Communities Committee

Report title:	Norfolk Library and Information Service - report on self service access pilot
Date of meeting:	29 June 2016
Responsible Chief Officer:	Tom McCabe, Executive Director of Community and Environmental Services

Strategic impact

This report considers the impact of the pilot of self service access at Acle library and proposes extensions to self service access to increase access to libraries for customers.

Executive summary

The first phase of the pilot of self service access to Acle Library has been completed with valuable lessons learned. Use of computers has increased and there have been positive outcomes for customers.   The proposal is to extend the hours of self service access to Acle library to attract new users.

At its meeting on 11 May the Communities Committee agreed that Norfolk Library and Information Service (NLIS) should install self service access equipment at a number of additional libraries. Proposals for further installations are outlined

Recommendations:

The Communities Committee is recommended to comment on the initial outcomes of the pilot at Acle Library and to note the installation of self service access technology at further libraries.

1.   Proposal

1.1   The first phase of the pilot of self service access to Acle Library has been completed with valuable lessons learned. The proposal is to now extend the hours of access to Acle library to attract new users.

1.2   At its meeting on 11 May the Communities Committee agreed that Norfolk Library and Information Service (NLIS) could install self service access equipment at a number of additional libraries. Proposals for further installations are outlined.

2.   Background

2.1   In 2009 NLIS introduced self service issue and return kiosks in all 47 libraries. Around 90% of issue and return transactions are carried out by customers at these kiosks. This has enabled library staff to spend more time supporting those people who need help to use the service, supporting literacy and learning and the County Council priorities.

2.2   In 2011 library opening hours were reduced by 10%. The majority of the opening hours that were removed were late afternoon and evening times. In 2014 staffing levels were reduced, and 34 libraries now have lone-working sessions for some or all of their opening hours.

2.3   At the same time, the number of library buildings has remained the same, with the effect

that significant amounts of library 'capital' – buildings, stock and other resources are not available to residents at times that may be convenient to them. We know from feedback that residents would like to use libraries when they are not currently available.

2.4 Self service access is a means of increasing access to a valuable community resource and enables people who don't need help or support with reading or ICT to use the library at times of their choice.

2.5 This does not negate the need for staffed opening times and there is strong evidence of the many interactions between staff and customer that result in positive outcomes for the customer and a contribution towards the NCC priorities.

2.6 The other benefit of self service access relates to the library role as a place that contributes to social cohesion and the vitality of local communities. Libraries can be seen as a location which provides people with a safe place to meet and the chance to create a sense of community. Libraries deliver and host a wide range of services, events and activities, as well as providing safe spaces to meet people and contribute to community life.

2.7 Opening the library using self service technology can enable people to make the most of their local library, taking advantage of the space to run their own book groups, craft groups and learning groups for example as well as giving increased access to public computers.

3. Initial results from the pilot

3.1 Acle Library was selected as the pilot site for self service access due to:
- The size of the library
- The availability of parking
- The large catchment area and the use of the library by a large community of users
- The shared use of the library building with a Children's Centre

3.2 The installation at Acle library was intended to test the viability of the technology as a way of extending access to customers to their local libraries for limited ongoing revenue costs.

3.3 Acle Library's opening hours were increased in August 2015 from 23 to 37 taking advantage of self service access.

The opening hours are set out below with the Open+ hours highlighted:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
9 – 2	9 – 10		9- 10	9 – 2		
	10 – 1	Closed	10 - 1		10 - 1	
	1 - 2		1 - 2			
2 – 5	2 - 5	Closed	2 - 5	2 - 7		

3.4 The pilot project did not set out to radically alter the pattern of opening hours at Acle. The main additions were Monday and Friday mornings and ensuring that the library was accessible at lunchtimes.

3.5 To address security concerns for the purposes of the pilot, the self service access sessions all end at a point when the library opens for a staffed session.

3.6   At the beginning of the project it was acknowledged that the risk of simply extending day-time opening was that the use of the library would be simply spread over the time available and the Open+ times would not grow or expand the audience at Acle. Offering 'more of the same' during the day time could result in the same customers adapting their library use rather than attracting new people to use the library.   In addition, because of the nature of the pilot, self service access was only made available to existing users of the service.

3.7   The anticipated pattern of use has materialised, with analysis of self service access use showing that the previous level of visits and book issue activity is now more evenly spread across the week. More women have used the facility than men and use of computers has increased.

3.8   Below is a comparison of the Performance of Acle Library in 2013/14 compared with 2015/16

	Acle 2013/14	Acle 2015/16	Commentary
Opening hours	23	37	Self service access for 14 hours
Square metres (Public)	146	146	
Issues (all)	68,269	68,443	Issues increased slightly at a time when material issues in the county decreased by c17% - please see note below*
Visitors	48,365	47,426	Visits decreased by 2% compared to an overall decrease in library visits in the county by 11%.
Issue/hour	57	35.5	As a result of increased opening hours the issues per hour at Acle have reduced, but issues in open+ time is small.
Visits/hour	40.4	24.64	As above
Number of PCs	4	6	
PC Use	28% of available time	44% of available time	PC use at Acle library has increased
Printer	Staff assisted	Wireless	

*A problem with the location of book renewals made by the customer service centre may have skewed the performance of Acle library upwards. In addition in 2013/14 the LMS in use was Axiell Galaxy which appears to have skewed performance upwards by a factor of 10%.

Gender split

OpenPlus Age Profile
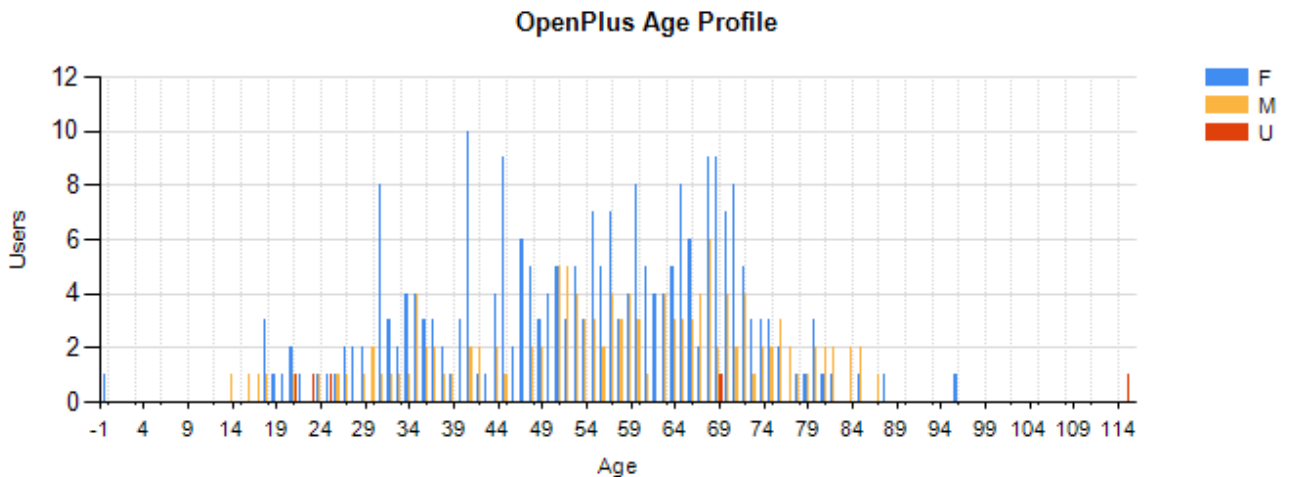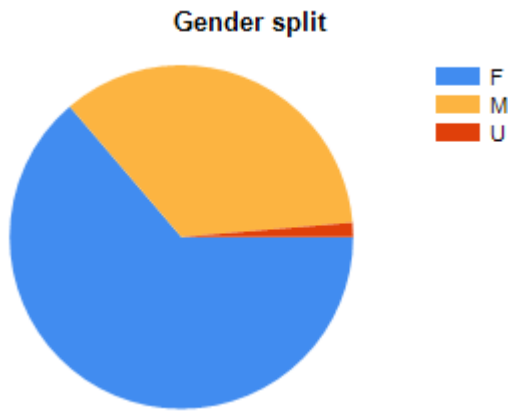
4. Outcomes of self service access

4.1 Increasing the availability of the service at Acle Library has resulted in a range of positive outcomes for residents including the following examples:

4.1.1 **Support for vulnerable people**
Libraries are lifelines for people who live alone. One example is a vulnerable customer who previously spent many hours in the library when it was open for 23 hours a week. He lives alone and going to the library is one of the few contacts he had with people each week. Now the library is open for 37 hours this customer has stated he has "benefited' from the company of other self service library customers and a "group" has formed. They support him with his isolation issues and with job searching.

4.1.2 **Support for job seekers**
Libraries are often used by jobseekers who use library computers to apply for jobs online. An example at Acle library is a customer who spotted a job advertised and was able to access the library during self service time to complete and submit her job application by the closing date. She was successful in her application and now has a job. She says that 'this would not have been possible before as the deadline was really tight'

4.1.3 **Supporting children and families**
The premises at Acle are shared with the Children's Centre. The Children's Centre ran a course making story sacks in the children's area while the library was running in self service mode. The result has been that now the course has finished the group continues to meet and is described by one of the attendees as a "wonderful safe environment to meet up with other mums so that I don't feel so isolated".

4.1.4   In addition, a library customer who home schools her three children uses the library in self service time as she would like them to recognise the library as their 'learning for pleasure' time.

5.   Next Steps

5.1   Extension of opening hours

5.2   Now that the service is comfortable with how the system operates, it is proposing to extend the opening hours at Acle library to make the library more accessible to people who work during the day. The proposal is to open until 7pm on some evenings and on Saturday afternoons. There will be a cost of around £1100 to this as the service will need to pay for a member of staff to close the library at the end of the additional sessions. This will be found from current revenue budgets.

5.3   In October 2015, library users across the County were surveyed. While only a small Number (34) of customers from Acle responded to the survey the appetite for increased opening hours is set out below.

	Before work / school in the morning	Morning	Lunchtime	Afternoon	Early evening	Late evening
Weekdays - Mondays to Fridays	0.0% (0)	24.2% (15)	9.7% (6)	41.9% (26)	16.1% (10)	8.1% (5)
Saturdays	0.0% (0)	40.9% (18)	22.7% (10)	29.5% (13)	4.5% (2)	2.3% (1)
Sundays	4.8% (1)	38.1% (8)	23.8% (5)	23.8% (5)	9.5% (2)	0.0% (0)

5.4   The catchment area for Acle library shows heavy use in the communities surrounding the library indicating that people are willing to travel to visit the library.

5.5   The catchment data for Acle indicates that a significant number of customers travel by car to the library, taking advantage of the large free car park close by and the proximity of services such as the GPs surgery. Opening in the evenings and for longer at weekends would help those who are able to call in on their way to or from work.

6.   Introduction of self service access to additional libraries

6.1   At its meeting on 11 May 2016, the Communities Committee agreed that the NLIS could use £200k of funding held back from its 2015/16 budget to install self service access equipment to further libraries.

6.2   The reasons for extending the technology to more libraries are to:

- Increase access to libraries and therefore increase issues, visits and use of computers
- Increase use of libraries buildings as safe spaces in communities.

6.3   It is proposed that the installations will be at up to 6 medium-sized libraries in communities

where there is significant housing development or where current opening hours do not appear to match the potential need in the catchment area. The first libraries are likely to be those in Poringland, Attleborough and Hethersett.

7.   Conclusions

7.1   The self service access pilot at Acle library allowed the service to pilot the new technology.

7.2   The chosen opening hours were cautious and have not had the impact of increasing use significantly, growing the customer base or indeed getting the most value from operating self service access.

7.3   There have been individual and group outcomes from having increased access to the library.

7.4   The catchment population mosaic indicates that the audience potentially has the appetite for extended opening hours during the evening and weekends.

7.5   To expand the audience we would need to look at increasing service availability in the evening and on weekends. There are of course risk and insurance issues to be dealt with if the self service access hours were extended into the evenings and weekends.

7.6   The activity at Acle library shows that people will use the library if it is available.

7.7   The service will extend self service access to further sites where there is significant housing development or where current opening hours do not appear to match the potential need in the catchment area.

8.   Issues, risks and innovation

8.1   Self service access technology is an innovative way of increasing access to valuable NCC assets including library buildings and stock, for limited revenue costs

8.2   The key risk is the integration of all the elements of technology with any building issues and each property has different issues. However, the service has the experience of having installed the technology and two very different sites and there will be clear deadlines within the project scheduling.

9.   Background

9.1   Final report of the Member steering group on libraries

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper or want to see copies of any assessments, eg equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

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