



Mobile Library Service Strategy

Rural Impact Assessment

Report for Consultation

September 2012

Consultation Period:

24th September – 14th December 2012

Libraries NI
1 Spillars Place
Omagh
BT78 1HL

www.librariesni.org.uk

Access to information

As part of our commitment to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations, we want to ensure that everyone is able to access the documents we produce. We would therefore be happy to provide any of the information in this document in an alternative format or discuss it with you in person.

Please contact **Mrs Anne Todd:**

 028 25 664 100

Consultation

Please submit all comments on this report to:

Helen Osborn
Director of Library Services
Libraries NI
1 Spillars Place
Omagh
BT78 17H

 028 82 253 703

e: helen.osborn@librariesni.org.uk

The closing date for receipt of comments is Friday, 14th December 2012.

Comments will be accepted in any format.

CONTENTS

	Page
1. Introduction	4
2. Background	4
3. Policy Context	7
4. Consideration of Available Data and Research	9
5. An Initial Assessment of the Impact of the Proposals on Rural Areas	16
6. Consideration of Mitigating Measures	19
7. Formal Consultation	19
8. Further Action	20

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Libraries NI is seeking to establish a new strategy for mobile library service provision. This report sets out the preliminary findings of a Rural Impact Assessment of changes proposed in respect of the provision by Libraries NI of mobile library services as a result of the new strategy.
- 1.2 The report is being published as part of the public consultation process in order that library users and other interested parties may comment on it and provide any additional information about the implications of the proposed changes to public mobile library services for those who live in rural communities.
- 1.3 In making final decisions on the way forward, the Board of Libraries NI will give consideration to any additional information provided during the consultation process. A final Rural Impact Assessment will be published at that stage.
- 1.4 Consistent with Rural Proofing Guidance¹ from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), this report provides information on the following matters:
 - Step 1: The background to the proposals
 - Step 2: Presentation of the policy context
 - Step 3: Consideration of available data and research
 - Step 4: An initial assessment of the impact of the proposals on rural areas
 - Step 5: Consideration of mitigating measures
 - Step 6: Formal consultation
 - Step 7: Decision and publication of the results of the Rural Impact Statement
 - Step 8: Monitoring for adverse impact.
- 1.5 This report has been written primarily to provide information to consultees during the formal consultation phase and includes the findings of the first 6 steps of the process. The action to be taken under the remaining 2 steps is also outlined in section 8 below.

2. Background

- 2.1 Libraries NI (the Northern Ireland Library Authority) was established on 1 April 2009. The primary duty of Libraries NI, as set down in the Libraries Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, is to provide a comprehensive and efficient public library service for persons living, working or studying in Northern Ireland. In doing so the organisation is required to:

¹ Thinking Rural: The Essential Guide to Rural Proofing, DARD, 2011

- Ensure that facilities are available for the borrowing of, or reference to library materials sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements of adults and children (whether by keeping adequate stocks, by arrangements with other bodies concerned with library services or by any other means).
- Have regard to the desirability of:
 - encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service;
 - providing advice as to the use of the library service and making available such bibliographical and other information as may be required by persons using the service;
 - promoting literacy and lifelong learning;
 - maintaining a collection of library materials relevant to the cultural heritage of Northern Ireland;
 - making library premises available for cultural and community activities; and
 - meeting any special requirements of adults and children by any appropriate means.

2.2 Libraries NI is committed to adopting best practices in its approaches to policy development and review and is seeking views on the impact on rural dwellers of its proposals in relation to a strategy for mobile library services. A separate draft Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) has also been published for consultation. The EQIA considers and asks for views on the impact of the proposals on those within the scope of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The Mobile Library Service

2.3 The mobile library service is an integral and essential part of the provision of public library services in Northern Ireland. Libraries NI is seeking to establish a new strategy for mobile library service provision which ensures that use of the service increases and that it meets the needs of current and future users in line with Libraries NI's vision.

2.4 Libraries NI has the vision of being a flexible and responsive library service which provides a dynamic focal point in the community and assists people to fulfil their potential. Its mission is to enrich and enhance the lives of individuals and communities through providing and promoting a range of high quality library and information services.

2.5 The strategy focuses on the mobile library service which serves the general public by visiting locations some distance from a branch library to lend books and other stock and, in some cases, to provide access to ICT. This service stops at agreed locations in settlements of various sizes (both rural and urban) and also visits a limited number of schools and playgroups.

- 2.6 Libraries NI will continue to provide its other mobile services. These are the Homecall service, provided for anyone who has significant difficulty in visiting a branch or mobile library due to ill health, disability or lack of mobility and who does not have anyone who can collect library materials for him/her and the E-express, a vehicle kitted out with computers.
- 2.7 Libraries NI operates 28 public mobile library vehicles, with over 700 stops in both urban and rural areas across Northern Ireland, serving a wide range of settlements of various sizes. Usage of the mobile library service currently represents 5.5% of overall library business, in terms of book borrowing.
- 2.8 Prior to the establishment of Libraries NI the service was provided by the 5 Education and Library Boards (ELBs). Each ELB had its own approach to the provision of mobile services and accordingly Libraries NI inherited a service where there was considerable variation in terms of provision and frequency of service.
- 2.9 The objectives of the proposed strategy are:
- to increase use of mobile libraries;
 - to ensure that the service is accessible;
 - to maximise the contribution of mobile libraries to Libraries NI's overall service provision in both rural and urban areas;
 - to deliver value for money services;
 - to deliver a harmonised and equitable service; and
 - to deliver a service which is appropriate for target users.
- 2.10 The proposed strategy includes five service proposals which form the main focus of the consultation. These proposals are summarised in the table below.

		Summary of proposals
1	Target groups	The limited space on public mobiles should be used to provide services for the key target groups, namely older, retired people and children of various age groups and their carers.
2	Services to be provided	Public mobile libraries are best designed for and should primarily deliver book lending services (including talking books) and should not provide Internet access.
3	Criteria for service delivery	A mobile stop in a rural area must have at least 5 regular customers on an on-going basis with a sustained level of use and must not be within 3 miles of a branch library.

		A mobile stop in an urban area must not be within easy access of a branch library; must be in an area of social need and must have at least 5 regular customers on an on-going basis with a sustained level of use.
4	Services to schools and playgroups	No limiting criteria but requests for stops will be prioritised on the basis of principles such as practicality, level of use and level of need, e.g. distance from a branch library.
5	Increasing usage	Increase the number of schools and playgroups served and develop a more targeted approach to publicising public mobile library services.

2.1

1 Further documents connected with the development of the strategy and full details of the consultation process can be found on the Libraries NI website (www.librariesni.org.uk).

3. Policy Context

3.1 Libraries NI considers that the principal rural policy contexts relevant to the proposed strategy for mobile library provision are contained in the following documents:

- Rural White Paper Action Plan (Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2012);
- Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework 2011 - 2015 (Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2012);
- Shaping Our Future, Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025 (Department for Regional Development, 2011); and
- Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, 2006).

Rural White Paper Action Plan

3.2 The Rural White Paper Action Plan contains commitments on rural issues by all government departments and provides a framework for a more integrated approach by the N Ireland Executive in seeking to address the challenges facing rural communities. The document identifies 5 Key Themes and associated policy priorities in relation to rural issues. The following Key Themes and policy priorities are relevant to the mobile library strategy:

Key Theme: Access to Services

Policy Priority: To promote fair and equitable access to key services for all rural dwellers

Key Theme: Rural Communities
Policy Priority: Seek to minimise, where it exists, disadvantage, poverty, social exclusion and inequality amongst those living in rural areas and in particular amongst vulnerable groups

- 3.3 By developing and implementing the proposed strategy for mobile library services, Libraries NI is seeking to promote equitable access to the service across N Ireland. The service, while available to everyone, will target specifically the elderly and children and their carers, who are the biggest users of the service and who have been identified in the Rural White Paper Action Plan as amongst the most vulnerable.

Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework

- 3.4 Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework was developed taking account of the views of a range of stakeholders and builds on DARD's rural anti-poverty and social exclusion work from 2008 – 2011. It identifies 3 priority areas for intervention: access poverty, financial poverty and social isolation.
- 3.5 The document refers to one of the Multiple Deprivation Measures that government uses to help target those in need i.e. 'proximity to services' which identifies particular problems of access and connectivity for rural dwellers which can potentially have adverse impacts on vulnerable groups, including the elderly, children and young people and those with disabilities
- 3.6 Libraries NI recognises that the mobile library provides a valued service for people who are unable, or find it difficult, to access a branch library and is seeking through its proposed strategy to make the service more relevant to the needs of vulnerable groups.

Shaping our Future

- 3.7 Shaping our Future is the Department of Regional Development's Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland, which recognises that accessibility to facilities and services can be difficult in rural areas, particularly for women, the elderly and young people and can contribute to rural isolation and peripherality. The Strategy also recognises that the rural community living in small towns, villages and small settlement clusters has experienced a fast rate of population growth in recent years, with the largest growth of population over the last 25 years occurring in the Belfast 'travel to work' hinterland reflecting the trend to use the countryside as a residential area for townspeople. The effect is to introduce into the countryside a population which looks to the towns and cities for services and social contacts, contributing to socio-economic differentials within rural areas.

- 3.8 The overall aim of the Strategy is to develop an attractive and prosperous rural area, based on a balanced and integrated approach to the development of town, village and countryside, in order to sustain a strong and vibrant rural community, contributing to the overall well-being of the Region as a whole. The mobile library service has a key role to play in helping to realise this aim.

Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries

- 3.9 The Department of Culture Arts and Leisure's policy framework for libraries (Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries) recognises that within the resource constraints, the library service should be available *'in the places, at the times and in the ways that enable as many people as possible to use it'*.
- 3.10 It specifically articulates that *'the use of mobile libraries should ensure optimal access in rural areas, including to the internet, through strategically located stops, with the duration and frequency of stops according to the needs of the locality'*.
- 3.11 Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries also recognises that within the context of being a universal service, the public library service is well placed to make a particularly effective contribution to those citizens who are, or who are at risk of becoming, socially excluded, including those who live in rural communities, where the library service can provide an effective support to other government departments.
- 3.12 Only some of the current mobile libraries have a public access computer with internet access and where this facility is available it is not well used for a variety of reasons, including lack of privacy and the speed and reliability of connectivity in some areas. Accordingly it is proposed to stop providing a public access computer in mobile libraries and use the space to provide more books, which users have identified as the main reason for using a mobile library.

4. Consideration Available Data and Research

- 4.1 In developing this draft Rural Impact Assessment various sources of information have been reviewed to determine the potential implications for rural communities of the proposals in the strategy for mobile library services, namely:
- Libraries NI data: and
 - Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures 2010 (NISRA).
- 4.2 Libraries NI would welcome information on any additional sources of data or research which it should consider in making decisions on the impact on rural communities of the proposals regarding mobile library services.

Libraries NI Data

Data on mobile library users

- 4.3 A customer survey was undertaken in June/July 2011, mainly to assess customer satisfaction with aspects of the current mobile library service and identify any additional needs. Almost 3,000 responses to the questionnaire were received from users aged 16 years +, estimated to be in excess of 50% of the total number of users. The questionnaire asked customers for certain information about themselves and given the high response rate, it can be assumed that the profile is fairly typical of all customers.
- 4.4 63% of customers who returned a questionnaire described the place where they live as a rural location (i.e. a village or farm/home in the country). Three fifths of respondents (60%) said that the mobile library stopped at their house and of those respondents for whom the mobile did not stop at their house, more than half (56%) lived less than 0.5 miles from the mobile stop and just over three fifths (61%) normally walked to the mobile library stop and two fifths (40%) travelled by car. 78% of respondents said that they did not use any other library services in addition to the mobile library. . Less than one in ten respondents (8%) said that they would like the mobile library service to provide services other than books.
- 4.5 Other relevant information relating to the profile of users is summarised in the Table 1 below.

Table 1: Profile of Mobile Library users

	Respondents
Age	More than three fifths (64%) of respondents who use the mobile library were aged 60+ years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18% were aged 60-69 • 19% were aged 80-89 • 24% were aged 70-79 • 3% were aged 90+
Gender	Over four fifths (82%) of respondents who use the mobile library were female and just under one fifth (18%) were male.
Racial group	The vast majority (99%) of respondents were white, with the remainder coming from Chinese, Irish Traveller, Indian, Pakistani or mixed ethnic origins.
Marital status	Almost half (49%) of respondents were either married/cohabiting or in a civil partnership. 30% were widowed or a surviving civil partner and 16% were single.
Disability	Over two fifths (43%) of respondents considered themselves to have a disability or illness that substantially limited their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Of these, over four fifths (83%) reported the nature of the disability or illness to be mobility-related, 22% sight-related and 16% hearing-related.
Dependants	30% of respondents indicated that they had someone who was dependent on them (i.e. a child, someone with an incapacitating disability or an elderly person).

- 4.6 Although the survey was limited to respondents aged 16+, questions were asked about whether respondents used the mobile library service for anyone other than themselves and, if so, the age group of the other person(s). 40% of respondents said they used the service for someone other than themselves in the following age ranges:

Table 2: Age groups using the mobile library service

	No. of respondents	%
Child / children (0-4 years)	389	35
Child / children (5-11)	496	44
Child / children (12-15)	207	19
Young adults (16-17)	64	6
Adult(s) (18-59)	237	21
Senior citizen(s) (60+ years)	311	28

Note: Respondents could select one or more answers to this question so the sum of the percentages will be greater than 100%

- 4.7 Information from the survey confirms therefore that older people (i.e. those over 60 years of age) and young children (0 - 11 years of age) make up a significant proportion of the customers of the mobile library service.

Other Libraries NI information on rurality

- 4.8 Public library services are currently delivered via a network of 96 branch libraries, 28 mobile library vehicles and 2 specialist heritage libraries. Rural areas are served by a combination of mobile library services and library branches in some rural towns and villages.
- 4.9 During January – April 2011, Libraries NI carried out public consultation on proposals resulting from Stage 2 of the strategic review of library provision in Northern Ireland. As part of that process, a Rural Impact Assessment was undertaken which included consideration of comments received on the impact on rural communities of the proposed closure of some libraries. Feedback which was of particular relevance to the proposals regarding the mobile library service included the following:
- “The costs associated with public transport and the fact that public transport routes and timetables often make it impossible to access the next nearest library, especially in the evenings”.*
- 4.10 During September – December 2011, Libraries NI published a draft Rural Impact Assessment on proposals to reduce the opening hours of libraries in order to achieve financial savings. General information received during this consultation about the circumstances of rural dwellers which respondents felt needed to be taken into account in relation to rural deprivation included the following:

- rural poverty manifests itself very differently from poverty in urban areas:
 - it is not spatially concentrated
 - it exists amongst relative affluence
 - people in rural communities are less likely to identify that they are in poverty and there is a culture of “making do”
- in 2007-08 in Northern Ireland, of those who earned 50% below the United Kingdom Mean Income Before Housing Costs, almost half (46%) lived in rural areas
- 54% of households living in rural areas are in Fuel Poverty
- rural dwellers face significant difficulties accessing employment and basic services that other people take for granted
- rural households must earn significantly more than their urban counterparts to reach a minimum standard of income due to the need to maintain a car and the higher cost of heating a home in rural areas.

4.11 The Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements (NISRA 2005)² defines settlements of less than 4,500 (Bands F, G and H) as rural communities. Using this definition and data on population from the 2001 census returns, 28 branch libraries are considered to be rural. These libraries are shown in the Table 3 below:

Table 3: Rural Branch Libraries

Broughshane	Carnlough	Castledearg	Castlewellan
Crumlin	Crossmaglen	Cushendall	Draperstown
Dungiven	Fintona	Fivemiletown	Garvagh
Irvinestown	Keady	Kells and Connor	Killyleagh
Kilrea	Lisnaskea	Maghera	Moirá
Newtownstewart	Portaferry	Portglenone	Rathfriland
Richhill	Saintfield	Tandragee	Whitehead

4.12 By plotting postcodes of library users to Output Areas³ an analysis was undertaken to determine the percentage of active borrowers in each library who live in a rural area. This is presented in Table 4 below.

² Report of the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group: Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements, NISRA, 2005

³ Output Areas (OAs) were introduced in Northern Ireland after the 2001 Census. Output Areas were built from clusters of adjacent postcodes. Output Areas themselves nest within the 582 Electoral Wards in Northern Ireland and were designed to have similar population sizes of around 125 households and 350 people; they are also as socially similar as possible. OAs in Northern Ireland are based on postcodes as of January 2000. There are 5,022 OAs in Northern Ireland

Table 4: Percentage of active borrowers in each library living in a rural area

Library	% Rurality	Library	% Rurality	Library	% Rurality
Antrim	18.84%	Ardoyne	0.59%	Armagh	40.34%
Ballycastle	28.36%	Ballyclare	42.70%	Ballyhackamore	2.20%
Ballymena	40.69%	Ballymoney	46.64%	Ballynahinch	57.99%
Banbridge	36.56%	Bangor Carnegie	5.43%	Bessbrook	36.01%
Broughshane	94.68%	Brownlow	17.39%	Carnlough	91.13%
Carrickfergus	10.33%	Carryduff	23.79%	Castlederg	94.49%
Castlewellan	93.54%	Belfast Central	6.21%	Chichester	0.93%
Cloughfern	2.00%	Coalisland	48.68%	Coleraine	23.48%
Colin Glen	2.85%	Comber	33.75%	Cookstown	49.88%
Cregagh	3.34%	Creggan	2.04%	Crossmaglen	82.52%
Crumlin	97.12%	Cushendall	90.68%	Derry Central	10.91%
Donaghadee	33.57%	Downpatrick	54.19%	Draperstown	99.08%
Dromore	41.72%	Dundonald	3.45%	Dungannon	43.29%
Dungiven	97.34%	Enniskillen	49.25%	Falls Road	2.32%
Finaghy	4.73%	Fintona	91.81%	Fivemiletown	94.81%
Garvagh	97.28%	Glengormley	7.30%	Greenisland	2.09%
Greystone	15.66%	Grove	2.54%	Hollywood Arches	1.72%
Hollywood	5.53%	Irvinestown	88.24%	Keady	89.56%
Kells & Connor	93.49%	Kilkeel	50.51%	Killyleagh	95.43%
Kilrea	98.08%	Larne	21.51%	Limavady	42.68%
Lisburn	32.17%	Lisburn Road	7.38%	Lisnaskea	92.96%
Lurgan	32.15%	Maghera	95.30%	Magherafelt	55.93%
Moira	96.17%	Newcastle	35.5%	Newry City	38.51%
Newtownards	17.04%	Newtownbreda	5.04%	Newtownstewart	90.33%
Omagh	50.56%	Ormeau Road	3.62%	Portadown	28.72%
Portaferry	97.70%	Portglenone	96.3%	Portrush	16.71%
Portstewart	6.43%	Randalstown	39.5%	Rathcoole	1.79%
Rathfriland	97.55%	Richhill	94.4%	Saintfield	93.92%
Shankill Road	0.88%	Shantallow	2.41%	Strabane	28.76%
Strathfoyle	24.91%	Suffolk	3.59%	Tandragee	96.31%
Tullycarnet	2.26%	Warrenpoint	40.4%	Waterside	24.40%

4.13 The new Mobile Library Service Strategy includes five service proposals, one of which is that *“a mobile stop in a rural area must have at least 5 regular customers on an on-going basis with a sustained level of use and must not be within 3 miles of a fixed library location”*.

4.14 Table 5 below presents an overview of the extent of mobile library stops by Local Government Area together with the location of static libraries in that area. Libraries, defined as rural, are identified in italics.

Table 5: Mobile Library Stops by District Council Area

Local Government Area	No. of mobile library stops	Libraries in Local Government Area
Antrim	4	Antrim, <i>Crumlin</i> , Greystone, Randalstown
Ards	44	Comber, Donaghadee, Newtownards, <i>Portaferry</i>
Armagh	35	Armagh, <i>Keady</i> , <i>Richhill</i>
Ballymena	6	Ballymena Central, <i>Broughshane</i> , <i>Kells & Connor</i> , <i>Portglenone</i>
Ballymoney	5	Ballymoney
Banbridge	14	Banbridge, Dromore, <i>Rathfriland</i>
Belfast City	49	Ardoyne, Ballyhackamore, Belfast Central, Chichester, Falls Road, Finaghy, Grove, Hollywood Arches, Lisburn Road, Ormeau Road, Shankill Road, Suffolk, Whiterock, Woodstock
Carrickfergus	0	Carrickfergus, Greenisland, <i>Whitehead</i>
Castlereagh	13	Carryduff, Cregagh, Dundonald, Newtownbreda, Tullycarnet
Coleraine	8	Coleraine, <i>Garvagh</i> , <i>Kilrea</i> , Portrush, Portstewart
Cookstown	25	Cookstown
Craigavon	40	Brownlow, Lurgan, Portadown, <i>Tandragee</i>
Derry	37	Creggan, Derry Central, Shantallow, Strathfoyle, Waterside
Down	49	Ballynahinch, <i>Castlewellan</i> , Downpatrick, <i>Killyleagh</i> , Newcastle, <i>Saintfield</i>
Dungannon	27	Coalisland, Dungannon, <i>Fivemiletown</i>
Fermanagh	74	Enniskillen, <i>Irvinestown</i> , <i>Lisnaskea</i>
Larne	11	<i>Carnlough</i> , Larne
Limavady	14	<i>Dungiven</i> , Limavady
Lisburn	78	Colin Glen, Lisburn, <i>Moira</i>
Magherafelt	4	<i>Draperstown</i> , <i>Maghera</i> , Magherafelt,
Moyle	7	Ballycastle, <i>Cushendall</i>
Newry and Mourne	41	Bessbrook, <i>Crossmaglen</i> , Kilkeel, Newry City, Warrenpoint
Newtownabbey	12	Ballyclare, Cloughfern, Glengormley, Rathcoole
North Down	85	Bangor Carnegie, Hollywood
Omagh	27	<i>Fintona</i> , Omagh
Strabane	17	<i>Castledearg</i> , <i>Newtownstewart</i> , Strabane
TOTAL	726	96

Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure

Rural Deprivation

- 4.15 The Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM) 2010 comprises seven domains of deprivation, each developed to measure a distinct form or type of deprivation: income, employment, health, education, proximity to services, living environment and crime. The domains can be interpreted individually or combined to assess deprivation in more than one domain.
- 4.16 In looking at rural deprivation the research would say that consideration should be given not only to the overall Multiple Deprivation Measure, but also to the **Proximity to Services** domain which is particularly relevant in rural areas.
- 4.17 It is mainly OAs in the west of the province (constituencies of West Tyrone, Fermanagh and South Tyrone and Mid Ulster) which rank as the most deprived in relation to the Proximity to Services domain. Libraries in these areas (Castledearg, Cookstown, Draperstown, Dungannon, Dungiven, Enniskillen, Irvinestown and Lisnaskea) have a substantial number of active members who reside in one of the top 10% most deprived OAs as measured on the Proximity to Services domain. It is fair to assume, therefore, that a significant percentage of those who use mobile library stops in these areas also reside in areas which rank among the most deprived in relation to Proximity to Services. However other libraries e.g. Ballycastle, Ballynahinch, Banbridge, Carnlough, Castlewellan and Rathfriland also have significant numbers of active members from OAs which have low rankings in relation to Proximity to Services and a similar situation is likely to exist as far as users of mobile services in these areas is concerned.
- 4.18 Table 6 (below) is taken from the NIMDM and shows the twenty most deprived rural SOAs in Northern Ireland. All rural SOAs are outside the most deprived ten percent when all SOAs in Northern Ireland are considered.

Table 6: 20 most deprived rural OAs in N Ireland

NIMDM 2010 Rank (1 is most deprived)	Super Output Area	Council area
97	Castledearg	Strabane
112	Crossmaglen	Newry and Mourne
126	Glenderg	Strabane
134	Newtownstewart	Strabane
136	Ardboe	Cookstown
141	Sion Mills	Strabane
159	Portaferry 2	Ards
170	Dunnamanagh	Strabane

178	Ardglass 1	Down
179	Finn	Strabane
180	Pomeroy	Cookstown
182	Silver Bridge-1	Newry and Mourne
184	Creggan	Newry and Mourne
189	Dungiven	Limavady
191	Keady	Armagh
197	Clare	Strabane
198	Armoy & Moss-side and Moyarget	Moyle
200	Fintona	Omagh
202	Irvinestown	Fermanagh
215	Ballylough & Bushmills	Moyle

4.19 The NIMDM also recognises that when assessing deprivation in rural areas, it may be more appropriate to focus on the Output Area (OA) results. The OA measures show 15 rural areas in the 10% most deprived OAs in Northern Ireland. The most deprived rural OA is in the Crossmaglen area in Newry and Mourne Local Government District and is ranked 109th most deprived out of 5,022 OAs. Small pockets of deprivation are identified in each Local Government District at OA level, with all Local Government Districts having at least one OA within the 20% most deprived OAs in Northern Ireland.

5. An Initial Assessment of the Impact of the Proposals on Rural Areas

5.1 This section of the report considers the service proposals which may have an impact on people living in rural areas.

Service proposal 1: Target groups

5.2 According to the survey of customers, the mobile library service is used mainly by children and young people and older people. The survey also identified that 63% of these customers lived in rural areas.

5.3 It is reasonable to conclude that the service proposal to prioritise space on public mobiles for these target groups will not have any significant adverse impact on people living in rural areas and in fact should provide added benefit for those in rural areas who have been identified as among the most vulnerable.

Service proposal 2: Services to be provided

5.4 The second proposal centres on the principle that book lending services are best provided by public mobile libraries rather than Internet access which should not in future be provided.

- 5.5 Libraries NI is of the view that this proposal will not have a significantly adverse impact on rural communities. While recognising that average broadband speeds delivered to premises in rural locations are typically slower than in urban areas, broadband penetration in urban and rural areas is reported to be the same. Ofcom's most recent research states as follows:

*"While broadband penetration [in Northern Ireland] is behind the UK average (76%), it is in line with Scotland and Wales (both 68%). Take-up in Northern Ireland does not vary between urban or rural areas, with penetration at 69% in both."*⁴

- 5.6 It is also recognised that Libraries NI research shows that Internet access is not well used because there is a lack of privacy and people who use the Internet normally wish to do so more often than once every two weeks, that public mobile libraries are far from being the best way to deliver Internet access and that these issues are pertinent for the 63% of rural users surveyed.
- 5.7 Libraries NI will continue to provide its E-express service. This is a vehicle kitted out with computers and used to deliver ICT skills training. Libraries NI would like to extend this service further in the future through the use of tablet devices.

Service proposal 3: Criteria for service delivery

- 5.8 Proposal 3 is represented by the criteria for a mobile stop being at least 5 regular customers on an on-going basis with a sustained level of use and that the stop should be at least 3 miles from a branch library.
- 5.9 It is recognised that the thrust of the strategy is towards ensuring a value for money service in as equitable a way as possible. The proposal does not relate to reducing the number of stops in rural areas although, at this stage, the number of stops which will be affected in rural areas by the adoption of such criteria is unknown and further analysis of the rural customers affected is not available.
- 5.10 Libraries NI is committed to working with existing customers in rural areas to ensure that practical mitigating measures are developed to help them to continue to access library services. Mitigating measures are discussed in more detail in section 6 below.

Service proposal 4: Services to schools and playgroups

- 5.11 This proposal relates to prioritising services to schools and playgroups, including those in rural areas, on the basis of principles such as practicality, level of need and level of use, e.g distance from a branch library. The

⁴ Communications Market Report: Northern Ireland, Ofcom, July 2012, Page 43

practical reality is that capacity is limited and the service cannot be extended to all the schools and playgroups in rural areas that might be interested.

- 5.12 The proposal should not have an adverse impact on rural communities providing decisions made with regard to visiting schools and playgroups in rural areas are based on principles such as suitability of available days and times, the effect on fixed libraries, the potential level of use and the level of need in rural areas.

Service proposal 5: Increasing usage

- 5.13 Libraries NI is seeking through the last service proposal to maximise the contribution of mobile libraries to overall service provision in both rural and urban areas and to deliver value for money services.
- 5.14 This proposal is not considered to present any potential for an adverse effect on existing or future customers in rural areas.

Summary of Rural Impacts

- 5.15 The preliminary findings of this draft Rural Impact Assessment are that the service proposals have the potential to produce adverse impacts on customers in rural areas but that these are not considered to be significant. Further, the mitigating measures proposed by Libraries NI (outlined in section 6 below) will address these potential problems.
- 5.16 Libraries NI is clearly committed to providing services for both rural and urban customers. The main thrust of the service proposals is how to recognise increasing resource constraints whilst ensuring a quality mobile library service is maintained. For delivery in rural areas there is a reality that there is an additional cost attached to supplying a service to a scattered population.
- 5.17 Rural areas will though, continue to be served by a mobile library service where it is not feasible, in terms of population size, to provide a static library. Clearly mobile services are necessary in rural areas, and valued by those who use them. It is important though, that the routes they take, frequency of visits, and the quality of provision within mobiles is carefully considered.
- 5.18 The Mobile Library Service Strategy can deliver real benefits to rural communities in Northern Ireland, including:
- improving the accessibility of services
 - providing a needs based approach to outreach provision via a mobile service delivery
 - reducing the need for rural people to travel by taking services to them
 - recognising the need for service provision in the rural areas where relative deprivation is high

- 5.19 Any additional rural impacts (positive or negative) identified by consultees during the consultation process will also be taken into account when the final Rural Impact Assessment report is prepared. Libraries NI would welcome information from consultees on how the service proposals might differentially affect people in rural areas.

6. Consideration of Mitigating Measures

- 6.1 This section of the report looks at the possible measures which could be applied to eliminate or substantially reduce the potential adverse differential impacts identified above.
- 6.2 When implementing the strategy, Libraries NI will put in place arrangements to mutually agree future service delivery with existing customers in rural areas. In particular, the new criteria for mobile stops will not be applied rigidly in the first instance and any changes will take account of special circumstances. For example:
- people who are eligible for a service to their home will be transferred to the Homecall service designed for people who cannot easily travel, usually for health related reasons;
 - where new mobile stops have been introduced following closure of a branch library, no changes will be made in the short term as Libraries NI appreciates that there needs to be a transitional period to establish the level of use;
 - where the level of use drops below the threshold of the new criteria, Libraries NI will consider all the circumstances before removing the stop from the route.
- 6.3 However, it is acknowledged that there may be a small number of people in rural areas whose local mobile stop will disappear. The strategy may result in fewer stops in some rural areas but the service should still be reasonably accessible to local people.
- 6.4 It is anticipated that these measures will allow all existing rural customers to continue to benefit from library services. Any further measures suggested by consultees during the consultation process will be welcomed and taken into account when the final Rural Impact Assessment report is prepared.

7. Formal Consultation

- 7.1 The consultation process in respect of the proposals in the draft strategy and the potential rural impacts will continue until 14th December 2012 (a period of 12 weeks). This process includes:

- a questionnaire available in mobile libraries;
 - opportunities to comment via the Libraries NI website; and
 - a focus group for organisations representing rural people
- 7.2 All consultation documents can be made available in hard copy and alternative formats on request, although it is envisaged that most people will access the documents via the Libraries NI website.
- 7.3 All Rural Impact consultees will be notified of the availability of this Rural Impact Assessment report and invited to comment. This report will be made available on the Libraries NI website and comments will be invited from any individual with an interest in the proposals.
- 7.4 As much background information as possible has been included within this report. If there is any information which has not been provided, Libraries NI will make every effort to do so on request. If any consultee has difficulty accessing the background information, Libraries NI will consider providing summaries in other formats or explaining issues on a face to face basis.

8. Further Action

- 8.1 At the end of the consultation period, the Rural Impact report will be revised to take account of all comments received from consultees. The report, together with a full report of the consultation process, will then be submitted to the Libraries NI Board to assist them to make final decisions on the Mobile Library Service Strategy. The Board's decisions will be incorporated into a final summary report which will set out the consideration given to the impact of alternative policies and mitigating actions.
- 8.2 The final summary report will be made available through the Libraries NI website. Libraries NI will ensure that information is available in accessible formats in a timely fashion, paying particular attention to the special needs of particular groups within each equality category.
- 8.3 Libraries NI is in the process of updating its monitoring systems. As part of this process, a system will be established to monitor the impact of the Board's decisions in order to find out the effect on rural communities.
- 8.4 The results of ongoing monitoring will be reviewed on an annual basis and will be published on the Libraries NI website.
- 8.5 If the monitoring and analysis of results over a 2 year period show that there has been a greater adverse impact than predicted, or if opportunities arise which would allow for greater equality of opportunity to be promoted, Libraries NI will take steps to achieve better outcomes for the rural community.