in case of emergency and whether a phone is provided for emergencies in the branch
- User feedback relating to the changeover procedure between staffed and unstaffed times
- Statistical data on:
  - age profile of users
  - patterns of use
  - number of people who enter the library during the extended hours based on the visit counter data - number of people who enter the library during the extended hours based on door access system counter
  - the percentage of overall visits during Open Libraries hours
  - number of new library members since the introduction of Open Libraries compared with rates of new membership prior to provision of the Open Libraries service
  - number of loans recorded by Open Libraries users and represented as a percentage of total loans.