Problems with Pilot Report

The report on the pilot project is inherently flawed. We are calling for a full and independent analysis of the pilot scheme (with widened parameters). Until this is done we believe the roll out should be halted.

1) Example of inherent discrepancies within the report:

A.

The report states that “There were no anti-social or other incidents in any of the three branches and all users complied with the terms and conditions” (page 17 of LGMA report).

However, later on we see that “very few anti-social; incidents have occurred and those that have were of a minor nature” (page 8 LGMA report) Perhaps they could clarify what is deemed an anti-social offence of a minor nature? Later it is stated that there were” no incidents of note”.

Interestingly, in Appendix 2 on “general areas for documentation during pilot extension” one area is:

“The issue of users not registered for the Open Library service tailgating registered users on entry to the library (i.e. how big a problem and any measures of dealing with the issue)” (page 34 on LGMA report).

In a PowerPoint presentation at the Library Association of Ireland conference on 15/04/2016 problems identified with the pilot were:

“User Education
Tailgating

ICT connections”

(Available online at https://libraryassociation.ie/node/101082)

Why was the safety issue of tailgating not addressed during the 2 years of the pilot?

B.

It is repeatedly stated in the report that “Staffing levels and staffed hours remained unchanged” (Page 3 and page 11 of LGMA Report. Open Libraries Pilot Service 2014-2016)

Already we have seen staffless hours being used to cover previously staffed hours (Banagher Co. Offaly March 2016)

This is just to mention two inherent false statements in the report. We also will be questioning some of the data/statistics published in this report. The report in its “International comparisons” section has conveniently excluded the UK. The report has not referenced any one of its broad sweeping statements.

2) Health and Safety concerns:

We believe the current format of the staffless libraries is unsafe and may contravene legislation with regard to health and safety, the Child Care Act 2015 and our own child protection guidelines.
In relation to safety some of our concerns have been outlined above. The report contradicts itself with regard to “incidents” and although tailgating was identified as a problem, no measures were taken to assess the extent or remedy this (see above).

The scheme has been extended down to 16 and 17 year olds (page 3 LGMA report). Children under 16 can accompany their parent/guardian if they are open library members.

In Ireland under the Child Care Act 1991, the Children Act 2001 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child a child is defined as anyone under the age of 18


Therefore, those 16-18 year olds that have access to the staffless libraries are legally considered to be children.

Under our current county council child protection guidelines staff have a duty of care to police and prevent the use of unacceptable language or behaviour such as:

• Racism

• Derogatory remarks and gestures

• Humiliation

• Bullying/Harassment

• Name calling
• Destructive Criticism
• Embarrassment
• Favouritism
• Sarcasm
• Sexual Innuendo/Sexual Harassment
• Hitting or physically chastising/children/young people

Monitoring during staffless hours will not include audio recording so as well as not providing on site protection through adequate staffing, staff will not be able to deal with the issue after the fact as they will not have any way of proving claims of oral abuse.

Guidelines also state that staff should ensure “adequate and appropriate supervision is in place” for meetings and events. How can this be achieved in a staffless building?

Initially there was no toilet access as this would be a locked area that could not be monitored by CCTV—but this is now available (Page 3 LGMA report). We would be highly concerned regarding this issue.

Also whilst the report refers to the buildings being monitored, these will not be live monitored, so are ineffective as means of preventing a crime, or intervening if there is an emergency.

We fear that staffs obligations and duty of care for children will not and cannot be fulfilled under the staffless library model.
3) Staffless libraries will not be “open” to all. Staffless libraries will not be accessible to all.

The public library system in Ireland has always had an ethos of being open to all and equally accessible to all. Staffless libraries are a direct contradiction of this ethos. Extending hours for registered members is not the same as extending the service for all.

Public libraries have to consider how their programmes and service delivery will affect people with the protected characteristics under the Equality Status Act 2000-2004. There is a duty on public libraries to consider socio-economic disadvantage when making strategic decisions about how to exercise their functions.

There was no research done in the pilot to analyse the demographics of users. It has been reported from pilots in the UK where this was done that:

“Pilots in some authorities show far more men than women are willing to enter an apparently unsupervised library (ratio of 90% male to 10% female mentioned in one workshop)”

(http://www.publiclibrariesnews.com/about-public-libraries-news/unstaffed-libraries)

One library worker wrote;” The library is the last remaining public space where people can come in and not have to pay anything to be there. You don't even need to be a member to come in. You are
just entitled to come in. You don't have to explain to anyone why you are coming in to the library. You are entitled to be there and that is that.

You can just walk right in and walk right out. You can do it again then if you wish. Walk in. Walk out. There is great freedom in that. You have the freedom to walk into this hallowed space where words can transport you from whatever it is you need transporting from. Or you can walk into this hallowed space and find whatever information it is that you need to get you to where it is you want to go. You are free to do that in the library.”

Users for the open library system must be library members. To join one needs photo ID and proof of address. So a space that is normally welcoming to all will now exclude many from entering its space e.g. homeless, tourists whilst admitting others.

4) **International comparisons.**

As mentioned already this section of the report provides no references and the UK experience of staffless libraries has been excluded for obvious reasons.

Some of the myths with regard to the Scandinavian model comparisons need to be challenged:

The origin of the staffless libraries started at Silkeborg public library in Jutland in 2004. The municipality were to take over the library service in Gjern, a rural municipality with very small local libraries. It would require heavy staff expenses and the municipality had to economize – also in terms of the libraries. (Scandinavian Library Quarterly No3 2013 pg. 22). Hence it was in a climate of economic cuts that the concept was born.
This was part of an overall plan- Over a period of several years, the development of library infrastructure in Denmark has moved towards centralization. With the municipal reform of 2007, the municipalities became fewer and larger – the libraries followed suit; several small branches were closed, resulting in renewed strength of the main libraries. (Scandinavian Library Quarterly No3 2013 pg. 22). The plan did result in branch closures and loss of jobs.

We fear that introducing staffless hours in Irish libraries now will pave the way for future administrations to use those hours to cover previously staffed hours during the next inevitable economic downturn.

The review of staffless libraries in Denmark conducted by in 2011 Professor Carl Gustav Johannsen, charted the existing 81 staffless libraries for the Danish Agency for Culture. About a third of the cases were due to the demands for cuts, e.g. as an alternative to the closing of local libraries. (Johannsen, C. G. (2012) ‘Staffless libraries – recent Danish public library experiences,’ New LibraryWorld:http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/0307480121244959) This was Hobson’s choice-communities were given the choice of no library or staffless libraries.

Again according to “international experience”:

“Professionals fear that politicians overlook the mediation aspect of librarianship in favour of large savings in terms of staff hours, when the borrowers seem so easily able to deal with everything themselves. This has happened in some places and is bound to happen in several more over the next few years”. (Scandinavian Library Quarterly No3 2013 pg. 22 Available at E:\Open libraries in Denmark _ Scandinavian Library Quarterly.html).
One of the fears of staff would be that open libraries would replace staff and staffed hours. This fear does not now appear to be groundless given that even within the pilot project Tubbercurry was closed due to staff shortages:

“Sligo County Council is facing a short term problem in staffing its Branch Libraries, as it will not be possible to provide staffing at the current levels during the summer months …Period when Library Services affected: Between June and August 2015

• Tubbercurry Community Library closes from Tuesday June 9th to Saturday June 27th 2015 inclusive. Open Library will operate its usual hours during this period.”

(http://www.sligococo.ie/News/Name,34818,en.html)

Regardless of the reasons it is apparent that the scheme can be viewed as a means to replace staff when not available. “Sligo’s library service is facing the threat of service cutbacks or even closures because of the county council’s heavy debts. However, the staffless library service in Tubbercurry might help services to continue in a self-service from outside of normal hours”.


It is repeatedly stated in the report that “Staffing levels and staffed hours remained unchanged” (Page 3 and page 11 of LGMA Report. Open Libraries Pilot Service2014-2016)

We now know that staffless hours were used to cover previously staffed hours in Banagher during March 2016.
The fact that Johannsen stated that, “It seems that, given a choice, people prefer to use libraries staffed by professionals” will be discussed in the cost section. (Johannsen, C. G. (2012) ‘Staffless libraries – recent Danish public library experiences,’ New Library World:http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/03074801211244959)

5) Ineffective and inefficient use of resources:

The report (pages 3+4, Open Libraries Pilot Service, 2014-2016, LGMA) also states that:

“In Tullamore in 2015, visits during Open Libraries hours accounted for 8.97% of all visits. In Banagher this figure was 27.32%”.

The staffless libraries operate from 8a.m. to 22.00pm 7 days a week less the normal staffed hours.

Tullamore is staffed 47 hours (in report as 37 but is in fact 47) a week and therefore has a total of 51 staffless hours a week.

Therefore, out of total hours, staffed hours account for 48.4% but 92.03% of visits (Staffless account for 51% of hours but only 8.97% of visits).

Banagher is staffed 14 hours a week and therefore has a total of 84 staffless hours a week.

Therefore, out of total hours, staffed hours account for 14.25% of the hours and 85.75% of visits. (Staffless account for 92.8% of hours but only 27.4% of visits)
We see a similar pattern with regard to issues. Again data taken from Page 4, Open Libraries Pilot Service, 2014-2016, LGMA)

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This data bears out research done by Johannsen, who points out that the higher visitor numbers reported were ‘not sensational’ when opening hours were increased up to 300%. And crucially, there were no cases where the number of visitors per hour during unstaffed hours surpassed the number of visits when staff were present. On average, there were four visits per hour when libraries were unstaffed, compared to 29 visits per staffed hour. People also borrowed more books when staff were present. Johannsen’s concluded that ‘This pattern indicates that the presence of staff still is a factor influencing public library performance.’

**It seems that, given a choice, people prefer to use libraries staffed by professionals.**

The data above suggests that resources used for a staffless scheme will not yield the returns. If those same resources were utilised for increased staffed hours, the returns would probably be higher. An independent cost benefit analysis needs to be undertaken before more valuable resources are wasted.

The initial outlay cost has been estimated in the report (€25,000-€50,000) which is substantial but it also needs to be realised that there will be ongoing recurring annual costs which will not be covered under the grant scheme (€20,000)-for example in Banagher the additional 84 hours of extra electricity for computers being on, printer, the self-service machine, the CCTV and the bibliotheca system itself now has to be paid for every week. On an annual recurring basis there will be costs for security and servicing contracts for the system and maintenance costs. These costs are not outlined in the report.

There will be a grant for implementing the service but the council will be left with the legacy of ongoing costs. These costs have to be considered in light of numbers using the facility, and the poor return for this investment—does this really represent value for money?

We are not opposing staffless hours on a simple industrial level. We are a group of both library workers and members of the public who oppose this on an ethical level. We believe this measure is going to open the door to the future denigration of the public library service. We passionately believe in the importance of a properly staffed and resourced public library service to the health of our communities. Please safe guard our one truly free, democratic public space.

**STOP STAFFLESS LIBRARY HOURS.**