MEETING THE DEMANDS OF A MODERN PUBLIC
LIBRARY SERVICE WITHIN NORTHERN IRELAND:
STAGE 2

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT
REPORT FOR CONSULTATION:
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Consultation period : 17th January – 8th April 2011

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Report prepared by
The Equality Company
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 –

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Consultation

Please submit all comments on this report to:

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The closing date for receipt of comments is Friday, 8th April 2011. Comments will be accepted in any format.
1. **BACKGROUND**

1.1 Libraries NI has a 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. In order to create this vision, Libraries NI needs to use resources – especially staffing resources – more effectively which means rationalising the provision of public library services.

1.2 Libraries NI is therefore in the process of carrying out a strategic review of libraries across Northern Ireland in three stages. Stage 1 addressed libraries in Belfast and Greater Belfast and was completed in May 2010; a full EQIA was carried out in respect of the proposals in the Stage 1 report. Stage 2 of the strategic review, addressing libraries in the rest of Northern Ireland, is currently being undertaken. Stage 3, which will be undertaken when Stage 2 has been completed, will address mobile provision across Northern Ireland.

1.3 The Stage 2 report sets out proposals for a programme of new build, refurbishment and rationalisation of assets. The Libraries NI Board has agreed that the findings of the review should be issued for consultation and that the potential equality impacts of the proposals should be assessed through an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA).

1.4 This Executive Summary briefly outlines the initial findings of the EQIA to date. The full EQIA report and all other documents referred to can be accessed on the website [www.librariesni.org.uk](http://www.librariesni.org.uk).

2. **CONSIDERATION OF AVAILABLE DATA AND RESEARCH**

2.1 This EQIA focuses primarily on the effects on local communities around the 10 libraries that are proposed for closure, i.e. Carnlough, Draperstown, Fintona, Gilford, Greystone, Kells & Connor, Kilyleagh,
Moneymore, Moy and Richhill. The full EQIA report contains an analysis of the population of the catchment area of each library and also summarises the main findings of earlier EQIAs which are relevant to this impact assessment, with particular reference to the findings of the Stage 1 EQIA.

3. ASSESSMENT OF ACTUAL AND POTENTIAL IMPACTS

3.1 Overall Libraries NI is convinced that the Vision will deliver significant improvements in library services which will benefit all library users and encourage non-users to participate. However, in the short term, the changes to be made may cause particular difficulties for some groups of people.

3.2 The key findings of the initial assessment of potential impacts are set out below. More detail is included in the full EQIA report. Libraries NI expects that consultees will be able to identify further impacts and clarify the extent to which they or the people they represent may be affected. The information provided by consultees will be included in the final EQIA report which will be prepared at the end of the consultation period.

Religious belief

3.3 Census data provides information on the community background (religion or religion brought up in) of residents in the catchment areas of the libraries which it is proposed to close. All the catchment areas include people from both main community backgrounds and four of the libraries (Gilford, Killyleagh, Moneymore and Moy) are in areas which are fairly evenly mixed. Three of the libraries (Carnlough, Draperstown and Fintona) are in areas which are predominantly Catholic (greater than 70%) and three (Greystone, Kells & Connor and Richhill) in areas which are predominantly Protestant (greater than 70%).
3.4 The principal issues raised during the Stage 1 EQIA relating to religious belief/political opinion concerned access to shared facilities. In that instance there were cases where residents might not be able to access the nearest remaining library because of community divisions. However, there is no reason to believe that this will be the case in respect of any of the proposed closures under Stage 2.

Political opinion

3.5 Given that the strategic review relates to a large area, it is considered that it is reasonable to assume that any impacts on people in terms of political opinion would be broadly similar to those relating to community background.

Racial group/ethnic background

3.6 The Census data indicates that there is a significant community of people with Pakistani background in the catchment areas of Gilford and library and a significant community of Chinese people around Greystone library. Since the Census was taken, it is estimated$^1$ that 20-25,000 migrants have come to Northern Ireland and there is some evidence$^2$ that there high numbers in both Craigavon and Dungannon local government districts who may be affected by the closure of libraries in Gilford and Moy.

3.7 The Stage 1 EQIA showed that many newly settled people make extensive use of libraries, both to learn English and to maintain their own cultural heritage and many libraries now stock books in minority languages. However, Libraries NI has no information on any difficulties which people in minority ethnic groups might experience in relation to accessing libraries; for example, there are no figures on car ownership.

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$^1$ Study by the Conflict Research Institute in April 2007

$^2$ Data based on Health Card Registrations
Age

(a) Children and young people

3.8 Libraries NI is aware that children and young people make extensive use of libraries, particularly after school. The Census data shows that, in the areas where libraries may close, there are high levels of children and young people (aged under 16) in the areas around Carnlough, Draperstown, Gilford, Moneymore, Moy and Richhill libraries.

3.9 It is acknowledged that it may be more difficult for children and young people to access libraries at a greater distance and that the proposals in the strategic review may therefore have an adverse impact on children and young people. However, given the rural nature of the communities around the libraries which it is proposed to close, it seems likely that many children and young people already rely on adults or their schools to provide transport or use public transport in order to access libraries.

(b) Older people

3.10 The Stage 1 EQIA confirmed that libraries are an important source of education and social stimulation for older people. The Census data shows that, in the areas where libraries may close, there are high levels of people aged 60+ in the areas around Carnlough and Killyleagh libraries.

3.11 It is difficult to define the extent of the difficulties which older people might face in terms of accessing libraries at a greater distance. Some older people are able to travel by car but bus usage for people over 60 is low. It is acknowledged that it may be difficult for some older people to access alternative libraries and Libraries NI would welcome information from consultees on this point.

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3 Throughout this document, 'High level' means higher than the corresponding figure for Northern Ireland as a whole.
4 Data from DRD Travel Survey, 2008
(c) **People of working age**

3.12 One of the main difficulties in accessing libraries faced by people who work normal office hours is the current restricted opening hours in many libraries. The proposals in the strategic review would result, in due course, in a network of libraries open for at least 30 hours a week with 10 hours outside normal office hours. This would significantly improve access for working people.

**Marital status**

3.13 There is no reason to believe that the proposals in the strategic review would have any greater or lesser effect on people on account of their marital status.

**Sexual orientation**

3.14 There is no reason to believe that the proposals in the strategic review would have any greater or lesser effect on people on account of their sexual orientation.

**Gender**

3.15 There is no reason to believe that the proposals in the strategic review would have any greater or lesser effect on women than men other than in relation to caring for dependants (see below).

**Disability**

3.16 The Census data shows that there are high levels of people who perceive themselves to have a limiting long term illness or disability in the areas around Fintona and Moneymore libraries. The Stage 1 EQIA showed that some disabled people experience difficulty in travelling; car ownership and use of public transport among disabled people is substantially lower than for people without a disability and many people with learning disabilities find it difficult to travel to new locations. There are also issues relating to physical access to buildings; however, these
will be fully dealt with during the design phase of any new build and refurbishment projects.

3.17 It is acknowledged that some disabled people have particular needs in respect of library usage and that they may be adversely affected by the proposals in the strategic review. Libraries NI would welcome information from consultees on the extent of the potential adverse impact.

Dependants

3.18 The Stage 1 EQIA showed that additional travel can have an adverse impact on those who care for dependants, including children, elderly and disabled relatives. Many carers manage by keeping to strict schedules and additional travelling time therefore has a greater impact on them than on people with no caring responsibilities.

3.19 The Census data shows that, in the areas where libraries may close, there are high levels of –

- households with dependant children in the areas around all the libraries except Greystone;

- people providing unpaid care in the area around Kilyleagh library.

3.20 Women tend to assume greater responsibility for the care of dependants than men and they have less access to car transport than men\(^5\). This means that the strategic review proposals may result in a greater impact on carers (particularly women).

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\(^5\) Data from DRD Travel Survey, 2008
4. CONSIDERATION OF MEASURES

Distance to libraries

4.1 The proposals in the strategic review envisage that 10 libraries will be closed and the nearest library will then be a maximum of 10.3 miles away. The distances from each library to the closest alternative library, as shown in the review document, were calculated using Mapinfo (mapping software) and are straight line distances. The table below shows both the straight line distance and the distance (by the shortest driving route) calculated using Google Maps.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Library to be closed</th>
<th>Next nearest library</th>
<th>Distance in miles (Mapinfo)</th>
<th>Distance in miles (Google Map)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carnlough</td>
<td>Cushendall</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draperstown</td>
<td>Maghera</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fintona</td>
<td>Omagh</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilford</td>
<td>Tandragee</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greystone</td>
<td>Antrim</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kells &amp; Connor</td>
<td>Ballymena Central</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilyleagh</td>
<td>Downpatrick</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moneymore</td>
<td>Cookstown</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moy</td>
<td>Dungannon</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richhill</td>
<td>Armagh</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Libraries NI acknowledges that some people will find it difficult to travel greater distances to libraries and that this will have implications for those who find travel physically demanding, too time consuming or too expensive. Research is currently being undertaken in relation to the transport links between various communities and libraries and full evidence will be presented to the Libraries NI Board before they make final decisions.
Alternative service provision

4.3 Libraries NI operates a number of alternative services, including –

- a mobile library service which provides both books and access to PCs and allows users to order books without charge;

- a door to door service specifically designed for people who are unable to visit libraries or use the mobile service;

- a range of outreach activities to schools which are not within easy travel distance of a local library; these activities supplement the service provided by the Schools Library Service provided by the Education and Library Boards and there is scope to consider how they might be extended.

4.4 An expansion of these services could mitigate the effects on children and young people, older people, disabled people and carers.

Changes to the proposals

4.5 It is difficult to consider changes to the proposals in terms of maintaining current services at some or all of the libraries identified for closure; Libraries NI is, however, very willing to talk to organisations in the statutory and voluntary sectors about potential partnership arrangements to provide alternative services to address particular needs.

5. CONSULTATION

5.1 The consultation process in respect of the proposals in the strategic review and the potential equality impacts will continue until 8th April 2011 (a period of 12 weeks). This process includes –
- a questionnaire available in libraries in both hard copy and electronic format;
- a series of public meetings in or near to the libraries which it is proposed to close;
- opportunities to comment via the Libraries NI website;
- a focus group for organisations representing people in specific Section 75 categories.

5.2 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, either at home or at a library.

6. FURTHER ACTION

6.1 At the end of the consultation period, the EQIA report will be revised to take account of all comments received from consultees. The EQIA 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 proposals in the strategic review.