



Rethinking public library services in Hull: a framework for transformation and growth

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Foreword

Throughout this country the public library system is under threat. Public libraries are being closed at an unprecedented rate and librarians are losing their jobs. It amounts, in the words of one commentary, to the remorseless destruction of our national public library system, a failure of will and imagination on a colossal scale.¹ In many local authorities and in the minds of many observers, there is an assumption that public libraries are obsolete in a digital age.

This report challenges that assumption. It demonstrates the relevance of libraries and librarians in the 21st century, and shows what impact they can have. It sets out a radically new way of thinking about libraries and a fresh approach to the delivery of library services. It provides a framework specific to Hull for the development of a vibrant and progressive 21st century library service capable of making a significant contribution to the reinvention and redevelopment of our city.

The report has been produced by The James Reckitt Library Trust with the intention of informing the development of public library strategy by the local authority in Hull and by Hull Culture and Leisure Ltd, the organisation wholly-owned and commissioned by the Council to deliver public library services. However, by mutual agreement, it is being published openly to give everyone in the city and beyond an opportunity to comment on its arguments and conclusions, and thus to contribute to a vitally important debate about the future of public libraries in this country. The contents of the report remain the sole responsibility of the Trust.

The report is the outcome of extensive research, conversation and reflection. Account has been taken of many examples of innovative and effective practice in public libraries both in the UK and internationally, as well as in Hull itself, and the report has drawn extensively on work done by other bodies concerned with public libraries. Of particular value has been the recently-published report of the Libraries Taskforce established by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport: *Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021*.²

Libraries Deliver is significant not just for what it has to say about public libraries but also because it places on local authorities an obligation to respond to a series of challenges and expectations as regards library services. This report by the Trust should assist the local authority in responding to those challenges and expectations.

In producing this report the Trust has benefitted from many conversations with individuals in the city who have responded to invitations to discuss the future of public libraries. Whilst there has been no formal public consultation – the Trust considers the Council to be the most appropriate and best-placed body to undertake this – it has been striking from the conversations that have taken place how much interest and enthusiasm exists to forge a new future for public libraries in the city. Public librarians in Hull are themselves at the forefront of this, as they repeatedly demonstrate both through the innovative work that they do and by their openness to new ideas.

The Trust's manifesto, *The Soul of the City*, published in February 2016, noted the poverty of the discourse around public libraries in this country.³ This is discussed again later in this report. However, there are exceptions to this, both in this country and abroad, and the Trust wishes to acknowledge its intellectual debt to the work of the American academic, David Lankes, who has pioneered fresh thinking about public libraries in the 21st century, and whose approach has strongly influenced this report.⁴

The James Reckitt Library Trust

The James Reckitt Library Trust manages an endowment established in 1892 by Sir James Reckitt, the pioneer industrialist and Quaker philanthropist, one of Hull's greatest citizens. Libraries were among Sir James Reckitt's many philanthropic passions. He campaigned tirelessly for the establishment by the City Corporation of public libraries in Hull, and at his own cost built the first free library in the City, the James Reckitt Library in east Hull. The opening of the Western Library in 1895, the first to be established from the public purse, was a direct result of his campaigning efforts.

The James Reckitt Library Trust now helps to develop public library provision throughout the city. Over the past six years the Trust has awarded almost £4 million to projects and activities designed to stimulate a love of reading and learning, particularly among children and young people, to encourage those who might not normally use public library services to do so, and to raise awareness of what modern public libraries can offer through investment in innovative projects in support of education and learning, health and well-being, business and the arts.

We believe that the Trust is responsible for the largest philanthropic endowment devoted entirely to public libraries in this country. This is an important differentiator for the city, and it gives Hull a real opportunity to take a national lead in developing a 21st century library service. It seems only right that a rethinking of library services should be done in the name of Sir James Reckitt, one of the original pioneers of public libraries, and in the year when Hull is so memorably justifying its status as UK City of Culture.

Richard Heseltine
Chair of Trustees
July 2017

Executive summary

What libraries are for and what librarians do in the 21st century

The debate about the future of public libraries is often framed on the one hand by a simplistic belief in the obsolescence of libraries and on the other by a sentimental attachment to the past. Whilst there is a more progressive defence of public libraries, which focusses on their positive impact in many areas of life, this can sometimes lead to libraries being treated as bit-part players in other people's agendas.

To understand the role of public libraries in the 21st century, we need to be clear about their fundamental purpose. We contend that this cannot be reduced to the provision of access to books and information.

Librarians are in the knowledge business. They are not in the book business. Publishers are in the book business; Amazon and Waterstones are in the book business. Librarians are in the business of knowledge, learning, creativity and imagination.

Of course books were for many years their main stock in trade. But the stock should not be confused with the trade itself. The business of librarians is to help people expand their knowledge and understanding of themselves, their lives, and the world about them. Librarians organise and facilitate this process. They create safe, inclusive, creative spaces, both physical and virtual, open to everyone, where people can follow their interests and satisfy their curiosity; they guide people to the resources they need; bring people together; encourage them to learn from each other; help people to develop the skills they need, and motivate people to get involved. None of this presupposes a book or even a building. Libraries are defined by the presence of librarians not by the presence of books.

Librarians are in the knowledge business because they believe in the power of knowledge. They believe that knowledge empowers people, individually and collectively. They believe in the power of knowledge to build, sustain and transform communities. They believe in the power of knowledge to give people a voice. By supporting people to expand their knowledge and understanding of themselves and the world about them, to release their creativity and imagination, librarians help to build strong, knowledgeable communities. At this stage in the development of Hull, this strikes The James Reckitt Library Trust as being absolutely fundamental to the future happiness and prosperity of all those who live here.

Hull's public libraries can already demonstrate that they are in the business of knowledge, learning, creativity and imagination. They deliver a wide range of programmes, activities and events that improve literacy and encourage learning; increase digital access and digital literacy;

enrich lives culturally and artistically; give support to business and entrepreneurship; enable people to develop new skills; promote health and well-being, and reduce social isolation.

The vision for the future of Hull articulated in the City Plan could serve as an agenda for a 21st century library service: 'to bring the whole community together to make Hull a place that is brimming with culture, enterprise and opportunity; a place where people want to live, work, play, study and do business; a city where those in the greatest need are valued and supported; a place that people will call home.'

Why this is a critical time for public libraries in Hull

Considering how much good work is being done by public libraries in Hull, it might be thought that they were in good health. But it is evident that all is not well. As a direct result of the enormous pressure placed on Council budgets, there have been significant cuts to services and facilities, whilst public and official understanding of the role of public libraries remains largely locked in the past.

Now the Council faces yet more cuts to its funding. It is highly unlikely that libraries will escape the consequences of this. It is the view of the Trust that the status quo is unsustainable. The library service is in a vulnerable state. Further cuts to services risk pushing public libraries in Hull into a downward spiral from which they may not emerge. Perhaps more to the point in an aspirational city, there are opportunities being lost. What public libraries in Hull require is a new strategic direction and a new business model that allow them to fulfil their proper role in the life of the city.

A new business model

The basis of a new business model is a new conception of the library not as a building but as a platform. Compare a library to a smartphone. A smartphone is a platform on which a personalised collection of apps is assembled. Some of these apps are common to all smartphones, such as the ability to make a phone call. The rest depend largely on the preferences of the smartphone's owner.

Now imagine a library not as a building but as a platform. This platform is dedicated to knowledge, learning, creativity and imagination. The task of librarians is to create a platform on which different apps, or services, are assembled to meet the needs of specific communities. The services are the specific ways in which librarians help people to expand their knowledge and understanding, to release their creativity and imagination. Some of those services may be common to all platforms, or libraries. Many will be specific to the community served.

Remember that this is a metaphor. We do not mean that all apps are digital, or that the library platform is a purely digital platform.

We can extend this approach by thinking of each app, or service, as an *enterprise*. An enterprise is an activity that is planned, financed, managed and delivered in a businesslike way, often through partnerships, and is one that fulfils a purpose that a community has identified as being in its interest. Understanding the library as a platform supporting an array of enterprises allows us to consider each of these enterprises as individual, self-standing, self-sustaining activities. We avoid thinking about the library service as an undifferentiated whole that is either present or absent in a community, and does only one thing. Instead we can focus on it as an evolving array of services, or enterprises, provided in different combinations at different times in different settings – settings that might be either physical or virtual.

This conception of the library as a platform supporting multiple enterprises opens up new possibilities. In particular it allows us to think seriously about *partnerships*. In a world where local authorities can no longer provide everything, and indeed may be forced to offer less and less, partnerships are vital for the renewal and sustainability of the services that communities need. These partnerships can involve multiple agencies: the local authority; other parts of the public sector, such as the NHS; the culture sector; the education sector; a variety of funding agencies and charities; the voluntary sector, and, critically, the private sector.

This approach also allows us to think more creatively about community engagement. Deeper community engagement is essential for the future of public libraries, which can no longer rely on people simply turning up at their doors. In the platform/enterprises model, there could be an open invitation to people and organisations to develop new enterprises.

Enterprises need not be managed in traditional ways. Particularly where they are formed by partnerships with different organisations and funders, new forms of management can be imagined. This is not to advocate a fragmentation of the overall system into numerous independent units. Individual enterprises would exist on a common platform providing shared infrastructural services and shared strategic planning and governance frameworks.

Delivering the new model

When it comes to delivering the new model, the Trust does not seek to be prescriptive. However, we believe the following elements provide a framework that could serve as a basis for engagement with the people of Hull on the future of their library service, and as a starting point for new strategic and operational planning.

- At present too many branch libraries are in the wrong place as a result of social, economic and demographic change. So we must redefine the boundaries of the communities in Hull on the basis of the latest data and make that the basis for planning all library services.
- We must recognise that ‘place’ still matters in 21st century library services, but not at the expense of persisting with a sub-standard network of conventional branch libraries. The aim must be to improve quality. Therefore we should concentrate on investing in the creation of a smaller number of outstanding ‘focal-point libraries’ to act as service magnets

for surrounding communities. These buildings would require significant investment to transform them in terms of infrastructural services, equipment, furnishing, interior design and staffing.

- At the same time we must continue to ensure that everybody has access to library services. So, alongside focal-point libraries, and consistent with statutory requirements, there still needs to be a commitment to making appropriate library enterprises available in every neighbourhood in the city. However, we do not need traditional branch libraries everywhere to achieve this. We need to think more about services than buildings. Throughout the world there are more and more examples of innovative ways of delivering library services outside conventional buildings. We can use the creative energy of the city to emulate and improve upon these international examples of innovation.
- Building on the success of the support provided to schools by the public library service, we need yet more focus on working with schools in the city as a specific example of partnership working in the local delivery of library services.
- We need to harness the energy, creativity, skills and experience of local groups and volunteers to build a stronger library service, involving people directly in the creation of new enterprises and in the overall management of the library system, whilst at the same time avoiding the pitfalls that have been exposed in cases elsewhere in the country where whole chunks of library services have been handed over to self-selected community groups without the capacity, skills or knowledge to develop a genuinely 21st century library experience.
- As The James Reckitt Library Trust has been advocating for some time, we need a new central library - the Library of Hull - to be a key component of the library platform, a place where the widest range of library enterprises are available, and a beacon for a new conception of what a 21st century library has to offer.
- It is vital to invest heavily in the digital dimension, giving libraries a strong online presence with a wide range of digital enterprises, interactive connections with other systems and services, and above all scope for deep community participation and ownership. Without this digital dimension, our public libraries might just as well not exist in the 21st century.
- The transformation of the public library service will require major investment in the development of the workforce. Many new demands will be placed on librarians if they are to be effective in pioneering deeper forms of community engagement; developing and operating partnerships; seeking new sources of funding; engaging in new methods of managing and governing services; developing new digital enterprises; fostering innovation, and transforming the public perception of libraries. They need support to be successful.
- We need an unparalleled marketing and communications campaign designed to transform the perception of public libraries, not only in the minds of the general public but also in the minds of politicians and opinion-formers. Public libraries will not thrive unless we can transform their image and fundamentally shift the public perception of them. Yet at the same time, we have to ensure that we do not lose the positive aspects of the traditional brand of libraries as safe and inclusive places, and of librarians as trusted, non-judgemental individuals committed to their profession and their values.

Funding

The transformation of the public library service advocated in this report will not happen without substantial capital investment and new thinking about recurrent funding. Given that the status quo is not an option, we must get to grips with the detailed work needed to put costs against the strategy advocated here.

We do not believe that the ongoing service model that we propose necessarily involves higher levels of recurrent local authority spending. Indeed we identify a number of areas where savings might be achieved, especially as regards the remodelling of the branch library network, and the release of some buildings and land. Such savings might contribute to overall Council savings targets, or be reinvested in the library service in new ways, or a combination of both.

We also identify areas of income growth, especially through partnerships, better alignment with the aims of external funding bodies, sponsorship, and commercial activity. Indeed partnership working is seen as a crucial way of expanding the range of enterprises offered on the library platform without a commensurate increase in spending by the local authority.

We identify four main areas for immediate non-recurrent investment:

- Investment in the buildings designated as focal-point libraries
- Investment in the online presence of the library service
- Investment in workforce development
- Investment in rebranding the library service

We consider the key to this to lie in a new partnership between the local authority and The James Reckitt Library Trust, aligning Council spending and Trust spending around a shared strategic development plan. This would provide the Trust with the incentive to focus its spending on major strategic investments spread over a number of years. Through such a partnership between the Council and the Trust, and with the prospect of securing major external funding to be explored, the potential for a substantial programme of transformational investment begins to take shape.

Next steps

This report proposes a framework for the development of a 21st century library service. We are confident that the proposals for practical action contained in the report provide a good basis for new strategic and operational planning. However, we do not wish to be prescriptive, and we hope that what can now ensue is a wider debate in the city about our recommendations. The Trust looks forward to listening to other views and to participating in that debate.

Part 1

Understanding the purpose of public libraries

Part 1 : Understanding the purpose of public libraries

1.1 The poverty of the debate about public libraries

The discourse about the future of public libraries is curiously impoverished, framed on the one hand by a simplistic belief in the obsolescence of libraries and on the other by a sentimental attachment to the past.

The argument that public libraries are rendered obsolete by some combination of Google and the Kindle is unquestionably powerful. It is indisputable that the role of libraries in providing access to printed books is seriously threatened by 'digital disruption'. People are now finding and buying books online: 2014 saw online spending on books overtake in-store spending on books for the first time,⁵ and ebooks rose from 0% of books sold to roughly 25% of the market within just a few years of the launch of the Kindle,⁶ and the proportion is now 30% by volume in the UK.⁷ 80% of consumers now go online before deciding to buy something in person.⁸

However, the principal long-term reason for the decline in book borrowing has been the relative cheapness of books, whether printed or electronic, and the increased spending power of the population.⁹ This has undermined the role of the library in providing shared access to an expensive resource. As a consequence, book borrowing has been declining for the past forty years.¹⁰ In 2016 alone, book loans declined by 14% at a time when book sales continued to climb. Even children's books are not immune to this trend: loans of these fell by 12% in 2016.¹¹ Book borrowing in Hull has fallen by 34% in the past five years.¹² Other factors have no doubt been at work, and it is to be expected that book loans will fall if libraries are closed and book budgets are slashed. But what we are facing is a long-term systemic change in the role of libraries in the book distribution chain. Libraries face the real prospect of being left with no other role in that chain than to cater for the needs of the most deprived 20% of the population. This might be an essential role, but it is not one on which future success will be built. As one report has put it: 'Libraries must not become soup kitchens for the written word – stigmatised spaces used only by those with no alternative.'¹³

On the surface, it would also appear to be self-evident that the ubiquity of the Internet must signal the end of the role of the public library as a source of information. How can it compete with the capacity of Google to provide instant access to previously unimaginable quantities of information? Why would anyone go to a library when they can get access to everything they want from a smartphone?

We will challenge this belief in the obsolescence of libraries primarily by asserting that the primary purpose of libraries and librarians cannot be reduced to the provision of access to books and information. That is the task of the next section of this report. However, it is

worth making some preliminary observations about the argument for the imminent demise of libraries.

First, libraries do remain incredibly popular. In the financial year 2014 to 2015, libraries in England received 224.6 million visits, more than the combined total number of visits to Premier League football matches, the cinema and the top 10 UK tourist attractions.¹⁴ There are still plenty of people left to object to those, such as the Adam Smith Institute, who argue that the state should stop funding libraries altogether.¹⁵ Many people in this country remain vocal and passionate about public libraries.

Second, a transition from print to digital does not in itself signal the end of libraries. This is nowhere more evident than in the university sector. Most university libraries now invest more than 90% of their information budgets in digital resources.¹⁶ Academic publishing is now almost entirely digital. Yet despite the fact that the users of academic libraries can typically access everything they need without ever entering a library building, libraries as places have never been so popular and librarians remain central to the provision of both print and digital information resources in universities.

Third, the provision of access to books and information has always been more complex than simply opening the door of the library. The role of librarians has long extended to organising this access through the provision of catalogues, indexes and other search tools; making the channels of access navigable; raising awareness of what information resources exist; helping people to develop the skills they need to discover, locate, evaluate and use information resources, and curating and preserving resources. How well are these functions replicated in an online world if librarians have no presence in it? And that consideration comes before we even begin to take account of the multiplicity of ways in which librarians today are reinterpreting their purposes.

Fourth, it is observable that even with books available cheaply through many new channels, whether Amazon or discount stores or charity shops, the fact remains that one in ten homes in the UK do not have a hard copy book in them, rising to 19% of households where people are aged under 25,¹⁷ and that an estimated three in ten children do not possess a single book of their own.¹⁸ An estimated nine million working-age adults in the UK have low literacy or numeracy skills, or both,¹⁹ whilst 16.4% of adults in the UK score at the lowest level of proficiency in literacy.²⁰ Amazon may well have a convenient business model, but it is evidently not succeeding in remedying poor levels of literacy or low rates of book ownership, nor does it provide curated collections adapted to particular communities or groups. Before we jettison libraries, we perhaps need to consider how well the alternatives are performing in terms of achieving wider societal goals.

The same goes for access to information. Google, to treat this as a shorthand for non-library-mediated information access on the Internet, is a hugely useful tool with unparalleled benefits in terms of the speed with which it can deliver massive quantities of information. At the same time it exemplifies a poor, catch-all model of information retrieval, and, along with much of social media, this has contributed to the huge problems posed by information overload, the unreliability of much information, and the propagation of false information. Furthermore, we recognise increasingly that

global tech businesses offer limited assurances of open, democratic access to information, and may well threaten it. Ultimately companies such as Google and Facebook are in the advertising business not the information business, and what they serve up as information is shaped by that fact.²¹

So the argument that libraries have been rendered obsolete by cheap books, Google and the Kindle may not be quite as straightforward as it first appears. It can be contested. What is depressing, however, is that those who seek to defend public libraries so often fall back on nostalgia. All too frequently the defence of libraries is sentimental and backward-looking, harking back to a golden age situated, it seems, somewhere in the 1950s. Nostalgia is very tempting, particularly when, as the American writer and academic John Palfrey observes, 'survey after survey, anecdotal encounter after anecdotal encounter, shows us that people "love libraries"'. Just as we all love a *memory* of a childhood experience, we love the idea of libraries in general. Often it feels like a patronizing sort of love. An approach that relies too heavily on nostalgia to pull libraries as institutions through this period of transformational change is a dangerous one.²² We agree: nostalgia for the past is not a prescription for the future.

The more progressive defence of public libraries is constructed around the impact of libraries on other sectors of public life - social services, health and well-being, education, business support, culture and the arts, and so forth. A series of important reports produced over the last few years have argued this case in detail. *Libraries Deliver* is the most recent of these, setting out a compelling argument for the beneficial and significant impact of good public libraries on many areas of life.²³

We shall look at the contribution of public libraries in the context of Hull later in this report. But all too often that particular narrative, when deployed in defence of public libraries, leads to libraries being reduced to bit-part players in support of other people's social and economic agendas. Impact is crucial but the question remains - what is the distinctive contribution that librarians make? What functions do libraries fulfil that other organisations could not?

For the fact remains that public libraries are overwhelmingly associated in everyday perception with the lending of printed books. Indeed, that perception is actually strengthened every time a defender of public libraries uses the argument that books will never die. To the extent that people either do regard printed books as a dying technology or simply consider libraries to be increasingly irrelevant to their supply, then the mission of public libraries as normally constructed is seriously undermined.

It is impossible to convince anyone about the future of public libraries and the need to continue to invest in them without a genuinely compelling vision of their future. How can public libraries fulfil their purposes in a world so utterly changed from the one in which they were founded? And what exactly are those purposes? In short, what is the library here for?

1.2 Librarians are in the knowledge business not the book business

The fundamental conviction underpinning this report is simple. Librarians are in the knowledge business. They are not in the book business. Publishers are in the book business; Amazon and Waterstones are in the book business. Librarians are in the business of knowledge, learning, creativity and imagination.²⁴

Of course books were for many years their main stock in trade. But the stock should not be confused with the trade itself. The business of librarians is to help people expand their knowledge and understanding of themselves, their lives, and the world about them. Librarians organise and facilitate this process. They create safe, inclusive, creative spaces, both physical and virtual, open to everyone, where people can follow their interests and satisfy their curiosity; they guide people to the resources they need; bring people together; encourage them to learn from each other; help people to develop the skills they need, and motivate people to get involved. None of this presupposes a book or even a building. Libraries are defined by the presence of librarians not by the presence of books.

Librarians are in the knowledge business because they believe in the power of knowledge. They believe that knowledge empowers people, individually and collectively. They believe in the power of knowledge to build, sustain and transform communities. They believe in the power of knowledge to give people a voice. By supporting people to expand their knowledge and understanding of themselves and the world about them, to release their creativity and imagination, librarians help to build strong, knowledgeable communities. In a world where, increasingly, wilful ignorance is worn as a badge of honour and lauded as authenticity, this is surely more important than ever.

The journalist Simon Jenkins put the argument well in a piece published late in 2016. The library, he argued, must 'rediscover its specialness' – note that the stress is on *rediscovery* not invention – and do so by exploiting 'the strength of the post-digital age, the age of "live"':

'This strength lies not in books as such, but in its readers, in their desire to congregate, share with each other, hear writers and experience books in the context of their community. Beyond the realm of the digital oligarchs, the big money now is in live. It is in plays, concerts, comedy, lectures, debates, gigs, quizzes, performance of every sort. London must have more live events today than ever in history. Who would have dreamed that retiring politicians would grow rich not on banking but on public speaking? The local library needs to become that place of congregation. It should combine coffee shop, book exchange, playgroup, art gallery, museum and performance. It must be the therapist of the mind. It must be what medieval churches once were.'²⁵

We are very clear in our belief that libraries are in the knowledge business, not in the book business. However, the argument about the place of books merits some development, if only to avoid misunderstanding. By insisting that books are part of the stock in trade of librarians but not the trade itself, we do not dismiss the value of printed books, nor do we undervalue the attachment that many people feel to them.

For a variety of reasons, we believe that printed books will continue to be an important resource in public libraries. Even though book borrowing is declining, its volume remains high, and at least in specific areas, such as children's publishing, we believe that libraries will continue to play a part in the distribution chain in the long-term. Public librarians also have a role in curating and preserving important legacy collections of printed materials. Hull central library, for example, has a large and unique collection of literature relating to the Napoleonic wars, and an important local history collection, now housed at Hull History Centre.

But printed books are just one of the resources at the disposal of public librarians. Electronic information resources – electronic books, electronic journals, databases and datasets, web sites, indeed any electronic information object – can be expected to underpin much of the work of public librarians in the future, as is now starting to happen, perhaps more rapidly in some other countries than here in the UK.²⁶ As we have seen, university libraries have already negotiated the transition to digital publishing, and demonstrated the continuing role of librarians in the management of digital collections.

Yet these electronic resources are still just part of the stock in trade of librarians, not the trade itself. Librarians are in the knowledge business, helping people *by whatever means are appropriate* to develop their understanding of themselves, their lives and the world about them.

Wherever we observe progressive public libraries, we see them expanding the range of resources they bring to bear on their mission. Printed materials are joined not just by electronic information resources, but by a host of resources for learning and enjoyment, from computers and computer software to Lego bricks and musical instruments; from 3D printers to film production equipment; above all, people themselves are now seen as a vital resource, as librarians increasingly engage their own members and supporters in developing the opportunities available to people, drawing on expertise and bringing people together to share their interests. The best libraries today are as much about the conversations that take place between people as they are about individuals learning independently.²⁷

It is perhaps worth stressing that this report is not trying to argue that libraries have nothing to do with books. However, we do say that books are just one of the many resources at the disposal of librarians, and we do say that books do not define the mission of librarians, which is to build strong, knowledgeable communities by helping people to expand their knowledge and understanding of themselves, their lives and the world about them.

It must also be emphasised that librarians do not fulfil their mission simply by providing access to resources, whether these are printed books, electronic information resources, musical instruments, paintings, computers, Lego bricks, people, or ongoing conversations. The professional skills of librarians certainly include those concerned with the organisation of access to resources, with the orchestration of those resources. But their skills extend beyond these to include competence in the organisation of appropriate spaces, physical or virtual, where knowledge and understanding can be developed; the ability to help people develop the skills they need to participate in the creation of knowledge and understanding; the capacity to create environments where people feel physically,

intellectually and culturally safe, welcomed and unjudged; and the ability to engage with people in order to understand their needs and aspirations, and to stimulate and motivate them, individually and collectively. As the 2014 Sieghart report put it, librarians should be seen as 'the community impresarios of the 21st century'.²⁸ And all of this is underpinned by a strong sense of commitment on their part to a formal set of professional ethics, and a fierce belief in the mission of librarians to improve society by helping to build strong, knowledgeable communities.²⁹

1.3 Libraries are not community centres

It is important to stress at this point that we do not see the libraries of the future as rebranded community centres. Good public libraries are often described as 'community hubs', and it is a reasonable description in so far as it underlines the important role played by librarians in building strong communities. But this description can also be misleading. Libraries are not community centres.

Community centres, community associations and libraries certainly share some purposes. They are all concerned with community development and with helping meet the needs and aspirations of local communities. The successful location of a branch library within the Freedom Centre in east Hull demonstrates the synergy that can exist between the two types of organisation.

However, libraries and community centres still have distinctive missions. The purpose of a community centre is likely to focus on community development through the provision of the infrastructure required to facilitate the activities of local community groups and to encourage the growth of services needed by the community. Community associations have the character of umbrella organisations for whom social cohesion and social improvement are the overriding objectives. Librarians also aim to help build strong communities, but they have a specific focus on the development of *knowledgeable* communities. Their mission is focussed specifically and distinctively on helping people to develop their knowledge and understanding of themselves, their lives and the world about them. In taking forward that mission, librarians deploy a range of distinctive professional skills, and they are guided in their work by a clear set of professional ethics and values. As noted previously, libraries are defined by the presence of librarians.

1.4 How Hull libraries demonstrate that they are in the knowledge business

The recent report produced by the Libraries Taskforce of the DCMS, *Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021*, sets out a convincing account of the impact of the best public libraries. This account is organised around seven outcomes that libraries deliver for their communities:

- cultural and creative enrichment

- increased reading and literacy
- improved digital access and literacy
- helping [communities] achieve their full potential
- healthier and happier lives
- greater prosperity
- stronger, more resilient communities³⁰

Similar language is used by Arts Council England in its 2013 report on the future of public libraries.³¹ In this section of our own report, we summarise the ways in which Hull libraries are helping to deliver the principal outcomes identified in Hull's City Plan. This description provides good evidence of the relevance of public libraries to the city's goals, and of the reasonableness of our insistence that libraries are in the business of knowledge, learning, creativity and imagination, not the book business.

The priorities of the City Plan are expressed in terms of three overarching themes.³²

- A UK ENERGY CITY

Hull's location on the Humber energy estuary means it is perfectly placed to become a UK hub for new and emerging industries with a focus on renewable energy.

The public library network contributes by:

- giving advice and support to help people start businesses and create jobs
- providing support for sustainable economic growth in the local community
- offering spaces where people can work and hold meetings
- supporting job seekers and giving career development help
- enabling people to develop improved skills for employment

The library service in Hull provides one of ten regional Business and Intellectual Property Centres set up in partnership with the British Library to support business owners, entrepreneurs and inventors with free access to a comprehensive collection of databases and publications. Expert advice and support is offered to individuals and through workshops and master classes.

Hull's library service has secured European Regional Development and Arts Council funding, in partnership with the Goodwin Development Trust, to increase support to local businesses and entrepreneurs. This will include creating space in libraries that can be hired by the self-employed and small businesses for work or meetings. Hull libraries also assist businesses by helping people to increase their readiness for employment by providing job clubs, volunteering opportunities, apprenticeship programmes, IT skills training, and training in broader employability and self-employability skills.

As the *Libraries Deliver* report observes: 'Knowledge is increasingly recognised as a driver of productivity and economic growth, with a new focus on the role of information, technology and

learning in economic performance.³³ Librarians help people to expand their knowledge and understanding of themselves, their lives and the world about them.

- A WORLD CLASS VISITOR DESTINATION

Hull is a gateway to Yorkshire, the UK and to Europe. As UK City of Culture 2017 and through the wider Destination Hull capital programme of major cultural and transport infrastructure projects, Hull will grasp this once-in-a-generation opportunity to create a thriving visitor economy, building on its rich heritage, culture and diversity.

The public library network contributes by:

- making art and culture a part of local placemaking
- providing spaces and opportunities where people can 'do, dream and create'³⁴
- enriching the lives of individuals and communities
- providing a varied and imaginative events programme catering for all interests and ages
- playing a full part in Hull UK City of Culture 2017
- making significant contributions to major cultural events such as the Freedom Festival
- being part of long-term cultural programmes, such as Creative People and Places 2017-2027

Hull libraries offer a vibrant events and activities programme from play and rhyme sessions for babies to Lyricull – a festival of contemporary British songwriting. Partnerships with other cultural providers, such as the organisers of the annual Freedom Festival and Humber Mouth Literature Festival, and in 2016 the Amy Johnson Festival, give the library service the opportunity to augment the programmes of these festivals. For example, Freedom to Tell Tales, Word on the Street and Street Books are all library-based projects that have enriched Freedom Festival.

Exhibitions and events are hosted in libraries for many creative businesses and organisations including: Heads Up Festival, Hull International Photography Exhibition, Hull Young Artist of the Year, and Hull Dance. Libraries support creative organisations digitally by providing space and equipment, and in supporting artists to learn new skills. The library service was one of the lead organisations on a new creative apprenticeship programme to support skills development within the creative sector and is a partner in the local delivery of Arts Council England's Creative Local Growth Fund.

In the words of the *Libraries Deliver* report: 'Libraries are cultural hubs within communities – places for enjoyment, inspiration, research, creativity, education, and economic prosperity. They help people gain a sense of place and take pride in their neighbourhoods and communities through local studies work and projects. By bringing the community together to explore and celebrate local people's shared and differing culture and heritage, they are a powerful force for social cohesion and integration.'³⁵

- A PLACE OF COMMUNITY AND OPPORTUNITY

Hull is a place where everyone matters and where everyone is supported to achieve their very best.

The public library network contributes by:

- providing free access to a wide range of books and reading materials, including e-magazines and e-books, to encourage people to read and to keep reading
- running a wide range of activities designed to develop literacy and a love of learning
- providing free electronic access to online databases, reference books, newspapers and academic research journals, helping people to discover the information they need to manage their lives and pursue their interests more successfully
- offering study space to those, especially young people, who may not have the right environment at home
- supporting people to be better-informed and able to manage their own affairs more effectively,
- reducing social isolation by providing community-based events and activities open and available to everyone
- supporting the NHS in its efforts to extend the reach of public health programmes
- improving digital skills and reducing digital exclusion by providing free access to computers and the internet and helping people to make good use of them
- providing access to a range of public information services
- giving people the opportunity to contribute to the community by volunteering and sharing their skills

Supported by The James Reckitt Library Trust, the library service in Hull offers an exciting reading and literacy programme that focuses on promoting reading from birth and encouraging children to continue reading for pleasure throughout their childhood. Initiatives include: an under 5s reading programme; Chatterbooks reading groups in schools and libraries for children aged eight to twelve; the Summer Reading Challenge promoted in every primary school and enhanced by a vibrant summer holiday activity programme; the James Reckitt Children's Book Awards, at both primary and secondary levels, where children read the nominated books, meet the authors and vote for their favourites at an awards ceremony, and many events that tie in with national celebrations of reading, such as Harry Potter Night, World Book Day and National Poetry Day.

There are activities aimed at adults too. Hull library service leads or is a partner in the delivery of large-scale events such as the Lyricull festival, the Humber Mouth literature festival, and the Head in a Book programme, as well as supporting reading groups, creative writing programmes and helping to develop a growing spoken word and storytelling scene in the city.

The library service will deliver two major literature programmes during Hull UK City of Culture 2017; the first is a legacy project from Derry-Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 entitled Reading Rooms, and the second will be the largest children's literature event of Hull 2017, a ten-day children's

literature festival - The Big Malarkey Festival. A partnership with the BBC and enhancements to regular literature and literacy programmes will create new opportunities for libraries after 2017.

Support for the development of digital skills takes many forms and is delivered in a variety of locations: in libraries themselves, in community centres and in people's homes. Provision includes free internet access, free Wi-Fi, a computers for beginners programme called Scared of Mice, sessions on How to Make the Most of the Internet, laptop loans and coding clubs.

Libraries in Hull play an important role in encouraging people to participate in first-rung learning activities, building their confidence and motivating them to participate in or supplement formal learning. Learning activities include family history research, Conversation Cafes for those with English as a second language, support for those participating in various forms of online learning, peer-to-peer learning groups, and family learning activities.

Support for health and well-being is wide-ranging. Reading Well: Books on Prescription and Shelf Help are national programmes delivered locally which offer self-help resources for common mental health conditions (anxiety, depression, phobias and some eating disorders) and dementia. Shelf Help is specifically targeted at young people aged 13 to 25. All staff in Hull libraries receive Dementia Friends awareness training and are part of the Dementia Friendly scheme. Key staff have also received mental health first aid training and others have undertaken specialist training to facilitate reading, oral history and creative writing sessions with people who have had traumatic experiences. The Hull 2017 Reading Rooms programme will add a further strand to this work.

Libraries build capacity within communities and encourage community cohesion by creating a sense of place for their residents. For example, the recently refurbished Western Library has become the hub of the community where residents manage the library garden, raise funds, and organise learning and cultural events working closely with the library team. The range of activities varies from author events to the building of a cob oven in the library garden. By providing a free, supportive and accessible community space that is open to all without question or judgement, libraries help to reduce social isolation. And they provide services to housebound residents when they can no longer manage to visit the library.

As noted earlier, Conversation Cafes are held in the Central Library for those who have English as a second language, and all libraries offer online citizenship support and training. Libraries are widely understood by people of all nationalities and backgrounds and are frequently the first port of call for those seeking to discover their local area.

The *Libraries Deliver* report summed up this huge range of activity succinctly. 'Libraries,' it said, 'are trusted to provide sound information and assistance, treating all the people that come to them in a helpful and fair way. Through providing free access to government information and digital services, employment assistance, learning and more, libraries play an invaluable role in community members' lives. By giving people the skills and knowledge they need to succeed, they reduce dependence and make individuals and communities more resilient.'³⁶

As we have argued in this report, and as this section has demonstrated, libraries are not in the book business. They are in the business of knowledge, learning, creativity and imagination. They help build strong, knowledgeable communities. And strong, knowledgeable communities are what Hull needs if it is to be a successful and prosperous city. The vision for the future of Hull articulated in the City Plan could serve as an agenda for a 21st century library service: 'to bring the whole community together to make Hull a place that is brimming with culture, enterprise and opportunity; a place where people want to live, work, play, study and do business; a city where those in the greatest need are valued and supported; a place that people will call home.'³⁷

1.5 Why this is a critical time for public libraries in Hull

In the light of what has been said in the previous section, it might be thought that public libraries in Hull were in good health. Certainly there is a stark contrast between the position in Hull and the fate that has befallen public libraries in many other towns and cities, where whole networks of libraries have been swept away. There have never been any proposals for wholesale library closures in Hull, despite the huge financial pressures placed upon the Council, and there is clearly no appetite in any local political party to sacrifice them. The library service here in Hull also benefits from the presence of the James Reckitt Library Trust. It is largely thanks to funding from the Trust that the library service has been able to sustain the wide range of innovative programmes described in the previous section of this report.

But it is evident that all is not well. As a direct result of the enormous pressure placed on Council budgets, cuts have occurred, and not on a small scale. Some branch libraries have been closed, and in many more there have been drastic reductions in opening hours. Opening hours at the central library have also been curtailed - it is now open for a mere 41 hours per week, and closes at 4pm on a Saturday, the only day, apart from a couple of hours on two evenings, when it is open outside ordinary office hours. The opening hours of the library service as a whole make it highly inaccessible to children and young people in full-time education during the week in term times, and to working people.

Staffing has been significantly reduced across all areas of the service. With the exception of the Western Library and the new Music Library, both recipients of Trust funding, buildings and facilities are barely of a standard to meet the requirements of a 21st century library service. The budget for the acquisition of new books and other resources is being sharply cut. The digital infrastructure is scarcely adequate, and the library service has a limited online presence. There are no funds to undertake effective marketing, or to run events and activities in a genuinely professional way. Public and official understanding of the role of public libraries remains largely locked in the past, and the library service rarely figures in city planning. It was disappointing, for example, that the city's recent Cultural Strategy missed the opportunity to recognise the significant role of public libraries in the cultural life of Hull.³⁸

And the Council faces yet more cuts to its funding in coming years. It is difficult to see how libraries can escape the consequences of this, and, on current evidence, hard to see what strategy might be adopted by Hull Culture and Leisure Ltd, the Council-owned body charged with delivering library services, to deal with this, other than one of closing more branch libraries. It might be able to muddle through and maintain some semblance of the present level of service, but only at the expense of yet deeper cuts to other cultural or leisure services; that seems an unlikely outcome, and is any case an undesirable one.

It is the view of the Trust that the status quo is unsustainable. There is much happening in public libraries in Hull today that is excellent. But the service has been steadily hollowed out, and is now in a vulnerable state. Further cuts to services risk pushing public libraries in Hull into a downward spiral from which they may not emerge. Perhaps more to the point in an aspirational city, there are opportunities being lost. Public libraries could be making so much more of a contribution to the life of this city if they were not locked into an obsolete business model and constrained by lack of investment. So in the next part of this report, we set out a very different way of thinking about libraries, and a business model that is better suited to the demands and possibilities of the 21st century.

Part 2
A new business model for public libraries

Part 2 A new business model for public libraries

2.1 Turning the library inside out: from building to platform

As we have seen, libraries have been traditionally understood as buildings containing books. People came to the library and entered the library building in search of whatever it was they wanted. Typically they did this as individuals. Libraries were at the centre of this information universe and they prescribed its scope and content. People who used libraries worked according to the rules and operating procedures of the library, not according to their own preferences. The discovery of new knowledge took place within the library.

It is this paradigm that is obsolete, not librarians. Thanks largely to the digital revolution, people can now find information resources in thousands of places on the Internet. People stand at the centre of their own information universes, which they themselves have constructed. They choose for themselves how and when to use those resources. The creation of new knowledge frequently takes place outside the library building. And increasingly people develop their knowledge and understanding in communication with others, not as individuals.

The library is turned inside out.³⁹ But now the library must find a place within the multiple information universes that people construct for themselves. It is no longer in a monopoly position. This is why librarians need to rediscover and reassert their fundamental mission, which is to build strong, knowledgeable communities by helping people to develop their knowledge and understanding of themselves, their lives and the world about them, by whatever means are relevant and appropriate in the early 21st century. They need to apply their traditional skills, and no doubt some new ones too, to the changing circumstances of the world today. And whereas librarians in the past could wait for people to come to them, they now need to find new and powerful ways of engaging with people to discover how best they can fulfil their mission and serve their communities. This theme of engagement is prominent in progressive discourse about public libraries, and we will return to it later.

For all these reasons it is more helpful to think of a library in the 21st century as a **platform** than a building.⁴⁰ Compare a library to a smartphone. A smartphone is a platform on which a personalised collection of apps is assembled. Some of these apps are common to all smartphones, such as the ability to make a phone call. The rest depend largely on the preferences of the smartphone's owner.

Now imagine a library not as a building but as a platform. This platform is dedicated to knowledge, learning, creativity and imagination. The task of librarians is to create a platform on which different apps, or services, are assembled to meet the needs of specific communities. The services are the specific ways in which librarians help people to expand their knowledge and

understanding, to release their creativity and imagination. Some of those services may be common to all platforms, or libraries. Many will be specific to the community served.

This conception turns the library inside out. People no longer simply 'enter' a closed building – librarians now engage directly with people through a wide range of services designed to help build strong, knowledgeable communities. Services become conceptually more visible, and they become so in practice if this conception can be realised.

2.2 The library as a platform for partnership: from apps to enterprises

The metaphor of a platform and apps allows us to imagine the library differently, disaggregating and exposing its services and connecting librarians more explicitly with communities. We can extend this approach by thinking of each app, or service, as an *enterprise*. An enterprise is an activity that is planned, financed, managed and delivered in a businesslike way, often through partnerships, in the interests of communities. Understanding the library as a platform supporting an array of enterprises allows us to consider each of these enterprises as individual, self-standing, self-sustaining activities. We avoid thinking about the library service as an undifferentiated whole that is either present or absent in a community, and does only one thing. Instead we can focus on it as an evolving array of services, or enterprises, provided in different combinations at different times in different settings – settings that might be either physical or virtual.

The use of the term *enterprise* is intended to signal flexibility and innovation in management and financial arrangements. It does not imply that enterprises are necessarily social enterprises in the accepted sense of the term – enterprises that have a social mission and generate the majority of their income through the sale of goods and services.⁴¹ At the same time there is no reason why a specific library enterprise should not be a social enterprise if that were appropriate. A library enterprise might be a business trading for the purpose of enabling people to expand their knowledge and understanding of some particular area of life.

This conception of the library as a platform supporting multiple enterprises opens up new possibilities, notably as regards the branding of the library service, to which we will return later. But above all it allows us to think seriously about ***partnerships***. In a world where local authorities can no longer provide everything, and indeed may be forced to offer less and less, partnerships are vital for the renewal and sustainability of the services that communities need. These partnerships can involve multiple agencies: the local authority; other parts of the public sector, such as the NHS; the culture sector; the education sector; a variety of funding agencies and charities; the voluntary sector, and, critically, the private sector.

Individual library enterprises might be developed and funded through different forms of partnership depending on the activity. For example, literary enterprises might be developed in partnership with a university or an arts organisation and funded through some combination of public funding agencies, charities and private businesses. Health-related enterprises might be developed in partnership with the NHS.⁴² IT-related activities might be developed in partnership with digital

businesses. Many of these enterprises might be dependent wholly on public funding, grants and other forms of external support but others might take the form of social enterprises generating profits for investment in the social purposes of the enterprise.

It is helpful to think of the platform itself as the means of providing common services needed by most, or all, apps/enterprises; for example, buildings, IT systems, and other physical and human infrastructure. This might be seen as a particular local authority responsibility, but partnerships could still come into play. For example, The James Reckitt Library Trust has advocated the building of a brand new central library; this is discussed later in this report. Such a building would very likely be funded through partnership arrangements, and would form both a fundamental part of the platform for the system as a whole and the setting for a wide range of specific enterprises.

The platform might also be understood as providing the overall governance framework for the combination of platform and enterprises that formed the complete library system, including the legal and ethical principles on which the system should be based, and the strategic priorities that should be pursued at the system level, for which the local authority, with its continuing statutory responsibility for public libraries, would remain democratically accountable.

This conception of the library system as a combination of platform and enterprises moves us well beyond the conventional thinking about alternative models of library service delivery. Current delivery models are typically variants on four main themes: libraries operated directly by a local authority; commissioned libraries, where responsibility for libraries is outsourced to a third-party organisation; shared services, where two or more local authorities share responsibility for libraries; and libraries run by the community with local authority support.⁴³

None of these delivery models escapes the traditional conception of the library service as a series of buildings providing books and services. In principle such models could reject that conception and adopt a view of libraries that is more consistent with the 21st century. But in practice, conventional alternative delivery models are simply ways of placing libraries unchanged in form or conception in a new delivery wrapper. Typically that is a wrapper designed primarily to reduce costs; it does nothing in itself to ensure that libraries are made fit for purpose in the modern world. By contrast, the conception advanced in this report is both consistent with the demands of the modern world and capable of supporting radically new delivery models.

2.3 Participative enterprises: how librarians can be more responsive and library enterprises better managed

Just as, for example, Apple and other tech companies have opened up their various platforms (smartphones, tablets and operating systems) to independent app developers, so librarians could open up their knowledge platforms to enterprise developers, and enhance the ways in which they engage with the community.

There could be an open invitation to the communities that libraries serve to imagine new enterprises, and members of these communities could be supported to develop them. Businesses might identify opportunities. Universities might see the library platform as an opportunity to connect with local communities. Openness does not imply a free-for-all, however. Any proposed enterprise would need to demonstrate to those responsible for the governance of the library service that it advanced the interests of the community, was a strategic fit, and was consistent with the objectives of the library platform: to enable people to expand their knowledge and understanding, to release their creativity and imagination. The balance between openness and control would need careful management and good judgement.

Remember that the use of the 'app' metaphor does not mean that the library apps/services/enterprises that we are discussing would necessarily be digital apps; they could just as well exist in the physical world. In our conception, lending books is an app. An oral history project or a mobile library service are apps or enterprises in the same way as, for example, an online information service for businesses, or a streaming service for library events.

Should all apps or enterprises be free? The James Reckitt Library Trust is absolutely committed to a free public library service, and that is in any case a statutory requirement, albeit one that is poorly defined. The strategic and governance frameworks established for the library system as a whole would need to be clear about this, and clearer than is the current legislation about the scope of the free services to be provided by the library system. But it would be worth giving some open-minded thought to the possibility that there might be a limited number of discretionary paid-for apps outside the broad scope of free provision, especially where these had been independently developed by third parties.

There are precedents for this. Museums and galleries often charge for special events; Freedom Festival combines free and charged events; that is also true of the City of Culture programme. In a later section of this report, where we consider how best to brand the library service, we will talk about the need to move from a 'deficit' model of library services, i.e. the library is there primarily to meet the needs of those who cannot obtain access to its services in any other way, to an 'opportunity' model, where the library targets everyone in the community. Libraries need to move from being seen as a place of last resort to a place of choice, and allowing enterprise developers in partnership with the library service to charge for some apps might have a place in such a transition.

New opportunities also arise where the management of services is concerned. Enterprises need not be managed in traditional ways, directly by the local authority or by one of the conventional alternative delivery models discussed earlier. Different management models might co-exist across the library system as a whole, each suited to the needs of specific enterprises. We no longer need to think in terms of a monolithic management model stretching across the whole system, although there would remain a need for strategic planning and coordination at the system level, which is where democratic accountability would also reside.

Where enterprises are formed by partnerships with different organisations and funders, it might be particularly appropriate to consider new forms of management and governance. This is not to advocate a fragmentation of the overall system into numerous independent units. It is important to recall that individual enterprises would exist on a common platform providing shared infrastructural services and shared strategic planning and governance frameworks. But our conception of the future does open up the possibility of more imaginative and flexible ways of delivering services.

2.4 Broadening horizons: from local enterprises to global enterprises

Enterprises need not only be developed locally. The library platform could incorporate enterprises developed anywhere in the world. This is already happening with digital services. For example, UK public librarians working collaboratively have developed shared services for access to e-books. The Digital Public Library of America brings together the riches of America's libraries, archives, and museums, and makes them freely available to the world, and provides software tools that allow its resources to be customised to local needs.⁴⁴

Librarians are instinctively collaborative, and there is no reason why librarians from different countries should not share their particular areas of expertise to develop new services.

2.5 A new business model

To provide a new ***business model*** for libraries, we need to start thinking in new ways. The current business model is based primarily around the cost of physical libraries and the staff assigned to those buildings, with some general costs added to that, consisting principally of the costs of certain professional staff based at the centre and the cost of the acquisition of books and other information resources. Income comes overwhelmingly from the local authority, which, in the case of Hull, commissions a wholly-owned company, Hull Culture and Leisure Ltd, to deliver library services.

This traditional model is highly inflexible, and invites (a) a mentality that can only envisage cost reduction in terms of the closure of individual libraries, or the reduction of service hours, and (b) an assumption that the local authority funds the core (still understood as most of the activity, and largely traditional services) with funding from other sources (the Trust and other external funding agencies such as the Arts Council) paying for what are regarded still as marginal activities.

Adopting the model of a platform and enterprises allows us to start thinking about the funding of the library service in new ways. We can construct financial plans based on the specification and cost of the platform, and the cost of each specific enterprise activity. Work would clearly be needed to determine which costs belonged where, but once we start to think in these new terms, we gain (a) flexibility in thinking about how to prioritise and manage available resources, and (b) the freedom to think more consistently and creatively about partnership funding.

The point about prioritisation merits emphasis. As stated above, the conventional model tends to limit thinking about the prioritisation of resources to considerations about individual libraries – whether to keep them open or to close them, or to reduce their opening hours, or to co-locate them with other public services. These stark choices are rarely attractive, particularly as they tend to leave one local community or another without neighbourhood library services of any kind.

However, once we start to think in terms of the library service as a collection of enterprises, then we have greater choice and flexibility. To take a hypothetical example, we might decide that the priority for the library system as a whole was the provision of services to children. Delivering these services across the entire city, in a variety of ways and using a variety of physical locations, could be achieved by prioritising enterprises relating to children over enterprises servicing other groups, or prioritising them over all-purpose, generalised services of the kind typically delivered through a conventional branch library. The outcome would be a very different library service but potentially a more vibrant and relevant service.

It is very unlikely that the library service would ever be limited to servicing the needs of just one segment of the population, and the legislation relating to public libraries might prevent that. Nevertheless, the Trust does believe that the library service needs to prioritise its services. The current financial pressures mean it simply cannot meet every demand placed upon it, nor can it continue to act as a dumping ground for the problems that other public services cannot cope with. But effective prioritisation means thinking about library services not in binary terms – a library open or closed – but in the different terms established by thinking about the library services as a platform and a set of enterprise activities.

In the case of the Trust, the new model also opens up the possibility of aligning Trust funding to Council and other funding in a more integrated way, based on an agreed development plan and agreed financial plan. *This would move us decisively away from an outdated core/margin funding approach, and provide more joined-up developmental planning.*

In the next part of this report, we look at what this new business model might look like in practice. How can it be delivered?

Part 3
Delivery

Part 3 Delivery

3.1 Community engagement and community boundaries

We have spoken already about the importance of engagement with local communities. The services or enterprises provided in any specific community need to be driven by the needs and aspirations of that community. The best international examples of successful and innovative public libraries all demonstrate the truth of that. The new central library of Helsinki, due to open at the end of 2018, has already been dubbed ‘the new cradle of citizen engagement’.⁴⁵

Indeed there is more generally a strong and growing sense of sustainable community development being internally-driven rather than externally prescribed; a growing interest in attempting to restore civic and political life by restoring community life, not, as explained by George Monbiot, by ‘ditching state provision, but complementing it with something that belongs neither to government nor to the market, but exists in a different sphere, a sphere we have neglected.’ This involves the creation of ‘thick networks’ of small-scale community initiatives developed through collaborations between local people. ‘Projects proliferate, spawning further ventures and ideas that weren’t envisaged when they started. They then begin to develop a dense participatory culture [leading to] wider social revival.’⁴⁶

Monbiot offers an interesting case from Rotterdam where ‘in response to the closure of local libraries, in 2011 a group of residents created a reading room out of an old Turkish bathhouse. The project began with a festival of plays, films and discussions, then became permanently embedded. It became a meeting place where people could talk, read and learn new skills, and soon began, with some help from the council, to spawn restaurants, workshops, care cooperatives, green projects, cultural hubs and craft collectives.’⁴⁷

It is a pity that libraries needed to close in Rotterdam to give rise to this explosion of community energy; how much better had librarians been facilitating it. Here in Hull, as elsewhere, our public librarians do have good connections with the communities they serve, or at least with the people who already use libraries, but will need to focus with increased vigour on working closely with local people in the design of services, welcoming new ideas in the spirit implied by the concept of the library as an open platform.

At present this kind of engagement is limited by the historic location of branch libraries. For the most part these are located according to past definitions of community boundaries. In many cases demographic shifts and major social and economic changes have changed community identities. Put simply, many of the branch libraries in Hull are in the wrong place.

And that is before we start to think about a library system composed of many discrete enterprises rather than a collection of branch libraries. Connecting library enterprises to communities requires a new understanding of the social composition of the city. Fortunately there is good work that has been done on this in the form of the 'customer segmentation model' that has been developed for Hull by the Council's Business Intelligence Team.⁴⁸ This community map categorises residents in terms of who they are (socio-demographic characteristics), what they do (behaviours) and how they think and feel (attitudes). With an overlay of data relating specifically to libraries, some work on which has already been done, this should be used as a basis for all future thinking about the shape of the library service. It could thereby inform a much more sophisticated, nuanced approach to community engagement, help mould the specification of what services are to be delivered in specific communities, and assist in decision-making about the future location of physical libraries.

3.2 The importance of place and the development of focal-point libraries

This report does not underestimate the importance of physical library spaces. Great cities still build great libraries, as can be seen from recent examples all over the world, and The James Reckitt Library Trust is an advocate of building a stunning new library in the centre of Hull. The Western Library on the Boulevard has been transformed by the Trust's investment in the building, and is now a thriving community resource. At the University of Hull, the redevelopment of the Brynmor Jones Library has triumphantly reaffirmed the place of the library at the heart of the academic life of the campus; this inspirational building, to which students have flocked, is a modern evocation of the magic of libraries as places.

There is also much discussion of libraries as 'third places', drawing on the ideas first put forward by Ray Oldenburg in his influential book *The Great Good Place*.⁴⁹ Oldenburg is an urban sociologist who writes about the importance of informal public gathering places in community development, separate from home ('first place') and the workplace ('second place'). Examples of third places include environments such as cafes, clubs, pubs, churches, local shops, and parks. They are locations where we exchange ideas, have a good time, and build relationships, and in Oldenburg's view, they are central to local democracy and community vitality. In any large city like Hull, where so many traditional 'third places' have been lost, the role of libraries in bolstering community life by providing these spaces is potentially significant.⁵⁰

We therefore believe that there is an important role for branch libraries in this city. The questions are about their number and their role. The conception of the library system as a combination of platform and enterprises does not in itself imply the existence of branch libraries at all. Individual enterprises could in theory be delivered in a wide variety of permanent and temporary locations and settings without the need for physical branch libraries: children's reading sessions in a school or community centre; a book exchange in a church building; storytelling in the streets during the Freedom Festival; an oral history project in a prison – all are conceivable and actually happen today.

At the same time, we believe that the library service must also enable people to make connections between one service or enterprise and another; leading children, for example, from reading to wider collections of books, or to means of expressing themselves through music or art, or giving them access to IT equipment and software, or just giving them the space for quiet contemplation or study. Good branch libraries allow librarians to give people the opportunity to make these connections, and to let people experience the magic of libraries as places. Just as there are those who look back on their library experiences forty years or more ago with deep affection and gratitude, we want people in the future to look back on their experiences of modern, inspirational, 21st century library buildings with the same sense of awe and indebtedness.

At present the branch library network in Hull can hardly be considered adequate, despite the best efforts of the staff to maintain a good level of service. Many of the buildings are run-down, facilities and equipment are poor, opening hours are limited, and there are not enough staff. It might therefore be argued that we should be investing in this existing network, aiming to have a dozen or more attractive, well-equipped, properly-staffed branch libraries with excellent opening hours located in all the right places across the city.

The position of the James Reckitt Library Trust is not just that this objective is unaffordable, though undoubtedly it is at the present time, but that it would represent a better use of resources to direct a major portion of any new investment into the development of other facets of the library service. We shall come to what those might be in due course. By focussing resources on the modernisation of the library service, making a reality of the platform/ enterprise model, we can do more to transform the service and make it fit for the 21st century than we would achieve by investing in the existing model.

What we do advocate is the establishment of perhaps four or five 'focal-point libraries' located at strategic points across the city. These would be focal points and service magnets for surrounding communities (defined in terms of the new community map advocated earlier) and would be places where a wide range of community-specific services could be offered. This strategy would give us the chance to establish a small number of genuinely first-class physical libraries in a hub and spoke model, with a central library as the hub. This could only be effective, however, in combination with significant investment in that number of existing libraries in order to transform them in terms of infrastructural services, equipment, furnishing, interior design and staffing to ensure that they could function according to our vision of libraries in the 21st century and were places of which everyone in the city could be proud.

But the creation of a number of focal-point libraries is only one element of our framework for the delivery of library services. We come next to the delivery of services in every part of the city.

3.3 Neighbourhood delivery

We believe that the new framework for the delivery of library services should include a firm commitment to making appropriate services available in every part of the city, not just through the

proposed focal-point libraries. The conventional approach to library services, with its absolute reliance on physical branch libraries, leaves some communities without services at all as a result of the misplacement of branches (for example, new and growing communities such as Kingswood have inadequate provision) or leaves some communities deserted when branches close, with all the outrage and sense of loss provoked by that.

What we advocate is a much more flexible approach to the delivery of specific services to the places where they are most needed, and in a wide variety of affordable settings. By disaggregating the library service as a whole into component enterprises, we can select the most appropriate services for particular communities and the best venues for their delivery. This also gives us greater flexibility when it comes to managing continuing shifts in population and community identities.⁵¹

Hypothetically, envisage the city being divided into a dozen distinct communities according to population, social and economic characteristics, geography and so forth, drawing on the work on segmentation referenced earlier in this report. Each community would be certain of having access to a relevant range of locally-delivered library services. Some of these services would in all likelihood be common to every community. So people everywhere could expect to have access to a collection of printed books and other materials for loan. In most communities there might be a need for IT facilities. Activities to encourage reading and develop higher levels of literacy among children would doubtless also be widespread. Other services might be concentrated on some communities only, or might be centred on one of the focal-point libraries, or might feature just at the central library. Some services might consist of occasional events but would be delivered throughout the city at different times; for example, literary events, or oral history projects.

What kind of venues are we envisaging? That depends on the specific service or enterprise. A good venue for a book exchange may not be the best place for IT facilities or business support services. All over the world there are countless, endlessly imaginative examples of non-traditional settings for the provision of library services. Libraries in airports, railway stations and hotels; the Bibliometro units at subway stations all around Madrid; the Garden Library and beach libraries in Tel Aviv; the static trolleybus libraries in Bulgaria; the tiny libraries – in converted telephone boxes, purpose-built kiosks, experimental art installations, even a disused commercial refrigerator – that are springing up on street corners around the world in countries as far apart as the USA, Germany, Greece, the Czech Republic, Latvia and New Zealand, as well as here in the UK; the living libraries in, for example, the USA and Sweden, where people can hire out a ‘living book’ – an expert individual with whom they can have a conversation to increase their knowledge and understanding of a specific topic.⁵²

We have the imagination in Hull to emulate these innovations. Converted shipping containers offer a particularly enticing prospect in a maritime city. These are appearing all over the world as shops, bars and restaurants. Three of the restaurants in the latest Good Food Guide are in shipping containers. Wapping Wharf in Bristol is home to CARGO, a fashionable retail yard consisting of independent shops in converted shipping containers with glass frontages and waterfront views.⁵³ An entire shopping mall was created from shipping containers in Christchurch, New Zealand after the 2011 earthquake; initially conceived as an emergency measure, it has proved so successful that

it is now likely to be made permanent.⁵⁴ Cheap to convert and install, imagine a series of containers housing IT facilities, perhaps shared with an IT company using them as retail outlets, with external decoration developed through community arts projects.

Locations do not always need to be permanent. Pop-up libraries in a huge range of shapes and sizes have appeared in many countries. Some of them are mobile, such as the Tucson Bookbike operated by the public library in Tucson, Arizona. The pop-ups run in parks in New York during the summer, offering children's programmes and educational activities as well as books,⁵⁵ provide an example we have already seen in Hull, and will see more of during our year as City of Culture. As we have also seen in Hull, the street itself can be a venue; storytelling in the street during Freedom Festival once more showed the library service at work in a new way.

Co-location with other organisations becomes easier to imagine once we stop trying to shoehorn a full-service branch library into a space that is fundamentally unsuitable for that. If instead we are trying to integrate a single type of enterprise, the possibilities are more promising. Book exchanges, for example, can be successfully located in coffee shops, banks, pubs and post offices or other public service locations as long as there is strong marketing, collections that are regularly refreshed, and, wherever possible, an engaging human presence.⁵⁶

It might be objected that the provision of such a rich tapestry of services in multiple locations across the city would be much more costly than the current branch library network, especially considering the need to have a staff presence in many more places. In fact we believe that financial modelling of different scenarios might well reveal scope for significant cost savings, which could then be reinvested in new activity.

The ongoing costs of several buildings would be eliminated, and land and buildings would be freed for alternative uses or for sale. Staff now absorbed by conventional branch libraries could be redeployed to deliver the services in other locations, and that could be done very flexibly, with activities or events being delivered by the same staff in different places across the day. Some staff functions required at permanent branch libraries might no longer be needed at all.

Where activities do not require the presence of professional librarians, a range of other staff could be deployed, including community volunteers, apprentices, and staff shared with other services or activities in shared locations. As part of a strategy for growth not retrenchment, these groups would enable an expanded service to be provided by augmenting existing library staff. More extensive use of self-service options would also need serious consideration. Emulating the examples of innovative book exchanges from around the world would need professional design and oversight, but should not require a continuous presence of professional librarians to operate. As another example, a network of venues providing IT facilities and IT skills support could be developed in partnership with our digital businesses and with the University, and might be staffed as part of a company's CSR contribution – as already happens in the case of KCOM – or perhaps by suitably qualified students working towards their own volunteering accreditations.

The approach we are advocating also opens up the potential for partnership, as already noted, as well as for sponsorship. The conventional branch library model has little or no potential in this

respect because what it offers is too generalised, and too tied to an outdated perception of libraries, to be an attractive proposition. Individual enterprises, by contrast, can align far more readily with the interests of other organisations. The library service might partner with digital businesses in the provision of IT services in the community. Partnerships with the NHS might be developed in the delivery of enterprises relating to health and well-being. Regional and national arts funders have already demonstrated their readiness to support imaginative and well-focussed arts-based activities delivered through the library service. Once we start to think of the library service as a series of enterprises, we can begin to think creatively about partnerships, sponsorship and new funding opportunities.

The Trust is confident that a rich set of library enterprises could be delivered locally without incurring large recurrent costs. We will talk about capital and other one-off costs later. It must also be remembered that the backbone of the local library service would be provided by the focal-point libraries, each serving three or four communities. What we can then anticipate is a network of facilities and activities spreading into every neighbourhood, and in fact achieving greater penetration and engagement than has been achieved by conventional branch libraries in fixed locations. This approach is in line with the points made earlier in this report about the 'inside-out library' and the need for librarians to engage more collaboratively, more proactively and more imaginatively with the local communities they serve than they are required to do in the traditional model of library services.

It must be stressed, however, that we do not advocate the closure of branch libraries as a first step in the transition to a new pattern of neighbourhood delivery. No conventional libraries should close without alternative provision having first been put in place. This suggests that careful planning and a gradual movement from one pattern of provision to another is likely to offer the best way forward so far as neighbourhood delivery is concerned.

3.4 Services in schools

Hull enjoys a thriving schools library service. This is operated on a subscription basis by the public library service, which provides resources, expert advice, training and guidance to those responsible for libraries in schools. In addition public librarians deliver literacy activities and other interactive sessions directly to school pupils in their school settings, helping to increase the educational achievement of pupils, improve literacy skills and foster a love of reading. The majority of both primary and secondary schools in the city subscribe to the service.

This is a vital dimension of the overall pattern of future public library provision in the city. It is an area of activity that currently has rather a low profile, and that needs to change as part of the overall rebranding of the library service that we advocate later in this report. In our framework for the development of the public library service, we see schools libraries provided in partnership with the public library service as a special case of neighbourhood provision, and one that exemplifies the argument we have made elsewhere about the importance of partnerships.

3.5 Community-managed libraries

Councils in many parts of the country looking for a quick fix to their financial problems have championed the model of community-managed libraries. In the worst cases this has meant simply handing all responsibility for the provision of local library services to groups of self-selected volunteers with little regard for their ability to operate and develop the service. The James Reckitt Library Trust is wholly opposed to this model of delivery.

However, the Trust recognises that there are examples of well-run community libraries staffed by volunteers. Arts Council England has published case studies and helpful guidance on best practice.⁵⁷ Successful instances have normally involved some continuing support from the public library service. However, the Trust remains cautious about this model. As we have argued repeatedly, libraries are defined by the presence of librarians, and that professional input remains, in our view, essential. The wide range of professional skills deployed by librarians cannot be set aside, nor can libraries flourish in the absence of the distinctive values and ethical principles that librarians bring to their work. We are also concerned that independent, volunteer-managed libraries sometimes fail to attract the wide range of users of different ages and backgrounds whose involvement should be a fundamental aim of public libraries. Volunteer-run libraries can turn all too easily into community centres for preferred social groups, excluding by inattention or discouragement more challenging members of the community.

As we have argued already, deeper community engagement is essential for the future of public libraries, which can no longer rely on people simply turning up at their doors. We concur with the view expressed by Arts Council England that libraries of the future must reflect the particular needs of the communities they serve 'with community engagement, enablement, and co-production becoming organising principles for libraries, modelling an emerging new settlement between taxpayers and the state.'⁵⁸ Or as it stated in another of its reports, we can 'expect to see a shift from a service *provided* to a community to one in which *local people* are *more active* and *involved* in its design and delivery. Libraries will be recognised as connecting individuals, communities and organisations to innovate, create and provide new library based services and ideas.'⁵⁹ Community involvement thus comes to be seen as a normal way of working rather than a cost-cutting tool.

It is worth stressing, therefore, that we welcome the involvement of volunteers, augmenting and not replacing valued permanent staff. Volunteering is an important strand in the life of strong and energetic communities, and can have many legitimate motivations, ranging from the acquisition of skills and work experience to sheer enjoyment and a desire to serve. Volunteers can themselves bring high-level skills and wide experience to their volunteering roles, whilst our partnership model envisages many people from partner organisations working within the library service.

We believe that the platform/enterprise model advocated in this report in fact presents greater opportunities for deepening community involvement, and arguably more sustainable opportunities, than do more conventional approaches to engaging the community. Our model of an open library platform on which local people could build their own enterprises is an invitation to community action. As we have argued already, individual enterprises could be designed, developed and

delivered in different ways, and a specific enterprise might be wholly community-led. This is likely to be a powerful way of engaging people and stimulating initiative and collaboration. But by anchoring these enterprises in the underlying library platform, enterprises would have access to the resources, expertise and facilities provided by the host platform, as well as being part of the library system as a whole, aligned to its strategic objectives, benefitting from its professionalism, and subject to its high-level governance.

In addition to community involvement in individual enterprises, we believe there is scope for experimentation with much greater community involvement in the management of all aspects of the library system. We should be looking for innovative ways of bringing people within the library membership directly into the management and direction of the service.

In Hull we have some good examples already of strong community involvement in the library service. This has been a notable feature of the development of the Western Library since its Trust-funded redevelopment. The Western Library is a good example of a fine public library offering a setting in which various community groups, working in collaboration with the library service, bring people together around a wide variety of interests and issues, including the management of the library's community garden. Here is a place where further steps might be taken towards community involvement in the management and development of the library as a whole, giving it a unique place in the overall tapestry of provision, yet still an integral part of the library system as a whole.

3.6 The new central library

The James Reckitt Library Trust has for some time been a strong advocate of the development of a brand new library in the centre of Hull. It is a proposition that has gathered considerable support across the city. The Library of Hull would be an international exemplar of all that libraries have to offer in the 21st century, and a beacon for learning in the city. It would embody the evolving brand of the city, reflect the aspirations of Hull, and help establish the city as a leading visitor destination. It would provide the people of Hull with new opportunities to help make Hull a successful, prosperous, ambitious, healthy and knowledgeable city of which we can all be proud, a true legacy of City of Culture 2017.

The aspirational brief for the new Library of Hull can be found in the Appendix to this report. The new central library must also be seen in the context of the library system as a whole. The Trust has always been clear that it does not support the development of a new library at the expense of investment in the library system as a whole in Hull. We do not believe that a system based solely on a single central library would ever be capable of providing effective services to all parts of the city. There are too many barriers to engagement, and too many disincentives, to make reliance on people travelling to the city centre a realistic proposition. The Trust has always argued that a new Library of Hull must be the hub of a thriving citywide network of library services.

The new Library of Hull (and in the meantime, and in varying degrees, the existing central library) has three main functions in terms of the system as a whole. First, it will act as a beacon for library services, the key component in the development of a new public perception of the role of libraries in the 21st century. Second, it will be an essential part of the platform for the system as a whole, the means of providing a range of common services needed by most, or all, library enterprises. Third, it will be the place where the fullest range of library enterprises will be found, and in that sense it must succeed in bringing people to it. It cannot remain a mystery to the majority of people in the city, as we believe would be the case if it stood in isolation. It will be better positioned to play its full part if it is at the heart of a thriving citywide network promoting what the Library of Hull has to offer and channelling people to it.

3.7 The digital dimension

Public libraries have assumed an important role in recent years in providing access to IT facilities and helping people to acquire basic IT skills. In some cases, including that of Hull, libraries have developed this role further: expanding into teaching programming through ‘code clubs’; providing advice about copyright and digital licensing, and supporting people in the acquisition of a broad range of information literacy skills. There are some excellent examples in the UK of the work that public libraries are doing in this area.⁶⁰

Libraries are helping to bridge some of the new divides being created in an age of what the 2015 BiblioCommons report on library technology calls ‘our age of digital abundance’, and which the report describes: the cognitive divide that prevents many from dealing with the superabundance of information; the social divide that means that some people have extensive online social networks and others have very limited ones; the attention divide, which for many has become ever shorter in an online world, and limits the potential of the Internet for deep learning; and the participation divide, which excludes those who lack the equipment, skills or sense of safety to participate in the online world with confidence.⁶¹

However, what remains seriously impoverished is the digital presence of public libraries. Libraries are almost invisible online. Their websites ‘are falling off the mental map of relevance for the majority of people whose opinions are shaped by what they see online.’⁶² Library websites – and this is entirely true of Hull – are weakly developed in terms of functionality, are poorly designed, are buried in council websites, lack integrated social tools that would enable people to engage with the library and with each other, fail to exploit search engine optimisation, lack resources that can be shared across social media, and deploy primitive means of searching even their own catalogues. In a world where most people conduct a significant portion of their lives online, this is a recipe for institutional annihilation – libraries might just as well not exist.⁶³

The digital presence of UK public libraries is similarly weak across other platforms. Hull is no exception to this. Although the public library service in Hull has a strong Twitter presence, it is doing little in terms of other social media, and offers almost nothing in terms of apps that people

can use on their smartphones. However, we cannot simply blame the library service for this. Public libraries throughout the country suffer from levels of investment in technology that range from minimal to non-existent; they lack both appropriately skilled staff and technology leadership; are all too often encumbered by outdated and inappropriate council IT systems, and are hedged about by rules and regulations imposed by council IT departments that fly in the face of the need for libraries to offer open and engaging digital spaces. The library-specific technologies that public libraries themselves deploy – principally their library management systems – are for the most part outdated remnants of 1980s and 1990s technologies that are unsuited to meeting the challenges and opportunities of the technology world of today.

The Trust has argued for some time that a deep and genuinely engaging digital presence is vital to the success of 21st century public libraries. Without it, librarians are working with their arms tied behind their backs. This requires significant levels of initial investment in the development of systems and online services, and a commitment to the ongoing investment in staff and resources necessary to maintain and continually enhance the library's digital presence.

This is also a crucial part of our overall strategy for the delivery of library services throughout the city. Digital delivery knows no geographical boundaries. Every citizen of Hull with access to a PC, a tablet or a smartphone should be able to enjoy a rich variety of digital applications that sit alongside the library enterprises experienced in physical settings.

There is a great opportunity here for Hull. Our growing digital industries are regarded as an essential part of the city's future prosperity and image. The development of C4DI, Hull's thriving centre for digital innovation, exemplifies that. Based on experience in other sectors, such as higher education and the NHS, we are highly sceptical of the chances of success of the collaborative national initiatives being advocated in recent reports as a means of making real progress towards improving the digital presence of public libraries.⁶⁴ We are even more sceptical given the absence of any serious funding for these initiatives.

Here in Hull, however, we could make major progress quickly by investing a substantial amount of money in commissioning development work from our own local digital industries, bringing benefits at the same time to the local economy. We return to proposals for funding this later in this report. We also need to look seriously at extracting the public library's digital infrastructure from the council's own IT infrastructure, where it will always suffer from being a low priority, from being subject to monolithic IT systems that are unsuitable to the needs of libraries, and from a regulatory straitjacket that conflicts with the ethos of the library service. Here is another opportunity to work in partnership with an organisation better placed to support the digital infrastructure needed by a 21st century library service.

3.8 Staffing

As the Government's recent *Libraries Deliver* report makes clear, '[to] transform public library services across England, we need to harness the talent and creativity of the people who work in them....It's important we develop people already working in public libraries to give them the confidence, skills and knowledge they need to lead and succeed in a changing environment.'⁶⁵

Throughout this report we have placed the emphasis on librarians and what librarians do rather than on the abstract concept of libraries. As we argued earlier, the traditional skills of librarians remain essential for the future; not just the skills involved in the organisation of access to resources, but also all those skills required to be effective in the many other ways in which librarians fulfil their mission.⁶⁶ Nor, particularly in a time of change, should we underestimate the importance of the strong commitment of librarians to the ethical principles and values that underpin their profession, and of the strong belief they possess in the mission of librarians to improve society by helping to build strong, knowledgeable communities. In the long run, it is values which persist, whereas specific skills may come and go.⁶⁷

At the same time, the conception of the public library service set out in this document suggests that the staff who provide the service are also likely to need additional skills. Many new demands will be placed on librarians if they are to be successful in pioneering deeper forms of community engagement, developing and operating partnerships, seeking new sources of funding, engaging in new methods of managing and governing services, developing new digital enterprises, fostering innovation and transforming the public perception of libraries.

The Libraries Taskforce of the DCMS has announced its intention to work with CILIP [the professional organisation of librarians] and the Society of Chief Librarians to produce a Public Library Skills Strategy. This will be designed to address:

- promoting leadership at every level of the workforce
- delivering outstanding customer service
- continuing professional development and training for library staff, broadening and deepening skills in areas like marketing, data analysis, commercial activities, choosing and using alternative finance models, digital services, and harnessing the commitment and expertise of volunteers
- attracting the best new talent, from diverse backgrounds, to work in library services
- retaining talented and well-trained staff in the library sector
- the learning and development needs of councillors, commissioners, senior council officers and board members of new library delivery bodies [such as mutuals and trusts]
- the learning and development needs of volunteers⁶⁸

This national strategy should be of value in Hull as a framework for the continuing development of the workforce, and it can be expected that staff development programmes and materials will be made available at a national level. At the same time there needs to be a Hull-specific audit of

current skill levels and a local plan for workforce development. This might need to be combined with a review of organisational structures to ensure that the library service has the right people in the right organisational places to deliver what we envisage will be a very differently managed and operated service.

It must be emphasised that we consider that investment in the staff is just as important as investment in facilities, equipment, digital infrastructure or the online presence of libraries. It is not an optional extra if we are going to transform our library services and make them fit for the 21st century. We come later to proposals for the funding of this.

3.9 Branding

Public libraries will not thrive unless we can transform their image and fundamentally shift the public perception of them. This is not simple. On the one hand it is necessary to combat the view that public libraries are obsolescent; on the other hand, we need to move people beyond a sentimental view of libraries and books that is excessively rooted in the past. There has to be a concerted effort to make people aware of what modern public libraries can offer, of the positive impact they can have on many aspects of life, and of how communities can themselves participate in their development. Yet at the same time, we have to ensure that we do not lose the positive aspects of the traditional brand of libraries as safe and inclusive places, and of librarians as trusted, non-judgemental individuals committed to their profession and their values.

This calls for a major effort to rebrand public libraries. This complex task will need to be tackled at a number of levels. At the most fundamental level, any marketing campaign aimed at transforming the popular perception of libraries needs to be based on a new product. Of course we can find many examples of libraries doing excellent work, and there is certainly much that is excellent happening in Hull libraries, and no doubt more could be done to promote that. Around the country there have been many efforts to raise awareness of what libraries offer. But it cannot be claimed that these efforts have shifted opinion to any great extent. The counterweight of the current image of libraries is such that better promotion of the current level of services is unlikely to be effective unless people can actually experience something that is dramatically different from what they have known before or might have expected. The product has to be transformed before a new image can be successfully projected.

At another level, politicians and opinion-formers need to be convinced that libraries change people's lives for the better. The *Libraries Deliver* report gives this a good deal of attention, arguing for work to be done to develop influence with local councillors and decision-makers; for better use to be made of data and evidence to demonstrate to decision-makers how libraries can help to achieve local strategic goals; and for promoting achievements where local leaders have worked through their public library services. In this context, the *Libraries Deliver* report also challenges central government 'to look first at whether the public library network would provide an effective, value-for-money delivery mechanism for services where public engagement within communities is needed to

achieve policy outcomes', and challenges local government 'to adopt a "Libraries First" approach when considering how to deliver information and services into local communities, and [to] promote this approach to local partners.'⁶⁹ The Trust looks to Hull City Council to respond positively to this challenge, and to ensure that public libraries feature properly in all future strategic thinking and strategic planning.

At the most visible level, a massive effort needs to be devoted to rebranding public libraries in the minds of the public. What we propose is a marketing and communications campaign on a scale never previously attempted on behalf of a public service, certainly not in Hull and probably not in any other city in this country. It will be made easier by the platform/enterprise model we have advocated. As well as marketing the library service as a whole, which risks being pitched at too high a level of generality, individual enterprises could be promoted and marketing campaigns targeted at specific communities and groups in more engaging and relevant ways.

This marketing effort needs to be directed at everyone who lives and works in the city. As mentioned earlier in this report, there is a need to move from a 'deficit' model of library services, i.e. the library is there primarily to meet the needs of those who cannot obtain access to its services in any other way, to an 'opportunity' model, where library services are seen as relevant to everyone in the community.

Such a campaign - along with a series of enterprise-specific campaigns - must be professionally designed and delivered, properly resourced, highly innovative, and sustained; this is not a week-long effort. Every possible form of media and public engagement should be used. Whilst it can certainly be linked to national campaigns of the type advocated by the Libraries Taskforce,⁷⁰ the focus must be on Hull and the needs and aspirations of this city at this time. Coming on the back of City of Culture, and the impact that this is already having on people's perceptions of the city and of themselves as citizens of Hull, there could be no better time to present libraries as inheritors of the mantle of City of Culture, taking forward the cause of reimagining and reinventing not just public libraries but the city itself.

3.10 Funding

The transformation of the public library service advocated in this report will not happen without substantial capital investment. Where will this come from? There are also legitimate questions about the recurrent costs of the model advocated here. Two perspectives underpin our approach to funding.

First, the status quo is unsustainable. Without an effort to change thinking about public libraries, as long as they continue to be regarded as somehow marginal to the ambitions we all share for the city, then they will inevitably become a Cinderella service, prey to neglect and cuts. The local authority in Hull itself faces a further round of deep funding cuts. As argued earlier, it can either just about maintain the library service in its present reduced state, and cut budgets even more

elsewhere, or it can further truncate the service by closing branches and limiting opening hours. This will put libraries into a downward spiral from which they may never emerge.

Second, and if we accept that the status quo is unsustainable, the starting point must be recognition that a new strategic direction is essential. We can then then embark on the detailed work needed to see how it might be funded. What the Trust is proposing is a rejection of the status quo, which leads nowhere, and its replacement by a radically different way of thinking about libraries and their funding. It is currently the only alternative strategy on the table. Everyone concerned about the future of public libraries in this city needs to consider this strategy and, if they believe it offers a way forward, then commit to the work of seeing how we could make a reality of it. We cannot simply throw up our arms in despair and automatically assume that anything new is bound to be unaffordable. If we have learned anything as a result of City of Culture, it is that Hull is a place where we can have great aspirations and can succeed in making a reality of them.

We have already addressed the question of ongoing costs earlier in this report, and identified areas for cost saving. We have also argued that the business model that we advocate, based on the concept of a platform and supported enterprises, offers far greater opportunities for attracting income, sponsorship and external grant funding than the conventional model based on a network of branch libraries. We have also repeatedly emphasised the importance of partnerships as a way of ensuring more sustainable funding, and of the contribution in kind that could come from greater community involvement.

The Trust is confident that a rich set of library enterprises could be delivered throughout this city without requiring major additional Council funding on a recurrent basis. Indeed it should be possible to reduce funding if we can make a reality of what we say about potential savings, partnerships and external income. But of course all that needs to be verified, and that means doing some hard work on planning this new service in detail. That work needs to begin now.

At the same time, the Council must also consider its priorities. If we can transform what we have at present – a service that still manages against the odds to do much excellent and innovative work but which is dangerously at risk – into a vibrant service fit for the 21st century, capable of playing a major role at the fundamental community level in the redevelopment of this city, then why should we be always thinking of reducing its budget?

But as we have already indicated, this is not just a matter of recurrent funding. The library service will not be transformed without substantial initial investment. Four areas for investment stand out, quite apart from the project to build a new central library, which will require its own funding strategy. All these areas will of course require some level of recurrent funding, but here we are talking about a large-scale initial investment of capital and other non-recurrent funding. First, there must be investment in the buildings designated as focal-point libraries in order to modernise their infrastructural services, equipment, furnishing, and interior design. If the project to build a new central library does not materialise, then this form of investment would need to be extended to the refurbishment of the current central library, which is dowdy, run-down and incapable in its present form of acting as the hub of the library network we envisage. Second, there must be

investment in the transformation of the library service's digital presence and its digital infrastructure, including investment in new arrangements for its support that take the infrastructure outside the Council's own IT infrastructure. Third, we have to invest in people through a major programme of training and development. And fourth, we have to invest in an unprecedented marketing effort, sustained over a long period, with the aim of rebranding public libraries and fundamentally altering the public's perception of them.

The James Reckitt Library Trust holds the key to this investment. We have already suggested that the new business model proposed in part two of this report opens up an opportunity to align the Trust's funding with the funding provided by the Council via Hull Culture and Leisure Ltd, and with other sources of income. Everything we have said about the future of public libraries - and indeed about the way in which they operate already - makes it clear that the old core and margin approach, whereby the Council funded supposedly core activities and the Trust funded activities at the margin - is obsolete. Activities once regarded as marginal are now core, and vice versa. The platform and enterprise approach offers a very different conception of the library system. In view of that, it makes great sense to align Council and Trust funding around a shared strategy and development plan. In the spirit of partnership that underpins our approach, this strategy and plan would need to be agreed between the two parties, and the Trust would seek a formal role in overseeing the implementation.

This in turn raises the possibility of Trust funding being much more strategically focussed. Given the resources the Trust currently has available for investment, and the expected level of funding it could provide over the next few years, the Trust would be prepared to consider making major investments in a number of the areas identified above. For example, whilst Council capital funding might most appropriately and realistically be focussed on the improvement of buildings and infrastructure, the Trust could focus its own investment on areas such as staff development, marketing and the development of the library service's digital presence. The James Reckitt Library Trust would welcome the chance to pivot away from relatively small-scale funding of a large number of heterogeneous projects and towards major strategic investment spread over a number of years. Through such a partnership between the Council and the Trust, and with the prospect of securing external funding to be explored, the potential for a substantial programme of transformational investment begins to take shape.

Conclusion

It is the view of The James Reckitt Library Trust that public libraries in Hull are at a turning point. In the face of renewed financial pressures on the local authority, there is a real danger that further cuts to the library service will set it on a downward spiral from which it may not emerge. At the same time the public and official perception of public libraries remains largely locked in the past. Unless this perception changes, the will to invest in public libraries at the level needed to make them fit for the 21st century is unlikely to be strong.

The Trust is clear in its belief that public libraries do indeed have an important part to play in the development of the city, and that they remain as relevant as ever in the digital age. As we have argued, this belief depends on understanding that libraries and librarians are in the knowledge business, not the book business. They are in the business of knowledge, learning, creativity and imagination, helping people to expand their knowledge and understanding of themselves, their lives and the world about them. In the process, libraries help build strong, knowledgeable communities.

There are many signs of change and recovery in Hull, and a fresh sense of ambition is tangible. But for many people in the city, a better life remains elusive. No doubt substantial improvement will be the work of years, and success will remain critically dependent on both national politics and the state of the global economy. But we can make the effort ourselves to give everyone, and not just a few, the opportunity to be part of a more successful, prosperous, ambitious, and healthy city.

As they already demonstrate in many different ways, libraries and librarians can contribute to that outcome by helping to build strong, knowledge communities. It is worth quoting again the vision for the future of Hull set out in the City Plan: 'to bring the whole community together to make Hull a place that is brimming with culture, enterprise and opportunity; a place where people want to live, work, play, study and do business; a city where those in the greatest need are valued and supported; a place that people will call home.' As we observed earlier, this should be the agenda for our 21st century public library service.

As we have indicated, the Trust is eager to forge a new partnership with the City Council, and with other potential partners too, in order to develop a long-term library investment strategy. We are more than willing to play a full part in this, and to help position Hull as a leading proponent of transformational change in the position of public libraries in this country.

This report has proposed a framework for the development of a 21st century library service. We are confident that the proposals for practical action contained in Part 3 of the report provide a good basis for new strategic and operational planning. However, we do not wish to be prescriptive, and we hope that what can now ensue is a wider debate in the city about our recommendations. The Trust looks forward to listening to other views and to participating in that debate.

Appendix:

Aspirational brief, produced by the James Reckitt Library Trust, for a new central library, The Library of Hull

- To build on the ethics and principles of the public library service in Hull to develop a Library of Hull committed to knowledge, learning, creativity and imagination; a place that is safe, free and open to all, welcoming and friendly; an inspirational space where people can expand their knowledge and understanding of themselves, their lives and the world about them; a place that reaffirms the position of public libraries at the heart of the development of strong, knowledgeable communities.
- To provide the people of Hull with new opportunities to help make Hull a successful, prosperous, ambitious, healthy and knowledgeable city of which we are all proud, a true legacy of City of Culture 2017.
- To create a building that stands as a beacon for learning in the city, embodies the evolving brand of the city, reflects the aspirations of Hull, and helps establish the city as a leading visitor destination.
- To develop a flexible, adaptable and inspirational environment for study, learning, recreation and respite that meets the needs and aspirations of all users of the Library, with ready access to the latest digital technologies and to quality collections of printed and digital resources.
- To create an environment that is inviting, welcoming, and comfortable; that promotes health and well-being; that encourages people to stop and sit, to linger, to read, to work, to talk, to feel at home; an environment where people can network and interact, particularly across boundaries, and can pursue their interests together; to be THE place to go to meet friends and colleagues.
- To create a place of surprise, wonder and imagination where people of all ages can discover and develop a love of literature and reading; a space where people can engage with science, technology and digital innovation, where they can build and learn from each other, and from this city's experts in these fields; a place where our artistic community can congregate, create, exhibit and perform.
- To develop a forum, an RSA of the North, where the great challenges of 21st century life can be debated, where everyone can be engaged; a place where world-class thinkers and entrepreneurs can share and discuss their ideas. A place that reinforces the strength of democracy and civic society.

- To develop a space where people can acquire the skills they need to be employable and to live life more fully; a place where the tools of entrepreneurship can be found, and where businesses, both big and small, can be supported with expertise and resources;
- To create a Library that is an international exemplar of what public libraries have to offer in the 21st century, underpinned by a fundamental commitment to open engagement with the communities that the Library seeks to serve.
- To develop this project as a practical demonstration of partnership working, bringing together a wide range of organisations across traditional divides, committed to a shared vision.
- To have a business model that is robust and sustainable, and is not reliant on uncertain short term funding.

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²⁸ DCMS, *Independent library report for England*, p.21

²⁹ For an extended discussion of the methods used by librarians to fulfil their mission, see Lankes, *Atlas of new librarianship*, pp.66-80

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⁴⁵ See <http://bit.ly/2nvuLkC> for details. Other prominent international examples of high levels of community involvement in the design and development of new libraries include Dokk1, the new public library in Aarhus, Denmark (see <http://bit.ly/2mQUMYg>); Almere in the Netherlands (see <http://bit.ly/WyL7I2>), and the Delft Concept Library, also in the Netherlands (see <http://www.doklab.nl/en/>). Further examples can be found on the web site of the Model Programme for Public Libraries managed by the Danish Agency for Culture (see <http://bit.ly/2mAC0mq>)

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