REGIONAL LIBRARY MANAGEMENT MODELS

CASE STUDIES

Prepared for the State Library of NSW

UTS:CLG
CENTRE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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1 Introduction

Local government is one sector in which adaptation or adoption of another's success is keenly observed and practiced. It is for this reason that six in-depth and comprehensive case studies were undertaken as part of this research project. The case studies were drawn from the 68 councils who currently operate regional and/or cooperative formal and non-formal library models. The case studies are also broadly geographically representative of NSW.

Library model definitions

For the purpose of the case study analysis, there are three public library models in NSW that are formalised under the *Library Act 1939*, as being:

> A **standalone library** – where local governments independently provide library services to their community. The library service is integrated within local government operations and may be part of a wider local government department such as Community Services

> A **regional library** – where two or more local governments agree that one local government manages library services on behalf of the other(s). Although such arrangements often form within geographically recognised regions, the term 'regional' simply denotes the involvement of multiple local governments

> A **cooperative library** – where two or more local governments agree that one local government provides a component or components of library service on behalf of the other(s).

It should also be noted that there are other models not formalised under the Act including the long-established Shorelink service in Sydney and the model in Glen Innes, which represents collaboration between the local council and the local TAFE (a State educational organisation).

The case studies selected present regional and cooperative library models (formal and informal).

Engagement process to date

Prior to the case study selection process, the UTS:CLG project team undertook the following engagement to inform the study:

> **One-on-one in-depth interviews** with a representative selection of staff from the State Library of NSW and relevant staff associated with regional and cooperative library models from across the State who were also part of the NSW Public Libraries Association (11 interviews in total). The following organisations were represented in the interview process:

  State Library of New South Wales

  Cessnock City Council

  City of Canterbury

  Pittwater Council

  Wagga Wagga City Council

  Griffith City Council

  North Sydney Council

  Orange City Council

  Lismore City Council

  Goulburn Mulwaree Council

> An online survey distributed to all library managers (approximately 140) across NSW (58 responses received from 45 different libraries).

> 24 responses from stand-alone libraries

> 31 responses from libraries involved in some form of sharing arrangement.

> > 14 based on a regional library model

> > 13 based on a cooperative library model

> > 4 based on 'other' types of models

Note – 'other' types of models may be those that are not necessarily formalised under the *Library Act 1939*.

For further data and analysis from the in-depth interviews and online survey, refer to the 'Regional Library Management Models – Summary Paper'. Specific criteria were developed at the completion of the extensive stakeholder engagement process to select six case studies.

Selected case studies

Several criteria were used to select suitable library models for inclusion as case studies for this research. Broadly, these included:

> Being in either a regional and/or cooperative library arrangement.

> Illustrating some form of shared service delivery or collaboration with one or more library service and/or council.

> Providing a service under Section 12(1) or 12(2) of the *Library Act 1939*.

The chosen case studies reflect the diversity of:

> Library model types.

> Agreement types (formal and informal).

> Number of staff.

> Geographic location.

> Land and population size.

> Expenditure per capita across the region.

Another key consideration included the information and data collected and analysed as part of the one-on-one in-depth interviews and online survey. Discussions with key representatives from the State Library of NSW informed the final selection of case studies.

An overview of key characteristics of the library models chosen to be case studies as part of this research is located at Appendix A.

As a result of the reviewing and analysing the research and data collected to date, as well as applying the selected case study criteria, the following six case studies were chosen.

> Richmond-Tweed Regional Library

> Central Northern Regional Library

> Riverina Regional Library

> Shorelink Library Network

> North Western Cooperative Library

> Taree and Great Lakes.

The process included up to three one-on-one in-depth interviews per case study with representative library managers from across the selected library models. The discussion guide used for these interviews is located at Appendix B. These interviews build on the data and information collected through the research and engagement to date. The purpose of the case studies includes gaining a greater understanding of:

> The types of agreements in place or under consideration and the reasons underpinning the models chosen;

> The impact of social, technological, and other trends on regional and cooperative library models;

> How different services operate within regional and cooperative library models;

> Council (staff) attitudes and policies associated with regional and cooperative library arrangements;

> Community perceptions of regional and cooperative library models;

> The impact of State Government policies and reform processes on library models;

> The benefits and disadvantages of regional and cooperative library models, organisationally, financially, staffing, Councils, and the community; and

> Future opportunities and challenges for regional and cooperative library models.

The next sections outline key findings for each of the six case studies. The findings provide an overview of responses gained as part of the case study in-depth interviews as well as other data, information and commentary throughout the research project.

2 Shorelink Library Network

Introduction

Shorelink Library Network is a cooperative library arrangement that has been operating successfully in metropolitan Sydney for over 30 years.

Shorelink is located in Sydney's lower north shore and harbour-side suburbs and includes five member councils:

> Lane Cove;

> Manly;

> Mosman;

> North Sydney; and

> Willoughby.

Apart from its longevity one of the key features of this service is that the size and resources of the participating libraries and the high level of cooperation between them contribute to an efficient operation. In addition the libraries have chosen to integrate specific aspects of their operations, meaning that only a small number of staff is required to run the network's central operations. The following provides a summary of the main themes discussed during the one-on-one case study interviews with representative stakeholders who are directly involved in the Shorelink library model and also draws on key documents relating to the library service.

How the service operates

Shorelink was established through a Cooperative Deed of Agreement in 1983 and operates under Section 355 of the *Local Government Act 1993*. It began as a mechanism to cooperate in the purchase of library management systems and has now expanded to include telecommunications infrastructure including eResources, Internet and Wi-Fi services and a shared courier service. Individual Councils are responsible for the provision of buildings, library fit-outs and IT hardware as well as the acquisition of other library resources and the employment of library staff. The five member Councils have a combined area of only 66.5 sq. km, the total population of the area covered by the network is approaching 250,000.

There are no other formal or informal members of the network, which also has no links to other library services apart from standard reciprocal borrowing arrangements. The network also does not have any formal links to other shared service arrangements, though three of the participating councils are members of Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils and the other two have membership of SHOROC (a Regional Organisation of Councils comprising Mosman, Manly, Pittwater and Warringah Councils).

While there is a shared WebOPAC (online public access catalogue), cataloguing is managed by the individual libraries; however there is a lot of information sharing between the libraries so approaches to cataloguing tend to be similar. From the user's perspective, their library card allows them to use any branch of the five participating libraries and the WebOPAC database to look at either local library or network-wide data. Users can also borrow books at their local library branch from any of the other libraries with next day delivery and they can also access a range of online databases and e-Resources. It should be noted that while some material such as library cards does reference the Network, the branding of resources largely features the individual library names.

The Shorelink Network office employs only two staff (one part-time) and is located at an "agent Council", currently North Sydney. The agent Council (which changes from time to time) administers the budget and its chief librarian directs the operations of the Network office "in

accordance with the policies and decisions of the Shorelink Committee and the Shorelink Library Managers Committee" (Shorelink 2014: 5). Shorelink also has a vision – "to be the best Library Network in Australia" – and a mission:

> *To be a service orientated, innovative and cost effective Library Network, committed to meeting the needs of our customers and providing extensive online eResources for our communities. (Shorelink 2015a: 3)*

The Shorelink Committee comprises a Councillor and the Library Manager from each of the Councils and meets five times a year. The committee determines the overall direction of the service and approves the annual budget, while the operational matters are handled by the Managers Committee which meets monthly. Other staff committees and working groups meet on an as-needs basis.

The Network's operations are funded by a contribution from the participating libraries based on their previous year's circulation. Each library applies for and handles its own library-related grants so there is no direct relationship between this income and the Network funding. Total operating costs in 2013-14 were $534,753, with additional capital costs and payments for e-Resources totalling $51,286 (Shorelink 2014: 18). The proportion of operating costs allocated to each Council ranged from 12% to 38%.

The Network has a four-year management plan, called the ShorePlan (Shorelink 2015a), which is reviewed annually. The 2015-19 ShorePlan has just been adopted; it comprises five strategic objectives relating to customer services, resources, the library management system, co-operation and growth and development. Each objective also involves a set of key strategies, actions with timeframes and an indicator for each action. In addition the plan contains a number of key performance indicators relating to characteristics such as the number of library members and the number of items catalogued and issued.

The annual review (Shorelink 2015b) reports on results against these indicators and provides useful information about the network's performance. There are no other formal network-wide reviews (apart from some financial and statistical reporting in the annual report), though reviews are conducted before specific infrastructure or management system upgrade. Some Councils have conducted internal reviews as part of their overall performance and financial management processes and have also included libraries in their surveys of community satisfaction with Council services.

A number of technological improvements have been made to the Network's infrastructure in recent years, including the introduction of a new library management system (LMS). There are plans to expand the network's purchasing of products and services, in particular to expand the e-Resource collection and to investigate other electronic formats such as the streaming of material to meet increasing community demand. There are also strategies in the 2015-19 ShorePlan to improve statistical reporting through the new LMS, review its efficiency and effectiveness and improve other aspects of service delivery.

Issues affecting the service

The State Government's Fit for the Future (FftF) process has caused a degree of uncertainty regarding the Network's future and in particular the prospects for expansion. If there are amalgamations, the Shorelink Deed of Agreement will have to be revisited. There would be additional and major implications if FftF results in amalgamations between Councils that use different LMS.

In general, the limited and decreasing funding provided by the State Government for library services is seen as hindering the development of cooperative and regional services because it discourages innovation. While it was understood that the introduction of Section 12A of the *Library Act 1939* provided more flexibility for councils to engage in cooperative arrangements, it was felt there was no need for the Shorelink libraries to adopt it because the current Section

355 arrangements work well. More broadly one of the reasons for the limited take-up of Section 12A arrangements may be that it has not been adequately promoted or explained. The uncertainty surrounding the FftF reforms and the prospect of amalgamations are also likely to have discouraged Councils in other areas from considering Section 12A arrangements.

Several suggestions were made regarding changes to government policy that would encourage cooperative approaches. The first not surprisingly was to increase library funding but others included the government taking a more proactive role in highlighting the benefits of cooperation and also supporting technological innovation in relation to cooperative models, for example supporting the use of the NBN to support the provision of free Wi-Fi in libraries.

This proposal reflects some common observations that were made in relation to the changing demands for library services and the technological challenges they face. While there is still a strong demand for hard copy material, the demand for e-Resources is increasing along with that for Wi-Fi access as well as for advice on how to use these resources. In addition the State Government has put more of its services online, which has increased the need for access and support at libraries. Associated with these trends is the growing use of libraries as community hubs where people can gather, meet and socialise as well as seek advice.

Outcomes

The network appears to operate successfully and enjoys widespread community support. It provides library users with access to a large catalogue, access to e-Resources and the ability to access materials from other member libraries with next day delivery. The growth in the use of e-Resources is particularly noticeable, with loans across the Network increasing from 11,262 in 2012-13 to 43,058 in 2013-14 (Shorelink 2014: 20).

In addition users can borrow and return materials at any library branch; this is an advantage even though many of the branches are relatively close together as they can stagger operating hours over weekends. A slight disadvantage is the potential for confusion among users as Councils have retained their own and sometimes differing fee structure and loan periods.

Staff members also benefit from the sharing of skills and expertise and through strategies such as cooperative training. The ability of staff to network and share information enables individual libraries to solve problems and operate more effectively. Another benefit to the member libraries and their Councils is the ability to achieve significant economies of scale in the purchase of communication infrastructure and the acquisition and management of a shared LMS.

On the other hand some Councils have concerns over costs, especially in relation to how the circulation model determines the contribution paid by libraries. This can affect Councils which wish to expand their services, particularly as each council is entitled to only one vote on the Shorelink Committee regardless of contribution size. There are also some concerns over the level of engagement that Shorelink sometimes requires from Councils in relation to specific projects.

Overall however there was a consensus that a cooperative approach is an effective model for libraries to adopt in responding to these trends and challenges. Not only does it provide a cost-effective way to acquire LMS and other network services and to deliver e-Resources, the model also provides an opportunity to share staff, implement better programs and provide more flexible and convenient services to users. It also provides a framework through which individual member libraries can pilot the implementation of new technologies (for example RFID systems) before they are adopted by the wider group. More broadly if regional and cooperative models were more widely adopted across NSW there would be greater economies of scale and greater consistency in the quality of service offered by the State's libraries.

Key points from the case study

In summary, the Shorelink Library Network provides an example of how a relatively lean model of library cooperation can leverage an effective result for participating libraries. Some of the key points arising from the Shorelink model include:

> Shorelink operates particularly efficiently with only two staff members. This is due in part to the high level of structured engagement that the participating councils adopted in establishing the service and which they maintain through the network's committee structure, as well as the established resource base of these libraries.

> Another factor contributing to the Network's success with relatively limited centralised resources has been its concentration on a few specific aspects of cooperation, commencing with the adoption of a common LMS.

> This means that not only has the network been able to achieve significant economies of scale for the member Councils, it has also been able to build on this experience in the subsequent purchase of other electronic and online services and resources as well as in the recent acquisition of a replacement LMS.

> The model is also ideally suited to technology-based purchases especially those that can be delivered online, such as e-Resources. It allows libraries to retain their autonomy, for example in cataloguing material while at the same time giving users access to materials across the network via a single online database. This facility and the other benefits provided have made the service very popular with users.

> The ability to retain a high degree of autonomy assists in the process of adopting new technologies. These can be piloted within one or two libraries before being rolled out to across the network.

> The limited resources available centrally means that the model does require a high degree of cooperation and input from the participating libraries, and as with other models the link between financial contribution and usage levels can be problematic for larger libraries and/or those seeking to expand. The fact that individual libraries retain their own policies regarding loan periods and fees are also potentially confusing for users.

3   North Western Library Cooperative

Introduction

The North Western Library Cooperative (North Western Library) is located in the central west region of NSW and incorporates the local government areas of:

> Bogan;

> Gilgandra;

> Coonamble; and

> Warren.

With a combined approximate population of 14,500 people, these four LGAs have been part of a cooperative library model for around 25 years. Each LGA has one library branch. The following sections provide a summary of the main themes discussed during the one-on-one case study interviews. These interviews were undertaken with representative stakeholders who are directly involved in the North Western Library model.

How the service operates

North Western Library model falls under Section 12(2) of the *Library Act 1939*, where all libraries enter into an Agreement for the carrying out of an integrated library service to enhance the library services to their respective areas. As part of this Agreement, the Shires of Bogan, Coonamble and Gilgandra delegate the provision, control and management of their library and information services to the Shire of Warren.

Warren Shire Library is the regional administering centre for the model. Each Council employs its own staff and there is approximately 10 staff across the library model. Funds from each Council are used to employ a regional library manager (located at Warren Shire Library) and some technical service positions (part time).

There are a number of exceptions to the Agreement, most notably that library staff are employed through each Council, library buildings and associated costs are that of each individual Council, and any costs associated with additional services outside the Agreement are that of each individual Council.

All four Councils provide the same amount of funding per year. *The North Western Library Cooperative Annual General Meeting Report, 2014* states that the 2014/2015 council contributions excluding GST are $48,160.00. This cost includes:

> Operational expenses ($22,250.00)

> Management/Administration ($10,420.00)

> Computer Software Maintenance ($11,210.00)

> Technical Support Officer ($3,615.00)

> Freight on stock rotation ($665.00).

In 2011, the four councils agreed to alter the structure of their agreement and name of the library service, and sought advice from the State Library on the new agreement. North Western Library provides a number of services for its community. The mission statement as outlined within the Management Plan is:

> *To develop and enhance the North Western Library Service so that it continues to be relevant and effective for the communities of the member Councils it services, in the areas of information, learning and recreation.*

Each library branch continues to undertake special events each year to highlight the contribution of the library service for the community. Examples of these events included; poster competitions, adult literacy projects, picnics, photographic workshops and story-telling sessions. North Western Library also provides access to computers and tablets across all branches, as well as wireless hotspots. It was noted that access to Wi-Fi is becoming very popular for not only local residents but also for tourists, illustrating the importance of library branches for a diverse population.

New acquisitions for North Western Library over recent years include; new release fiction, junior title, talking books, and large print material. It was noted that non-fiction is now sourced on a demand basis from the branch libraries.

North Western Library also provides a number of extension activities including housebound services for people who have difficulties in accessing library branches. There is also a high demand for talking books (audio). These audio books are supplemented by bulk loans from the State Library. North Western Library has a number of established informal partnerships with local schools and other community based groups.

All stock across the library model is processed and catalogued at Warren Shire Library via the acquisitions module before distribution to library branches. One stakeholder noted that streamlined procedures, particularly around cataloguing processes have enabled staff to "become more productive" and ensure all branches are following set procedures. New items and stock rotation is carried out by a courier on a weekly basis. In addition to this recent training provided to staff included: iPad training, catalogue training and Spydus 9 training (library management system).

The four Councils undertake an annual general meeting which provides a forum to approve ongoing funding and discuss any issues regarding resourcing. There are also library meetings every three months for the branch librarians.

It was noted that there is no regular review of the cooperative library model – "…there is not a great deal of monitoring apart from the annual meeting". However, resident surveys are done each year for North Western Library. In addition, each Council includes input and advice from key representatives from their library branches to inform council plans and policies.

In terms of strategic planning, it was understood that library services have generally expanded over recent years. This is largely due to the fact that there has been a movement towards electronic resources and the need to procure e-books, e-audio, and e-magazines. North Western Library is also currently looking at joining a consortium with other libraries subscribing to BorrowBox. BorrowBox allows people to browse and borrow bestselling eAudiobooks and eBooks on their electronic devices e.g. iPad. It was also noted that there are currently no plans to expand the number of library branches or Councils as part of North Western Library.

Issues affecting the service

The role of the State Government in enabling regional and cooperative library models was seen as helpful and positive. However, it was noted that funding has been capped at a certain level and "… it is only placing greater pressure on the ability to maintain the library service". In addition, it was believed current drivers for the State Government was increasing access to technology and supporting volunteerism within libraries. One respondent believed that there needs to be better provision of appropriate structures to enable new technologies and increased volunteers to be undertaken.

There was some uncertainty around the impact of the State Government's Fit for the Future (FftF) process on the North Western Library and the relationships between each of the Councils generally. As a result of this uncertainty around amalgamations that may result from FftF, one respondent believed "…things like employee arrangements wouldn't change until FftF is

settled". Overall most respondents found it difficult to comment on the impact of from FftF until submissions and recommendations were made.

With continuing changes around new technology, respondents believed that this may change how libraries are used and function in the community "…the demand for libraries might continue but the advent of e-books might change this". An example of this impact is that patrons may stop going into libraries to borrow books and start going to access e-resources, Internet and computers only. One respondent stated that "…librarians may turn into research advisors rather than staff processing transactions".

A potential barrier for increased collaboration between LGAs is the difference in the communities, with each Council having a strong local vision. For example, one Council may have a particular focus on community services, while another has more of a focus on sports and recreation etc.

It was also understood that these expectations currently outweigh the funding being received, particularly around technology.

An idea that was brought forward around strategies that the State Government could adopt to assist the development of regional and cooperative library models was the introduction of funding at a regional level. However, it was also noted that this could potentially "takeaway some of the flexibility that makes the model work".

The branding and marketing of the North Western Library was also discussed. Overall it was believed that the community is very aware of the North Western Library model; however they may not understand exactly how the service operates "behind the scenes". Book stock, the website and other things that are dealt with collaboratively are branded North Western Library. It was noted that most patrons are aware of what services the Library provides, in terms of; inter-library loans, obtaining items etc. The fact that Council members keep their own physical identity within their LGAs, rather than adopt a North Western Library identity, allows for a local connection to continue.

Outcomes

One respondent noted that North Western Library does not necessarily 'showcase' the complete collaborative approach as seen with regional library models; however the cooperative arrangements that are in place work well for the four councils involved. A cooperative library arrangement is one where "…member councils work together and support each other to provide the best services for the entire community".

The success of the North Western Library Cooperative model may "…stem from the smaller size of the libraries", enabling stronger and closer working relationships. An important success of the North Western Library is the approach to cataloguing, as it enables equal access to a wide variety of resources across different LGAs. One respondent also noted that "…it's great not to have layers of management that other regional models experience". Other benefits noted include:

> Economies of scale allowing for greater purchase power;

> Smaller sized libraries allow for a higher level of stock (not moving stock between other LGAs);

> Administration and information technology is controlled by one library, limiting the number of tasks and processes that each individual library needs to undertake;

> Increased opportunities for training and professional development of staff; and

> An overall increase in resource sharing among Councils.

Generally, there were not many disadvantages associated with the cooperative arrangements in place. A challenge that North Western Library faces is that of staffing and library building maintenance. These functions are separate to the cooperative Agreement; it is sometimes difficult to manage specific issues around staffing and maintenance at a regional level.

Respondents were also asked to provide comment on challenges and/or barriers of cooperative library models. Responses included financial pressures may be more prevalent for smaller councils, particularly if councils with larger populations are providing the same amount of funding, political aspects including support from Councillors.

Looking towards the future, libraries are seen as places that will continue to support all age cohorts. It was noted that libraries may provide particular support around tutoring, literacy, and information technology based training. The provision of meeting spaces for the community was also noted as an increasing demand amongst the regional community.

Overall, there was general consensus that an increase in regional and cooperative library models across NSW would encourage higher levels of sharing of not only physical library stock but also other resources including staff, knowledge and training opportunities. Libraries are also currently looking at consortiums for electronic resources and could be the beginning of more sharing. One respondent stated that "… funding for an individual library is very low and it is sometimes hard to meet the expectations of the community as a standalone library". While another noted that increasing regional and cooperative library models may provide a benefit to the State Government having fewer organisations/models to manage. However, it was also noted that increasing these collaborative arrangements may "… increase bureaucracy and decrease the flexibility they currently have".

Key points from the case study

In summary, the North Western Library operates under a cooperative arrangement between four relatively small (population size) member Councils. This cooperative arrangement illustrates that each member Council managing their own staff and building assets has minimal impact on the overall operation of the library model. It demonstrates how a number of different LGAs with different community characteristics can collaborate and share resources in a successful manner. Some of the key findings arising from the North Western Library include:

> The level of importance placed on library services compared to other essential Council services differs across LGAs. This could have an impact on the scale of funding or support provided by Councils and councillors, at a local and State level.

> The importance of Regional Organisation of Councils (ROCs) in the formation of relationships and increasing shared services across LGAs. As one respondent stated "…there are a number of ways to effectively share and build relationships between Councils that are shown within ROCs particularly between Human Resources, finance and General Managers".

> The support and opportunities provided by the State Government for the establishment and provision of regional and cooperative library models is positive.

> There are a number of financial benefits working within a cooperative library model. It was acknowledged that decreased funding continues to place pressure on the ability to maintain library services, particularly with changes in new technology, where the expectation of the community around access to e-resources, Internet and computers outweighs the funding being received.

> Branding, marketing and information sharing are important in promoting the activities, programs, events and stock levels available across all library branches.

> The success of this cooperative model could stem from the size of the councils involved (relatively small population sizes). A smaller number of library branches and residents enable closer relationships between librarians, the purchasing of higher stock levels, and as a result a more streamlined service with increased access to resources, training, programs and events.

4 Riverina Regional Library

Introduction

The Riverina Regional Library (RRL) is the largest regional library service in NSW. RRL provides library services to approximately 137,000 people across 13 local government areas (LGAs). The service includes 18 stationary library services and two mobile library/telecentres. The Mission Statement of the RRL is '*Creatively connecting people, information and knowledge'*. The 13 LGAs that form part of the RRL service includes the shires of:

> Bland;

> Coolamon;

> Cootamundra;

> Corowa;

> Greater Hume;

> Gundagai;

> Junee;

> Lockhart;

> Temora;

> Tumbarumba;

> Tumut;

> Urana; and

> Wagga Wagga.

The following section summarises the main themes discussed during the one-on-one case study interviews. These interviews were undertaken with stakeholders directly involved in the Riverina Regional Library model.

How the service operates

The RRL was established in 1978, and continues to grow through the addition of a number Councils over recent years. Under Section 12(1a) of the *Library Act 1939*, the RRL has a regional library model deed of agreement, providing for two or more Councils to collaborate and deliver library services. This model requires participating Councils to appoint an Executive Council to administer library services on their behalf.

Wagga Wagga City Council is the Executive Council of RRL. In addition, the RRL Advisory Committee, comprising representatives from the 13 member Councils, meets twice per year to discuss and make recommendations to the Executive Council on regional library matters. The Executive Director of RRL communicates recommendations and feedback between the RRL Advisory Committee and Executive Council. An annual RRL Management Plan is adopted by 30 June each year.

It is understood that this model works "exceptionally well" and that it has taken a while to "build the level of trust that is required for the model to work as well as it does. It is like anything in local government, especially when you have a number of stakeholders, you have to work out what it is they want and serve it up to them, and make sure you keep serving it up to them and keep communicating".

There are a number of services and programs that RRL provides as well as each branch library. All branch libraries have free Internet access and Wi-Fi together with programs tailored to children, youth, and adults. The following outlines those services that are common across most RRL branch libraries.

> Free internet;

> Children and youth services;

> School holiday programs;

> Readers' advisory;

> Photocopying and faxing;

> Online library (eLibrary);

> eReaders for loan;

> Book Club; and

> Local and family history services.

In addition to these services, there are a number of branches that also provide homework help, technology classes, library groups, Council associated services, and writing groups. The RRL library Agreement covers a number of other services that are coordinated at a regional level. Wagga Wagga City Council employs all library staff across the RRL area, and provides a streamlined and centralised administration and governance system that includes information services, e-Library and IT services, outreach programs and promotion as well as two mobile libraries located in the Shires of Urana and Lockhart. Each individual Council is responsible for the asset of their physical library branch. The following services are delivered and managed by RRL through Wagga Wagga City Council:

> Cataloguing;

> Virtual Private Network (VPN);

> Electronic Books;

> Human Resources;

> Information Technology e.g. internet support, computers etc.;

> Purchasing of collection materials;

> Reciprocal borrowing;

> Outreach programs, including mobile libraries; and

> Inter-library loans.

Part of the success of RRL is that member Councils have been involved in collaborating and working together for a long time. The involvement of the RRL Councils in the Riverina and Murray Regional Organisation of Council (RAMROC) was stated by most stakeholders as a successful example of the relationship building, sharing services and establishing cooperative arrangements across a large geographic area and between a number of different jurisdictions.

RRL also works closely with a number of other non-council organisations across the different LGAs, including, but not limited to; community groups, local schools, tertiary education institutions, aged care facilities and child care centres. Some Victorian libraries also have arrangements with RRL as a consequence of the Upper Murray library model folding.

There are no regular reviews undertaken to assess the performance of the RRL. However a number of individual library branches or Councils undertake reviews on their specific service.

The most common review process noted by stakeholders included Council customer/resident satisfaction surveys through specific questions included in broader Council community-based surveys. It was also noted that an external agency was used last year to contact individual libraries for a telephone survey. The phone survey was used to understand what the RRL does well and what needs improvement. It was also noted that individual performance reviews are conducted at a Council level and that there is an evaluation process as part of any training services provided at Wagga Wagga City Council. Results from any reviews or surveys are communicated across RRL member Councils.

Councils pay an amount of money per population size to RRL each financial year. This funding goes towards the operation, staffing and management of RRL and its services and programs. There are also service level agreements between RRL and its member libraries that relate to services and programs provided. For example, for book clubs, individuals pay a sum ($400 for a club) and that goes to RRL to provide the books. Overdue fines also go to RRL.

Issues affecting the service

Overall there was general consensus that there are not that many current issues affecting RRL and its level of service. It was noted that sometimes there are challenges around communication and support between library branches, Councils and RRL.

The impact of technology on RRL's processes, programs and services was a key discussion point for all interviewees. As one stakeholder stated "…before reading was a leisurely activity, and now there's a lot of new technologies that the libraries have to compete with".

The State Government's Fit for the Future (FftF) process has had limited impact on the structure and operation of RRL. It was noted that the uncertainty around amalgamation has made some Councils feel "a bit funny with each other" because they may have been left out of proposed amalgamation options. It was understood that the Section 12A amendment initiated a review of other potential regional and cooperative models for RRL. However, RRL could not find anything "better" than what they had already established under Section 12. This was particularly in terms of compliance requirements and the need to establish a framework parallel to a Council. It was thought that moving to a different model under Section 12A would defeat the purpose of Section 12. It was also noted that there have been no applications for alternative library models to date, and that this may be due to:

> A "lack of clarity" about what models may be acceptable;

> A lack of enablement of alternative models through the *Local Government Act 1993;* or

> The absence of an imperative for collaboration.

Another interesting opinion captured was that regional models may facilitate decreased funding from the State Government. It was noted that it is often more difficult to leave regional or cooperative library models once you are in them, generally because of agreements and contracts.

In addition, it was generally agreed that support from Councillors is key to a successful regional library model. The importance of Councillors understanding what the library is doing is essential and the RRL committee meetings provide this opportunity. For example, if Councillors are informed and kept up to date with RRL and their library branches, they are generally more likely to oppose potential library funding cuts.

There continue to be changes in the demand for and community expectations of public libraries. It was noted that more people are using libraries as community spaces and spaces to meet for group activities. Libraries are also becoming places for local residents to attain technology support, particularly for iPads and tablets, in rural and remote areas "people have technology issues and problems and the library has turned into a place to seek answers about new technology and it's hard to meet those needs, more funding and training would help in this

area". It was also noted that libraries are continuing to be places where people meet and connect. Having appropriate spaces and facilities for local groups, children, young people and older people is an important consideration in future library design. As one respondent noted: "… libraries are taking up a third space in people's lives – it is not home and it is not work, but it is a place where you can learn, connect and be part of your local community".

Outcomes

Generally, it was believed that RRL is a great success and that most member Councils are happy with the regional library model.

Being part of a regional model provides a number of benefits to staff, community and Councils. RRL delivers a number of these opportunities and these have been highlighted through the engagement undertaken as part of this research. There is an increased opportunity for staff to learn and develop through scheduled training and branch meetings each year. Being part of a regional model provides an "opportunity just to get together, share experiences and knowledge". Further, it was noted that building relationship between Councils and libraries was an important outcome of being part of a regional library model. "People are happy to share their skills, experiences, to discuss what's working within their branches". The coordinated approach of RRL towards library management systems and associated upgrades was noted to be beneficial to a number of smaller library branches and Councils.

The general perception was that regional or cooperative library models have more buying power, larger budgets and therefore a greater opportunity to provide a wider number of services, resources and diverse programs. A benefit to all Councils involved in RRL is access to a significantly larger range of collection resources and outreach and promotional services, the library management system, and access to e-devices and e-resources, as well as governance in terms of policy development. The "one-card" library systems of Victoria and South Australia were also stated as good practice initiatives that could be implemented across larger library models.

On the other hand, some Councils had concerns around the involvement of library staff in decision making processes, the difficulty to ascertain whether there are cost efficiencies as a result of being part of RRL, in particular whether or not being part of RRL allows individual Councils to employ more staff. In addition there is concern that although Wagga Wagga City Council is the largest branch, and inputs the highest percentage of funding, the actual distribution of services is similar across the region – "the larger financial contributions of some Councils may not necessarily mean that it provides more services or freedom". It was also noted that there are challenges around finding a "balance of power" between the RRL base at Wagga Wagga City Council and each library branch. Some librarians noted that they would like to be more involved in strategic planning, policy development and service provision of RRL and that consultation often only happens between RRL and individual Councils. This was also reflected in considering a fairer process to distributing new books across branches. Currently branches reserve books well in advance, limiting the access of other libraries to these resources.

An important consideration for regional library models, and the associated library branches, is that community demographics and consequently service needs may vary significantly from one jurisdiction to another. This is also reflected in comments of some librarians that there are barriers in terms of service consistency. This is largely due to each Council only being able to afford certain services. Some stakeholders believed this to be a challenge of a regional model, particularly around programs developed at a regional level not appropriately catering for the characteristics of a particular local community. Another challenge noted by some librarians is the continued increase in the number of member Councils. It was noted that additional member Councils would increase the geographic area of RRL and as a result the distance to be covered for staff and couriers in particular to attend events, meetings and training opportunities.

There was consensus that local residents usually associate their library branch being connected to their Council. Although the RRL branding is used across some shared items e.g. books, physical assets such as buildings often still portray local Council branding and signage.

Overall, RRL continues to value the cost effectiveness of services, programs and databases. Examples of benefits include decreasing some of the unused databases, and moving from paper membership applications to online memberships.

Key points from the case study

In summary, the Riverina Regional Library illustrates how a large number of Councils can collaborate, share services and programs and successfully learn from of each other despite covering a significant geographic area. Some of the key findings arising from the RRL model include:

> Libraries continue to provide places and spaces for local and regional communities to interact, connect and learn. Despite the move towards technologically-based resources the "spaces" that libraries provide are perceived to be of importance to communities.

> An important factor in establishing this regional library model is that it has had time to build relationships and collaborative initiatives and partnerships.

> The support of Councillors is an important success factor of the RRL. This enables Councillors to become advocates for the library service at a local and State level.

> There is difficulty around meeting community expectations of libraries, particularly around services, with the continued decreasing funding from State government.

> Due to the number of Councils (13) and associated library branches of the RRL model, there is the potential for a lack of transparency and communication among library managers, Councils and the RRL.

> The relationships between libraries within the RRL have also helped to establish stronger connections and shared resources across other areas of council.

5   Great Lakes and Greater Taree

Introduction

Great Lakes Council and Greater Taree City Council libraries have a non-formalised cooperative arrangement between their branches.

The Great Lakes Library Service has five branches across the LGA. These include:

> Forster Library;

> Nabiac Library;

> Stroud Library;

> Bulahdelah Library; and

> Tea Gardens Library.

The Greater Taree City Council Library Service has five branches across the LGA, These include:

> Taree Library;

> Wingham Library;

> Hallidays Point Library;

> Harrington Library; and

> Old Bar Library.

The following information provides a summary of the main themes discussed during the one-on-one case study interviews. These interviews were undertaken with representative stakeholders who are directly involved in the Great Lakes and Greater Taree library model.

How the service operates

The Great Lakes and Greater Taree LGAs region is known as the Mid North Coast of New South Wales. The LGAs have a combined population of approximately 85,000 people across a land area of 7,102.4 square kilometres.

The Great Lakes and Greater Taree library model is not formalised under the *Library Act 1939*. As one respondent stated "… there are five standalone libraries in each LGA, and we just get on and do good things". However, there are some formal arrangements between the Councils, for example, there is a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) around electronic resource sharing and contracts surrounding grant funding agreements. State Government library funding requires an administering Council. To access these funds each Council (Great Lakes and Greater Taree) takes turns in being the administering body.

Geographically the libraries cover a large number of square kilometres; however the respective central libraries are within close proximity. This is reflects population distribution patterns. "The close proximity of central libraries and larger population areas allows ideas to be shared more regularly and the community is quite fluid between the two LGAs".

There are currently 11 permanent staff and 3 part time staff across the Great Lakes Library Service. The Greater Taree Library Service currently has 13 full time staff spread across the network. Both library services have significant volunteer bases that help develop, support and implement key programs, activities, and events associated with Councils.

In terms of relationships with other shared services or cooperative arrangements, one respondent stated that both library services are part of the North East Zone of the NSW Public

Libraries Association. The North East Zone is larger than a Regional Organisation of Councils (ROC) and enables the sharing of ideas, knowledge and resources as well as opportunities for collaborative grant funding.

There are a range of services that Great Lakes and Greater Taree Library Services provide cooperative and separately. Great Lakes and Greater Taree have worked cooperatively to undertake and provide the following procedures and services:

> Funding (generally);

> Grant funding for Playaway collections (visual and audio book packs for children);

> E-book collections; and

> E-magazines provided through Zinio (an app to read magazines on iPads, iPhones etc).

In addition to these cooperative arrangements, Greater Taree Library service offers their local residents with access to family history services, a home library service and extensive local history archives. The home library service allows members of the community who are unable to visit the library due to age or disability to access books, DVDs, magazines and audiobooks through a delivery service each fortnight. Greater Taree Library Service also provides a number of events and programs for different age cohorts within the community. Some of these include:

> Photography workshop (adults);

> Information Sessions – different topic areas (adults);

> Family history workshops (adults);

> Kids singing workshops; and

> Pre-school story.

Great Lakes Library Service provides a number of locally based services and activities. Some of these include:

> Homework help;

> Mobile Device Support Group;

> Early childhood programs;

> Book clubs; and

> HSC study nights.

Respondents were asked to comment on how the cooperative arrangement is managed and structured. It was noted that although the arrangement is informal and is predominantly a 'project based' arrangement, it works extremely well for each Council. Communication between the Councils is crucial to the success. Training is undertaken jointly that encourages and enables exchanges or experience, expertise, knowledge and ideas. One respondent stated that due to grant funding enabling the use of the same systems, there has been good coordination around training. For example, the e-book project includes a monthly teleconference or meeting between staff members from Great Lakes and Greater Taree. There are also joint customer service meetings (emails, teleconferences, feedback etc.) with suppliers.

Each library service is funded separately. However, Great Lakes and Greater Taree come together to see how the funding can be most efficiently used across the greater region. It was noted that having cooperative collections and working together generally, enables greater opportunities for joint funding to occur. An example is the RFID system. Both library services jointly researched, developed, implemented and then ran the RFID system through each separate library system.

Staff are employed by individual Councils, however they interact and share knowledge and undertake training together. This was noted as a key success factor of the informal cooperative arrangement of Great Lakes and Greater Taree. There is not a structured process in place to review the informal cooperative arrangements, however the library manager reviews each branch individually and provides input into higher level strategic planning reports and policies. There is also consultation with executives on any progress and updates on projects but all decisions on cooperative arrangements are done within the scope of the library manager role.

Both library services are also looking at potentially increasing the collection opportunities. One respondent stated "…there is no real hindrance to the resource sharing occurring at the moment". The services are also looking into sharing respective book club collections.

Previously both services looked into providing the community with seamless access to both network collections with a 'confederated database' largely to benefit from economies of scale. In the end it was believed to be too expensive to implement. Another cooperative arrangement that did not eventuate was the potential for staff exchanges, in the end it was noted that this was too difficult with "too many practical barriers to implement".

Issues affecting the service

It was difficult to ascertain whether State Government policies have helped or hindered the development and progression of regional and cooperative library models. Respondents understood that over recent years changes to the *Library Act 1939* have encouraged "…more flexibility on how Councils deliver services", however it was difficult to ascertain that these changes have helped. It was also acknowledged that changing systems and process at a State Government level often has significant

The State Government's declining proportion of the funding for public libraries was mentioned as the main concern for both library services. Generally, because the cooperative arrangement is informal, there are not too many State Government policies that "…. affect the service… however grant outcomes are seen more favourably as a cooperative". It was also noted that the State funding has increased, but not as much as local government funding – hence dollar figures are higher but proportion is less.

In terms of the State Governments Fit for the Future (FftF) reform process, there was a consensus that it was difficult to comment, due to uncertainty of process and possible outcomes. It was noted that FftF could potentially draw both Councils closer together or push them further apart, and as a result it could change the way the informal cooperative library approach operates.

Outcomes

Overall, respondents noted the positivity from each Council on the joint collaborative approach of the respective library services. This was shown in the respondent of one respondent – "Council think we are going the right thing to cooperate because it makes things more effective, efficient and proves the community with better resources".

A benefit of the informal cooperative arrangement between Great Lakes and Greater Taree is economies of scale. For example, the e-magazines provided through Zinio enable both LGAs to register as a joint population and obtain a cheaper deal with twice the number of e-magazines for the local and regional community to access – "…all these resources can be accessed through their own library catalogue and the public are able to access it seamlessly through their own library website.

There are also benefits of the relationship between the library services around collaborative training of staff "…staff build relationships and share experiences together… the staff exchange ideas and that enriches and innovates the outcomes so there is a larger opportunity to brainstorm internally and externally".

When asked to comment on the specific arrangement Great Lakes and Greater Taree have in place, a key benefit was how flexible and adaptable the model is, and that it is "more opportunistic because you get all the benefits and not the problems of cooperatives". Difficulties sometimes emerge when there are differences in Council systems or policies as you need complementary policy alignment to enable projects. The Great Lakes and Greater Taree library service arrangement needs a high degree of alignment and practical sense to ensure the 'informal' arrangement is successful.

In terms of the success of the informal cooperative arrangements in place, another respondent believed:

> *"…providing the community benefit is the goal of the job and that is being accomplished through the cooperative arrangement because the community is being provided with greater resources. By doing that cooperatively, it is making the best use of the budget and is responsible budget management because it extends the life of the money. Regarding staff development, the projects and experience that are shared enhance the relationships and job satisfaction of staff".*

An observation by respondents was that libraries across both LGAs have been busier the last few years and that there is "… a process of evolution occurring with the community shifting from a book base to a community lounge room". There are specific changing demands around print materials versus electronic materials, with electronic materials being a preferred method. This is an important consideration in terms of future service delivery for these councils. It also highlights the current and future role of regional and cooperative library models to enable electronic cataloguing and resource sharing to occur to continue in an efficient, effective and financially viable manner.

The changing demographic characteristics of the community were also heralded as an important consideration. Australia is expected to continue to experience an ageing population. The demand from the ageing community across Great Lakes and Greater Taree is that "… they expect libraries to assist them". One respondent noted that there is an overall expectation that libraries need to deliver more services with less funding. With this proposition, it was believed that an increase in more cooperative arrangements may be inevitable, however it is not "…always cheaper to amalgamate". Each Council also continues to maintain their own branding of library service and associated branches, with one respondent noting that "…generally the community aren't aware it is happening… for funding the branding is more prominent, but with the community it is very minimal".

Overall, it was considered that there are benefits and challenges associated with any type of library model "…sometimes it benefits Council or the community, and sometimes it doesn't". The Great Lakes and Greater Taree model is an informal agreement and "…seems to cherry-pick the best of the cooperative model and not be bound by the structure of challenges that may be associated with ones that are formalised". The strength of the model is the opportunity it delivers – only using cooperative approaches that benefit the community or financial outcomes - "the informal aspect is a great strength of ours".

Key points from the case study

In summary, the Great Lakes and Greater Taree informal library model demonstrates the success of a cooperative library arrangement that is not formalised under legislation. Some of the key findings from arising from the Great Lakes and Taree library service include:

> Whilst the library model is not formal, there is willingness between Councils to be open and communication between Councils is an important success factor of the informal cooperative library arrangement.

- > There is an established relationship between Council executive and director staff which enables an understanding of the role of the library at a broader strategic level within Council.

- > There is an opportunity for innovation – particularly around cost savings through joint grant opportunities for resources, systems and services.

- > Recognising the change in what the community wants from public libraries. For example, "…shifting from a book-based service to a community lounge room".

- > Staff have increased access to training and knowledge sharing opportunities, through an increased avenue of programs and events.

- > When forming regional or cooperative library models, it is important to consider the social, environmental and economic contexts of each council and their library services (for example; location, partnerships, operational models etc.) potentially impacting on how collaborative the library service is.

6   Central Northern Regional Library

Introduction

Central Northern Regional Library (CNRL) provides regional library services to six councils in the northern inland region of NSW. The library provides a range of services and has a strong regional focus especially through its website, but only a comparatively small number of staff are employed regionally. The following provides a summary of the main themes discussed during the one-on-one case study interviews undertaken with representative stakeholders who are directly involved in the Central Northern Regional Library model and also draws on key documents relating to the library service.

How the service operates

Central Northern Regional Library is located in inland northern NSW and has six member Councils – Gwydir (the most recent member, joining in 2012) Liverpool Plains, Narrabri, Tamworth Regional, Uralla and Walcha (Gunnedah was previously a member but withdrew in 2008 over a dispute about funding arrangements). The population served by CNRL is around 95,000 but the area covered is vast – nearly 47,000 square kilometres. There are no other formal or informal members of the network or links to other library services, apart from standard reciprocal borrowing arrangements.

CNRL was established in 2005 as a Regional Library Agreement (RLA) under Section 12 of *The Library Act 1939*, though it had been operating as a regional service before then. Tamworth acts as the executive council for the service which oversees the operations of 16 branches. The library's vision statement is outlined in its annual report:

> *CNRL councils build community by providing virtual and physical gathering places that foster lifelong learning, literacy, intellectual recreation and participation.(CNRL 2014a: 3)*

The CNRL Committee which manages the service meets twice a year. It comprises a councillor representative from each of the member Councils who is often accompanied to meetings by the Council library manager. The committee makes recommendations to Tamworth Regional Council which has overall responsibility for the service.

The CNRL agreement is renewed every five years and addresses aspects such as the duties and responsibilities of the executive council, asset management, resourcing, budgeting and the payments made by member Councils. The CNRL Strategic Plan also covers a five-year period and identifies a number of key themes including:

> Libraries as Community Builders;

> Libraries as Online Community;

> Maximising Value of Technology;

> Flexible, Team Oriented and Skilled Staff; and

> Responsible Finance and Governance (CNRL 2010: 3).

Associated with each of these themes is a set of outcomes, actions and performance measures. The plan also indicates which body has responsibility for specific actions – CNRL, Tamworth Regional Council (TRC) or the member Councils (collectively or individually). Implementation of these themes and actions is reviewed in the annual report and also in quarterly progress reports. Both the Regional Library Agreement and the strategic plan are due to be renewed in 2014-15.

The estimated funding for 2014-15 totalled $1.49 million with the bulk of funding ($1.12 million) coming from contributions by the member Councils made on a per capita basis (CNRL 2014b: 21). In 2014-15 these will range from 3.2% from the smallest council (Walcha) to 62.4% from the largest (Tamworth). This reflects the wide range in populations of the CNRL Councils and in particular the fact that Tamworth has over 60% of the total population. Councils also contribute all the library grant funding they receive from the State Government.

In 2013-14, 21 staff (including part-time positions) were employed by Tamworth Regional Council with a role in relation to the regional library (CNRL 2014a: 44) but these staff are also involved in activities specifically related to Tamworth's own library service. Staff in other branches are employed by the relevant member Councils.

CNRL provides a wide range of services, including:

> Purchase and provision of all regional resources and collection management;

> Acquisition and implementation of a regional Library Management System (in 2013-14 CNRL upgraded to a new LMS);

> Provision of eResources including eBooks and music and 3D printers which are rotated around the region;

> Staff training;

> Technology training for users – for example, Tech Savvy Seniors; and

> A range of standard library services including story time sessions, holiday youth programs and book clubs.

In addition CNRL has an extensive website with an online catalogue, reservation facility and access to eResources and information services. The website is the primary information source and contact point for all participating libraries and branches. Participating Councils retain responsibility for the provision and management of buildings and other infrastructure such as computer purchase, along with branch library staff recruitment, though there is some input from the regional library in these processes. Individual libraries can also initiate local programming and are responsible for public Internet access.

There have been no broad-based reviews in at least five years of the regional service, though individual participating Councils have conducted internal reviews comparing the costs and benefits of the regional service against returning to a stand-alone library model. Some Councils have also conducted community satisfaction surveys of their services including their library branches. As noted earlier strategic plan implementation is reported on through the annual and quarterly reports which also contain a range of other statistics on describing CNRL's performance.

While there are no major plans to expand the range or level of services provided there has been an increasing trend towards co-locating and/or partnering with other Council, community and cultural services with library branches. Different combinations have occurred at different branches, but the overall advantage is that the co-located services get leverage from each other, for example, the ability to use existing infrastructure and to offer longer hours than either service might be able to provide on a stand-alone basis. One perspective is that these arrangements are most successful if library staff provide the combined services.

Discussions have been held with a neighbouring Council regarding joining CNRL and it is understood CNRL would be interested in Gunnedah re-joining. However the State Government's local government reform process (see below) has affected these proposals.

Issues affecting the service

Consistent with the experience in some of the other regional and cooperative library services examined in these case studies, the State Government's Fit for the Future (FftF) local government reform process has raised a number of questions about the future of the service. As a result CNRL is considering extending the current agreement and strategic plan by 12 months rather than renewing them for another five years.

While it was noted that the approach adopted by CNRL would not be inconsistent with the Joint Organisation models proposed in FftF for the regional delivery of services in some areas, there were also concerns that the government's main agenda is amalgamation and not regional cooperation. While this was likely to affect large regional libraries to a lesser degree, it could also result in amalgamations of some CNRL member councils with others that did not want to be part of the regional library or in amalgamations that effectively divide the current region.

The State Government's limited and declining funding of local government library services was also cited as having a major impact on service delivery, though ironically it was also pointed out that this could be a factor in driving further cooperation as Councils seek to cut costs and achieve economies of scale. It was suggested however that the government could provide additional funding to help market libraries and to encourage cooperative approaches.

There was a mixed response to the State Government's introduction of Section 12A. While it was generally seen as providing additional flexibility and opportunities, some stakeholders felt that it was not particularly relevant to CNRL members or other Councils already in regional arrangements. It was also noted that to some extent Section 12 A was now caught up in the FftF processes and may become more relevant once this is completed.

In terms of service delivery there is continued demand for hard copy materials but this has declined to some extent while the demand for eResources has increased. In association with this changing pattern of usage, online service provision, training and education continue to increase. Libraries are ideally placed to provide access to these services and to new technologies generally, especially in places where TAFE is out of reach. Similar to other regions and library services, there is an increasing focus on community, with growing demand for community meeting spaces and local studies collections, along with greater collaboration in community service provision.

Outcomes

CNRL seems to operate very successfully. The community particularly in the smaller Council areas appreciate the opportunity to access a far wider range of resources and technologies than they would have otherwise. This access is supported by the development and sharing of specialist skills between library staff and the economies of scale which allow the purchase of specialised equipment, for example 3D printers. In addition to the professional development opportunities, library staff also benefit from being able to overcome geographic isolation by working together on projects.

The regional library is also seen as providing a range of benefits to member Councils. These include practical benefits such as economies of scale in purchasing, the sharing of resources and the knowledge of specialised staff. In addition the library has helped develop stronger relationships between the Councils over the years as they have worked together towards a common goal.

In turn, these relationships and the five-year framework provided through the RLA assist in shielding libraries from funding cuts. It was also noted that some of the smaller Councils might not have been able to provide a library service at all were it not for the existence of the CNRL. Even in Councils that might be able to provide standalone services, the CNRL reduces staff duplication and allows Councils to provide a wider range of resources to their residents without having to acquire all the material involved or provide premises large enough to store all these

materials. At the same time the expectations of the CNRL ensures that member councils and branches maintain a high level of service.

Relatively few actual or potential downsides were identified. These appear in part to be unintended consequences of the integration of CNRL within Tamworth Regional Council. Some stakeholders noted that, at times, operational decisions were not fully communicated to other branches. In addition because materials are purchased regionally there may not always be a full understanding of the needs of specific local communities. At a more subtle level problems can arise because of the need for branches to conform to CNRL policies and procedures and also because of the differing management styles of the member Councils. On the other hand, because individual Councils retain control of some policy areas variations in these policies can cause confusion among users, for example some Councils impose fines while others do not.

Notwithstanding these minor concerns there was strong support for the regional approach which has evolved through the CNRL. It was seen as particularly appropriate in rural and remote areas in helping libraries to overcome isolation (both for staff and users), support the development of staff skills and assist them in providing a much wider range of services and resources for their communities than would otherwise be possible. It was also noted that a regional model could work even more effectively with a group of councils that are relatively closer to each other than the members of CNRL.

Some potential barriers were identified but it was felt these could be resolved. These included the importance of getting the right balance between providing a regional service and the need to retain some local identity and the need to recognise the difficulties involved in integrating different LMS and technical platforms.

Key points from the case study

In summary, CNRL demonstrates how a regional library model which includes one larger Council and a number of smaller Councils can collaborate and work effectively together. Some of the key findings from arising from the CNRL model include:

> The regional library model developed by CNRL appears to work particularly well in the context of its region, where a large regional Council (Tamworth) is surrounded by several rural Councils most of which are significantly smaller. This is also likely to reflect the wider social and economic relationships the communities in these surrounding Councils have with Tamworth as regional capital, which in turn the regional library service has helped to strengthen.

> The benefit for the smaller Councils from participating in this arrangement is clear; they and their communities gain access to a considerably greater range of resources and services than would otherwise be available. While Tamworth does not receive the same level of benefit, all the participating councils gain from the economies of scale the regional approach provides.

> It can also be argued that the regional approach has helped address intra-regional equity issues by improving the access of smaller isolated communities to eResources and other services. This could become an increasingly important role as other services co-located with library branches, an approach which could also benefit the libraries themselves,

> The annual budget is modest and the number of regional library staff comparatively low, one of the benefits of the integration between CNRL and Tamworth Regional Council as the executive library. However this model has the potential to raise issues about autonomy and identity for smaller councils which provide staff for the branch libraries.

> As in most of the other case studies, the acquisition of a common LMS was a key aspect of the CNRL model. This combined with an online database and a common website which

provides access to a range of eResources has allowed CNRL to present a single accessible interface to the community.

> The potential impact of the FftF local government reforms on CNRL is very hard to assess. On the one hand the CNRL library model could act as a template for the development of joint organisations and services; on the other amalgamations or new regional arrangements could divide the CNRL and cause a range of management issues if the libraries involved do not share the same LMS.

7   Richmond Tweed Regional Library

Introduction

Richmond Tweed Regional Library (RTRL) provides library services to four councils on the far north coast of NSW. Unlike a number of other regional and cooperative arrangements, RTRL has complete responsibility for the provision of staff as well as resources and services to the participating councils. Another unusual feature is that the Executive Council responsible for managing the service does not have the largest population among the member councils.

Richmond Tweed Regional Library has four member councils, these include:

> Ballina;

> Byron;

> Lismore; and

> Tweed.

> The following provides a summary of the main themes based on one-on-one case study interviews with representative stakeholders who are directly involved in the Richmond Tweed Regional Library model as well as key documents relating to the library service.

How the service operates

Richmond Tweed Regional Library covers a region of 1,321 square kilometres with over 205,000 residents. No other councils or organisations participate in the library but it does occasionally undertake cooperative activities with Clarence Regional Library and the North East Public Libraries zone and has made presentations on library issues to Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils (NOROC).

The library was established in 1971 with an agreement between Lismore and Ballina councils. They were subsequently joined by Byron and Tweed. Until 2009 RTRL operated autonomously with executive support from Lismore City Council (LCC) but in that year adopted an administrative model consistent with Section 12 of the *Library Act 1939*, with Lismore as the Executive Council.

The library's vision, mission and values are as follows:

> *Our Vision:*   *We will support our communities to achieve.*
> *Our Mission:*   *To create an environment where people can discover, connect and escape with knowledge, skills, ideas and stories.*
> *Our Values:*   *Show mutual respect, strive to do our best, love doing what we do, communicate connect, listen learn.* (RTRL website n.d.)

RTRL has a three year strategic plan and an operational plan is being developed. There has not been a review conducted of the whole library service in recent years, though the annual and quarterly committee meetings receive reports on the library's performance. The service level agreements between Lismore and the other councils are also reviewed periodically. Some councils however have conducted their own reviews, most notably Tweed which in 2013 reviewed its membership of LRLF. Libraries are also included in the annual community satisfaction surveys run by some member councils.

RTRL has 11 branches plus a Genealogy Centre and a mobile service. It has a management committee comprising two councillor representatives from each member council which meets four times a year. While the committee can make recommendations the library is run largely as

a section of Lismore Council; the Regional Library Manager reports to an Executive Director of Council who in turn reports to council's General Manager. As a result of this structure the other three member Councils have relatively little input to the management of the service, especially on a day-to-day basis.

Reflective of this management structure, a description of the services provided by RTRL is straightforward; the regional library is responsible for almost every aspect of library service provision, apart from the provision of library buildings which are provided by the participating councils. As a consequence the library's budget is higher on a per capita basis than that of most other regional or cooperative arrangements where member councils directly cover a higher proportion of the costs.

The draft 2015/16 RTRL budget estimates an income of $6.78 million, of which $6.35 million will come from council contributions (RTRL 2015: 14). These contributions are worked out on a per capita basis; Tweed with over 91,000 people is over twice the size of Lismore (around 45,000 people); it is the largest council in terms of population in the RTRL region and provides over 36% of the total contribution.

Currently there are no plans to make major changes to the range or level of services provided. However the library has come under budgetary pressure with funding cuts within LCC. The resources budget has been particularly affected, though at the same time there is an expectation that the library will continue to maintain the same levels of service.

Issues affecting the service

It is clear that the centralised structure of RTRL has become one of the key issues impacting the service. As noted earlier Tweed Shire Council (TSC) conducted a review of its participation in the regional library and examined a range of options including continued membership, partial disengagement and complete withdrawal and the establishment of a separate library service, either in conjunction with another council or completely stand-alone.

TSC had been seeking the establishment of a new business model for the regional library, a proposal that was rejected by the RTRL committee in 2013 pending the outcomes of the State Government's local government review then underway. As a result council decided to prepare a report into its own capacity to provide library services and to "explore other partners for the provision of such services" (TSC 2013a: 111). This decision reflected a view that the library service was becoming more expensive and that council had no direct control over aspects such as staffing or service levels. In addition there was little reporting on the library service directly back to council. This raised issues regarding accountability and the level of responsibility that council had for the provision of library services and also made it difficult to integrate with council's other services, for example cultural infrastructure such as museums.

This report was considered by council in July 2013. It found that while council could deliver the current level of branch and web-based services for approximately the same cost as its contributions to RTRL, with increased recurrent costs largely offset by administrative savings, the provision of a replacement mobile library service would require an upfront investment of $850,000 to $1 million in a new vehicle. Because of this and the uncertainty over the outcomes of the local government review, council resolved to continue its participation in RTRL but also continue efforts to develop a new business model for the library (TSC 2013b: 15).

The other issues identified in the stakeholder interviews were consistent with those raised in the other case studies. Rate pegging and reductions in state government library funding have put the library's budget under pressure, but it was observed that these factors affect all libraries irrespective of structure. It was also noted that the reduction in library funding undermined the prescriptive bit positive intentions of the NSW Library Act to ensure the consistent rollout of library services.

Two suggestions emerged regarding policies that the government could adopt to encourage the development of regional and cooperative approaches. One was to provide funding specifically to facilitate the establishment of regional services and in particular to cover the cost of integrating library management systems (LMS). The second was to ensure that the *Library Act 1939* complements the *Local Government Act 1993*. In this context there was relatively little consideration given to the role of Section 12A, though it was observed that the reason for limited take-up may be the uncertainty caused by the State Government's Fit for the Future (FftF) reforms to the sector.

The potential impact of these reforms was also discussed. Given the centralised nature of the service, if any amalgamations were to occur between the current member councils the impact would be relatively limited, especially as the RTRL agreement had been structured to provide for this. The current FftF proposals do however call for the amalgamation of Kyogle council with LCC, which would involve the integration costs mentioned earlier, as would any other proposals for any amalgamations of participating councils with those outside the RTRL region.

More broadly there was a concern that the emphasis that the FftF proposals place financial efficiency and sustainability could have for libraries given their high cost and role as a social service with limited revenue opportunities. It was also suggested that to be effective the reform process needs to consider which services function best at a regional level and what is best done locally.

Other challenges include the changing nature of the demand for library services and the impact of new technologies. While the demand for eBooks appears to have levelled out and eResources have not displaced traditional materials to the extent expected, there are high and increasing demands for eServices and also in training and supporting people in the use of new technologies. This is a particularly significant issue in some areas in the region which have high proportions of people aged over 65. There is also an increasing demand for physical space in libraries – not for collection storage but for community and meeting spaces. Libraries need to do a better job of quantifying this demand however.

Outcomes

RTRL seems to be generally regarded as a well-run service which has operated successfully for over 40 years. The service is popular and there is little criticism of the quality of service delivery or of the convenience the regional model provides.

More broadly however there is a wide range of views regarding advantages and disadvantages of the RTRL's very centralised model. On the positive side the library clearly achieves economies of scale and is able to provide a wide range of resources and services, while the regional approach to grant applications means that any funding received is spread across a wider community. There are also advantages in sharing staff and training opportunities (though the fact that the library staff are employed by Lismore council means that they can feel isolated from the library headquarters). It also avoids duplication, for example in acquiring and maintaining an LMS.

On the negative side some of the participating councils and in particular TSC still have concerns that the current model is overly centralised. While the expense of the regional service was an important factor in TSC's 2013 review, the perception that councils apart from Lismore have little or no say in the management of library services in their own local government areas and in their council buildings is still obviously a major issue.

Key points from the case study

In summary, RTRL demonstrates how a centralised model can operate across a number of councils. Some of the key findings from arising from the RTRL model include:

- The centralised model used by RTRL has the potential to achieve significant economies of scale and consistency in service delivery. However even if a centralised regional library does provide a cost-effective and popular service it runs the risk of being undervalued by the participating councils if they are not directly involved in the reporting and management process.

- The problems of the centralised model appear to be exacerbated when there are several large member councils within the regional library, and especially when one or more of these councils is larger than the council which runs the library service. It may be that this model is more appropriate (though not necessarily the only applicable approach) where there is a large "regional capital" council and a number of significantly smaller councils.

- In addition there are a range of practical issues associated with the centralised model around accountability and responsibility, for example in relation to library building design, insurance and liability. Member councils also have little say about service standards and it is also more difficult to integrate library branches with other services that member councils may wish to provide.

- The centralised library model provides an interesting example of a purchaser provider split and has implications for the development of regional libraries and more broadly for the development of shared services (for example the Joint Organisation model proposed in FftF). Apart from the practical issues outlined above reducing the provision of library services to a financial transaction, there are risks in the loss of local ownership and identity. It is possible however that an alternative management structure could be adopted that would address these problems.

8   Concluding remarks

This research project has included a number of engagement methods to capture the experience and opinions of public library representatives from a diverse number of library models across NSW through a series of case studies. The purpose of these case studies was to build on the prior research and data collected, reviewed and analysed as part of this project. The six case studies provided an opportunity to undertake a more focused and in-depth review of the different types of formal and informal regional and cooperative library models and relationships.

The case study process has highlighted some key considerations in relation to regional and cooperative library models. The following provides a summary of the key findings.

> There are a number of formal and informal regional and cooperative library arrangements in place across NSW. Collaboration is occurring between libraries and across local government areas in a variety of ways, with groups of councils having chosen a range of models from limited cooperation through to full integration. Many of these services have also expanded the level and range of services offered cooperatively or regionally gradually over time.

> The relative decline in funding has also placed libraries under increasing pressure to cut costs. The collaboration process however needs to not only address the mechanics of achieving value for money and achieving economies of scale but also the wider potential for increased community engagement and involvement. There is a clear appetite for cooperation to provide better and greater services and resources to the community and library staff as well as to continue the opportunity for people to learn and to exchange knowledge and ideas.

> All libraries continue to experience to varying degrees the shift from being a predominantly book-based service to one in which a variety of resources and services are provided, including an increasing role as a 'community lounge room'. New technologies have impacted on the way libraries are accessed and used. Community members are increasingly going to libraries to use the Internet, to access free Wi-Fi, to study collaboratively, to attend community programs and to participate in group activities. While all library services have to respond to these trends, regional and collaborative libraries are likely to have the greater strategic capacity and resources to do so.

> The strategic and operational context needs to be considered when a group of libraries and councils are considering whether to operate collaboratively and the model type that may best suit their needs. Factors to consider may include the geographic location, the size and demographic composition of the local and regional populations, the relative sizes of the councils and communities involved, the political context and the nature of the existing library services.

> The level of support provided by councillors was seen as being very important to the success of regional and cooperative models. Councillors play an important role not only in the management of library services but also through their support for the continued operation and the provision of adequate funding by the individual councils involved in the service. As a corollary the library service needs high standards of transparency and accountability in its management to gain the trust and support of councillors.

> The outcomes of the FftF process are likely to have an impact on many library services including current regional and cooperatively-based services. For example, potential amalgamations and/or the establishment of joint organisations (JOs) may occur between

councils where one is located within a regional or cooperative library service and the other is not. Consequently there is general uncertainty around the future impact of FftF and the identity that local communities associate with their library service.

> There are also indications that this uncertainty may be discouraging stand-alone libraries from considering the establishment of new regional or cooperative services. On the other hand, the proposed JOs may provide an additional regional structure for the delivery of library services. In addition the existing examples of library collaboration may provide models for service delivery in other areas of council cooperation that could be incorporated in the development of the JOs. Library buildings also provide potential opportunities for the colocation of other services by all levels of government, particularly in isolated areas.

> There appears to be a general consensus that the increased flexibility provided through the introduction of Section 12A of the *Library Act 1939* may not have been particularly relevant or useful to many libraries. Some library services currently collaborate informally without the need for particular legislation, while in general those services surveyed that had adopted formal structures under other sections of the legislation did not feel the need to adopt 12A. In addition the introduction of joint organisations may make this the model "template" for future inter-council cooperation including the development of additional regional and cooperative library services.

> All library models including collaborative ones have their limitations and issues, though these vary to some degree with the model type. Some of these may include; the costs of services for participating councils, the basis on which the service is funded, potential tensions around autonomy and identity and the provision of and access to programs and services that cater for local communities. In general however there appears to be strong support for regional and cooperative library services.

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Appendix A.   Selected case study snapshots

TABLE 1: CASE STUDIES - REGIONAL LIBRARY MODELS

Criteria	Richmond-Tweed	Central Northern	Riverina
Type of model	Regional	Regional	Regional
Type of agreement	Agreement under s12 of the *Library Act 1939*	Agreement under s12 of the *Library Act 1939*	Agreement under s12 of the *Library Act 1939*
Council partners	Lismore Ballina Byron Tweed	Tamworth regional Gwydir Liverpool Plains Narrabri Uralla Walcha	Wagga Wagga Coolamon Cootamundra Gundagai Junee Lockhart Temora Tumut Urana Corowa Greater Hume Bland Tumbarumba
Number of staff	74	31.05	41.78
Geographic location	Northern Rivers	Northern Inland	Riverina
Land area of region	1321 km^2	46,959 km^2	23532.2 sq kms
Population of region (2012)	205,296	94,835	103,400
Expenditure per capita (region)	35.72	38.66	35.47
Part of Joint Organisation Pilot?	No	Yes – some councils form part of the Namoi Joint Organisation pilot	Yes – some councils form part of the Riverina Joint Organisation pilot

TABLE 2: CASE STUDIES - COOPERATIVE LIBRARY MODELS

Criteria	SHORELINK	North Western	Taree and Great Lakes
Type of model	Cooperative (formal agreement not formalised under the Act)	Cooperative	Cooperative (not formalised)
Type of agreement	Agreement under the *Local Government Act 1993*	Agreement under Section 12(2) of the *Library Act 1939*	Not formalised
Council partners	Lane Cove Manly Mosman North Sydney Willoughby	Bogan Coonamble Gilgandra Warren	Taree Great Lakes
Number of staff	133.98	7.4	25.92
Geographic location	Sydney Metropolitan	Central West	Mid North Coast
Land area of region	66.5 sq kms	40102.2 sq kms	7102.4 sq kms
Population of region (2012)	246,825	14,725	83,965
Expenditure per capita (region)	76.8	71.02	57.4
Part of Joint Organisation Pilot?	No	No	No

Appendix B. Case study interview discussion guide

DISCUSSION GUIDE – CASE STUDY INTERVIEWS

STATE LIBRARY OF NSW – REGIONAL MANAGEMENT MODELS RESEARCH

The Centre for Local Government (CLG) at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) has been engaged by the State Library of New South Wales (State Library of NSW) to undertake research to explore and recommend regional management models for NSW public libraries.

CLG is undertaking this research project to:

> Understand the types of arrangements that are currently in place between councils for regional or cooperative library services across NSW;

> Explore regional management models for NSW public libraries; and

> Explore other possibilities for management models e.g. cooperative models that councils may use for other local and regional arrangements.

CLG has already undertaken a significant amount of work for this research project including:

> A document and literature review

> One-on-one in-depth interviews with a selection of library managers who currently operate in regional and/or cooperative library models

> An online survey distributed to all library managers across NSW.

INTERVIEWER NOTE: Some library managers may have already been interviewed during stage one of the project – it will be important to acknowledge this and try and delve a little deeper around some of the questions that they may have already answered.

We are hoping to speak with you today to build on the work already undertaken by the CLG team and to gain a greater understanding of your thoughts on regional management models for NSW public libraries.

A few things to note:

> The interview may take approximately 45 minutes

> You will not be identified by name in any reports or papers using information from this interview without your permission and after your review of the materials.

> All information collected will be kept strictly confidential and stored securely and any subsequent use of the data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

> I will take notes as we talk to help with the analysis.

Do you have any questions? Can you please confirm that you have understood this information and agree to the interview being recorded?

Thank you – let's begin.

Background and basic information

> Can you please tell us briefly a little about your current role and the type of work you do in relation to the library service? (e.g. position/title/organisation etc.)

Interviewer note: The interviewee should be in the position of Library Manager or above, e.g. Director, GM etc

Basic description of the library service

> Please describe the regional/cooperative library service in terms of:

>> The type of agreement;

>> The council partners to the agreement;

>> The geographic area the agreement covers and the population involved; and

>> The number of staff involved.

> Are there any other councils which are not formally part of the agreement but which participate informally in specific aspects of the service?

> Are there any non-council organisations that participate in the library service or specific aspects of it?

> Does the service have any relationships to other shared services and cooperative arrangements (e.g., ROCs)?

Range of services provided

The range and scope of services

> Please describe the range and scope of services which are managed through the regional/cooperative process.

> What services (if any) are excluded from the regional/cooperative arrangement?

The management processes and financial structures involved

> How is the regional/cooperative library service managed?

> How is the regional/cooperative library service funded?

> How are the staff of the library service employed? For example, how many (if any) of the staff are employed centrally in relation to the regional/cooperative service and who specifically employs them?

Performance reviews and strategic planning

Review and monitoring processes

> Is the service subject to regular reviews and if so when and how are these conducted?

> Has the service been externally reviewed and if so when and by whom?

> Please describe the measures used in these reviews to assess the service's operations and in particular the following:

>> Financial performance and cost effectiveness;

>> Service delivery; and

>> User/community satisfaction.

> In summary, what have been the key outcomes and findings of these reviews?

> Are the outcomes of these reviews reported to the participating councils and have they resulted in any changes to the library service?

> Are the reports of these reviews available for this research?

> Generally speaking, what are the attitudes of the participating councils towards the regional/cooperative library service?

Strategic planning

> Specifically in relation to your regional/cooperative library service, are there any plans to:

Increase or reduce service levels;

Expand or reduce the range of services provided;

Expand or contract council membership and/or the involvement of other organisations;

Change the management and/or financial structure;

Change library employee arrangements; and

Change any other aspect of the regional/cooperative library service?

Interviewee perceptions

> What is your personal assessment of the success (or otherwise) of the service generally?

> Do you think that specific aspects of the service perform significantly better or worse than others; if so, which are they and why do you think this is the case?

> What generally do you think are some of the benefits and disadvantages of libraries adopting a regional or cooperative approach for:

Organisation management;

Financial efficiency;

Library staff;

Participating councils;

Relationship building between Councils;

The community?

The operating environment

Impact of State Government policies

> Do you think current State Government policies help or hinder the development of regional and cooperative library services?

> What is your opinion of the introduction of Section 12A into the legislation and why do you think councils have not taken up S12A to develop alternative models for regional library management?

> What other policies or strategies could the State Government adopt to assist the development of regional and cooperative services?

> What do you think are the implications (if any) of the State Government's Fit for the Future local government reforms for:

Your library service specifically; and

Regional and cooperative library services generally?

Impact of social, technological and other trends

> Do you think there are currently any barriers and challenges in achieving shared service and/or regional agreements of libraries and other services across Local Government Areas and if so what are they?

> Looking towards the future, do you think there will be any changes in the demand for and community expectations of library services? If so, what do you think these changes may include?

> To what degree do you think regional/cooperative library models may be able to meet these new challenges?

> What do you think are the major technological challenges and opportunities that libraries face and what are their implications specifically for regional/cooperative library services?

> Generally speaking what opportunities/benefits do you think could result from increasing the number and range of regional and cooperative library services in communities across NSW?

Additional comments

> Do you have any other comments regarding your regional/cooperative library service?

UTS:CLG
CENTRE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT