Northamptonshire County Council

my county council

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Amended: 25th February 2018

Response from the Library Service following Consultation

Update – 25th February 2018
The purpose of this paper is for the library service to respond to the points and suggestions raised in the budget consultation. This paper served to support the recommendations to Council. This paper has now been updated in light of the changes to the recommendations to Council. Amendments to highlight the considerations presented by Option 2 are clearly marked.

1. The case for change

1.1 The Case for Change tested by the consultation

During the consultation period, using the various means available to consultees, local people and organisations contributed to the consultation almost 6000 times. The consultation received submissions from a number of local organisations, including the district and borough councils in Northamptonshire, 30 parish and town councils (including their umbrella organisation), library Friends/Supporters/Strategy groups, local clubs, groups and organisations, academic institutions and a group of authors, partner organisations, local political parties, a residents' association, a charity and a parish council from outside the county. Five local MPs wrote to us expressing their views and/or forwarded concerns from their constituents.

1.2 Option 4

During the consultation there was a campaign for "Option 4". This was the no change option which argued that all libraries in Northamptonshire should stay open under County Council management.

Of the 5,255 respondents to the consultation questionnaire, Option 4 was mentioned 189 times although not by 189 individuals as some respondents mentioned it numerous times.

There were two petitions relating to Option 4 – a 392 signature petition and a 1,107 signature e-petition. Additionally there was a 281 signature petition specifically in relation to Earls Barton library. There were 350 pro-forma letters relating to Option 4 and 65 individual letters or emails supporting Option 4.

It is important therefore to revisit the case for change. The most up to date information concerning national, regional and local usage of libraries is explored below.

It must be noted that the consultation did not include a 'No Change' option, as because of Northamptonshire's circumstances this was not an option. To have included that option would have been disingenuous.

Update – 25th February 2018
For more detailed analysis of the consultation feedback, please refer to Appendix N of the February 13th 2018 NCC Cabinet papers which is accessible from the NCC wesite.

1.3 National trends in library usage update

Since commencing the consultation, the latest annual statistics released by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), accountants specialising in public services, have been released. These show spending, numbers of paid staff and numbers of libraries declined in 2016/17 for the 7th year running.

During the 12 months to April 2017, the number of libraries in Great Britain fell by 2.7% to 3,745. The total of 105 libraries closing is 38 higher than the previous year when 67 libraries closed.

The total expenditure for library services fell by £66 million (from £919 million to £853 million) in 2016-17 - more than double that of the previous year, when funding was reduced by £25 million.

Visits to libraries were down by 2.9% from 250 million to 243 million for the year to April 2017, a smaller decline than a year prior, which saw the number of visits drop 5.5% from 265 million to 250 million. This gives a total decline of 14% over five years.

Over a five-year period, the number of full-time staff has fallen by 17.7% from 19,688 in 2012-13 to 16,194 in 2016-17, while the number of volunteers has increased 42.6% from 33,685 in 2012-13 to 48,025 in 2016-17.

Libraries across the country continue to be subject to closure proposals due to funding reductions, including 17 libraries in Bristol, 10 in Bury as well as those identified in Northamptonshire which have all drawn national attention.

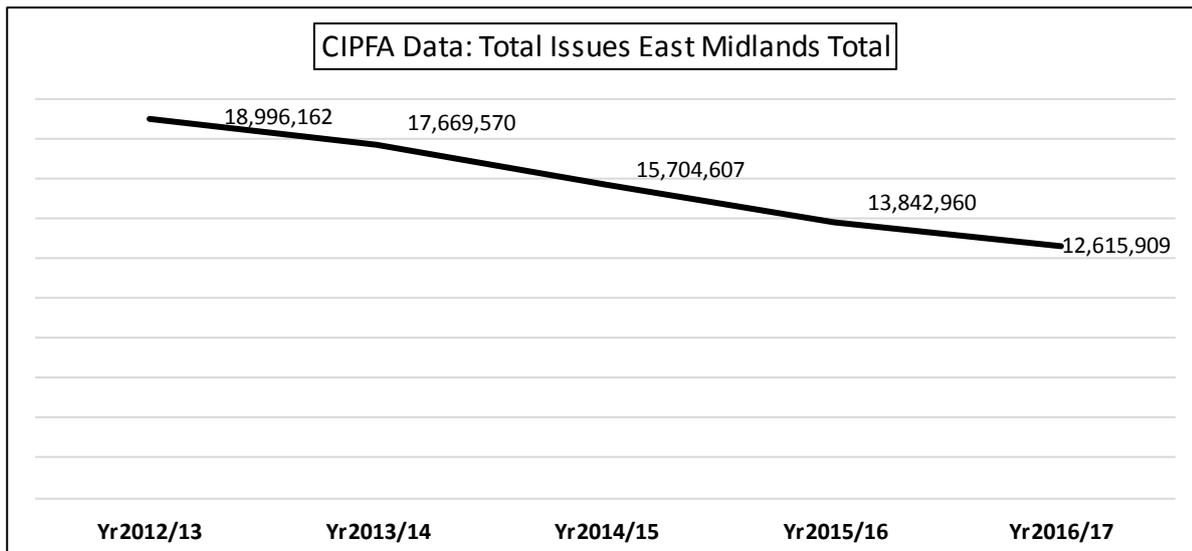**1.4 Library usage regionally in the library review**

The library review considered library usage regionally. The 2016/17 update is now available.

Library visits
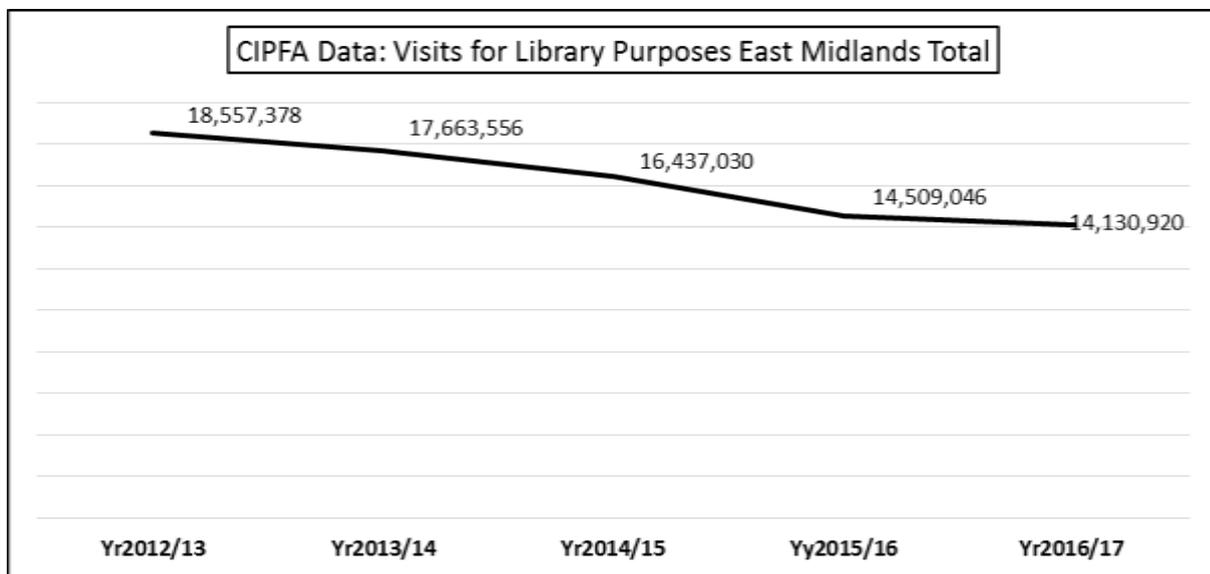
- % change 2016/17 from 2012/13: ↓ Down by 23.9%
  - Northamptonshire: ↓ Down by 10.1%
- % change 2016/17 from 2015/16: ↓ Down by 2.6%
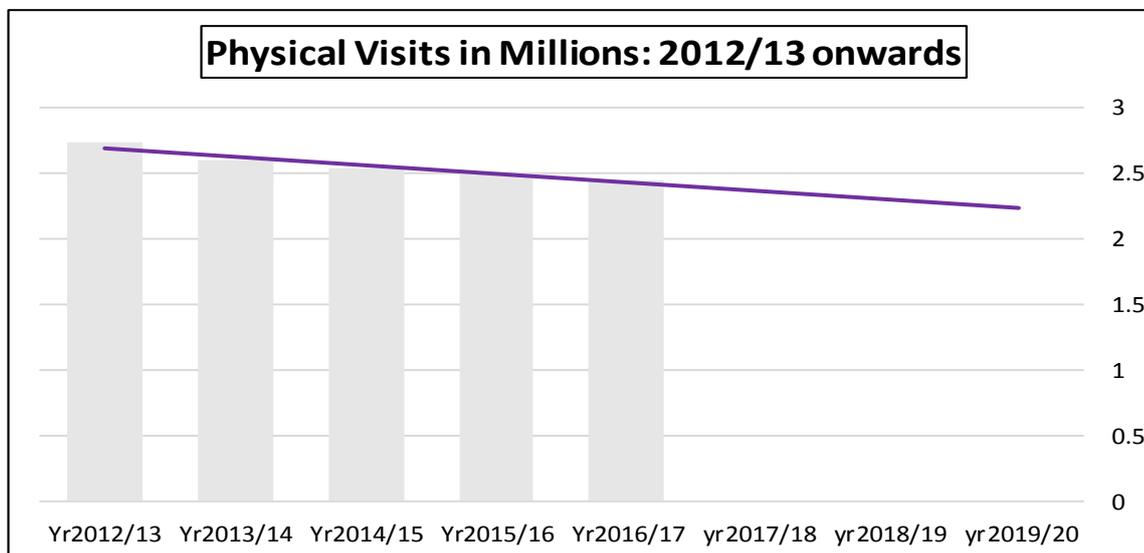 - Northamptonshire: ↓ Down by 2.4%

Library borrowing

CIPFA Data: Total Issues East Midlands Total

18,996,162 17,669,570

15,704,607

13,842,960

12,615,909

Yr2012/13   Yr2013/14   Yr2014/15   Yr2015/16   Yr2016/17

- % change 2016/17 from 2012/13: ↓ Down by 33.6%
    - Northamptonshire: ↓ Down by 35.6%
- % change 2016/17 from 2015/16: ↓ Down by 8.9%
    - Northamptonshire: ↓ Down by 27.3%

1.5 Library usage locally in the library review

The library review considered library usage including 2016/7 figures and this information is repeated here.

Physical Visits in Millions: 2012/13 onwards

3
2.5
2
1.5
1
0.5
0

Yr2012/13 Yr2013/14 Yr2014/15 Yr2015/16 Yr2016/17 yr2017/18 yr2018/19 yr2019/20

1.6 Population Growth and Library Usage

There was a strong theme in consultation responses that the library review had insufficiently considered the impact of future population growth in Northamptonshire, increasingly widely reported in recent months, especially in some areas where there are large housing developments planned. These concerns have been acknowledged and further detailed consideration of the impact of population growth on library usage has been undertaken.

1.6.1 Northamptonshire compared to similar size counties in England

The table below compares counties similar in size to Northamptonshire and demonstrates the impact of population growth on library usage over a three year period of 2013/14 to 2016/17.
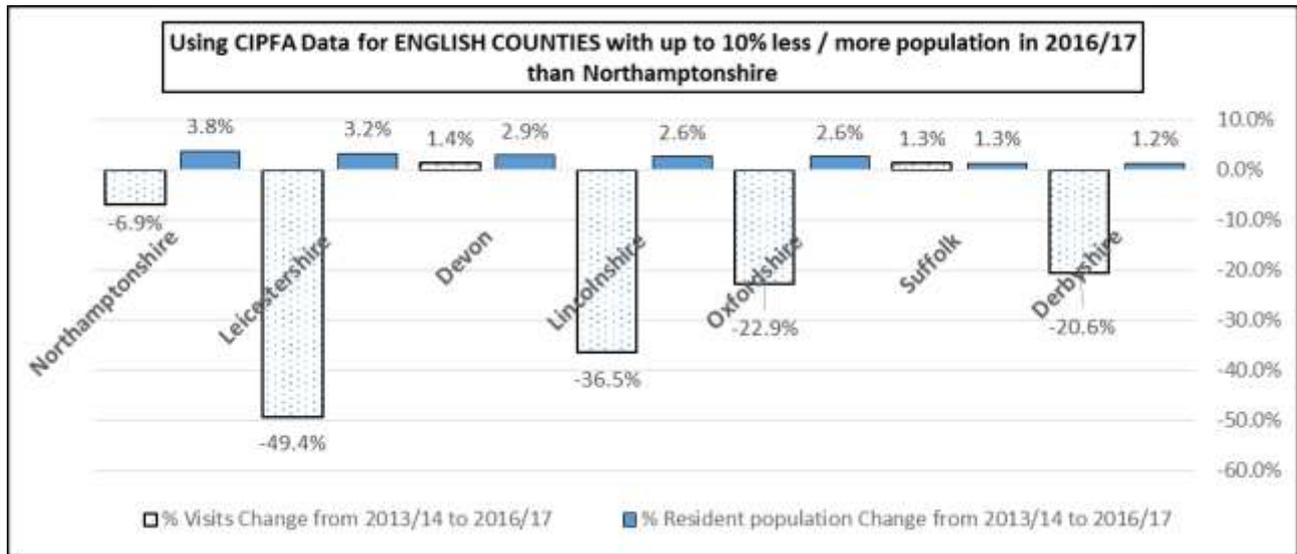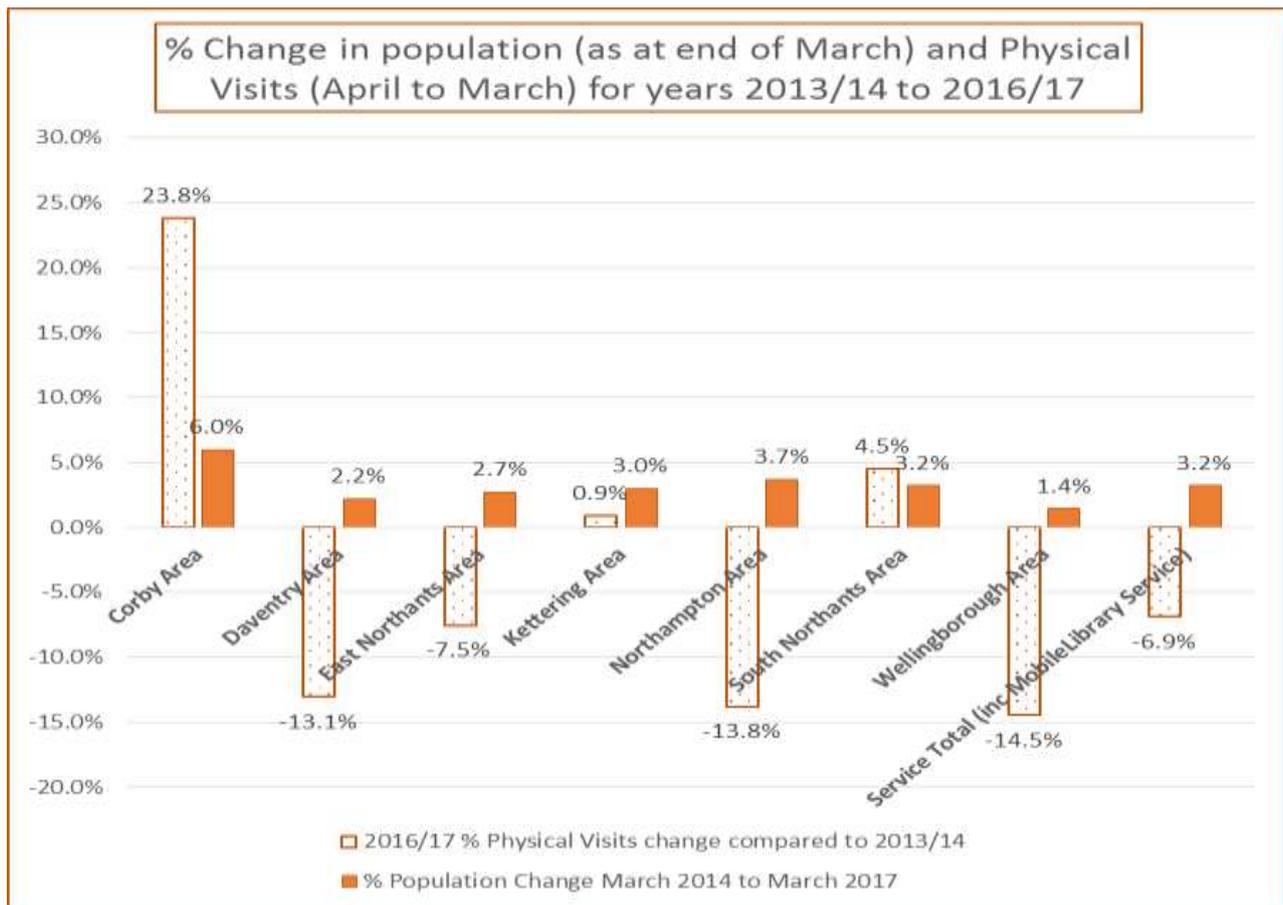

This does not support the view that an increased population leads to increased usage of libraries in Northamptonshire. There are two counties where there was an increase in visits, but only one of these where the increase in library visits matched the increase in population. Overall it demonstrates that library visits are declining despite population growth.

1.6.2 Population growth and library visits per District and Borough in Northamptonshire

Population (using data from Northamptonshire Analysis) has increased across all boroughs and districts and 3.2% overall in the three years 2013/14 to 2016/17. Library Visits (using data from the Library Service) have increased in three of the Library Areas, although total visits have decreased overall by 6.9%.

Corby, Kettering and South Northamptonshire Library Areas show % increases in the number of physical visits in 2016/17 compared to 2013/14. For Corby and South Northamptonshire this is due to the new library buildings in those areas: Corby Library in the Corby Cube and Towcester Library in the Forum; for Kettering area it is an increase in visits recorded for Rothwell Library.

Once again, this does not support the view that library visits are linked to population growth. However it offers interesting insight into the impact that new premises co-located with other district and borough services has on library usage.

1.6.3 Population growth versus library usage in Districts and Boroughs

% Population changes and % of Active Library Card Users: All Ages from March 2014 to March 2017
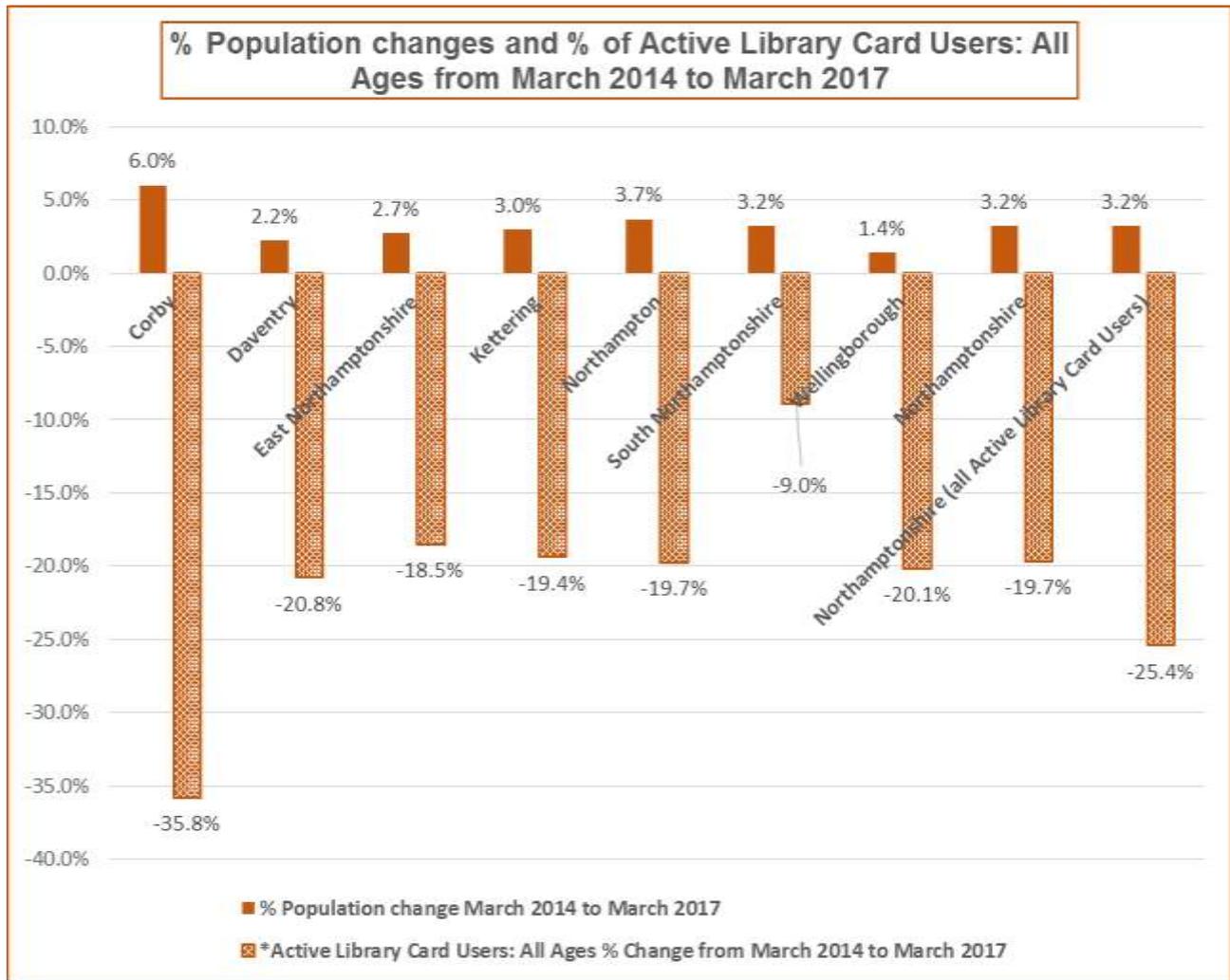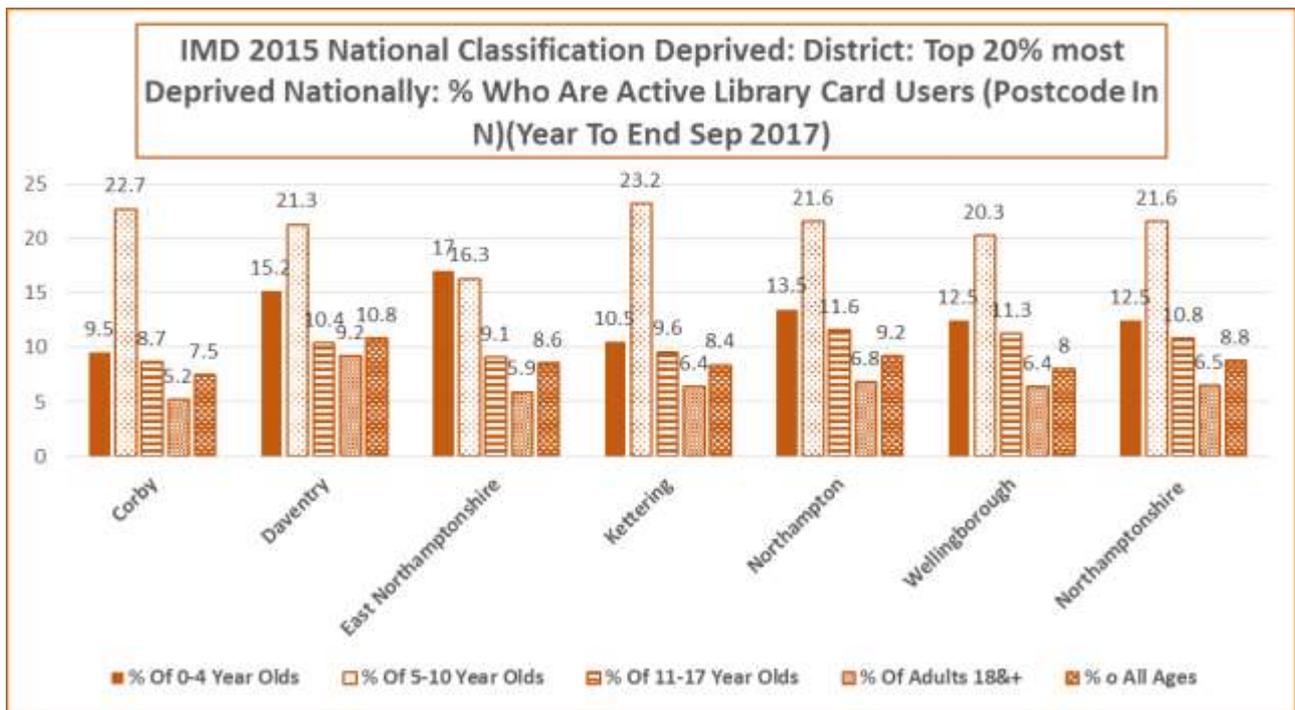
This table demonstrates that whilst population has increased, active Library Card users – those who borrow books or materials – has declined significantly in the same period. This further supports the view that visits to libraries are for reasons other than borrowing. Many of the services and activities provided in libraries do not form part of the statutory obligation, and this data does not support the view that population growth in any of the areas in the county leads to an increase in the statutory duties in regards to library services in the county.

1.7 Library usage by the most vulnerable communities

A strong theme emerged from the consultation responses in relation to whether the Council's obligations towards those users from the most disadvantaged communities had been sufficiently considered. Whilst geographical location of library premises was covered in the library review, the impact on the most vulnerable users of the library service needed further consideration.

The table below demonstrates that where the library service proposals have an impact on disadvantaged communities, the age brackets that are likely to be most impacted. Here it is possible to see that the greatest use in deprived communities is amongst those children aged 5-10.

IMD 2015 National Classification Deprived: District: Top 20% most Deprived Nationally: % Who Are Active Library Card Users (Postcode In N)(Year To End Sep 2017)

Update – 25th February 2018
Detailed EQIAs have been prepared throughout the development of proposals, and these have been iterative as more information has become available. The EQIAs for each library have been updated to reflect the change in recommendation. They can be found on this link:
http://www3.northamptonshire.gov.uk/councilservices/council-and-democracy/budgets-and-spending/Pages/review-of-library-services-in-northamptonshire.aspx

1.8 The case for change given the serious financial situation that the Council is in

In September 2017, the Council set out its intention to focus on the delivery of its statutory functions in order to meet the increased demands of the aging population in Northamptonshire. As a result, the library service review set out to make the case for change given the serious financial challenges faced by the Council and the need to develop a sustainable service alongside budget savings.

The summary above demonstrates that visits and borrowing are declining nationally and regionally irrespective of population growth. Similarly library visits and borrowing in Northamptonshire are in decline despite the significant demographic changes at a county and at district and borough level. The steep year-on-year decline of borrowing in Northamptonshire in particular demonstrates that there is over capacity in the statutory element of the library service provision.

2 Themes from the Consultation

There was a significant response from the public to this consultation exercise. Several strong themes came through from what the respondents contributed which warrant further exploration here. For the purposes of this report focussing particularly on the library service, responses which concentrate on the Council's management of funding or approach to taxation have been omitted.

2.1 Alternative models of delivery – public sector

Many respondents referenced the need to consider alternative structural models of delivering the library service, particularly in respect of a library trust model or other public service mutual model. This has already been subject to some exploration prior to the consultation, and alternative models of delivery are strongly encouraged by the National Libraries Taskforce as a way of achieving efficiencies and ensuring sustainability.

In Northamptonshire, there is already a new model of delivery. First for Wellbeing A Community Interest Company, is contracted to deliver a number of public health universal front-line services on behalf of Northamptonshire County Council. These services include the Library and Information Service, Adult Learning Service, Northamptonshire Sport, Outdoor Learning Service, Wellbeing Service and Countryside Services.

First for Wellbeing is a Teckal company and therefore falls into the Libraries Taskforce alternative delivery models under the Local Authority Trading Company category. The Libraries Taskforce also describes Public Service Mutuals – this is the category that "trust status" would fall under.

Typically a Public Service Mutual

- may involve an element of employee-ownership
- may involve a range of other stakeholders including community groups or the Council
- are typically "spun out" organisations from the Council
- has significant commercial freedoms and flexibility to 'deliver differently'.
- may re-invest operating surpluses generated to pilot new or innovative services but could still be subject to Council "clawback"
- holds a contract with the Council to deliver the library service
- may or may not hold assets which must be used for community benefit
- may use surpluses to create reserves

Potential advantages of PSMs are:

- A potential increase the level of freedom and autonomy
- The establishment of a new organisational culture
- Stronger influence from stakeholders
- Less bureaucratic decision-making processes
- a higher degree of commercial freedom to generate income from new sources
- may appear to demonstrate greater levels of efficiency
- charitable organisations may benefit from 80% business rates relief
- may be in a position to procure services in a more cost effective way
- may be eligible for grant funding opportunities not available to in-house council services

Potential disadvantages of PSMs are:

- establishing a PSM can be complicated, resource intensive and time consuming
- most PSMs are reliant on their core contract held with the Council.
- the staff group transferring to the PSM often does not possess all of the skills and capabilities needed to operate a commercially disciplined business.
- as an independent company, PSMs are required to pay VAT and corporation tax.

As a Community Interest Company, there are remarkable similarities between First for Wellbeing and any potential future Public Service Mutual set up to deliver library services in Northamptonshire. In particular both rely on the Council contract to deliver library services. As a Public Service Mutual, any potential charitable trust established to hold property may benefit from 80% business rates relief, or up to 100% dependent on the discretion of the relevant district or borough council. In Northamptonshire, based on 2017/18 rateable values, 80% reduction in business rates equates to an annual saving of £336,678 however the Council would have to be

satisfied that this saving was not outweighed by the costs of changing from the existing vehicle or any increased running costs incurred by the new organisation.

There are a few examples nationally of PSM who run library services.

Explore York Libraries & Archives Mutual Limited (previously York City Council)

- Libraries
- Archives

Inspire Culture, Learning and Libraries (previously Nottinghamshire County Council)

- Archives
- arts in the community
- community learning and skills services
- education library services
- instrumental music teaching in schools
- Nottinghamshire Music Hub
- Libraries
- records management for the council
- youth arts

Libraries Unlimited (previously Devon County Council)

- Libraries

Suffolk Libraries IPS Ltd (previously Suffolk County Council)

- Libraries

The Library Service in Northamptonshire is already delivered as part of an established National Libraries Taskforce "Alternative Model of Delivery"

The breadth of the LibraryPlus provision in Northamptonshire, that is the range of services delivered through libraries in addition to the core universal offer, has drawn national attention. What is interesting is to explore the exceptional value for money that the library service in Northamptonshire offers, especially when compared to those services now operating as trusts. Given that the main driver for change to library services locally has been budgetary, there appears to be little to gain by transformation of the current service into a "library trust."

Put simply, libraries in Northamptonshire cost less to the taxpayer than any of the sample authorities.

Data from CIPFA 2016/2017

		Population	No of Visits for Library Purposes	Visits per 1,000 pop	Cost Per Visit (Net Expenditure excl Capital Charges minus premises)	Net Expenditure (Excl Capital charges minus premises) per 1,000 pop
E2701	York	208,400	1,025,480	4,921	**No Data**	**No data**
E1121	Devon	779,800	2,805,690	3,598	**£1.90**	**£6,834**
E2820	Northamptonshire	733,100	2,452,999	3,346	**£1.42**	**£4,741**
E3021	Nottinghamshire	810,700	2,678,893	3,304	**£2.74**	**£9,054**
E3520	Suffolk	745,300	3,159,367	4,239	**£1.66**	**£7,030**

2.2 Alternative models of delivery – private sector

Some respondents to the consultation felt that a private sector solution should be sought.

However since the demise of Carillion in recent weeks, there are no public libraries in the UK run by a for-profit company. In 1998 John Laing began to run Hounslow libraries and the contract was taken over by Carillion in 2013. The 3 library services that were currently delivered by the private sector were all delivered by Carillion and are now looking at coming back in house and other alternative methods of delivery.

GLL are a charitable social enterprise running 57 libraries for a number of authorities. Their authority funding is supplemented by existing leisure services that the company already run. We are investigating this model however, early indications are that Northamptonshire Library and Information Service is already run more cheaply in its existing form.

2.3 Service efficiency

A very strong theme came out of the consultation responses suggesting that the existing service could operate more efficiently. Service efficiency drove the previous library strategy (2011) which prevented the closure of 8 libraries in Northamptonshire. As a result of 2011 consultation suggestions a number of efficiencies were made. National CIPFA data for 2016/17 suggests Northamptonshire is already the most cost effective library service in the country, and currently spend significantly less overall than any other library service. However, it is important that each of the suggestions that were made by the public is considered since this information will be important when determining what a future library strategy should contain.

2.3.1 Increase the number of volunteers

The 2011 strategy set out to recruit 1600 volunteers to support library staff. We have managed to maintain circa 850 volunteers annually to support local libraries. However, these volunteers require managing which can be staff intensive. We actively recruit where more volunteers can add value but this will not save money as staffing is already minimal.

2.3.2 Raising fines

Northamptonshire libraries already charges comparatively higher charges compared to bordering counties. For example, adult fines are 10p higher than Milton Keynes, Cambridgeshire and Leicestershire and 17p more than Warwickshire. Raising fines further would deter users from accessing the service and is unlikely to lead to an increase in income.

2.3.3 Increase digital offer

We are continually developing our digital offer but this can be cost prohibitive. We have invested significantly in e-lending platforms and regularly review the market to ensure best value and service for our customers. All our libraries use self-service technology to ensure efficiency of staffing. Digital resources can be more sustainable in the long term and part of our role is to increase digital confidence and skills in our customers to enable this channel shift. By offering assisted digital support for online bus pass and blue badge applications, libraries have enabled NCC to channel shift these costly transactions.

2.3.4 Increase income generation

The service continues to exploit any avenues to generate new income streams. In the last few years we have invested in spaces for hire to maximise income from library buildings. We introduced retail shops into our libraries and are seeing a gradual increase in income, last year this equated to 15% our of income. We partnered with businesses such as My Hermes to generate new revenue streams and piloted hireable office space in one of the larger libraries. We have also successfully delivered training and expertise to other library services as consultants and our traded services (Schools library service, prison libraries etc.) continue to generate a significant income. Not all of these ventures have been successful but we continue to explore all avenues.

2.3.5 Better stock management

By exploiting new technology and working with a regional consortium and our suppliers, we have realised efficiencies in the stock procurement process. This has enabled us to remove our in-house cataloguing, procurement and system teams. The introduction of dynamic stock rotation enabled us to reduce a costly delivery process. The adult library user survey 2016 showed a 1% increase in stock satisfaction by customers.

2.3.6 Commercial manager recruitment

Since the library strategy (2011) there have been two commercial roles introduced to the service, an income generation officer and a principle librarian transformation. The former focused on creating the library retail offer and the latter focused on exploiting commercial opportunities for the library service. Both of these roles were removed during restructures to save money. Within the service, the two strategic managers are responsible for income generation. As part of First for Wellbeing, libraries had access to a commercial director.

2.3.7 Reduce staffing levels

Since the library strategy (2011) there have been a number of staffing restructures to realise savings. These focused largely on management and back office support where efficiencies could be made. We operate on minimal front-line staffing within health and safety guidelines and it is no longer possible to reduce staffing further without closing libraries. Northamptonshire libraries are already the cheapest service to run.

2.3.8 Greater use of space

Where possible libraries collocate with other services to help reduce property costs for the council, these include borough and district councils. Hireable meeting spaces have been created where

possible in libraries to generate revenue and this currently counts for 11% of our income. NCC property services continue to work with us to look for opportunities to reduce costs.

2.3.9 Review running costs

As stated in the library review document, we have made over £300,000 of savings since the library service review (2011). We continue to exploit technology to achieve efficiencies where possible but the largest proportion of costs to the service are for staffing. As stated, we operate on minimal front-line staffing within health and safety guidelines and it is no longer possible to reduce staffing further without closing libraries. Northamptonshire libraries are already the cheapest service to run.

The tables below demonstrate how Northamptonshire funding and performance compares with that of the county-wide local authorities in England that submit data to CIPFA. For ease of comparison, it excludes those library services which serve unitary authorities. Please note CIPFA data is reliant on councils providing the appropriate data, which not all councils choose to do.

In summary, the data indicates that Northamptonshire has the lowest funding levels for library services in counties in England both in actual funding and in funding per 1000 head of population. Despite this, it achieves the average levels of library service visits of all the counties. Given it achieves the same levels of visits but has the lowest levels of funding, it ranks as the most cost effective library service in the country.

Northamptonshire in relation to other authorities (CIPFA Data - 2016/17)

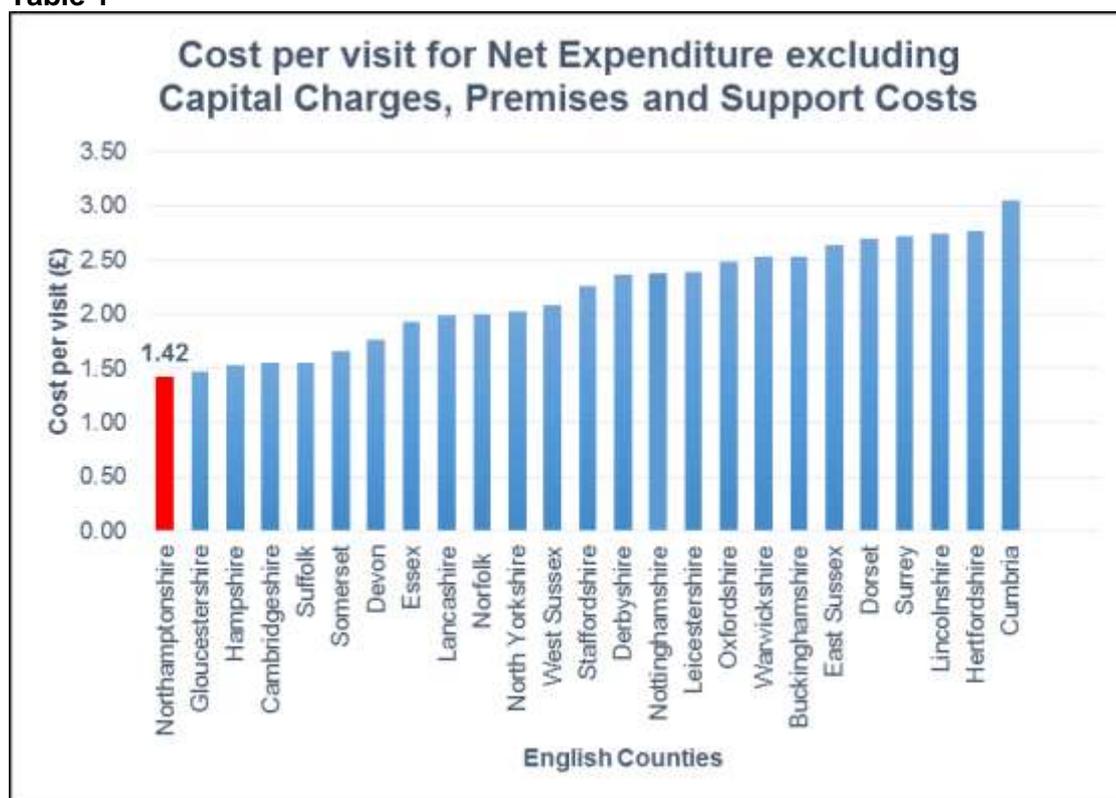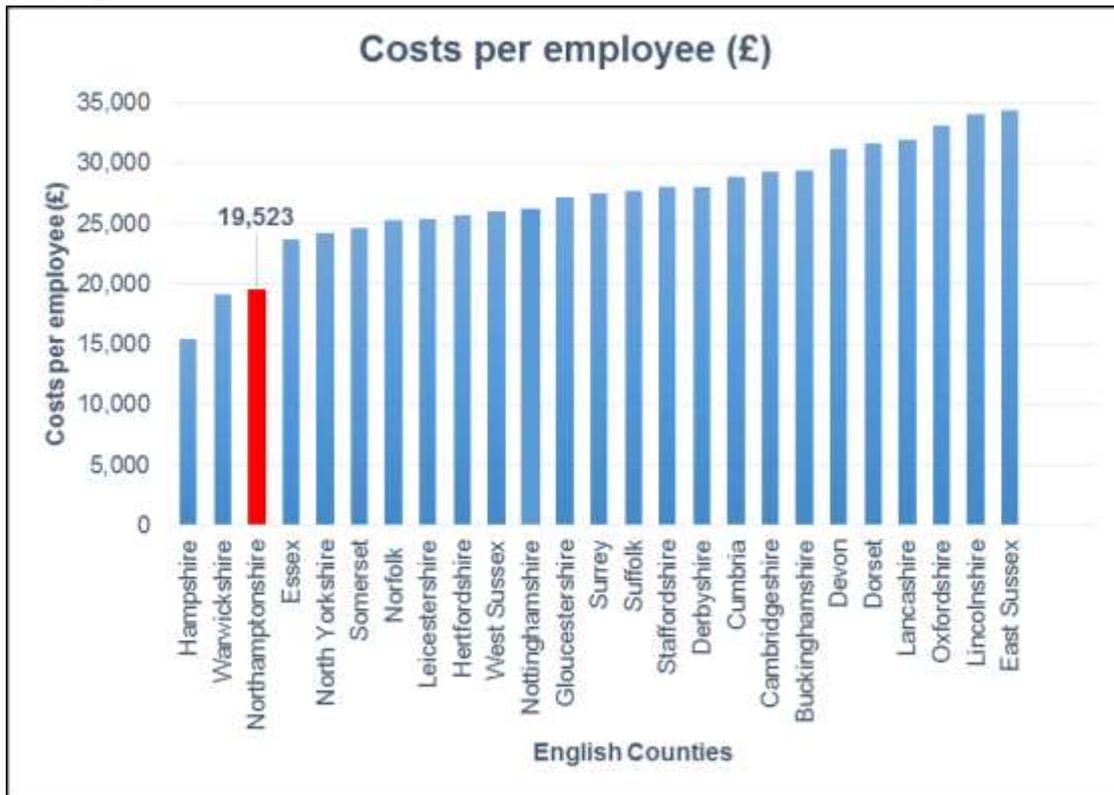**Table 1**

Table 2

Table 3

13

Table 4

Net Expenditure Actual Amount excluding Capital Charges

Table 5

Visits For Library Purposes - Visits per 1,000 Pop
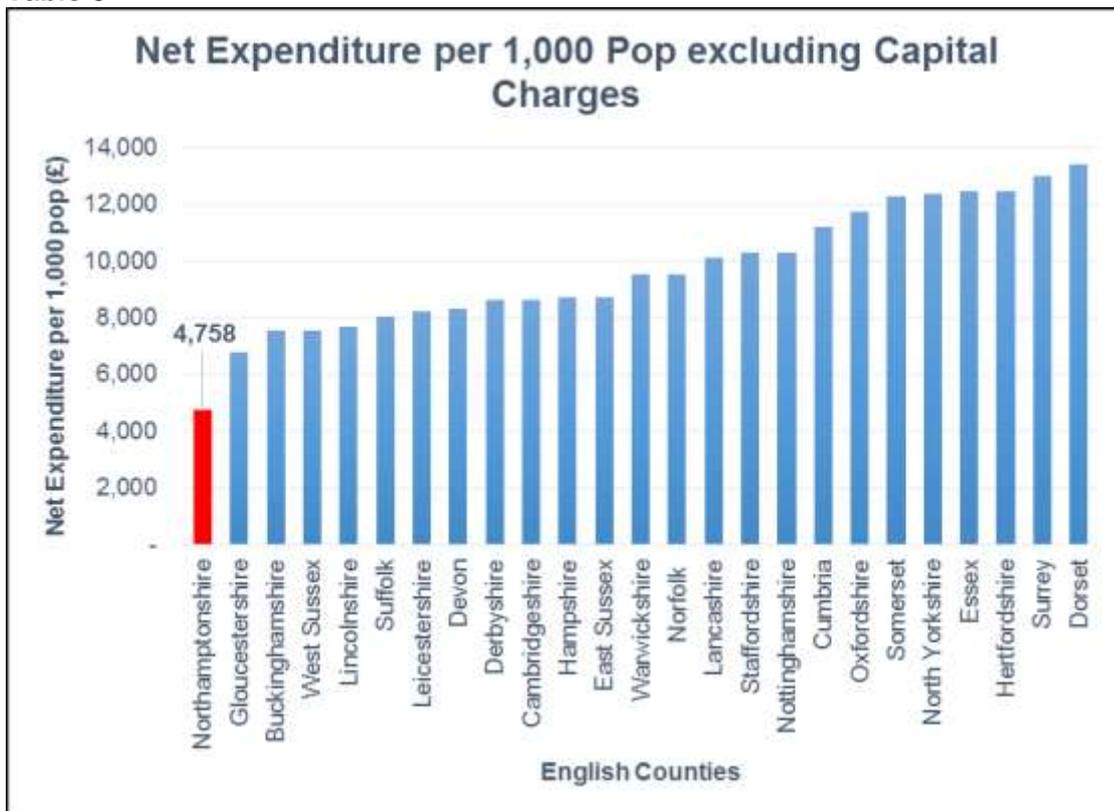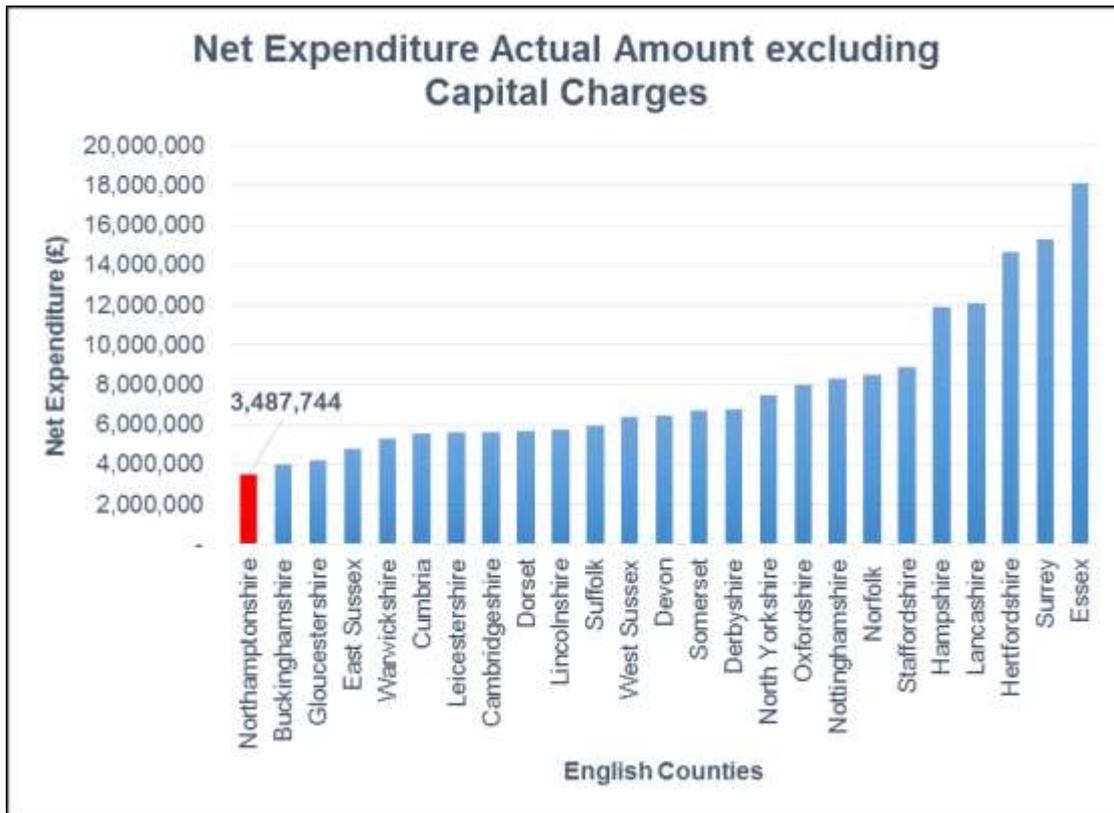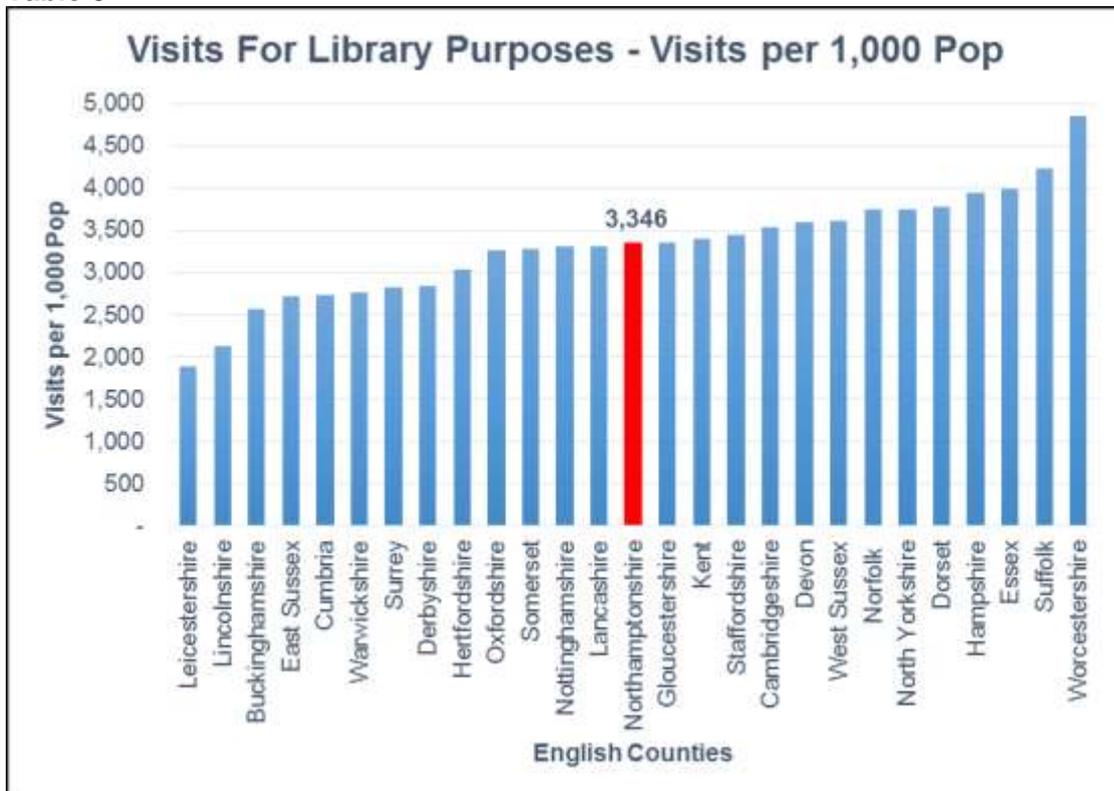
Table 1 indicates that of the county-wide local authorities in England that submit data to CIPFA, Northamptonshire library service is the most cost effective when the cost per visit to library is measured.

Table 2 demonstrates that of the county-wide local authorities in England that submit data to CIPFA, Northamptonshire is the third lowest when average pay per library service employee is measured. This is an indicator of the balance between front-line staff and middle and senior managers. In Northamptonshire, it demonstrates that the service staffing is heavily weighted towards front-line staffing.

Table 3 indicates that that of the county-wide local authorities in England that submit data to CIPFA, Northamptonshire is the lowest funded library service by a significant margin when the funding is measured per 1000 head of population which allows a like for like comparison with other counties.

Table 4 considers raw funding levels without standardisation for population size. This demonstrates that Northamptonshire has the lowest levels of funding of those counties in England who submit data to CIPFA.

Table 5 demonstrates that Northamptonshire achieves an average number of library visits per 1000 population when compared to other counties.

2.4 Close larger libraries and keep the smaller ones

64.9% of library users utilise the 8 largest libraries. These properties also offer the best opportunities to generate sustainable income. The smaller libraries do not have the infrastructure locally or within the buildings to support the amount of customers, stock, events, customer parking and public transport access that it would need to be able to provide in order to support the extensive increase in customers that the closure of a larger library would require. Though maintaining smaller libraries would enable those in more rural locations to access local services, it would not be practical to close the larger facilities.

2.5 Reducing Opening hours and some extension of opening hours

The 3 options all propose a reduction in opening hours for the remaining council run libraries. These are based on usage figures with reductions made at least popular times. Many people suggested removing Sunday opening as these are quieter times in libraries and this is already part of the proposals. Prior to the library strategy (2011) the service had made large reductions to its opening hours and this had a significant effect on usage and lending. Evening opening has not proved popular or cost effective however.

2.6 Charging for book borrowing/ subscription service

Statutory public libraries are prohibited from making charges for the lending of printed material as per the Public Libraries Act 1964. Independent community libraries would be free to explore this option. The library service already uses paid subscriptions for a number of other income generation streams including services to choirs and orchestras and the school's library service.

2.7 Use Section 106 monies to support libraries

Section 106 funding is a developer contribution to mitigate the impact of their development. The aim is to provide for extension and improvements to local services to accommodate the increase in population brought in by the development. NCC's policy is to apply to developers for contributions to local services, including libraries. The funding may only be used for the purpose outlined in the agreement with the developer. The allocation of the funding would not be dependent on who is running the library service, so the funding could pass to a community group if they can demonstrate appropriate use of the funds and can also demonstrate that occupiers of the new housing are largely making use of the local library facilities and not travelling to another, larger library. Capital schemes which would be covered are those which extend the capacity of the

library to serve the additional population and would include the purchase of equipment, stock or furniture and would also cover alterations or extensions to the building to provide more flexible or income generating space. It does not cover purchase of the existing building or ongoing running costs including staffing. NCC retains the overall responsibility for ensuring that s106 is allocated correctly and in line with the relevant legislation. Any failure to do so could require repayment (plus interest) to the developer.

2.8 Divert money from education budget to pay for libraries

Education funding is ring-fenced and cannot be used to provide library services to the community.

2.9 Go back to basics

The Libraryplus services were introduced as part of the 2011 library strategy to future proof the library service by adding value to the facilities in the community and hence preventing the 8 proposed library closures. By delivering more local services through libraries the council was able to achieve significant savings elsewhere including assistance for blue badge and bus pass applications. It makes financial sense to exploit existing library buildings and staffing to deliver a hub of services from a single location. We operate on minimal front-line staffing within health and safety guidelines and it is no longer possible to reduce staffing further without closing libraries. Northamptonshire libraries are already the cheapest service to run. According to the 2016 adult public library user survey, only 50% of library customers use libraries to borrow books. If libraries solely delivered book lending it would be a very expensive service benefitting 50% less citizens.

2.10 Mobile library service

The mobile library service has gradually declined in use over the last few years despite a radical overhaul to attempt to halt the decline. Longer stops were introduced with the inclusion of early evening and weekend visits, with the intention of providing increased accessibility to the service by working families. However, in reality usage has declined and the changes were not welcomed by everyone, with complaints about visits to villages after dark. Some customers only use the evening service during the daylight summer months. The number of users of the service during the year June 2016 – May 2017 was 5753. Annual cost £36396 with a cost per visit approx. £6.80

2.10.1 Retain the current service

It is possible to extend the current lease, but due to the age of the vehicle this would be on a 'lease only' basis, with NCC liable for the full cost of all regular inspections and repairs. As the vehicle is subject to frequent breakdowns, to go ahead on this basis is high risk to NCC, with unknown future costs. This option also builds in unreliability. The vehicle is now subject to frequent break downs, leading to cancellations and an unreliable service, which in turn leads to a natural drop off in usage.

2.10.2 Remove the mobile library service completely

To continue to provide a library service to customers who are unable to visit a static library, the mobile library service could be replaced with the volunteer run 'Library to You' service. This service is well established and has run in its current form for many years, providing a link for people across the county who are unable to visit our libraries in person.

The service offered has not changed over the years and it has long been our intention to update the provision to reflect the range of services we could offer and decide how best to deliver them. We are currently looking to expand the service to incorporate additional customer numbers who may wish to make use of it if the mobile library is ceased. We have also initiated discussions with

community infrastructure organisation to explore the possibility of linking with volunteer driver schemes. This scheme currently provides transport for medical appointments and could be extended to offer a 'You to the Library' service, where customers would be transported to their nearest library to choose reading materials and take part in library activities – thus increasing social inclusion and wellbeing.

2.10.3 Commission a new vehicle

A new vehicle could be commissioned, delivering the same service as currently. Commissioning a new vehicle would take approximately 6 months and could be either:

- Purchased outright - costs upwards of £150K – but in the current financial climate capital funding is not likely to be secured.

- Arranged through the leasing company on lease only basis. A normal leasing contract would require a commitment for a period of 10 years. At the current time NCC is not likely to be able to commit to this length of contract.

Update – 25th February 2018
There is no statutory requirement for mobile libraries. The lease for the current mobile library was due to run out at the end of March and the vehicle was beyond reasonable economical repair. It was incurring significant costs on a monthly basis to keep it on the road. In light of the Section 114 spending controls and the need to undertake further repair works on the vehicle, the mobile library has now been withdrawn from service and a decommissioning plan has been implemented. Customers are being contacted and arrangements made to collect those books which are still on loan. All fines for books issued from the mobile library are being waived throughout the decommissioning period.

2.11 Partner with businesses/ commercial sponsorship

There have been multiple attempts since 2011 at securing partnerships or sponsorship for individual libraries with limited success.

Update – 25th February 2018
In the work to develop a new Library Strategy, every effort will be made to partner with businesses and develop commercial sponsorships.

2.12 Parish/ town/ district and borough councils stepping in to take over

Many respondents suggested that there were other infrastructures which may be well placed to take over the running of libraries.

Update – 25th February 2018
The recommendations to cabinet now include the development of an independent library service offer where it would be possible for parish/ town/ district councils to run libraries. Throughout the consultation period, there were many Informal Expressions of Interest in Option 1 community managed libraries received from these councils and it may be that these organisations are now well placed to consider running an independent library.

2.13 Partnership delivery through schools

One of the libraries was formerly delivered from Caroline Chisholm School as part of a Private Finance Initiative. The county council withdrew from this initiative as it was not cost effective but customer feedback also indicated that the location within the school made access difficult.
Update – 25th February 2018
We are open to the suggestion of schools running an independent library as part of the Option 2 recommendation.

2.14 Libraries Taskforce – opportunities for everyone funding

Respondents to the consultation questioned whether this fund might provide vital funding for the library service in Northamptonshire. This was a one off funding opportunity which Northamptonshire unsuccessfully bid for. Projects needed to fit with one of the taskforce key themes and as part of First for Wellbeing, the bid was focussed on wellbeing. All funding opportunities are usually available to develop innovations in libraries and are not to sustain business as usual.

2.15 Fraudulent users and lost stock

There were very many respondents who believed there to be many fraudulent or duplicate users of the library service and that the presumed lost stock as a result of this practice would be costing the service money. There is no data or evidence to support this. There have been some previous occasions where some customers have abused the DVD hire system. These were identified quickly and dealt with locally and we have put measures in place to minimise this.

2.16 Consider unstaffed libraries

The service are currently trialling unstaffed times in Moulton library but this is largely due to the great working relationship that has been developed with other businesses within the purpose built building. Not all libraries would have the security in place to provide this and there can be an initial outlay for securing retail and DVD stock so that it can be locked down when unstaffed. As per the adult library survey 2016, only 50% of customers would benefit from this as the other 50% require staff engagement. CCTV and insurance changes may also be required.

There is a nationally available system called Openplus which allows unstaffed access to libraries. It is expensive to set up and relies largely on new IT which may not be compatible with the current systems. It has been proven to have difficulties with homeless sleeping within the libraries and other issues such as criminal damage and theft of property. Some customers do not feel safe in these buildings without the presence of staff.

Update 25th February 2018
As Option 2 is now the recommendation to be implemented, the remaining 15 libraries will be staffed.

2.17 Invest in remaining libraries to improve them

The library service has had minimum opportunity to make wide reaching improvements to the library environments from revenue funding, but has made local small scale improvements where this has been necessary. Whilst revenue funding has been used to carry out essential repairs and maintenance, Section 106 monies have been used where possible to enhance the library provision. Capital funding has been used to fund the IT infrastructure upgrades necessary to maintain the computer networks in the libraries.

2.18 Extend loan time of books

Some respondents suggested that it would be preferable to extend the loan times on books to prevent having to travel to a library, especially in light of proposed changes to public transport. Library customers may renew their book if they wish to keep it for longer and the service has made it easy to renew books either online, by phone, or in person at any library irrespective of where they book was borrowed.

2.19 Review libraries on an individual basis

Some respondents felt strongly that libraries should be reviewed on a case by case basis, particularly where they felt that such an approach may be advantageous for their own preferred library. In preparing the library service review document and in the subsequent analysis undertaken through the Equalities Impact Assessments, libraries have been considered individually. However it is important that the Council take a strategic approach to the provision of library services in the county, and this requires looking at the service in the round as opposed to libraries on a case by case basis.

2.20 Relocate from expensive buildings

It is true to say that some of the library buildings are expensive to operate from, particularly those in Corby Cube, Weston Favell Centre and Towcester Forum. However there are operational and customer benefits from being in these buildings. Less staff are needed due to the sites being shared with other services and the associated provision of security and premises staff. Library staff are able to concentrate more fully on serving customers. These spaces offer a much better customer experience especially since they are co-located with another district and borough services. There would be significant costs in extracting from the current lease arrangements and the full costs of relocating are likely to prohibitive. Although the property costs are expensive in these libraries, these are among the busiest libraries in the county.

2.21 Spend less on books

Books and other physical media are part of the statutory offer in libraries. The service has taken care to invest appropriately in new stock. Without this the quality of provision would decline and there would be a reduction in customer choice, the ability to offer reading promotions and provide books clubs. In recent years, some of the book fund has been diverted from physical stock to investing in digital stock. All three of the Options consulted on propose proportionate reductions to the book fund.

2.22 Develop the Children's Centre Services further in libraries

The current Children's Centre Services offer in libraries is provided under contract from Public Health. The response in the consultation with regards to the Children's Centre Services offer in libraries was significant and the strength of feeling with regards to the potential reduction in services was clear. This is reflected in the recommendations made to Council.

3   Feedback on the Community Managed Library model

Update – 25th February 2018
In the light of the recommendation to proceed with Option 2, this section relating in particular to the development of community managed libraries has been removed. However, this is still available as Appendix M of the papers for February 13th 2018 cabinet meeting which are published on the NCC website.

4   Further considerations

4.1 Bus Passes and Blue Badge Applications

In the consultation, people told us very clearly about how the proposals would impact on those who depend on libraries for their Bus Passes or their Blue Badge applications. By definition, these are those people who are likely to have reduced capacity to travel to a larger library to receive these services. Whilst the model is assisted self-serve, the eligibility criteria indicate that those who are

completing these applications are those more likely to need support in completing online applications.

Update – 25th February 2018
In Option 2, all remaining libraries will offer supported applications for Blue Badges and Bus Passes. However, as part of the new Library Service strategy we will explore alternative ways of ensuring there is a greater level of county-wide coverage for this service which may include delivering them in a different way, or offering outreach support from retained libraries.

4.2 Consideration for new Community Libraries

During the consultation, the Council was approached by further communities who do not currently have a library but who might like to establish a community library. This was outside the scope of the current budget consultation. However, decision makers may wish to consider their strategy in respect of the development of indeependent libraries. It may wish to consider this in conjunction with other strategic priorities it will have to deliver and there may be opportunities to align services from different sectors and achieve a Community Managed Library offer in parallel.

Update – 25th February 2018
The recommendations to Council include a recommendation for the development of an independent library model. The current library service has a number of independent contracts whereby the Library Service offer support to organisations to deliver their independent libraries. This currently includes provision to hospitals and prisons. Similarly, the Library Service supports schools in stocking their libraries by way of a Service Level Agreement. The service is therefore well placed to develop a model contract with a range of different support options from provision of stock alone to provision of a fully staffed service supported by a Library Management System and IT infrastructure to support community Independent Libraries.

5   Case Studies

Update – 25th February 2018
This section containing detailed case studies of community managed libraries has been removed in light of the change in recommendations to Council.