

Library Services

Service Transformation – Channel Shift and Partnership Working

West Lothian Council

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West Lothian council has transformed its library service by channel shift and partnership working. Between 2010/11 and 2015/16 the council reduced the cost per library visit by 64% and at the same time, increased library visits by 97% with no reduction in customer satisfaction.

Background

With little statutory protection of culture and leisure spending, library services face a particularly challenging financial context. In 2010/11 the West Lothian library service operated at a cost of £3.62 per visit – more than two times the current cost per visit.

Staff costs made up a particularly large part of the costs. West Lothian Library service operated two headquarters made up of 25 members of staff and four area managers. In addition, there were 14 libraries, all with six members of staff and a library manager, as well as two mobile libraries. A transformation of the service focusing on the use of technology and partnership models was inevitable to make necessary savings.

Key Activities

The restructuring began in 2011 with the agreement of a Rapid Improvement Plan which focused on three main changes:

- A flatter management structure
- Closing of library headquarters
- Integrated customer information services and library services

To do this the council introduced:

Multi-functional libraries

The 14 existing libraries were developed into multi-functional libraries using partnership development and integration of customer information services.

The partnership centres now offer several services in addition to library services including:

- Collection of batteries for NHS hearing aids

- Access to employment advisors
- Access to McMillan cancer support
- Customer information services including; Benefit advise, bill calendars, blue badges, bulky uplifts, concessionary travel, council tax and housing applications.

Channel shift

- Introduction of Self-service kiosks and online services
- An eLibrary is offered through Borrow Box, a subscription service that offers a download service to customers.
- The eLibrary contains ebooks, digital talking books, digital magazines, digital comics and a range of online information accessible 24/7.

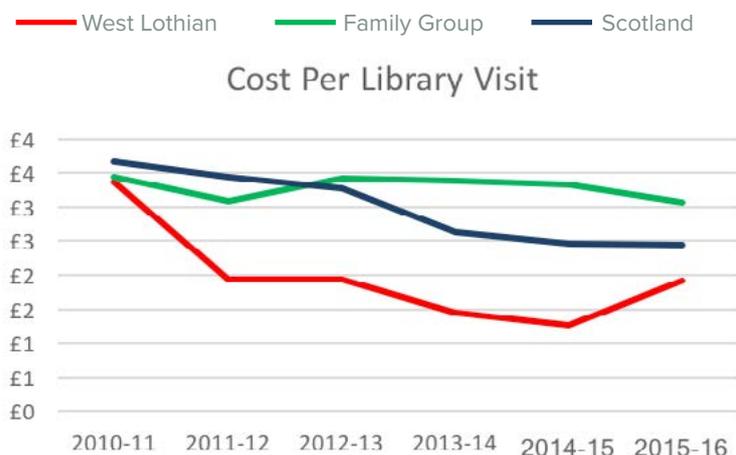
The West Lothian Library Services also:

- Reduced opening hours based on customer need
- Introduced pop-up libraries
- Avoided closing any of its libraries
- Removed fines for customers

Benefits and Impact

The transformation of the West Lothian library service has brought down the cost per visit by 64%. The cost per visit is now below the national average at of £2.45 at £1.92. At the same time, there has been a 97% increase in the number of library visits without any reduction in customer satisfaction.

Self-service transactions have risen significantly from 47% in July 2015 to 57% in July 2016. The total use of eResources has grown from 2230 downloads in 2012/13 to 18765 in 2015/16 and this number is continuing to grow. The number of issues libraries must deal with has also decreased as level of service has reduced.



Learning

- The introduction of an eLibrary can lead to increased number of library visits.
- Integration of libraries and customer information services have enabled the council to sustain customer satisfaction while reducing costs.