

**The Effectiveness of Mobile Library
Provision in Urban Communities which
have lost Static Libraries:
A Case Study.**

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ABSTRACT:

In order to investigate the effectiveness of mobile libraries in communities which have lost their static service points, this study attempted to assess the value of both mobile and former local library services to users in four Sheffield communities. This 'value' is measured primarily in terms of cost-effectiveness, convenience and social benefits. An account is also given of the relative advantages and disadvantages of alternative library provision, both static and mobile, for residents of the affected communities.

The research used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Interviews were conducted with library and community centre staff in the case study areas, and with staff at Sheffield Mobile and Special Library Services. Questionnaires were conducted as semi-structured interviews with mobile library users in these areas. Sheffield Mobile and Special Library Services' own evaluation of the new route and service priorities was investigated. Data on book issues and costs at the former local libraries and costs of running mobile library services was collected to provide evidence for the cost-effectiveness of the mobile library services for the communities.

Evidence from interviews with library staff suggested that users of former local libraries were attracted to the facilities of alternative static libraries, and followed particular members of staff to their replacement locations. Alternative static libraries were found to be inconvenient to some users, in terms of distance and the need to venture into a different community.

Evidence from with mobile library users indicated that a significant percentage (66%) said that they use the service every week, and 4% said that they use the service less frequently than once a month. Disadvantages of the mobile library service were found to include scheduling changes, limitations of time and limitations of stock. 57% of mobile library users questioned for this study rated the choice of stock on the vehicles as above average.

55% of mobile library survey participants said that they found out about the service from leaflets handed out in the former local libraries at the time of closure, and 69% claimed to use the mobiles as their only gateway to library services. This suggests the need for co-operation between branch and mobile library services.

Findings from the mobile library user survey and interviews with library staff show that a static local library service may have a role which is not related to the traditional library function of materials provision. 87.5% of survey participants said that they use the mobile library service because their local library had closed. Of these, 66% claimed to miss the former service, and 32% said they missed it for reasons other than choice and accessibility of stock. Library staff commented on the social role of a static library building within a community.

Mobile libraries were found to provide a form of library service to the affected communities at a fraction of the cost of the former static service points. Staff at Sheffield Mobile and Special Library Services commented on the value of mobile libraries in terms of accessibility to certain client groups, comprising people who are themselves less mobile. 58% of survey participants said they were aged over sixty-five, 13% had children aged five or under, but 22% did not appear to belong to any of the priority client groups specified by the Mobile Library Services.

Conclusions reached are that those who use the mobile libraries in the case study areas are satisfied with the material-lending aspects of the service. However the mobile libraries seem to attract people who use the service frequently. This may be attributed to a lack of effective publicity, or to the fact that a mobile library cannot provide what occasional users might want from a library service. In the communities chosen for this case study the mobile library service could be described as effective for those who are regular library users, and who belong to its priority client groups and wish to use a library to fulfil a materials-related requirement.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

‘All people living, studying or working in the local community area will have free right of access to public library services. This is a statutory right in England and Wales under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964... In some communities this statutory right is best delivered through the provision of a public mobile library service..’ (Library Association, 1997:1).

The closure of static branch libraries in favour of a public mobile library service has become increasingly more common in recent years. There are many reasons for closing a branch library: it may cost too much for the level of service it provides, it may be under-used, it may be structurally unsafe or there may be other libraries within a short distance. In fact, decisions to close libraries are influenced by the proximity of alternative static libraries and the possibility of providing other library services to the affected catchment areas.

Mobile libraries, by their nature, target their services to meet the needs of elderly and other less mobile people - those who may find it difficult to reach the nearest static libraries. Therefore decisions to provide mobile services in areas which have recently lost static libraries are affected by the presence of these vulnerable groups, which in turn requires a familiarity with the communities involved.

This study will attempt to assess the value of both local and mobile library services to their catchment communities. In order to do this, it is necessary to focus on communities which have been affected by branch library closures in recent years and to investigate what has been done to provide mobile services for the most vulnerable (least mobile) groups within these communities.

This sort of research may be useful to those who plan and influence branch library closures, so that they can be informed of the relative strengths and weaknesses of branch and mobile library services which may vary according to the nature of the communities being served.

In December 1995, six branch libraries were closed in Sheffield. It had already been decided that some library provision could be put back into the communities affected

by these closures by the Sheffield Mobile and Special Library Services, who began to introduce a mobile library service to all these areas within a month of the closures.

The situation in Sheffield provided an opportunity to look closely at the effectiveness of recently-established mobile library services in several different communities, which had all lost their local static libraries at the same time. The study concentrates on four of these communities, each of which has its own local shopping and healthcare facilities within walking distance of the former libraries.

1.1 Aims and objectives:

Does the Sheffield Mobile and Special Library Services provide what its users in the areas affected by branch library closures really need? Does the implementation of mobile services to these areas represent a truly cost-effective use of resources by Sheffield Libraries and Information Services? The attempt to answer these questions will be the primary aim of this study.

This study intends to draw attention to the role of mobile library services in the context of public library provision for Sheffield, and to ascertain whether the recent increase in their role is an effective way of continuing services to those who cannot travel far whilst also preventing further cuts in opening hours and spending on material in the static libraries of the city.

The study does not intend to investigate the effects of branch library closures in Sheffield, but it does aim to examine the effectiveness of what is being done to cope with the closures. The study does not aim to draw conclusions about the Mobile and Special Library Services as a substitute for all client groups who used a former static library. Instead, it targets the concerns of those who now find it difficult to reach the nearest existing branch library. It is therefore necessary to investigate the accessibility of the mobile service since the closures, and to examine the user perceptions of this service.

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

1) The Communities:

- **Could Sheffield Mobile and Special Library Services provide what the people in areas affected by branch library closures really need?**
- To what extent has the mobile library service compensated for the branch library closures for those in its target groups?
- Are the inhabitants of the communities aware of what mobile libraries have to offer?
- What are the general impressions of the mobile library services by those who have lost their local library and now use other static libraries?

2) The Mobile Library Users:

- **Are there people in the communities who use the mobile service because it is their only means of gaining access to the public library system?**
- Do these users belong to specific groups targeted by the Sheffield Mobile and Special Library Services? That is, are they elderly, disabled or under five years old?
- Are such users more inclined to use a mobile library service rather than their nearest local branch library?
- How easy has it been for ex-users of former static branch libraries to change to the mobile library service?
- Do the current users of mobile libraries in the affected areas miss their former branch library?
- What are their new patterns of library use? Are these patterns different to those they had when they used the former static library?

3) The Service Providers:

- **Has the need to provide new mobile services for the six communities affected the efficiency of the Sheffield Libraries and Information Services?**
- Has it affected the ability of the Sheffield Mobile and Special Library Services to operate effectively?
- Do the additional stops provide a truly cost-effective use of resources?

1.2 Library closures:

Between 1988 and 1994 public library service points in the UK fell by 189 (3.6%) and there was a 17% reduction in opening hours for libraries which were open for over forty-five hours per week (England & Sumsion, 1995:6). In many authorities, library closures have been the result of financial constraints. In recent years cuts in local budgets have led to decisions to reduce opening hours or close libraries altogether.

In 1996 Geoffrey Hare, President of the Society of Chief Librarians, conceded that:

‘Public libraries have known for twenty years that, if sustained downsizing of services has to be undertaken, shops have to be shut and rich material and limited resources concentrated. Failure to do this simply leads to waste and to services incapable of supporting the education, learning and informational needs of their communities’ (p.152).

This point of view seems to agree with Frank Cole, director of libraries and arts for the London Borough of Camden in 1982 (Cronin 1982) who, faced with budget cuts, favours ‘surgery, rather than slow bleeding to death’ (p.348). There are grounds for believing that if public library standards are to remain at a certain level, branch library closures are in many cases inevitable. But which branch libraries should be chosen for closure? What are the criteria used for closure? Do decisions to close always take the possibility of alternative library provision and the number of vulnerable client groups in a community into account?

Research into the effects of library closures for public libraries and their actual and potential users is relatively limited at present (Reilly, 1997:2). However, researchers at the University of Sheffield’s Department of Information Studies are being funded by the British Library Research and Innovation Committee (BLRIC) to study the impact of opening hour reduction and closure of public libraries in the UK. The project, *Access to Public Libraries: The Impact of Opening Hour Reduction and Closure* is yet to be published, and it draws on the results of the 1995 ASLIB *Review of the Public Library Service in England and Wales*. It is concerned with the values of the public library service within communities, and it involves finding out how library users feel about the reduction and withdrawal of their local library services. In the draft version the authors wrote:

'...perhaps one reason for the lack of research in this area is that within a short time of the initial closure, alternative services have tended to be provided, either on site or close by' (1998).

Yet research on the use of alternatives could maybe indicate trends that influence the criteria to consider when closing a library service. Unpublished results for this report show that in areas where mobile services had been implemented since the closures, only 18% of respondents had used the service, but that 72% of library users where able to use a static alternative (Summary, Ch.6).

1.3 Public library closures in Sheffield:

Sheffield Libraries and Information Services have not been immune to budget cuts; from 1990 to 1995 the Services suffered massive cuts in opening hours and in spending on materials, but when the 1995/95 budget was set Sheffield Council did not want any further reductions in opening hours or cuts in the material fund. Sheffield library management already felt that a rounding down of all services would merely mean providing uniformly mediocre services (Banks, 1988:20), so library closures became inevitable.

The six branch libraries chosen for closure were: Concord, Grenoside and Lane Top in the north of the city, and Hackenthorpe, Handsworth and Hemsworth in the south. In 1974 there were thirty-eight branch libraries in Sheffield, and at the end of 1995 thirty-three remained. Eighteen of these were classed as 'local libraries'.

The most predominant criteria for the closure of these libraries was that they were small local libraries with issue figures lower than those of other local libraries in Sheffield, and that there were already alternative static services within two miles of their location. Other factors which were taken into account were the overall costs of the library per user or in relation to its general use, and the vulnerability of certain client groups - such as the elderly, the disabled or families with young children. These are the users to whom Sheffield Mobile and Special Library Services are targeted.

What might appear from the management overview of the service to be the most economically justifiable cut could fail to convince the people of a local community. The

eight-week Sheffield Libraries strike of 1995 provided an opportunity to investigate the opinions of users who had just been deprived of their local service. The University of Sheffield Department of Information Studies used this opportunity, and the results of their investigation highlight the importance of the local library to library users in Sheffield: 31% of respondents said that they could find no suitable alternative for the missing service (Proctor et al., 1996:39). This could indicate that there is a niche for the provision of alternative services in areas which have permanently lost their local libraries.

When the six Sheffield branch libraries were closed at the end of 1995, public meetings were organised in the affected communities, so that the decisions could be explained to local people (Telfer, 1997:10). Even though the closures were a reluctant last resort, residents of the affected communities felt strongly against the decisions and their feelings were demonstrated in petitions, meetings and a twenty-two day long sit-in at Hemsworth Library. Staff at Sheffield Mobile and Special Library Services were also involved in campaigns to save these libraries:

‘The massive defence of local library services by local people made us proud and even more determined to play our part in defending those services’ (Telfer, 1997:12).

1.4 Sheffield Mobile Services Step In:

At the end of October 1995, arrangements were made to provide and promote mobile services in the areas which had lost their local libraries.

At this time the Sheffield Mobile and Special Library Services had five vehicles, four drivers, six full-time equivalent assistants and 228 stops in rural, inner city and suburban areas as well as at sheltered housing and special needs centres throughout Sheffield. Now they reached an agreement with Keith Crawshaw, the Head of Sheffield Library and Information Services that they would be given one extra part-time driver and one full-time assistant to cope with the addition of six new areas to their timetable. They could also take stock from the six former branch libraries.

The funding for this would have to come from savings made within the Community Libraries sector of the Libraries Department budget (Telfer, 1997:10), so the

Mobile and Special Library Services would have to cover the affected areas quickly and at the smallest possible cost.

Three days were set aside for the addition of the six new areas to the timetable, so that a full morning or afternoon could be spent in each area. Each of the six communities now has three stops of forty-five minutes duration once a week. The location of these new stops needed to be chosen with care, as they must provide a library service for those who cannot travel far. The opinions and needs of the residents in each area were sought when the new services were being planned. The exact locations of the stops were decided by staff at the Sheffield Mobile and Special Library Services, with the help of community library staff and elected members of community associations.

Rosemary Telfer, Group Manager for Sheffield Mobile and Special Services, stresses that the new services are not intended to replace the static local libraries (1997:12), and it was for this reason that the mobile library vehicles do not stop outside the closed libraries. It was felt that this would be inappropriate.

On November 6 1995, an agreement was reached between the Mobile Services Shop Steward and Rosemary Telfer, and on Tuesday December 5 the first mobile library visit was made to Handsworth.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW: MOBILE LIBRARY SERVICES IN THE UK

2.1 Background

Forms of mobile library have existed in the United Kingdom for over a hundred years. Orton's *Illustrated History of Mobile Libraries* (1980) cites early examples of horse-drawn carts, wagons and vans delivering small collections of books for a nineteenth-century readership.

The Kenyon Report, written in 1924, mentions the 'travelling bookbox' as the most economical form of library distribution for thinly or unevenly populated areas, but its writers were prepared to approve of them only as a temporary measure until a full branch service might be possible (Kelly, 1977:246).

In the USA, mobile libraries were pioneered by rural library authorities. In Britain it was left to the towns to show the way (Eastwood, 1965:6). The first library authority to make the mobile library a regular and recognised feature of its service was in a city. Manchester library authority was struggling to meet the needs of the new housing estates on the fringes of the city, as the money to create new branch libraries was not forthcoming. The answer was the mobile library, which was known at the time as a 'bibliobus'. The idea owed its origin to Stanley Jast, and the first vehicle, a converted single-decker bus, took to the road in 1931 (Kelly, 1977:284).

In 1935 Kent County Library introduced the first county mobile library, which offered a service 'as we know mobile libraries today' (Orton, 1980:37). The basis of the mobile library service in the UK was established before the Second World War. The first rural area to receive a mobile library service was the county of Lancashire, where a vehicle was introduced both as a mobile branch library and as an exhibition van in 1938 (Horrocks & Hargreaves, 1961:360).

Building restrictions in the 1930s enhanced the viability of mobile services, which were then known as travelling libraries and often consisted of a converted van, lorry or bus. World War Two imposed further building restrictions on public libraries. For example, it halted any hopes of the London Borough of St.Pancras for library expansion, so the borough librarian arranged a mobile library service. This wartime measure became successful: two thousand new readers joined the library in the first month. This was not

an isolated case. In 1953 a mobile library service was introduced to Woolwich. This was designed to provide temporary relief until permanent branch libraries could be built, but it became popular and attracted 2200 new readers almost immediately (Orton, 1980:54).

Such astounding successes could mean that mobile services have a place in urban library provision, or it could mean merely that a mobile library was used because there was no other library in the neighbourhood.

By the 1960s, interest and experience in mobile library services had developed. The Library Association formed an interest group for this particular field in December 1965. The Branch and Mobile Libraries Group exists to this day, and publishes its own journal, *Service Point*, every month. There have been many experiments and developments in mobile librarianship since the War. Some library authorities have favoured a traditional type of mobile library vehicle, whilst others operate alternative modes of library transport, such as converted buses and electronically-driven vehicles.

At a present count, there are four hundred and eighty mobile libraries in England and sixty in Wales (Library Association, 1995). In 1993 there were 709 mobile libraries serving rural and isolated communities (Greenhalgh & Worpole, 1995:38).

2.2 Definition

The term 'mobile library' is used to describe variations on a theme. The assortment of vehicles used and areas covered by what is generically known as a mobile library service defies a single definition.

The term 'mobile library' has been used specifically to mean a large vehicle which is:

'... devised, equipped and operated to provide, as far as reasonably practicable, a service comparable to a part-time branch library.' (Library Association, 1960:261)

2.3 The role of mobile libraries

Confusion about the role and value of mobile libraries is evident in the varied writings which comprise at best a meagre literature. A mobile library can be used to introduce a library service to a variety of different client groups in many different areas - such as small communities without adequate library facilities; urban fringe areas; city neighbourhoods without a branch library within a reasonable distance; areas isolated by natural or man-made barriers; and rural areas.

Campell (1982) argues that the main objective of a mobile library is to provide a service to communities which do not have access to a static library (p.12). This may be because the people living in these communities are geographically or economically isolated, or because they are isolated by their own lack of mobility.

2.3.1 Different reasons for implementation

There are many different justifications made for implementing mobile services, rather than branch libraries. To some, a mobile service is an attempt to bring the rudiments of library service to those who would not otherwise have access to one in their own area. To others, it brings a library service to people who are unable to reach their nearest library because their own lack of mobility. To still another group, the use of mobile libraries is the only way in which to continue to serve the public in a time of rising costs, limited opportunities for expansion and changing geographical conditions (Goldstein, 1961b:287).

The definitive Standards published by the American Library Association in 1963 could not assign one single role to the mobile library service. Instead, it produced a list:

‘a bookmobile [mobile library] may be used to introduce library service to unserved areas; to give continuing service to areas that cannot support permanent library buildings; and to determine desirable locations for branch library buildings’ (p.3).

2.3.2 Attempts to standardise a role

In 1971 the Library Advisory Council for England and Wales attempted to formalise a national role for mobile libraries by recommending their use as:

‘the most satisfactory means of bringing library facilities to communities of less than 1500 population’(p.15).

Many library authorities have accepted this boundary figure and have adopted it in their own policy on mobile libraries (Smith-Langridge, 1985:11), but it is restrictive. National mobile library practice defies standardisation, as the disparate reasons for implementation show. This is due to the variation of local features, such as geography and demography, as well as the number of potential users in a given area.

This does not mean that standardisation of the mobile library service role is unnecessary or undesirable. As far back as 1961(b), Goldstein recognised a 'great need for a cogent review of logical and philosophical statements about library extension services' (p.290), from which each library authority may be able to draw its own conclusions.

2.3.3 Widespread use

Whatever the reasons for implementing a mobile service, or the function it fulfils, its importance and widespread use have been noted:

'We recognise the important contacts that people have with library services outside the branch library. Mobile libraries have traditionally provided a service for rurally isolated communities, and there is a widespread use of mobiles in urban and suburban hinterlands' (ASLIB, 1995:196).

Many mobile libraries are regarded as a cultural, recreational or merely social lifeline to people, especially in the more rural areas (Smith-Langridge, 1995:12).

2.4 Mobile library services in urban areas

In urban areas a mobile library service may be the most economically viable way to provide a library service to some communities. A permanent building with its own stock to cater for the needs of a large district may not be economic or desirable if that district covers a range of different communities, containing potential users with various needs. The communities may be changing too rapidly for an authority to know where to put a permanent building, so that it can offer the maximum benefit. In these cases, a mobile service is a quick and flexible solution to library provision:

'Librarians in the search for immediate answers to service needs in such a situation have relied on a well-proven device - the mobile unit' (Sealock, 1961:292).

2.4.1 Where branch libraries have closed

Many of today's mobile library stops were originally introduced to replace former part-time village centres which allowed for little variation in stock, did not provide professional staff, and could not be located to the greatest convenience of the communities they were built to serve. Library authorities have replaced these centres with mobile library stops which could be timed and positioned more conveniently if appropriate research is carried out (Worcester, 1981).

In this era of budget cuts the tendency to replace static service points with mobile library stops has spread to urban areas, in the hope that money might be saved. As well as budget cuts, the overall cost of maintaining library services has risen over the last ten years. The total figure for running the library service in the UK, whether from central or local government sources, stood at £746 million in 1991-92. This compares with £639 million at constant prices ten years before, and represents an increase in real terms of 16.7 percent (Greenhalgh & Worpole, 1995:38).

In 1978, Davies reported on the use of a mobile library service instead of several branch libraries, and reflected on the economic sense of such a move:

'The transportable library concept was really intended to replace part-time branches rather than, as has actually happened, give a service to communities which ought to have had such libraries. It is still regarded as an experiment, but one which we expect to repeat. After all, we serve three communities with one shelf stock of about 4000 volumes, rather than three such shelf stocks' (p.21).

The 'experiment' has spread to other library authorities. Other urban areas where mobile services have been provided after branch libraries have closed include Rotheram and North-East Lincolnshire.

2.5 Advantages of mobile library service provision in urban areas

It has been suggested that a mobile service can be just as effective as a static service:

'As long as the objectives of service are being met - or even approached - the matter of suitable buildings is possibly of secondary importance. Staff, material resources, the desire to expand the value of the library in the community for all ages and all people - these are the essentials which can take hold and grow in a metal container as well as in a brick and mortar shell' (Goldstein, 1961a:383).

Mobile library services may be more suitable than static services in some areas. Since they are mobile, they are flexible and can change location according to need, and they can come into housing estates so that frail and disabled people may use them. From a library authority's point of view they are an economical way of providing limited bookstock and other resources to several communities at once.

These advantages have been encapsulated in a recent advertisement for Coventry City Libraries:

'The mobile library reaches parts that other libraries cannot reach' (McMurray, 1993: back cover).

2.5.1 Flexibility

According to the *ASLIB Review of Public Library Services in England and Wales* (1995):

'Services should reflect the society in which they exist, and should adapt to meet demographic, economic, informational, technological, recreational, educational, cultural and political changes in society' (p.48).

However in the UK this objective may not be as straightforward as it seems:

'The demographic structure of the country continues to change and yet the library network is tied to a set of historically determined buildings and sites and administrative structures' (Greenhalgh & Worpole, 1995:157).

By their nature, mobile libraries are suitable for providing a service as need arises, and can move as communities shift and change. They can respond quickly to demographic change (Library Information Series 20, 1993:37). In this way mobile libraries have an important part to play in helping the public library service to keep abreast of shifts in population.

2.5.2 Personal service

According to Pybus: 'Researchers tend to omit the need to meet other people and the value placed on personal service' (1993:15). Although user 'satisfaction' is almost impossible to measure, as a perception of quality is often based on what is known before, a mobile may be the only means of providing a personalised library service to a community.

By their nature, mobile libraries can create an atmosphere of informality. By stopping outside the houses of their users, mobile library assistants may get to know them in a highly personalised light. It is also difficult to remain formal with users in the small environment of a typical mobile library vehicle. The closeness of the service and the smallness of regular clientele at most stops allow for personal rapport between staff and users. (Smith-Langridge, 1985:11).

This informality may be important to users, enabling them to liaise with staff in an unthreatening atmosphere:

'For those in need, access to information by itself is often not enough to solve a person's problems' (Usherwood, 1992:30).

By being personalised and informal, mobile libraries can offer more than information alone.

2.5.3 Access for frail and less mobile people

There may be particular groups of people who would benefit from the provision of information via mobiles; those who 'might not otherwise be able to take advantage of a facility for which they are paying' (Northwood, 1994:324). Elderly and disabled people who wish to use a library service may be unable to reach the nearest static library (Library Information Series 20, 1993:37). Mobile services, which stop in the heart of residential areas, allow access to library resources for these people.

2.5.4 An economical way to spread library resources

If a branch library is open only for limited hours, its bookstock and other resources are idle for a large part of the week. The bookstock on a mobile library is used intensively as the library is open on most days. As the American Library Association pointed out in 1963:

‘Mobility brings professional librarians and a constantly changing book collection to readers who may be scattered over a wide area’ (p.3)

It seems obvious that a mobile library should reach people more economically than a branch library involving the same capital outlay and equivalent maintenance costs. By way of example, Greenhalgh & Worpole (1995) outline in very general terms some typical library costs. The all-inclusive cost for a small library, intended to serve a community of 5000-8000 people, would be around £300,000. This would include £150,000 - £200,000 for a new building of about 180 square metres and £30,000 - £60,000 for fittings, a stock of about 11,000 volumes and other facilities. Staffing would typically be around 2.5 people and annual overheads in the order of £40,000. Their figures for the cost of a mobile library are considerably smaller. Equipped with approximately 3,000 volumes a mobile library vehicle would cost about £50,000 to buy and fit out, with annual overheads of about £25,000 (p.38-39).

Although mobile services vary greatly, it has been noted that greater national co-operation between mobile library services might improve the economy of their use:

‘We do recommend that there is greater regional and national co-operation in the provision of mobile libraries. We believe that such co-operation could lead to an overall improvement in the building of mobile libraries and greater economies in their cost’ (ASLIB, 1995:221).

2.5.5 Economical for the users

The mobile library service also represents an immediate economy directly to the user (Smith, 1961:298). The mobile library stops are often closer to the users’ homes than the local branch library, so transport costs may be reduced.

2.6 Disadvantages of mobile library provision in urban areas

Many writers are scathing in their evaluation of mobile services in urban areas, and compare them unfavourably with static branch libraries:

‘The inadequacy of the bookmobile [mobile library] for any long term use in a given neighbourhood as a center for reading guidance and reference is obvious’ (Sealock, 1961:294).

Davies regards mobile libraries as an unfortunate necessity rather than an essential service:

‘Their acceptability as a library service point is a matter of economic reality rather than desirability’ (1978:17).

2.6.2 Lack of facilities

One reason for the derisive commentary may be the lack of facilities on a mobile library vehicle for its users - facilities which even the smallest branch library attempts to provide. These facilities include reference materials, tables for readers, and a fairly wide range of representative books on many subjects and in varying degrees of specialisation:

‘There are no study facilities, little in the way of periodical and audio-visual materials provision and limited provision of community information’ (Library Information Series 20, 1993:37).

The collections are also much smaller, due to space limitations. Book selection cannot be as full or comprehensive as even a small static library, as shelf space is restricted.

However this is not always a disadvantage, as long as the stock for the library vehicles is selected with care:

‘A bookmobile collection which is properly policed and frequently changed through access to an adequate reservoir collection is ordinarily at least as ‘live’ as those of most smaller branches’ (Smith, 1961:297).

Unfortunately this still leaves the problem of meeting the needs of each community that a single vehicle might visit in one day.

2.6.2 Limited time

Another disadvantage of mobile services, when compared to static libraries, is that they are not available for any length of time - and schedules are invariably restrictive. Mobile libraries by their nature move from one place to another and must of necessity provide much less time for public service at any given area than a fixed agency (Smith, 1961:296). Goldstein was bolder in his criticism:

‘One bookmobile does not equal several branches for the very simple reason that one bookmobile cannot be in more than one place at the same time’ (1961a:376). There is no way that one vehicle can carry or maintain the same service load as two or more fixed locations. This service load includes browsing facilities, community activities and the ability to use the library as a meeting place for those who cannot be restricted to less than one hour a week. The Library and Information Series Report 20 draws attention to this:

‘... the library is not a social asset in the way a static library building may be and cannot be used for community activities (1993:37). Static libraries provide one service that mobile libraries can never hope to achieve: they provided a fixed focal point for a community (Telfer, 1997:16).

2.6.3 Unreliability

As well as being in the neighbourhood for a limited time, a mobile library vehicle may not be as dependable as a static building. It can be subject to unforeseen breakdowns and timetable changes:

‘Users can be inconvenience by changes to routes as a result of bank holidays, rescheduling, breakdowns and maintenance’ (Library Information Series 20, 1993:37).

It is also possible that a mobile library vehicle may experience difficulty parking in the same spot every time it visits a particular service point.

2.7 A unique purpose for mobile libraries

In 1961(b), Goldstein asked this question:

‘...is it possible that full library service through fixed centres will ever rise beyond a minimum attainment to the point where bookmobiles [mobile libraries] will not only be discarded, but never again necessary? (p.375).

The question implies that mobile library service does not have a unique purpose - that it is merely an adjunct to static library service.

2.7.1 As an adjunct to static libraries

According to one service review:

‘Mobile libraries are a valued service to a rural community and are widely regarded as having a function in the maintenance of small communities’ (Gloucestershire Education Committee, 1991:1).

But what about mobile library services in urban communities? Do they have a specific function?

It will never be possible to offer all branch library services on a mobile library. In 1961, Smith argued in favour of a mobile library service as an adjunct to static services:

‘The bookmobile should be used as an adjunct to, rather than a substitute for, branch or central libraries. As such it has its place.’ (p.297).

The same principle appears in a report from the Northamptonshire County Council Education and Libraries Committee (1991):

‘...that mobile libraries should exist to supplement the service provided from static libraries’.

The idea reappears in 1993:

‘It will never be possible to offer all services on a mobile library. The key issue may be to ensure that mobile library services are integrated into the wider aspects of service provision’ (Library Information Series 20, 1993:38).

2.7.2 Special services

So that they do not become marginalized, mobile library services should have their own unique purpose:

‘Having no unique purpose... means that mobiles could be seen as a fill-in and a substitute. Mobiles are not a fill-in for gaps in the community library services and cannot afford to be seen as an add-on’ (Telfer, 1997:16).

Specialisation is the key to a service which must prove its worth to those who control the budget. For this to be possible, the mobile library service needs a limited set of specific goals.

2.8 Specific client groups

Although the Library Association stipulates that: 'Everyone has the right to full access to a mobile library' (1997), it also suggests that the service targets specific groups:

'Where appropriate to the needs of any particular identified community or group the mobile library should directly provide a range of specifically targeted information and materials'.

A function that is unique to a mobile library is its ability to reach those who are physically restricted to a small area and are therefore unable to get to a library by themselves.

Mobiles are used to serve a wide variety of people for whom public transport is not available, who are often too frail to walk a distance, who may be housebound, who are perhaps in long term residential care or who have a physical or mental handicap which prevents them using the library alone (Gloucestershire Education Committee, 1991:2). Research has shown that those who benefit most from the mobile library service are housewives, the elderly and children (Moseley & Packman, 1983).

2.8.2 Attending to special needs

Mobile library staff are therefore often an unrecognised arm of welfare services. Research undertaken for the ASLIB Report (1995) has revealed an abundance of ways in which the elderly and the mobility-impaired are helped in vital tasks by mobile library staff (p.196). This demonstrates a possible fine line that can be drawn between library outreach and social welfare work.

According to the Thameside Metropolitan Borough, mobile services have a core service role and should avoid budget cuts:

'Special client service must be regarded as core service, not optional extras. Defined core services should be free of charge to the user at the point of use... and should include mobile and housebound services..' (ASLIB, 1995:49).

In attending to special needs, mobile libraries have a place in the scheme of general library provision:

‘Everyone has special needs. There is no such thing as general needs. It is important to consult and involve the special client group on a continuing basis. Libraries should not be building-based alone. There will be a need for mobiles and home deliveries (ASLIB, 1995:49).

2.9 Characteristics of mobile library users

A key issue for a mobile library service is its flexibility to meet customer needs. Some argue that circumstances, such as availability and changes in society, have created these user groups:

2.9.1 Availability

‘Most mobile services are generally available during the day (office hours)... this limits the potential user group to the elderly, the disabled, those without transport and women at home with young children’ (Library Information Series 20, 1993:38).

Although some local authorities recognise the potential benefits of evening and week-end mobile services, few are prepared to commit resources to these projects until there is sufficient evidence that they will generate an effective return on investment.

The Comedia Report (1993) comments on the possible exclusion of employed people from library services because library opening hours tend to match the 9-5 working day (p.79). In 1996 Proctor et al. found that a Cheshire survey of lapsed users, quoted in England & Sumsion (1995), discovered that 35% of employed people gave ‘unsuitable opening hours’ as one of the reasons for lapsed membership, compared to 25% of all users. The survey sample for the report suggests that opening hours are a key issue in determining the characteristics of library users (p.7).

2.9.2 Changes in society

Increase in personal mobility, and changing patterns of work and family life have affected the use of mobile libraries (Northamptonshire County Council, 1991), as well as the shifting balance of the population towards the elderly. In 2021 the elderly population in Britain will have grown from 10.5 million to 13 million (Comedia, 1993:79).

The elderly are a key group of mobile library users. A recent survey carried out in Birmingham suggests that a very high percentage of the elderly population of the city use library services (Comedia, 1993:79). Many of these people need to use outreach library services, as a user comment shows:

‘Each year the number of pensioners grows and many without a car and with disability problems find it difficult, particularly in the smaller places, to get to their nearest library.’ (ASLIB, 1995:121).

In the same report Gloucestershire County Library, Arts and Museums Service are quoted as saying:

Demographic Britain has an ageing population. Many elderly people use the full range of library services for their entire lives. Others suffer problems of infirmity, disability and ill health. In response to the growing numbers in the second category there is a need for mobile and housebound services and services for visually and hearing impaired people in appropriate formats. This may move the library service away from traditional modes of service into more imaginative areas of service delivery’ (ASLIB, 1995:48).

There is a demand and a future for mobile library services, whether this is created by lack of money to implement local static library services or changes in the population, or even their own availability.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study is inductive, as it involves reasoning from a specific case to a general theoretical conclusion. It does not set out to prove a theory. Instead it aims to describe a phenomenon. It is hoped that the survey may: ‘stimulate thinking that will result in the formulation of a new theory’ (Hornig Priest, 1996:9).

The survey method has been described as ‘probably the only satisfactory means of exploring the social aspects of a library’ by Line and Stone (1982). The reason they give for this statement is this:

‘... it is doubtful whether the infinite number of variables involved in the interaction of libraries and human beings can ever be ascertained in other ways.’ (p.146).

Robson (1993) defines the case study as a form of enquiry which is achieved from the ‘development of detailed intensive knowledge about a single “case”, or of a small number of related “cases”’ (p.40). The function of a case study, according to Yin (1994) is that it:

‘... investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’ (p.13).

A descriptive case study aims to ask how and why, without controlling behavioural events. This aim of this study is to describe events and look across the case for similarities, and it is for this reason that a case study was considered appropriate.

3.1 The case study

The main objective of this case study is to target those who have been affected by branch library closures in Sheffield, and to assess the opinions of those who use mobile library services because their local libraries have closed.

On the basis of these findings, the study aims to discover whether the mobile library services are fulfilling their original intended function of prioritising on those who cannot travel far from the affected communities, and whether the original intended function of the Sheffield Mobile and Special Services has been affected by the addition of these extra stops.

The communities chosen for the case study are: Hackenthorpe, Handsworth and Hemsworth, which used to have local libraries in the Southern Group of Sheffield Libraries and Information Services, and Grenoside - which used to have a local library in the Northern Group. These communities are all relatively self-contained, each having its own shopping and healthcare facilities. In addition, figures identified in user population profiles prepared by Sheffield Libraries from the OPCS 1991 census data show that the populations of these catchment areas show various proportions of unemployment, inhabitants aged over sixty/sixty-five, and households without a car.

The decision to concentrate the study on these four areas was based on the fact that they had all lost their local libraries at the same time. These former small community libraries had shared a similar role within the tiering strategy for Sheffield Libraries and Information Services. However the catchment areas for these libraries covered a range of

different and distinctive communities, so it was felt that the case study would provide a rich cross-section of areas in Sheffield affected by a similar loss.

It is therefore hoped that these target populations permit interesting conclusions to be drawn, and that a sample is chosen in such a way that these conclusions are valid (Howard & Sharp, 1983:126).

3.2 Research methods:

The decision to use mostly qualitative research methods for this study was due to its anthropological nature. Qualitative research has been defined as that which:

‘... relies on the interpretation and analysis of what people do and say without making heavy use of measurement or numerical analysis’ (Hornig Priest, 1996:5).

Many researchers prefer to use qualitative methods because the processes they are interested in cannot be easily captured in quantitative models, which have clearly defined variables.

Qualitative research was considered appropriate for this study, in which it was necessary to find out the perceptions of individuals directly affected by branch library closures and individuals who use the mobile library services. The analysis of statistics could not reveal such perceptions. Determining personal points of view, and possibly needs, may lead to improvements being made in these library services.

Although the attitudes of users and staff towards both static and mobile services could be measured only indirectly, through the use of questionnaires and interviews, all opinions expressed were treated as valid.

3.2.1 Qualitative and quantitative research methods

This study combined both qualitative and quantitative methods, as quantitative data such as survey findings can be used to supplement ‘soft’ qualitative data. It was decided that a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was an appropriate strategy for gaining an informed observation of the role of mobile library services in the overall library provision for Sheffield.

Qualitative data provides an understanding of individual perspectives on what the Sheffield Mobile and Special Library Services have accomplished, whilst quantitative data offers a background for the study, whilst also helping to determine how far the qualitative data reflects a more general pattern (Stone & Harris, 1984a:25). For this reason the study is concerned with both individual feelings and with statistical data collected from a representative population.

3.2.2 A mixture of methods

The data for this study was collected using several different methodological approaches, as 'often the best approach to understanding a problem is to use more than one method' (Stone & Harris, 1984b:20). Triangulation was the preferred option for data collection, because multiple approaches which lead to similar results allow the researcher to have more faith in these results (Hornig Priest, 1996:12).

Data was gathered from questionnaires, interviews and statistical information from individual branch libraries and staff and users of Sheffield Mobile and Special Library Services. This was supported with contextual information from written sources.

3.3 The literature search

The initial search for literature concentrated on the history and issues around mobile library provision in the UK, focusing on provision in urban areas. Unfortunately a search of the Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA) database presented few relevant articles on the subject. These articles were also found to be mainly prescriptive and specialised. There did not seem to be much in common between many of these 'prescriptions': mobile library services differ enormously within the UK as they depend on the nature of local demands and resources.

The literature search was therefore divided into four main areas:

- Mobile library provision at a local and national level.
- Community library provision at a local and national level.
- Local and national information about public library closures.

- Local information about the communities chosen for this case study.

Searches of the LISA database were supplemented with manual searches of the *Public Library Journal*, the *Library Association Record* and its related publications. Overall, the search for literature for this study depended on a great deal of serendipity. A manual search at the Library Association Headquarters in London and at the periodicals section of the University of Sheffield Main Library yielded information about current public and mobile library issues, as did bibliographies of dissertations written by previous MA Librarianship students at the University of Sheffield.

Local information was obtained at the Local Studies section of the Central Library at Sheffield, and documents relating to local mobile library provision could be acquired directly from the Sheffield Mobile and Special Library Services headquarters in Handsworth Road. These documents include their own service charter and statement of intent, which govern the way in which their services are delivered.

3.4 Preliminary interviews

Preliminary research provided the necessary contacts and background information on the six branch libraries that had closed, so that four suitable communities could be chosen for the case study.

One significant advantage of preliminary interviewing is that:

‘Lines of questioning emerge which might not have been anticipated but which might be highly relevant to the study (Stone, 1984:19).

Preliminary interviews can provide clues as to which areas should be explored and which left out. This is also the stage at which people directly concerned with the topic are encouraged to talk about what is significant to them, so that important areas for the study are found.

An interview with Rosemary Telfer, Group Manager for Sheffield Mobile and Special Library Services, provided relevant lines of enquiry and a feel for the current state of mobile library provision in Sheffield. This included information about the differences between static and mobile library provision and details about the mobile services which have been provided in the areas since the closures.

Peter Barr, Manager of the South Group of libraries in Sheffield, offered information regarding the criteria used for closing the six branch libraries at the end of 1995, incorporating details of alternative static services for the affected areas in the southern part of Sheffield.

3.5 Questionnaires:

The principal data-gathering instrument for the study is a questionnaire, which was designed to provide both qualitative and quantitative data from a mixture of open and closed questions (see Appendix 1). Open-ended questions gave respondents the opportunity to provide rich data in the form of freely-worded opinions, and judiciously chosen quotation could enliven the results of the survey and make it more readable. Structured questions were included in the questionnaire, as it was felt they could ease comparison between data and save analysis time.

3.5.1 The target group

The questionnaire design was targeted to users of the eleven mobile library stops in the areas chosen for the case study. As many users as possible were approached at each stop, and the response rate was high - all those who were approached agreed to co-operate.

The opinions and attitude of these mobile library users were investigated, with particular attention given to those who had used the former branch libraries. The questionnaires were not intended to measure the quality of the mobile library service, as the measurement of respondents' expectations was beyond the scope of this study. The results nevertheless revealed something about the respondents' attitudes towards the service.

That people's standards of adequacy or quality of a library differ does not matter, so long as it is clearly realised that it is their attitudes that are being measured, not the adequacy or quality of the service' (Line & Stone, 1982:64).

Respondents were also asked if they used any other static library in the area. This could provide evidence for the role of mobile library services as a principal or secondary source of information for their users in the four communities under investigation.

A period of two and a half years had elapsed between the closure of the local static libraries and this study. This provides a situation for investigating users who had been given time to 'settle' into a new pattern of library use.

3.5.2 Administering the questionnaires

The questionnaires were conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews, as this was felt to be an efficient way of gaining information from people who use a service which is only available to them for forty-five minutes once a week. All interviews took place inside the mobile library vehicle, because this meant that respondents could be approached at a time which their books were being stamped and the process could take up less time than would otherwise have been the case.

It had been anticipated that respondents would only say what they thought mobile library staff would want to hear. Library research is particularly vulnerable to this effect (Bookstein, 1985:27). The questionnaires were therefore administered by someone who was not a recognised member of the mobile library service team. It was also necessary to explain the purpose of the questionnaire to potential respondents, and to describe what would be done with the information provided (Bell, 1997:85).

3.5.3 The pilot study

A pilot study was essential in this case, as it would indicate how the questions might be interpreted and therefore reveal any ambiguities which could be resolved in time for the survey itself:

'This will help to show up any weaknesses in the questions, such as ambiguities, lack of clarity about the meaning of terms' (Stone & Harris, 1984:19).

3.6 Interviews:

Interviewing is a flexible way of collecting qualitative data, and it is therefore an appropriate method to use for this study:

'Interviews provide the best window on how people think and feel, allowing you to probe into areas that aren't immediately understood' (Hornig Priest, 1996:83).

3.6.1 Type of interview

All interviews conducted for this study were semi-structured. Preliminary details were obtained using closed questions, and open questions were used to collect opinions, explanations and descriptions of behaviour and events. Richness of the information was considered to be more important than the ability to compare responses, so the interview schedules were not rigidly followed. Respondents often provided information, whether it was requested or not.

3.6.2 Recording interviews

All interviews were recorded by making notes, rather than by using a tape recorder. This was mainly due to a consideration for the comfort and ease with which interviewees could speak about a sensitive issue in which they were involved. In addition, many interviews took place in public areas, where tape recording would have been impractical.

3.6.3 The interviewees

For this study interviews provided background information regarding the communities that had lost their local branch libraries, the information needs of those who live in these communities, and whether these needs are being met.

Information about the general perception of the scope and prominence of mobile library services in each of the four areas was obtained from representatives at community centres in these areas. Grenoside Community Association, the Gleadless Valley Community Forum and Hackenthorpe Tenants and Residents Association were contacted, and representatives agreed to be interviewed.

The problem of identifying ex-users of the former libraries who have failed to use the mobile library services in the areas under investigation has been recognised. It was felt that staff who used to work in the former branch libraries could provide information concerning the needs of their former users and their library use habits since the closures.

Many of these employees now work in the nearest alternative static libraries and are therefore still in contact with those former users who have elected to continue visiting a static service. They could provide some information about those who live in the affected communities but do not use the mobile library services. Furthermore, since they know these communities, they were in a position to ascertain the extent to which the mobile library services seem to exert their presence in the local area.

Representatives were interviewed from the former libraries of each of the communities under investigation. Unfortunately there were no statistical figures available to indicate how many users of the former services had transferred their membership to alternative static services. It was hoped that the staff who were familiar with local faces would be able to estimate roughly how many people were now using alternative static services.

Questions concerning the impact of branch library closures on the Sheffield Mobile and Special Library Services, and whether the services had acted on comments made by people in the affected communities, could be addressed to staff within the sector. Aside from a preliminary interview with the manager of the Mobile and Special Library Services, there were many opportunities to collect anecdotal information from mobile library staff whilst interviewing the users of the service.

3.7 Analysis of quantitative data

‘The statement ‘I am satisfied by the library’ merely records the fact of the respondent’s satisfaction; it does not of itself indicate that the library is an adequate library or that he is difficult to satisfy. There are many other things one would need to know before the statement becomes meaningful’ (Line & Stone, 1982:13).

3.7.1 Questionnaires

Quantitative data provides a background for personal viewpoints and perceptions, and this was demonstrated in this study. The popularity and use of the mobile library service points being investigated were assessed by questioning the mobile library service staff, and this information was verified by noting the number of people who visited each stop as the questionnaires were administered.

It was possible to collect quantitative figures about the nature of the client group of the new mobile library services from the questionnaire data, as well as their reasons for using the service. Respondents were also given the opportunity to rate various aspects of the service, using a five-point scale.

3.7.2 Census data

Another source of quantitative data was provided by the user population profiles prepared by Sheffield libraries from the OPCS 1991 census. This supplied background information about the nature of the communities chosen for the case study, and their potential suitability for mobile library services geared specifically towards the less mobile client groups.

3.7.3 Issue figures

Issue figures from both the former branch libraries and their nearest static alternatives could be used to verify qualitative information provided by their representative staff, and provide additional clues towards the movement of users to other libraries. However the reliability of these figures are questionable, as they may have been affected by the eight-week Sheffield libraries strike which took place in 1995. Both the former libraries and the static alternatives have been subject to changes in their opening hours for several years, which could also influence the reliability of the issue figures as a representation of alternative library use.

3.8 Problems and limitations:

‘Because interviews and questionnaires assume such a prominent place in social research ... their deficiencies should not be forgotten’ (Line & Stone, 1982:76).

Numerous factors can distort survey results. Perhaps the most important of these is bias in the response. Attitudes can be measured only indirectly - had to make the

assumption that all opinions expressed were true. Possibly it was only the more vociferous and regular mobile library users and library staff who provided the most useful data - they might not be representative of all mobile library users and library staff in the area. In addition, there is a tendency for survey respondents to give answers they feel the respondent would most like to hear. This phenomenon has been noted to be rife in the context of library surveys: Bookstein (1985) reflects on 'the strong tendency to give answers that are socially desirable' in this case (p.27).

Another limitation in this study was the size of the sample of mobile library users. Unfortunately the pressure of time kept this to a minimum. A more realistic picture of mobile library use might have been obtained if users were questioned throughout the year, rather than on one occasion.

4.0 LIBRARY AND COMMUNITY PROFILES

According to the City Council's Central Policy Unit, the total population of Sheffield in June 1995 was 531,000. It now stands at 532,300. A distinguishing feature of this city is its hilliness. The uneven terrain of the area has not allowed huge areas of urban sprawl to develop, as it has 'provided a challenge to housebuilders in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' (Watts et al., 1989:19).

Sheffield is one of Britain's major cities, but it is one made up of many distinct communities. The geography of the area may also contribute to the presence of village-like communities within the boundaries of the city. Many of these communities were self-sufficient and cut off from one another by steep hills or valleys until comparatively recent times:

The outer parts of Sheffield contain several old village nuclei, either of originally agricultural settlements or, in the east, of industrial settlements (often mining villages) created in the nineteenth century but not engulfed by the general expansion of the city until more recent years' (Watts et al., 1989: 21).

Library provision in Sheffield appears to have followed the development of these communities. Each village community may have once had its own local library, but this concept is becoming endangered as the communities continue to be 'engulfed by the general expansion', transport is developed and the libraries budget tightens.

4.1 Sheffield Library and Information Services

In December 1992, Sheffield City Council endorsed a report from the Library and Information Services entitled 'Serving Communities: A service plan for the 1990s'. In this report it was recognised that although the City Council had a statutory responsibility to deliver a 'comprehensive and efficient service' by the 1964 Act, the level of budget cuts over recent years had compromised their ability to meet this duty. This was an ominous sign for the Council's financial crisis in 1995, which resulted in the closure of six Sheffield libraries that were classed as 'local'. There was an agreement between library service managers and the City Council that the materials fund should not be cut further, and for that to be the case closures were inevitable.

In 1995, Sheffield had thirty-three branch libraries. In order to aid decisions on funding and opening hours, these libraries were classified into distinct groups. They comprised:

- Eight core libraries (eight district)
- Seven protected services (two 'town', five 'inner city')
- Eighteen local libraries.

The principal consideration was that the closures should affect the least possible number of people. Statistics prepared by a research assistant employed by the Library and Information Services at the time of the closures show how the number of registered users, the number of transactions and the opening hours had fallen in each library in Sheffield between 1990 and 1995.

Table 1: Comparison between Figures for 1990 and 1995 for Selected Sheffield Library Services

	All services	Gren	Hack	Hands	Hems
Registered users 1990	-	1377	3317	2953	2031
1995	-	891	1384	1609	1577
% change	-20.3%	-35.5%	-58.3%	-45.5%	-22.4%
Total book issues 1990	-	40728	67578	91434	72853
1995	-	21653	34200	45474	44686
% change	-34.1%	-46.8%	-49.4%	-50.3%	-38.7%
Opening hours 1990	-	18.00	29.00	39.00	28.00
1995	-	16.00	17.00	19.50	16.00
% change	-25.1%	-11.1%	-41.4%	-50.0%	-42.9%

The above table indicates how the percentage drop in issue figures and registered users for those former libraries chosen for this case study compare to the average percentage drop for all library services in Sheffield for the same period. These four libraries appear to suffer a particularly substantial decrease in issues and registered users, although it is important to note that small drops in transactions are more noticeable in smaller libraries.

Since the choice of libraries for closure was aimed to affect the least possible number of people, the proportions of users at each of the local libraries were taken into account. Figures for 1994/85, prepared by the city council (7/8/95), are replicated below.

Table 2: Figures for 1994/95 for Selected Sheffield Library Services

	ALL	Gren	Hack	Hands	Hems
Registered users:	5461	891	1384	1609	1577
% of total local library users:	3.9%	0.6%	1.0%	1.2%	1.1%
Total book issues:	155132	21653	37522	48182	47775
% of total local library book issues:	4.5%	0.6%	1.1%	1.4%	1.4%
Opening hours:	68.50	16	17.00	19.50	16.00
% of total local library opening hours (918hrs)	7.45%	1.74%	1.85%	2.12%	1.74%

This table shows that the four local libraries chosen for this case study did not serve a high proportion of all community library users in Sheffield, and did not have a high proportion of issues. This would indicate that if these were the libraries chosen for closure, the least possible number of people could be affected.

It was recognised that six would be the minimum number of library closures that would allow enough reinvestment to enable Sheffield Library and Information Services to respond to the needs of those affected.

4.2 Sheffield Mobile and Special Library Services

Sheffield Mobile and Special Library Services have been operating from their purpose-built headquarters in Handsworth Road since the 1960s. In 1995, five vehicles, four drivers and six full-time equivalent assistants provided library facilities over an area of 36,775 hectares. At that time the mobile library service visited a total of 228 stops all over Sheffield.

The five vehicles used by the Mobile Services have a capacity of between 2500 and 3800 volumes on shelves fitted down each side of their interiors, and all have a separate children's section and a side entrance. Some have toilets and disabled access. Each vehicle has a continuous flat floor, and staff counters are placed at each end: the rear counter is used for returning items, and the counter at the front of the vehicle is used for issuing items.

The stock for the vehicles is predominantly fiction, which includes books, videos and spoken-word cassettes. Each vehicle carries stock for adults and children.

The selection of stock for the vehicles is centralised and requests for items cannot be handled formally, although the situation has improved since two Dynix terminals were installed at the Service headquarters in December 1996. These terminals allow Mobile Service employees to see what materials are available at other Sheffield public libraries connected to the automated system.

Hours of service are from 9:30am to approximately 4:30pm, and one assistant and one driver are on duty at a time in each vehicle. The vehicles return to base at lunch time. All members of staff spend part of the week doing clerical work at base.

4.2.1 Route five

Route five was implemented in late 1995, and it intended to cover the six areas of Sheffield which had just lost their local libraries. This increased the number of regular routes used by Sheffield Mobile Services from four to five. The new route allows a mobile library vehicle to spend a morning or an afternoon per week in each affected area, and included sixteen new service points. This brings the total number of stops served by the Sheffield mobile library service to 244. The addition of one part-time driver and one full-time assistant for these extra stops means that the mobile library service now has the equivalent of four and a half drivers and seven full-time assistants.

Mobile library vehicles are not scheduled to stop outside the former libraries, as this was considered inappropriate. Details of the current timetable for this route can be seen at Appendix 2.

4.2.2 Service priorities

The Mobile and Special Services in Sheffield has its own approved objectives, priorities and service standards.

The statement of intent for Sheffield Mobile and Special Library Services governs the way in which they deliver their services (see Appendix 3). The priority client groups for the Sheffield Mobile Services are as follows:

- Elderly people with disabilities.
- People who live in areas where there is no access to a local community library service.
- People who, by reason of inadequate public transport or domestic/personal circumstances, are unable to make use of a community library service. (For example: families with children under the age of five, travelling people.)
- People with a physical or mental illness or learning difficulty.

4.4 CASE STUDY COMMUNITY PROFILES

The four areas chosen for this case study have all lost a local library at the end of 1995, and all are self-contained communities of different sizes with varying degrees of unemployment. Figures produced by the SASPAC software for Sheffield Libraries and Information Services from the 1991 Census show that, in terms of library provision, the catchment areas for the four former libraries of Grenoside, Hackenthorpe, Handsworth and Hemsworth would have very different needs.

Table 3: Inhabitants who are aged 0-4 and over 65

	Gren.	Hack.	Hands.	Hems.
Total population	4006	11947	8958	5585
% population aged 0-4	4.5%	6.3%	4.8%	5.9%
% population aged 65+	18.1%	21.4%	23.4%	26.9%

Table 4: Inhabitants who are aged over 16 and inactive/unwaged

	Gren	Hack	Hands	Hems
Total population	4006	11947	8958	5585
Number of inhabitants aged 16+	3327	9760	7485	4572
Number of inhabitants aged 16+ and inactive/unwaged	1254	4546	3293	2537
% of inhabitants aged 16+ and inactive/unwaged, of the total number of inhabitants aged 16+	37.7%	46.6%	44.0%	55.5%

Table 5: Households without a car

	Gren	Hack	Hands	Hems
Total number of households	1565	4981	3716	2504
Households without a car	315	1886	1343	1426
% households without a car	20.1%	37.9%	36.1%	56.9%

4.4.2 Grenoside

Area profile

The rural community of Grenoside, situated in the north west of Sheffield, appears to have the lowest unemployment rate of all the areas considered in this study. With a population of 4006, it is also the smallest community under study, as well as being the community with the smallest percentage of inhabitants over the age of sixty-five, the smallest percentage of over-sixteens who are inactive or unwaged and the smallest percentage of households without a car. Grenoside has limited local shopping facilities, a thriving community centre and a local medical practice. Housing around the region is mostly private, and similar developments have been made in recent years.

The former library

The library at Grenoside was housed in a small portacabin building at the top of a hill within the grounds of the local infants school. The building suffered from structural problems and vandalism, and was eventually demolished when the library was closed in 1995. At this time the library service looked at alternative buildings to house the library collection and there were discussions among residents about raising money for a new community library building, but plans did not materialise.

The former library had been taken over by Sheffield Library and Information Services from West Riding Authority in 1974, and figures from Sheffield libraries show that between 1974 and 1993 opening hours were cut by 32%, and between 1976 and 1993 the library staffing was reduced by 19%.

Alternative static services

At the time of closure, Chapeltown library was promoted as a suitable alternative as it is situated 2.7 miles from the former library, it has longer opening hours, a more extensive stock, and there are facilities for shopping and banking nearby. In addition, the bus service from Grenoside to Chapeltown is excellent, with frequent and regular stops made to both areas.

Although Hillsborough library is approximately 4 miles from Grenoside, those who live in the Fox Hill area may find the bus service to Hillsborough more convenient than the service to Chapeltown. Hillsborough library is also located near facilities for shopping and banking, and its longer opening hours may be convenient for those who are prepared to travel.

Staff who worked at Grenoside library have now moved to similar kinds of community libraries at Ecclesfield and Parson Cross, which are situated approximately 1.9 miles and 2.1 miles from Grenoside. Both these libraries can be reached by bus from Grenoside, although the service is infrequent and irregular.

Another alternative static service for ex-Grenoside users is at Southey, which is situated 2.7 miles from the former library. There is no bus route between Grenoside and Southey.

Because the former library was situated in the grounds of a school, it provided a convenient service for children. However, since its closure the school library collections have become more extensive.

4.4.2 Hackenthorpe

Area profile

Hackenthorpe is the largest community in this study, with a population of 11947 in 1991. This community, situated to the south-east of the city centre, was developed from a large corporation housing estate built in the 1950s. It is not an affluent area, with a high proportion of small older council housing and the percentage of those aged over sixteen who are inactive or unwaged is 46.6%. Of all the communities studied, this community has the highest percentage of inhabitants aged 0-4 years.

The former library

The library at Hackenthorpe was built in October 1972, and it was incorporated into the local shopping area. Due to its central location, it became a focal point for the surrounding area, and former staff refer to a strong sense of community among its users. Immediately after the closure of the library in 1995, the building was taken over by Hackenthorpe Residents' Association Management Committee and it became known as the Central Point for community.

Alternative static services

Possible alternative static services for former Hackenthorpe library users include Waterthorpe library and Frecheville library. Waterthorpe is established as a large district library, whereas Frecheville is classed as a local library similar in size and status to Hackenthorpe library.

Crystal Peaks Shopping complex was built, along with several private housing developments around Hackenthorpe, in 1989. The shopping complex incorporated

Waterthorpe library, which may have attracted many Hackenthorpe library users when it opened. The library is situated next to the Council Offices for rent payment, housing and community services, and it is adjacent to the most extensive shopping facilities in the area. Waterthorpe library is situated approximately 1.5 miles from Hackenthorpe, and the bus service between the shopping centre and Hackenthorpe is extremely regular. The 41 Mainline bus services runs to both places at every ten minutes, and runs to the town centre as well. The library is open one evening a week, until 7 pm.

There is a smaller community library at Frecheville. This library is approximately 2 miles from Hackenthorpe and the bus service to it is frequent and regular. The library closed every day at 5 pm, except on Fridays when it closes at 6:30 pm.

4.4.3 Handsworth

Area profile

The community of Handsworth, situated further to the south-east of the city centre, appears to be relatively prosperous and friendly. It has a rich agricultural and mining history, and it offers a wider range of local facilities than the other communities in this study. The area is bisected by the A57 road, along which a chemist, several newsagents, a dental surgery, a medical practice and a post office can be found. Of all the communities studied, this community has the second highest percentage of inhabitants over the age of sixty-five.

The former library

The former library at Handsworth was not situated on the main A47 road, but within a short walking distance from one of its side streets. The library has a chequered history. Built in 1968, the original library had to be demolished in 1983 when asbestos was found in the building. In the same year the service was re-housed in a nearby school, and managed to stay there when the school closed in 1994 and Catering for Sheffield took over the rest of the building. However the library continued to operate under the shadow of uncertainty and with frequent reductions in opening hours.

Alternative static services

The alternative static library services which were publicised to borrowers when Handsworth library closed were: Woodhouse library, Darnall library and Waterthorpe library. Waterthorpe library is accessible from Handsworth, being approximately 3 miles away, and the bus service between Handsworth and Crystal Peaks is regular and frequent (264, M64).

Woodhouse library, situated approximately 1.5 miles from the former Handsworth library, serves another small and self-contained 'village' community. The service is open four days a week, and it remains open until 6pm on Fridays. The number 52 Mainline bus is extremely regular and it runs to both Handsworth and Woodhouse, but it does not stop anywhere near Woodhouse library.

Darnall library was opened in November 1980, and it was the first in Sheffield to employ a community librarian. It is situated in a large shopping area approximately 1.5 miles from Handsworth, and the number 52 Mainline bus service stops at the library entrance. These factors make this an ideal alternative for former Handsworth users, as they are likely to be acquainted with the area already. Darnall is a multi-cultural area, and the stock at the local library reflects this.

4.4.4 Hemsworth

Area profile

Hemsworth forms part of the Gleadless Valley Estate, which was first developed in the 1950s in the south of the city. Since the library closure many shops have closed down in the area, and it appears to be the least prosperous of the four communities studied. The area has the highest percentage of inhabitants who are aged over sixteen and inactive/unwaged, and the highest percentage of households without a car. It also has the highest percentage of inhabitants aged over sixty-five.

The former library

Hemsworth library was purpose-built in 1963. It was situated in the centre of the community, next to the bus terminus. At the beginning of its existence it was open for

forty hours per week, but by 1995 it was open for only sixteen and a half hours per week. Former staff claim that the library was busy for its size, and its popularity was reinforced when Hemsworth residents and library staff protested against its closure by occupying the building for over three weeks at the end of 1995.

The building is currently occupied by the Gleadless Valley Community Forum, which was established very recently. When it first closed, some wished to maintain the building as a private library but plans did not materialise.

Alternative static services

The nearest static alternative service for former Hemsworth library users is Newfield Green library, which is only one mile away. However a steep valley separates the two communities, so the journey by foot from one to another is arduous. The number 48 Mainline bus service operates between the two locations, and it is reasonably regular although for Hemsworth residents Newfield Green is not necessarily situated on the most convenient route towards the city centre. The library is open on four days per week, and it remains open until 6pm on Mondays.

5.0 ALTERNATIVE LIBRARY SERVICES

Although steps were taken to minimise the effects of local library closures in Sheffield, they were not going to be negligible. The provision of suitable alternative services became a key issue, demonstrated by a plea from the Sheffield Library and Information Services for co-operation at a local level (see Appendix 4):

‘Many current users will not find alternatives, even if locally delivered, convenient enough ... we should hope that local people will provide us with the beginnings of a clearer understanding of their needs so as to provide us with a basis to consider some level of alternative provision’ (Briefing notes for a closures meeting, 8 July 1995).

This chapter concerns the current availability of library services to people who live in the communities studied.

An attempt is made to assess the use made of alternative services (branch and mobile) in each area. In addition, evidence for the relative advantages and disadvantages for alternative branch and mobile library services for each area is charted. Since the publicity of alternative library services may be an important contributing factor to their use, the study attempts to assess the extent of publicity in the four areas, its effectiveness and possible improvements that can be made. Finally, co-operation between branch libraries and mobile library services is discussed and investigated. Co-operation may be an important influence in providing an effective service to users.

5.1 Use of branch libraries

When deciding the criteria for the closure of local libraries in Sheffield, the proximity of other services was taken into account:

‘The principal consideration was that the closures should affect the least possible number of people, so the proximity of other services was taken into account. Questions considered were: Where are other libraries in relation to the rest of the service? Where would people go if they had to make choices?’
(Area Manager, southern libraries group, Sheffield)

However it is very difficult to tell how many users have moved to other branch libraries, especially if those libraries are much larger:

'It is difficult to tell how many users have moved [to Waterthorpe library]. It is like asking the manager of Sainsbury's how many customers have moved from each corner shop.' (Area Manager, southern libraries group)

5.1.1 Evidence from borrower data

It was decided that a comparison of book issue figures for 1994-95 and 1996-97 for each static library located nearest to the communities studied would be unreliable - even meaningless. There are many other factors affecting these issue figures, which would complicate any attempt made to ascertain whether the closure of local libraries had affected them in any way.

Factors affecting the issue totals for all branch libraries in Sheffield for the years 1994-95 and 1996-97 include:

- The eight week long libraries strike in 1995 resulted in artificially low issue figures for that year, a factor which affects the reliability of issue figures for following years.
- Reductions and changes in the opening hours of several branch libraries between 1994 and 1997.

Another complication to a full appreciation of issue figures is the fact that several libraries in Sheffield were on a ticket system which did not generate computerised borrower records until recently. Such libraries include both Grenoside library and Handsworth Library, where certain statistical issue information is consequently difficult to find and prove. There are no available figures that show how many former users of Grenoside and Handsworth libraries transferred their membership to other libraries.

Therefore any investigation of the use of alternative static services by people who live in the case study areas would have to rely on qualitative information.

5.1.2 Qualitative evidence

Staff at Darnall library claim that many former Handsworth library users transferred their membership at first, but they cannot be sure that they have continued using this service.

Those who are interviewed for the case study reflect on how many users of the former local libraries have transferred their membership to other static branch libraries:

'About twenty borrowers have moved over to Ecclesfield. Quite a few pensioners with cars have come here. A lot went to Chapeltown... secondary schoolchildren are able to travel to Chapeltown library.' (Former assistant at Grenoside library, now at Ecclesfield library)

'Most ex-Hemsworth users have moved to Newfield Green - perhaps 45% have moved over...

They did not move all at once, they dribbled in. Some tried the mobile library service first; some were to upset at first, but then their principle changed; some tried the market first, but found that too expensive.' (Former assistant at Hemsworth library, now at Newfield Green)

'Use of Frecheville library [by former Hackenthorpe library users] has been off and on.' (Former assistants at Hackenthorpe library, now at Frecheville)

5.2 Advantages of branch libraries as alternatives

Larger static libraries may attract users who are able to travel, but smaller static libraries could appeal to those who value personal services.

5.2.1 Facilities

The range of resources, services and specialist capabilities of larger public libraries could have a magnetic pull on users from a wider catchment area than a smaller local library. If this were the case, it would provide the basis for the argument in favour of large-scale regional libraries. According to ASLIB (1995):

'Our data indicate that public libraries have a "gravitational pull", comparable to that exerted by shopping centres... the evidence of our case studies (data to be published separately) indicates that the larger the library, the more people will use it, and the further they will travel to reach it' (p.129).

'Darnall library has very good bus connections, and it is in a shopping centre...

Waterthorpe library is on the bus route, and it is easy for people to look in if they are there shopping.' (Area Manager, southern libraries group)

'The catchment area for Waterthorpe library is vast - users come from as far afield as Worksop. The shopping centre is a magnet.' (Former librarian at Hackenthorpe library, now at Waterthorpe)

In some cases the image and facilities of a large district library may even poach actual and potential users from their smaller local library.

'Users [of Hackenthorpe library] drifted out... new people automatically went to Waterthorpe library.' (Former assistants at Hackenthorpe library, now at Frecheville)

'A lot of people in Hackenthorpe use the library at Crystal Peaks [Waterthorpe library]. It's not a problem.' (Secretary, Hackenthorpe Tenants' & Residents' Association)

'Perhaps Waterthorpe library nudged Hackenthorpe library out of business?' (Former librarian at Hackenthorpe library, now at Waterthorpe)

5.2.2 Familiar staff

Many of those who were interviewed made references to users following familiar staff to whichever library they had been moved. Peter Barr, area manager for the southern libraries group, refers to this as 'brand loyalty'. Staff who worked at Grenoside library have now moved to similar kinds of community libraries at Ecclesfield and Parson Cross, which are situated approximately 1.9 miles and 2.1 miles from Grenoside. Also, the community librarian for the Handsworth and Woodhouse libraries has remained at Woodhouse library.

'The enthusiasm of staff dragged readers along with them...

Woodhouse library did draw a lot at first - the transfer of membership was most noticeable here. This might be due to brand loyalty - the same community librarian was responsible for both Handsworth library and Woodhouse library.' (Area Manager, southern libraries group)

'Users do appreciate staff... staff spent time with them and listened to their groans. When staff transferred, people were inspired to follow them.' (Former librarian at Handsworth library, now at Woodhouse library)

'A lot of users didn't even know Ecclesfield at all, but they made the effort.' (Former assistant at Grenoside library, now at Ecclesfield)

'Quite a few people have followed the familiar faces of the staff. Quite a few had tried Waterthorpe library, but they found it too big - they were used to a personal service.' (Former assistants at Hackenthorpe library, now at Frecheville)

'More users have come to Waterthorpe library than to Frecheville library. Some have found what they wanted here, but there have been a lot of comments about it being too impersonal... Some say they don't like Waterthorpe library - it's too big and noisy and they don't know the staff. Personal service is important to them.' (Former librarian at Hackenthorpe library, now at Waterthorpe)

These comments suggest that a local library may serve a social function. Further evidence for this is included in the next chapter.

5.3 Disadvantages of branch libraries as alternatives

Users of former local libraries may not visit the nearest branch libraries for two reasons. The branch libraries may be situated too far away, and they serve an entirely different community.

5.3.1 Location

Proctor et al. (1996) discovered that:

'Despite increasing personal mobility through car ownership, recent research suggests that the number of people prepared to travel far to use a library may be limited' (p.14).

They found that findings from a user survey in Berkshire showed that on average 80% of users surveyed did not travel more than two miles to visit a community library (Stevens, 1991).

Further obstacles to the nearest branch libraries may be steep hills or valleys, which abound in Sheffield. Consideration of these obstacles lead Jones (1965) to conclude:

'The average city-dweller is not prepared to walk or travel far to use a local service like a library, and there are many barriers to accessibility such as steep hills, rivers and train lines' (p.12).

A good example of a geographical obstacle to a local library is at Newfield Green, where a steep-sided valley separates the library from the inhabitants of Hemsworth.

The most convenient alternative static services for users of former local libraries may vary depending on their local bus routes. Many are reported to have experienced transport problems when attempting to use an alternative branch library.

'The Grenoside to Ecclesfield bus route is very poor: it is not direct, and there is only one per hour.' (Former assistant at Grenoside library, now at Ecclesfield)

'Users have gone all over - it depends on the bus routes.' (Former assistant at Hemsworth library, now at Newfield Green)

'Waterthorpe library did draw a lot from there [Hackenthorpe], but older people didn't want to travel.' (Area Manager, southern libraries group)

'One user has said to me: " A library service should be free, and if I have to get a bus to it, it isn't free".' (Former librarian at Hackenthorpe library, now at Waterthorpe)

Such comments indicate that the accessibility of branch libraries depends on a variety of factors - the convenience of bus routes, the mobility of users, and the cost of travel.

5.3.2 Another community

Several of the alternative branch libraries advertised for users of the former static libraries are located within distinct and separate communities. For example, Woodhouse library serves a small and self-contained village community. It is therefore a similar kind of library to the former library at Handsworth, but Handsworth residents would have to make a special trip into a different community. This may be a deterrent to their use, as the following quotations suggest:

'Sheffield isn't a city, it's a collection of villages.' (Area Manager, southern libraries group)

'To begin with a lot of people came, but a lot found it too far. Some individuals still come here, because they are in the routine. I would say that ex-Handsworth library users feel strange here - as if they are making a pilgrimage to another place...

Older people find a multicultural population difficult - signs in two languages make them feel as if they have gone abroad. Not many people wanted to go [to Darnall library].' (Former Handsworth librarian, now at Woodhouse)

There may be more pragmatic reasons for avoiding a library which serves another local community. Because facilities are geared towards a local community, they may not be suitable for the inhabitants of a different community.

'Frecheville library is in a different community [to Hackenthorpe], with one of the oldest average ages in the city - whereas Hackenthorpe includes many families with young children.' (Area Manager, southern libraries group)

5.4 Use of mobile libraries

An entirely new mobile library route was planned for the coverage of the six communities affected by local library closures in 1995. This increased the number of regular routes used by Sheffield Mobile and Special Services from four to five.

The new route includes eighteen new service points, and it allows a mobile library vehicle to spend either one morning or one afternoon per week in each of the six affected areas. Mobile library vehicles are not scheduled to stop outside the former library buildings, as this was considered inappropriate.

Public consultation meetings at the time of the library closures provided information for the most suitable location of each stop, although changes have been made since then.

5.4.1 The impact of providing Route five on the Mobile Library Services

According to the Sheffield mobile library services Outlook Report 1997/98:

‘The inevitable result has been some loss of service due to the lack of spare vehicle capacity when breakdowns have occurred. This has been kept to a very minimum and all monthly stops have been achieved (except those affected by heavy snowfall)’

This is reinforced by the following comment:

‘No cuts were made elsewhere, but now we have no spare vehicle capacity and no emergency cover.’ (Group manager, Sheffield Mobile and Special Services)

5.4.2 Evidence of mobile library use

For the purposes of this study questionnaires were administered to a total of eighty mobile library users. The relative popularity of service points in the areas covered by the study could be surmised by comparing the number of questionnaires which were administered at each one.

Table 1: Questionnaires administered in each community

Community	Name of stop	Questionnaires administered	Total no. of questionnaires administered
Grenoside	Stephen Drive	5	18
	Community centre	9	
	Rojean Road	4	
Hackenthorpe	Social Club	6	9
	Delves Avenue	3	
Handsworth	St. Joseph's Wood	7	34
	Richmond Park clo.	19	
	Handsworth Grange Crescent	8	
Hemsworth	Gaunt Close	10	19
	Raeburn Road	3	
	Backmoor Road	6	

The above table suggests that Handsworth might be the area where mobile library services are most heavily used, and it implies that Hackenthorpe could be the area where mobile library services are the least popular. However it is important to note that these figures represent mobile library use on one occasion. A more accurate indication of the popularity of mobile library service points in these areas would require a user-count which is spread over several occasions.

An interesting point to note is that, in Handsworth, the service point located closest to the former local library appears to be less busy than other service points in the area:

'Where the local library used to be is not very busy, but the next stop [Richmond Park Close] is very busy.' (Assistant, Mobile & Special Library Services)

5.4.3 Frequency of mobile library use

Mobile library users who took part in the survey were asked how often they use the service. The results are tabulated below:

Table 2: Frequency with which mobile library users visit their local service point

Frequency	All	Gren	Hack	Hands	Hems
Once a week	53 66%	8	8	26	11
Twice a month	18 23%	5	1	6	6
Once a month	6 7%	4	-	1	1
Less frequently	3 4%	1	-	1	1
TOTAL no. of respondents	80	18	9	34	19

The above table shows clearly that the majority of those who took part in the survey claim that they are frequent and regular users of the mobile library service. This may indicate that users of the mobile library service in the case study areas are in a routine, and that relatively few 'drop in' less frequently.

The following quotations reinforce this idea:

'Not many have tried the mobile libraries and don't feel happy about them. There are two reasons for this: people have either carried on using them because they are satisfied, or they have gone away.' (Former librarian at Hackenthorpe library, now at Waterthorpe library)

'Some do see it as an apology for closing the building... but perennial library users will appreciate something - especially those who don't have their own transport.' (Director, Grenoside Community Association)

The use of mobile libraries may be influenced by the nature of the service. It has been suggested that 'devoted' users are more likely to visit the service than casual passers-by:

'The mobile library is only there once a week. Users have to be devoted... there is no drop-in effect.' (Area Manager, southern libraries group)

5.5 Advantages of mobile libraries as alternatives

Advantages quoted in favour of mobile library services include the proximity of their facilities for people who cannot travel far, an ability to change according to community needs and a high turnover of stock. Rosemary Telfer (1997) outlined these advantages:

'... can allow access to those people who cannot get to a local library... provide a fresh and changing stock... can offer flexibility and the ability to respond to changing community needs - as communities evolve and new housing is built, the library service can move with them' (p.15-16).

5.5.1 Flexibility

Whether the reason for implementing mobile services is demographic change or a more urgent need to cover gaps left by static library closures, it is obvious that flexibility to reschedule their timetable is of paramount importance.

Changes have been made in Route five since the original implementation. For example, one service point in Grenoside was expanded three which now visit the bottom, middle and top of a steep hill. A service point has also been re-sited in Handsworth, so it is now closer to the council estate.

5.5.2 High turnover of stock

It was felt that a mobile library service would benefit the Grenoside area. The turnover of books would be greater, so users could have a wider choice of stock than before. The stock would also include videos, which could not be loaned in the former building because its security was compromised by structural problems.

5.6 Disadvantages of mobile libraries as an alternative

The mobile library service in the case study areas have attracted some disgruntled remarks:

'People will stick to mobile libraries for a certain length of time, then they will end up not having anything... mobile libraries are still providing a service - but what service?' (Former assistants at Hackenthorpe library, now at Frecheville)

'The mobile library is just a non-starter' (Secretary, Hackenthorpe Tenants' & Residents' Community Association)

'It was just an apology for closing down the building.' (Manager, Grenoside Community Association)

However it is important to remember that the majority of these remarks are made by those who were employed in the former static services and are therefore subject to bias. The authors of the ASLIB Report (1995) have found that library employees and library users had very different agenda. Library staff are shown to rate the direct benefits of day-to-day use of a public library significantly lower than users (p.159).

5.6.1 Scheduling difficulties

The ability of a mobile library service to change its timetables may also cause problems:

'One user said "I never know when it is there - they keep changing their times".' (Former assistants at Hackenthorpe library, now at Frecheville library)

'A few tried the mobile library, but they said it didn't suit them. One said it was "hit and miss" - it had teething problems. They weren't very impressed with the times it stopped...' (Former assistant at Grenoside library, now at Ecclesfield)

Initial perceptions of mobile library service reliability may have been affected by the recent loss of a static library service. Users may have needed time to adjust to a different library service.

5.6.2 Limited time

The limited availability of a mobile library service in terms of time has implications for browsing and socialising:

'There is pressure to get away - forty minutes isn't long enough to browse.'
(Former Handsworth librarian, now at Woodhouse)

'One problem is the time factor - the elderly don't want to rush. There is also the community thing - people can't stop to chat.' (Former assistants at Hackenthorpe library, now at Frecheville)

The limitations of space inside a mobile library vehicle could be another factor affecting users' inclinations to browse and meet others.

5.6.3 Limited choice

When asked if they missed anything about their former local library, 51% of survey participants mentioned the choice of stock (see Appendix 5). This significant percentage verifies the following comments from library staff.

'A mobile library is no substitute for even a small community library - even if the stock could be regarded as "better".' (Area Manager, southern libraries group)

'One user said that on the mobile library there isn't enough choice compared to what she's used to. She only uses the mobile library because otherwise it might be stopped... she uses it more to keep it going that for any other reason.' (Former Handsworth librarian, now at Woodhouse)

Again, mobile library users' expectations may have been affected by the existence of a static service.

5.7 Publicity of alternative services

Before the closure of the six local libraries at the end of 1995, both alternative static and mobile libraries were publicised in the former libraries. The publicity took the form of posters and leaflets.

'You need to publicise [alternative] services out in the community. It is not enough to publicise in the library down the road. The alternatives ought to have been much better publicised.' (Area Manager, southern libraries group)

5.7.1 Publicity for mobile library services

Education is vital, so that potential and current users do not expect a mobile library service to provide the same facilities and resources as a static service:

'Common to most libraries is a lack of understanding of its function by the general public and by governing bodies... Publics who expect everything from a bookmobile have cousins who use a branch library with the same expectations' (Wallace, 1961:353).

The lack of a fixed location means that the public are not as aware of the presence of a mobile service as they are of a library building. This may influence who finds and uses mobile libraries. In an urban area the presence of a mobile service may simply not be expected and potential borrowers may automatically head for a library building. This makes publicising mobile services even more important than publicising a branch library service (McMurray, 1993:1).

Directors of mobile library services realise that one of their greatest needs is a continuous and co-ordinated publicity programme. It is an important contributing factor to the general knowledge of the mobile library service. This will inform potential users of the services that a mobile library can provide, and it also educates them about what to expect from a mobile service - what its specific objectives are, and the fact that it is not intended to replace a static service. It is also essential so that people can depend on the service. Stopping times must be sorted in advance and publicised - the public must be able to use the service at their leisure.

The Library Association suggests a number of ideas regarding the publicity of the mobile services:

‘The livery and exterior design of the mobile library should clearly identify the purpose of the vehicle, and should give a positive image of the service’ (1997).

This suggestions draws on one of the strengths of the mobile library service - that it ventures into the community and it is seen. Mobile libraries can use this feature of their services to advance public understanding of what they can offer.

This can be built upon by communication with people in the communities served by the mobile libraries, and with staff in other areas of service delivery.

‘Given the wide area covered by the vehicle.... effective consultation with users and community representatives is essential’ (Library Association, 1997).

As well as the vans themselves, publicity material for mobile services include leaflets, posters, photographic displays and features on local radio and in the local press. All publicity should include what the service aims to deliver, as well as the timetable - which is crucial if use is to be maximised.

Groupings of residences such as high-rise council estates lend themselves to the distribution of leaflets. Blanket coverage of an area in which a new site is being opened is imperative (McMurray, 1993:9) Surgeries, shops, post offices and community centres may accept leaflets and posters free of charge and without obliging the library to take material in return.

5.7.2 Publicity for Sheffield Mobile Library Services

At the time of the local library closures publicity for the new mobile library route took the form of simple leaflets in every library in the city (see Appendix 6).

According to the Sheffield Mobile Services Outlook Report 1997/98:

‘Promotion was to have centred, in the short term, around visits to the six communities where libraries were recently closed. Unfortunately the company concerned with the commercial bookmark scheme decided not to include the mobile library service... This target has therefore been included in those for 1997/98’

And what about general publicity for Sheffield Mobile Services?

‘Bookmarks are posted through letterboxes of every area that looks as though it’s flagging a bit.’ (Area manager, Sheffield Mobile and Special Services)

5.7.3 Evidence from the users

For this study mobile library users were asked how they found out about the service. The question relating to the way in which mobile library users found out about the mobile library service reveals something about the effectiveness of publicity for the mobile library services studied.

Table 3: How mobile library users found out about the service

Type of publicity material	All users	Gren	Hack	Hands	Hems
Leaflet	44 55%	10	4	18	12
Friend	9 11%	6	-	3	-
Poster	5 6%	-	1	1	3
Seeing the vehicle	22 28%	2	4	12	4
TOTAL no. of respondents	80	18	9	34	19

The above results indicate that leaflets may have been the most successful advertising campaign in areas affected by closures.

Those unconnected with the provision of the mobile library services have provided the following comments:

'I saw the mobile library in the car park for the first time two weeks ago... It is not publicised in any way, shape or form. It would have been advisable to contact the Tenants' and Residents' Association for publicity, but they haven't.' (Secretary, Hackenthorpe Tenants' and Residents' Association)

'Frecheville library doesn't have a list of current stops. Publicity was good at the time of the closures though... libraries aren't publicised enough anyway.' (Former assistants at Hackenthorpe library, now at Frecheville)

These comments indicate that present publicity for Sheffield Mobile Library Services may be lacking, although this could be a reflection of publicity for library services in general.

5.8 Co-operation between branch and mobile libraries:

‘Where a local library network has been broken up as a result of local government re-organisation, especial attention needs to be given to joint arrangements with other public library authorities in the area to ensure that the benefits of the combined stock, staff expertise and automation are not lost to users’ (Library Association, 1995)

This is co-operation on a grand scale. The same kind of co-operation may be beneficial on a smaller scale, within a public library authority. This has been suggested by the American Library Association in 1963:

‘The successful bookmobile operates as an integral part of the library system. It has the same high standards for staff, for book collections and for service to be rendered as any other department of the library system’ (p.4).

However it has been noted that the work of mobile library services can be underrated by other librarians:

‘This arises.... from the deep-seated urge of the earnest librarian to see that every borrower has available to him the full library service. So anxious are they to have bookmobile patrons realize what they are missing, they fail to see what those patrons are getting.’ (Wallace, 1961:356).

Conversely, mobile library employees may not be fully aware of the fact that library workers under immovable roofs also face pressures and problems.

5.8.1 The situation in Sheffield

The need for co-operation between static and mobile library services, both in terms of publicity and in terms of service, is suggested by the number of mobile library users taking part in the survey who claim to use a branch library as well as a mobile library. This has been tabulated below:

Table 4: Mobile library users who claim to use a static library service as well

Library	All	Gren	Hack	Hands	Hems
Central	7	2	-	2	3
Darnall	3	-	-	3	-
Jordanthorpe	2	-	-	-	2
Newfield Green	3	-	-	-	3
Waterthorpe	5	-	4	1	-
Woodhouse	5	-	-	5	-
TOTALS	25	2	4	11	8

The fact that 31% of mobile library users questioned for this study use another library service indicates that 69% use the mobile as their only gateway to library services. This serves to highlight the need for co-operation between static and mobile library services, if mobile library users wish to have access to full library services. As Telfer(1997) points out:

‘Access to the wider network of services is what both are about and something which they can both offer’ (p.16).

No evidence was found during the course of this study, which could show that mobile libraries are viewed as ‘poaching’ branch library users. Mobile library employees took an active part in demonstrations against local library closures; many took part in the sit-in at Hemsworth library (Telfer, 1997:12).

Telfer(1997) advises against rivalry between different areas of the library service in Sheffield:

‘... the community and mobile libraries are also inextricably intermeshed. One cannot exist without the other. We are all part of a network of service delivery... Rivalry between different areas of the service is pointless and destructive.’(p.16)

An investigation into the ways in which mobile and branch librarians perceive one another is beyond the scope of this study, and may be an area for further research.

6.0 THE VALUE OF A STATIC LOCAL LIBRARY

The Library Association reveals a vision of local libraries serving local communities:

‘The local library is truly at the heart of its community, reflecting its values and experiences’ (1995)

The local library is unique to the community it serves, a quality which was commented upon by ASLIB (1995):

‘The team’s research shows that there are significant variations between the make-up of areas, the standard and quality of public libraries, and local people’s needs. Most people want well-furnished libraries and a range of effective services that will suit local circumstances’ (p.10).

The unique quality of a local library service was commented upon by a librarian interviewed for this study:

‘Libraries are like shops: Both central libraries and branch libraries serve a purpose, in the same way that both supermarkets and corner shops serve a purpose. Both are equally valuable, but in different ways.’ (Former librarian at Hackenthorpe, now at Waterthorpe)

‘Hackenthorpe was the local library: local people said they wanted to keep the local service, even if it was open fewer hours and had old stock.’ (Area Manager, southern group)

But how is the value of a local library service measured? It seems that there is no single definitive answer to that question. Line and Stone (1982) reflect on the measurement of value, when applied to a library service:

‘You cannot truly measure the value of a library to its community. You can measure the use made of it, the community’s attitude to it, even to some extent the economic contribution it makes to the community. All or any of these may help greatly in judging the value of the library, but in the last resort this must be a value judgement’ (p.14).

This chapter focuses on two ways in which a local static library may be valuable to the community it serves:

- The provision of local information.

- Its function as a social centre and haven.

6.1 Mobile library users who miss the former local library in their area:

Before assessing the value of a local library, it is first necessary to establish that the local libraries in the four areas chosen for the case study are missed by those taking part in the survey. This table indicates how many mobile library users who took part in the survey, and who use the mobile library because their local library closed (89% of total surveyed) miss the former static library service in their area.

Table 1: Mobile library users who miss the former local library

Do you miss the local library?	All users	Gren	Hack	Hands	Hems
Yes	47 66%	12 67%	4 50%	20 74%	11 61%
No	24 34%	6 33%	4 50%	7 26%	7 39%
TOTAL	71	18	8	27	18

The above results suggest that, two and a half years on, a significant percentage of mobile library users in the case study areas still miss their former local library.

6.2 Local information

The availability of information can be broadened or restricted, permitted or denied, but Harris (1992) asserts that it is important to all local communities:

‘The availability of a wide range of diverse sources of information is fundamental for a healthy community, so that information surrounds people and can be ‘happened upon’ and can be used to stimulate ideas and initiatives’ (p.46).

Unfortunately, in under-resourced circumstances information cannot be shown to be of direct relevance to those in a community, and a local library service may be threatened with closure.

One way in which to assess the 'value' of a local library is by measuring the amount of appreciation for the local information it provides. Local information has been described as an important aspect of local library provision:

'Many of the most important information requirements are about local issues, issues such as housing, employment, education and shopping' (Usherwood, 1992:28).

However the same author concedes that the provision of local information is: 'not only, or even primarily a library function' (p.31). In fact, only 2% of the survey participants who said they missed their former local library (66% of total surveyed) claimed that they missed it for its provision of local information.

6.3 The social role of a local library

Many writers claim that a local library brings social benefits to the surrounding community, but such benefits are difficult to recognise and measure. This leads many to assess the effectiveness of a library service by concentrating only on more tangible benefits such as book issues and the number of registered borrowers. Greenhalgh and Worpole (1995) warn against this:

'... there is a danger of measuring only those things that are easy to measure - book issues and attendance - and to disregard the positive social effects a library can have on its locality' (p.97).

Recognition of the intangible benefits is vital, if the worth of local libraries is to be proven:

'When one can demonstrate a cut or a gain in measurable social, educational and economic areas, the tasks of central and local government in fighting for the service will be greatly eased.' (Hare, 1996:154).

Unfortunately the role of local libraries in supporting the social infrastructure of their surrounding community is relatively under-researched (Greenhalgh & Worpole, 1995:95).

In their survey of library users during the 1995 Sheffield Libraries Strike, Proctor et al. (1996) charted comments from respondents and found:

‘It is significant how many respondents overall missed the library for a reason not specifically related to the commonly accepted core services of reference, information and book lending.’ (p.26).

Others, such as those employed at Newport Library, suggest that a local library serves a social purpose by providing for disadvantaged groups:

‘Supporting the emotional needs of particular disadvantaged groups in local communities - women carers, middle-aged unemployed men, grandparents (all heavy library users) - by helping to provide stability and continuity in the midst of social fragmentation and upheaval.’ (ASLIB, 1995:155)

The ASLIB Report also quotes a user, to reinforce the idea:

“‘Our local library has been a godsend to my family for the past sixty years. Please ensure that nothing is done to deprive poorer families of this valuable life-line.’” (p.168).

This appears to be the case in some of the communities studied here, as indicated by the remarks made by mobile library users who took part in the survey:

‘The loss has taken a big chunk out of my life.’
‘I could feel I belonged there.’

6.3.1 Community librarianship

The term ‘community librarianship’ emphasises a service that meets the needs and demands of the community it serves, rather than merely providing a branch of a central service. Muddiman and Black (1993) identify the period of growth of the community library movement as 1970-1985. They suggest that, because of the eclecticism of its roots, community librarianship is a series of practices rather than a ‘coherent and rigorously implemented philosophy of service’ (p.12). Comedia (1993) identifies the development of community librarianship as a ‘key initiative in the library world’, and provides a clearer definition for the term:

‘The community library was seen as an agency of social change, and its services a way of redressing social and cultural inequalities’(p.36).

However this concept cannot thrive if the idea of community is questioned. Harris and Green (1997) question the existence of community life:

'... some of the context and values which underpin our understanding of the social role of libraries and of "community" - such as public ownership, and the sense of neighbourhood associated with corner shops and public space - have been eroded. The social context for community librarianship as it evolved in the sixties and seventies is irrecoverable' (p.184).

Muddiman and Black (1993) claim that community librarianship has seen a decline since 1985, and that:

'The residue of community librarianship has become, characteristically, a scaled-down welfarism involving services to "special" groups or concern about new social "problems" such as community care' (p.13).

6.3.2 Specific client groups

If community librarianship is now regarded as a 'scaled-down welfarism', it makes sense to suggest that this implies that local libraries now aim to meet the needs of certain vulnerable client groups rather than the inhabitants of the entire catchment area.

In the briefing notes for a closures meeting on July 8 1995 (see Appendix 4), Sheffield Library and Information Services describe local libraries as:

'... intended to meet the needs of those who are possibly the least mobile, such as children and elderly people'.

If these groups also represent the primary user groups given for mobile services in Sheffield, it would be logical to infer that local libraries would be the prime target for closure - if closures had to be made and if mobile libraries were able to provide their services to those who live in the affected catchment areas. This conclusion was reached at the same meeting.

6.4 The value of a static building

The question is, even if static and mobile services target the same groups (rather than being open at times when only people belonging to these client groups can use them), do they fulfil different needs? Can a static service offer more, simply by being a building?

Advantages quoted in favour of static libraries include:

- Services can be made available in the evening and on Saturdays

- They are perceived by some users as having a larger range of books than a mobile library
- They may be easier for families and the elderly to use
- There is more space for notices, community information, audiovisual materials and browsing facilities
- Well-trained local staff often have access by the phone to all libraries within the authority and elsewhere
- They may act as social centres
- They permit extension activities to be carried on
- They permit opening hours to match local circumstances
- They are not affected by vehicular breakdowns.

(Library Information Series 20, 1993:37)

6.4.1 As a quiet haven

According to the Library Association (1995) a public library provides a 'safe and non-threatening environment'. A comment from Newport Library emphasises the importance of 'providing a quiet refuge or haven in the midst of the noisy city, and a place where people can go alone and unharrassed.' (ASLIB, 1995:155).

In the context of local communities, the need for a quiet haven is just as important as it is in the midst of the noisy city. According to Greenhalgh and Worpole (1995):

'Urban cultures need free space as much as they need working space and selling space: the life of towns needs convivial public spaces.' (p.12).

6.4.2 As a meeting place

The local library is regarded as a neutral space, where anybody can come in and for which people living in the surrounding community can feel an ownership:

'It is a meeting place as well as a place of study' (Library Association, 1995)

'The social impact of libraries stems from the way that they inform a sense of the public domain that is open to all. They give shape and identity to a notion of society.' (Greenhalgh & Worpole, 1995:96).

A user survey undertaken by ASLIB (1995) indicated the possible importance of the library as a community facility, which can serve many purposes without the intervention of its staff:

'Survey participants ranked social benefits - a familiar relaxing place, which is safe, warm and well-lit; a pleasant spot where you can meet your friends for a chat or a gossip' (p.169).

It has been suggested that a local library provides a focal point for a community: 'They are meeting places and bases for all sorts of community activity' (Telfer, 1997:16)

Similar remarks have been made by those interviewed for this study:

'It may be the only focal point in the community.' (Area Manager, southern group)

'The library was like a meeting place: two members of staff were there all the time and people used to stay and chat. It was more than a library, it was a hub of the community... even now people say they miss Grenoside library - it is the community spirit that they miss.' (Former assistant at Grenoside library, now at Ecclesfield)

'The biggest factor [for a local library] is a stopping-off place in the community. Some users would never speak to anyone else. It provides somewhere to sit, where people can meet and chat - that's so important.' (Former assistants at Hackenthorpe library, now at Frecheville)

'Users miss the personal service and the coffee mornings. Waterthorpe library does not have the same atmosphere.' (Former librarian at Hackenthorpe library, now at Waterthorpe)

'Handsworth library users felt they had lost their own place they valued - their meeting place.' (Former librarian at Handsworth library, now at Woodhouse)

'The library was next to a bus stop. People could sit indoors whilst waiting for the bus and meet other people.' (Former assistant at Hemsworth library, now at Newfield Green)

Comments among mobile library users who took part in the survey include:

'I could meet people - it was sociable.'

'The social part. The staff were very good - it was like a personal service.'

'I enjoyed the buzz. I used to like going in, and I got to know the girls.'

'I miss the parties.'

6.5 Library or community centre?

During recent times in this country, many more public services have decentralised and others have developed a community role for the first time (Coleman, 1992:301). It may be that the librarian's skills of information collection, organisation, retrieval and dissemination are best utilised to support others to provide direct public service. This service may not necessarily be provided in a library, according to this author.

Comedia (1993) refute this argument, by providing evidence from a case study conducted in Cleveland where more than three hundred users were interviewed in two libraries. In both libraries the staff had created a warm 'almost domestic ambience' which made them appear to be:

'..symbolically owned by - and belong to - the community, unlike other forms of public provision such as job centres, youth clubs, training projects, welfare centres and some community centres on the same estates' (p.36).

The authors then suggest that the building itself provides the quality and ambience that public libraries have, which cannot be replicated in any other community facility:

'The library building has always been symbolic, embodying civic values, ideas of citizenship and the principle of the individual right to knowledge and information' (p.78).

One interviewee agreed with the idea that a community library stands apart from other community buildings:

'A community library is favourable, as it is accessible day in day out. It is more easy to regard the community library as part of the community: a library co-operates and reacts with other types of activities' (Area Manager, southern libraries group).

The following quotation implies that a library has a function that is distinct from other community buildings:

'None of the ex-Hackenthorpe library users who now use Frecheville library say that they use the community centre at Hackenthorpe. Maybe it's used by a different set of people.' (Former assistants at Hackenthorpe library, now at Frecheville)

7.0 THE VALUE OF MOBILE LIBRARY SERVICES

The ASLIB Report (1995) confidently asserts that:

‘The mobile library service performs a valuable and cost effective function, delivering services to rural communities or places isolated from a static library’ (p.196).

Careful and systematic management is vital for a mobile library service, as its success depends on a variety of factors. The management of a mobile library service is a complex business - vehicle maintenance demands close attention, and timetabling must be detailed and designed to maximise resources.

Under proper local conditions and if intelligently operated, bookmobiles can be extremely important, if not invaluable. Conversely, if the mobile units are too small, if their collections are inflexible, if the administration and staff take a dim view of their value or if the geographical situation does not warrant their use it is, no doubt, best to forget the whole thing’ (Smith, 1961:302).

But how is this ‘valuable’ function recognised and delivered?

The main aim for all mobile library services should be to ensure minimum costs and maximum exposure for the vehicles. Cost effectiveness is a key concern.

This raises two questions:

- Does the provision of mobile library services to the areas affected by branch library closures represent a truly cost-effective use of resources by Sheffield Libraries and Information Service?
- Does the Sheffield Mobile and Special Library Service provide what people in the areas affected by branch library closures really need?

The attempt to answer these questions is the primary aim of this study, and forms the basis for this chapter.

7.1 Mobile Libraries: A Substitute for Branch Libraries?

Campbell wrote in 1982:

'In order to ensure that the maximum use of both the branch library and the mobile library, there is little point in bringing the vehicle into the static branch's catchment area... the main objective of a mobile library is to provide a service to communities which do not have access to a branch library.' (p.12).

The mobile service in the case study areas appears to have been successful, according to Telfer (1997):

'We had expected an expression of public anger and even some boycotting of the service. In fact we got neither... All six communities are now part of our normal mobile library network and it is as if they had never used anywhere else' (p.13).

'Once we found out that a mobile library service was replacing us there was relief that they were getting some kind of service, although it wasn't ideal.'
(Former assistant at Grenoside library, now at Ecclesfield)

The operation of mobile library services could be regarded as an extension to the provision of books and other materials in static buildings, but there are many features of this service which cannot be adapted from static libraries. As well as issuing books and other materials, a local branch library provides a focal point for the community it serves. It can be a meeting place, a drop-in centre and a base for all kinds of community activity. The primary function of a mobile library is to issue books and other materials, and to target these where specific needs are to be met.

Whilst mobile libraries are an integral part of almost any public library services, being a method of spreading library facilities such as lending books to a greater number of readers, they provide a different kind of service to that offered at static libraries. The aim of Sheffield Mobile and Special Library Services is to provide for those who may find it difficult to reach the nearest existing branch library. Such people include the elderly, the disabled and those with children under five. This primary intention is reflected in the stock carried by the mobile library vehicles. The fact that six Sheffield communities had lost their libraries simply allowed the Mobile Services to offer their facilities to the prioritised client groups of these communities.

Sheffield Mobile and Special Library Services could not and did not intend to replace the provision offered by the former community libraries, because the service priorities of the former are different to those of the latter. Mobile Services would stand by their service priorities, and implementing services in an area where there had once been a community library would not alter them (Telfer, 1997:12).

7.1.1 Exemption from budget cuts

In 1995 cuts in the fleet and staffing were put forward as possibilities within the senior management team at Sheffield Library and Information Services. Budget exemplification figures were then drawn up for the Mobile Services, showing the implications of such reductions. There are three good reasons why the Mobile Services should be exempt: The money saved by cutting out one vehicle would be negligible; the number of users affected by the loss would be spread over a wide areas; and those who lose out may be the most vulnerable.

Firstly, taking one mobile library vehicle out of service in Sheffield would reduce the service hours by thirty hours per week. For that, a mere £20,000 would be saved (Telfer, 1997:9). This would not be anywhere near enough money to make a difference to the £100,000 deficit at the time.

Secondly, it would have been impossible to take a vehicle and staff out of the Mobile Services without causing disruption to mobile library services across the city. This is because each vehicle serves a number of areas scattered from one side of the city to another (Telfer, 1997:8), removing a route would cause a severe lost of readership throughout the city.

Finally, the protection the services to the most vulnerable in Sheffield is a City Council priority. As the Sheffield Mobile Service priority client groups are those who may be too disabled or isolated to reach other library services, their objectives reflect those of the Council. Cutting down on mobile library services would be against the City Council's objective of protecting these people. Telfer puts it like this:

'The mobile library service's objectives so closed reflect those of the council, that we should be hitting the hardest those people whom the members most wish to protect' (1997:9).

It would appear that the mobile library services in Sheffield provide something that could be valuable in terms of cost-effectiveness and service to people.

7.2 The costs of mobile and static library provision

Mobile library vehicles are not an inexpensive form of library provision, as they involve recurrent expenditure for their maintenance, fuel, tax and servicing. A vehicle can be expected to endure a maximum of ten years almost daily service, but the life expectancy of the vehicle cannot always be depended upon.

7.2.1 The cost of mobile library provision

According to Telfer (1997:9), the annual vehicle and maintenance costs for one mobile library vehicle is approximately £3,600. As each excursion requires one assistant and one driver, it would make sense to infer that the annual staffing costs for one mobile library vehicle would amount to £25,000. This figure is calculated from an estimate of a salary of £12,500 for both assistant and driver, based on the current recommended salary for library assistants employed by Sheffield Library and Information Services.

The cost of keeping one mobile library vehicle on the road in Sheffield for one year would be expected to total approximately £28,600. The cost of keeping mobile library services to the four areas chosen for this case study would be less, since the total hours of service to these areas are found to be approximately twelve hours per week (see timetable at Appendix 2).

7.2.2 The cost of local library provision

Figures produced by the research assistant employed by Sheffield Library and Information Services in 1995 indicate the annual full year cost estimates for the libraries

which were threatened with closure. Figures representing the annual costs for the local libraries in the case study areas have been replicated below:

Table1: Full year cost estimates for the local static library services

	Total	Gren	Hack	Hands	Hems
Employees	£52920	£13230	£13230	£13230	£13230
Premises: Electricity	£1800	£650	£600	-	£550
Gas	£590	-	£350	-	£240
Water	£620	£150	£200	-	£270
Rent	£5500	-	-	£5500	-
Rates	£4348	£593	£2500	-	£1255
Cleaning	£4200	£500	£2500	-	£1200
Total cost	£69478	£15123	£18880	£18730	£16745

These figures suggest that the cost of providing static library services to the four communities is considerably more than the cost of providing the current mobile library services to the four communities. This implies that, compared to the cost of providing static services, the provision of mobile library services in these areas costs less and could therefore be cost-effective.

However the manager of Sheffield Mobile Services is less optimistic about the future:

'Now mobile library services is the cheap option, but the cost of maintaining a fleet is rising.'

7.3 The cost-effectiveness of mobile library services

The importance of showing that a mobile library service is running on maximum economy cannot be under-estimated. Although a mobile library service is not run by commercial interests, it must still be defended against encroaching economic cuts.

Monitoring a mobile library service is also necessary in order to maintain its cost-effectiveness and validity.

7.3.1 Constant evaluation

To optimise the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of a mobile library service, it is important to monitor and evaluate its progress on a regular basis. Data and documentation should always be kept current in order to create solid evidence for the validity of the service (Smith-Langridge, 1985:33).

The Library Association recognised the importance of constant review:

‘Mobile library routes and stopping times should be under constant review in order to maximise resources and meet user needs’ (1997).

Sheffield Mobile and Special Services team have undertaken extensive evaluation in 1997, and their Outlook Report 1997/98 describes the process:

‘The process was very detailed and exhaustive and threw up a number of issues around re-scheduling and timing of specific stops.’

However the actual re-scheduling has not yet taken place. This has been postponed until details and implications of public service cuts have been announced.

7.3.2 Route Planning

Route planning is considered by many to be the most vital way in which a mobile library service can maximise its cost-effectiveness:

‘To achieve cost effectiveness, route-planning is vital - with fuel and staff costs, as well as the cost of vehicles being so high, any wastage in mileage, or time, is extremely important’ (Campbell, 1982:5)

A schematised planning of routes can become complex - factors to take into account include: population, catchment populations of each nearest branch library and mobile library stop, issue statistics, number of current borrowers, and minimum service requirements.

Considerations when planning a cost-effective route include the following:

- The frequency of service to communities - fortnightly visits appear to be the minimum frequency considered by many authorities (Smith-Langridge, 1985:33).
- The time scale for each service point, which can be based on the consideration of the average number of books issued per minute.
- The type of service to be offered, which will depend on the nature of the communities being served and the housing patterns of the area.
- The area to be serviced by the mobile library, and the minimum distance from other service points.

A Northamptonshire County Council report states that: 'each static library should be assumed to have a catchment area of 1.5 miles, within which mobile libraries should not operate' (1991). The same report suggests that a mobile library can be assumed to have a catchment area of 0.5 miles around each stop, which suggests a standard for the most economically viable distance between service points.

However, cost-effectiveness is not the only concern when planning a mobile library route.

7.4 Convenience

Ensuring maximum and most cost-effective exposure of mobile library vehicles is meaningless if those who plan the routes ignore the needs of the users. Since the unique nature of the mobile library services has already been discussed, it would make sense to suggest that routes were designed so that the maximum number of people in the priority user groups were exposed to the service.

7.4.1 Route planning

In 1997 the Library Association wrote guidelines concerning the location of mobile library stops:

‘As a minimum standard of provision mobile library stops will be located to ensure that no person is further than twenty minutes travelling time by foot or public transport from their nearest public library service point, whether a static library or a mobile library’

This is not a simple objective: In one place a particular schedule and coverage may be inadequate, but the same schedule and coverage in different circumstances might be entirely adequate and natural. Is it possible to apply a basis for evaluation?

Historically, the Cheltenham mobile has been used to provide stops at a number of (mainly urban) locations within Cheltenham. It is now the case that the mobile provides an additional service in places which are on the main bus routes into the town centre and which are no more than 1.5 miles from other service points. This may not provide a cost-effective use of resources in the current financial climate. The working group of the Gloucestershire Education Committee (1991) recommended that urban mobile libraries should not serve communities closer than two miles to the nearest static service points, unless there are groups of elderly or frail people - the majority of whom are unable to reach the static service points.

The nature of the route depends very much on the community it is designed to serve. There is no fail-safe way to plan perfect routes and schedules. No standardised or ideal solution can be seriously advocated.

This view is endorsed by the Library Association:

‘The availability of mobile library services should... be determined by a detailed understanding of the community. This will need to take account of existing and potential users - mobility, age profile, multi-cultural needs, number of people with disabilities and geographical considerations.’ (1997).

Scientific planning of schedules may be devised using analyses of borrower or population data, but it is also necessary to bear human factors in mind. The final choice of stops cannot rest on statistics alone, as it depends upon what the service is aiming to do, as well as the nature of the area to be covered.

‘Above all, in planning routes and halts, personal knowledge of the area and its patterns of movement are invaluable’ (Jones, 1965:14).

Human factors need to be borne in mind when designing mobile library routes. Some criteria cannot be measured in numbers:

‘This service is about people. You cannot reduce it to a scientific exercise’ (Allison & Cook, 1982).

It make sense to suggest that each individual community should develop its own criteria as to what constitutes a valid route, and that schedules should constantly be re-evaluated and re-appraised in view of these criteria (Sexton, 1961:316). Experience with the individual community can in some measure govern the estimate for the area to be served by a single mobile library stop.

As well as consulting the communities to be served, it is also necessary to consult all the staff who are working with the communities:

‘The co-operation and assistance of staff at all levels is very important, therefore, consultation should take place at all stages of route planning’ (Campbell, 1982:26).

Other considerations to consider when planning a mobile library service route are the frequency of mobile library visits and the length of stopping times. Such considerations involve personal knowledge of the communities to be served, as well as an affinity with staff who are experienced in this field. These considerations are beyond the scope for this study, and may be suggested as a topic for further research.

7.4.2 Evidence from staff

The location of mobile library service points in the case study areas involved mobile library staff, the library staff of the former local libraries and other local people:

‘We could have found out much of the information by ourselves, but we felt it vitally important to involve local people in these decisions, so that they could own them’ (Telfer, 1997:13).

Telfer indicates that previous experience of the mobile library staff was considered:

‘Where no information was forthcoming we made our own decisions based on our service knowledge and experience.’ (1997:13)

It was decided that service points would not be located outside the former library buildings, as this was considered inappropriate. It would give the impression that the mobile library vehicle was aiming to be a substitute for the former library, and it would

have ‘really rubbed the public’s nose in the fact that their library had been taken from them’ (1997:13).

7.4.3 Evidence from users

Survey participants were asked to rate the location of the service points they were using, in terms of convenience.

Table 2: How mobile library users rate the location of their nearest stop

Rating	All users	Gren	Hack	Hands	Hems
Excellent	46 58%	8 44%	7 78%	22 65%	9 47%
Good	30 38%	7 39%	2 22%	12 35%	9 47%
Average	3 3%	2 11%	-	-	1 6%
Poor	1 1%	1 6%	-	-	-
Total	80	18	9	34	19

Most users were satisfied with the location of the stops, offering remarks such as ‘The stopping place is ideal for me’. However this survey may be biased towards favourable results, as only those who find the stop convenient will use the service at any given time.

7.5 Reaching the priority client groups

The priority client groups for Sheffield Mobile Library Services included the following:

- Elderly people with disabilities
- People who, by reason of inadequate public transport or domestic/personal circumstances, are unable to make use of a community library service (e.g.: families with children under the age of 5, travelling people)

- People with a physical or mental illness or learning difficulty.

This list provided some guidelines for the suitability of mobile library services for each community:

‘The Mobile Library Service was strictly targeted to the priority groups. Whenever requests came in for new stops, they were measured against the priorities and service statement, both of which had been approved by the committee.’ (Telfer, 1997:8)

It would be possible to suggest that those who live in the affected communities and who belong to any of the above priority groups would stand to benefit the most from a new mobile library service in their area. This would also imply that those who live in the affected communities and who do NOT belong to any of the above groups might benefit the least from a local mobile library service.

It is clear to see that there may be a tension between mobile services being seen as a substitute library service for those who have lost their local static service, and the fact that they claim to be a specialised service which caters for specific groups of people. The specialisation of Sheffield Mobile Services has been noted by others:

‘The Mobile Library Service is targeted where specific needs are to be met. At one stage it was seen as a stop-gap, but they didn’t attempt to do that. They focus their efforts on specific targets.’ (Area Manager, southern group)

‘It has its limitations, but it is appreciated by some - such as old people and some children.’ (Director, Grenoside Community Association)

With this in mind, survey participants were asked to give details about themselves, and their reasons for using the mobile library services. They were also asked to rate the effectiveness of the following:

- Stock selection and choice
- Staff

This study attempts to find out whether Sheffield Mobile Services are fulfilling their priority of meeting the needs of certain client groups in the affected areas. Those who

took part in the survey of mobile library use were asked about their reasons for joining the service, and whether they belong to any of the priority client groups specified by the service.

7.5.1 Reasons given for using the mobile services

An overwhelming majority of survey participants (87.5%) claim to use the mobile library service because their local static branch has closed down. The remaining 12.5% claim to use the service because it is difficult to reach the nearest static service. Such figures suggest that the majority of mobile library users in these areas may be active library users before their introduction to the mobile service - few have been introduced to the mobile service as their only experience of using a public library.

7.5.2 Profile of mobile library users

Survey participants were asked to give information about themselves, or about the people for whom they were using the mobile library. It is hoped that this information could indicate whether mobile library users in these areas belong to the vulnerable client groups specified by the Mobile Library Services.

Table 3: Information about mobile library users

Client group	All users	Gren	Hack	Hands	Hems
Aged over 65	46 58%	3 17%	8 89%	23 68%	12 63%
Aged 5 or under	10 13%	5 28%	-	2 6%	3 16%
Disabled	2 2%	-	-	2 6%	-
Housebound	-	-	-	-	-
None of the above	22 27%	10 55%	1 11%	7 20%	4 21%
TOTAL	80	18	9	34	19

It is clear to see that the majority of mobile library users in these areas are aged over 65. Of the areas studied, Grenoside has the lowest percentage of population aged 0-4 (SASPAC figure for 1991 is 4.5%), although the percentage of mobile library users who live in this area is significantly higher than the percentage for other areas. This shows that factors to take into consideration when planning a mobile library route include the proximity of other library services as well as the nature of the local community.

7.6 Stock selection

It would be difficult to adopt one policy for selecting stock for a mobile library vehicle, because it covers a wide variety of areas and users. A mobile library can travel from one extreme type of community to another, and must be prepared to serve both. It must develop a flexible and widely appealing collection.

This difficulty is exacerbated by the limitations imposed on the collection by the size of the vehicles. This means that greater demands must be made to justify the inclusion of stock on the shelves. Little has been written on the particular issue of choosing stock for mobile libraries, but in practice the stock usually reflects popular literature. Non-fiction is often included as well, but this must also have a wide appeal:

‘No matter how good a stock of non-fiction is kept on a small van, it must by demand be popular non-fiction.’ (Bell, 1974)

The Library Association attempts to impose a minimum standard on stock selection for mobile libraries by suggesting that at least half of a vehicle’s total stock should be exchanged annually (1997). The Library Association also recommends that mobile libraries should: ‘provide the user with the means to identify and locate material not immediately available on the vehicle’(1997) and that each mobile library should provide a range of audio and video recordings in line with the authority’s provision in small static branches.

7.6.1 Evidence from users

The situation concerning stock selection in Sheffield is that material is bought for the Mobile Library Services and spread around the vehicles so that it represents the service as a whole. The stock is circulated, as all mobile library vehicles serve all routes.

The stock for the mobile library vehicles in Sheffield is predominantly fiction, and it includes books, videos and spoken-word cassettes. The relatively small coverage of non-fiction stock has been noted in the Outlook Report 1997/98.

According to Telfer (1997), the six monthly review of the new stops revealed the following public opinion:

‘The stock on the vans is so much better than the stock in the libraries which were replaced. This is because the material in the small libraries was neglected and out of date. Not through any fault of the librarians who managed them, but because of the dreadful reductions in library spending.’ (p.15)

Now, two and a half years later, survey participants for this study were asked to rate the choice of material.

Table 4: How mobile library users rate the choice of stock

Rating	All users	Gren	Hack	Hands	Hems
Excellent	13 16%	-	3 33%	5 15%	5 26%
Good	33 41%	7 39%	2 22%	17 50%	7 37%
Average	29 36%	7 39%	4 45%	11 32%	7 37%
Poor	5 7%	4 22%	-	1 3%	-
total	80	18	9	34	19

These results are encouraging, given that 87.5% of survey participants claim to have been using local static services. Further comments made in favour of the mobile library vehicle stock include the following:

'I can't grumble.'

'There's a good variety of books.'

'I am more than satisfied with the choice - it's better than it was at the branch library.'

As far as stock is concerned, the overall impression given by survey participants is one of satisfaction.

7.7 Staffing

Consideration must be given to the number and status of mobile library staff. In 1963 the American Library Association suggested that a mobile library should have no less than two members of staff, and a total departmental staff equating at least one member for each 25,000 volumes circulated annually (p.11). Practice regarding the numbers of staff needed on mobile library vehicles vary in the UK, and depends on the size of the communities being served.

The personality of mobile library staff members is an important factor to take into account when recruiting. Firstly, capable and well-trained outgoing library staff build good public relations and enhance the image of the service. Secondly, they must be able to overcome the difficulties of lack of comfort and space and deal with conditions which are often trying. Staff should also be flexible, as mobile libraries can be subject to sudden and dramatic schedule changes as well as a tremendous range in age and reading level of their users (Williams, 1961:303).

7.7.1 Evidence from users

Survey participants for this study were asked to rate the staff they had encountered on the vehicles:

Table 5: How mobile library users rate the staff

Rating	All users	Gren	Hack	Hands	Hems
Excellent	50 63%	11 61%	7 78%	20 59%	12 63%
Good	29 36%	7 39%	1 11%	14 41%	7 37%
Average	1 1%	-	1 11%	-	-
Poor	-	-	-	-	-
Total	80	18	9	34	19

The results may have been biased by the fact that the survey participants were questioned on the vehicles.

Mobile Library Services in the Future:

Is there a future for mobile library services in the UK? Will they be able to keep up with the present government's technological aspirations?

The manager of the Sheffield Mobile Library Services is not optimistic:

'If the government says what it's going to... it will be difficult for mobile library services to keep up. Our future has to be with technology, otherwise we'll be picked off.'

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

'An individual study provides only partial answers - social science cannot usually provide complete answers, but it can almost always provide useful insights' (Hornig Priest, 1996:13).

The function of this study was to describe the effectiveness of mobile library services for the residents of particular communities which had lost local branch libraries. All communities are different, in ways that are impossible to define. For this reason the

sample chosen for the case study cannot be proven to be representative of a wider population of people who had lost their local libraries.

8.1 The social role of static libraries

For each community the effectiveness of the mobile library service was measured against that of the former static service, as well as that of alternative static services. Evidence was found which supported the notion that facilities and the familiar staff attract users of the former local libraries to other static libraries. Deterrents to the use of alternative branch libraries were found to include the cost of travel, the mobility of users, and the fact that it may be perceived as belonging to another community.

The community function of local libraries was discussed, and evidence of the social role of a local static library was collected from staff and mobile library users. This supports the notion that a static library is unique in providing a neutral ground for people in the community, and that it may not be directly related to the provision of reading material. Of the survey participants who use the mobile libraries because their local library was closed (87.5% of the total number surveyed), 66% claimed to miss the former local library and 32% said that they missed it for a reason unrelated to materials provision.

This survey was limited by the fact that only current mobile library users were questioned. Further evidence for the limitations of mobile library services for former static library users could be obtained by examining the effectiveness of mobile libraries from the point of view of those who have stopped using the service. Unfortunately the task of finding and identifying such survey participants was beyond the scope of this study.

8.2 Mobile library use and publicity

The majority of survey participants (66%) claimed to use the mobile library service every week. 69% said that they use the mobile as their only gateway to library services. This, together with the fact that 87.5% of survey participants claimed to have used their former local library, suggests that those who use this mobile library service are dedicated library users. 55% of survey participants said that they found out about the current mobile library service from leaflets left in the former local libraries at the time of

closure. Mobile library services may be effective for those who are dedicated library users, but no evidence was found to show that new users were being attracted. This could suggest that there is a need for ongoing publicity of mobile library services outside libraries.

Deterrents to the use of mobile libraries as alternatives to former local libraries include scheduling difficulties, limited time to browse and meet people, and limited choice of stock. However the evidence for these deterrents was obtained indirectly from static library staff. Again, a sample of former mobile library users could provide direct evidence to this effect.

8.3 Route planning

It was found that route planning was of vital importance, to compensate for the limited availability of the mobile library and to ensure that priority client groups have maximum access to the service. It was difficult to obtain a clear picture of the effectiveness of route-planning in this case, since survey participants use the mobile service because it is convenient for them. The scope of this study could be broadened by asking survey participants whether another stopping time or place would be more suitable and why.

8.4 Target client groups

A significant percentage of survey participants (58%) said that they were over sixty-five years old, which means that they belong to one of the target client groups specified by Sheffield Mobile Library Services. 27% of survey participants said that they did not belong to any of these groups. An area for further research would be the comparison of mobile library users in areas which have recently lost a branch library with mobile library users who have not had access to a local library in their community. This may produce evidence to suggest whether mobile library users in these areas share the same concerns and opinions about their service, and it may discover the extent to which users' expectations could have been affected by former access to a static library.

8.5 What mobile library users value

57% of survey participants rated the choice of stock on the mobile library vehicles as 'excellent' or 'good', but a significant percentage (51%) of participants who claimed to miss the former static service said it was the choice of stock that they missed most. These figures could suggest that current mobile library users prioritise on the material-lending function of a library, and that those who may value the social function of a library have gone elsewhere.

8.6 Cost effectiveness

The cost of supplying a mobile library service (approximately £28,600) was found to be a fraction of the cost estimated for running the four former static libraries (approximately £69,500). Mobile library provision could be said to be more cost-effective than the provision of static services, although this does not address factors such as loss of readership.

8.7 To sum up

It appears that those who use mobile libraries in the areas selected for this case study are satisfied with the material-lending aspects of the service. However the mobile service seems to attract people who use it frequently and regularly. This could be attributed to a general lack of publicity for the mobile services or the fact that a mobile library vehicle cannot provide what occasional library users want from a library service.

Mobile library services in the case study areas may be effective for those who use a library regularly; live near the service points; fall into the priority client groups specified by Sheffield Mobile Library Services, and use a library to fulfil a materials-related need.

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APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Mobile Library User,

I am undertaking some research for the Department of Information Studies at the University of Sheffield, which investigates the role of the Mobile Library Service in the overall library provision of Sheffield.

I would be grateful if you could give two minutes of your time to fill in my questionnaire. All information I receive will be treated in the strictest confidence.

MANY THANKS FOR TAKING THE TIME TO FILL IN MY QUESTIONNAIRE.

1) Name and location of library vehicle stop: _____

2) How often do you visit this stop? Once a week: ___
Twice a month: ___
Once a month: ___
Less frequently: ___

3) Do you use a branch library as well? Yes ___
No ___

If YES, which one? _____

4) How did you find out about this service? Leaflet: ___
Friend: ___
Poster: ___
Seeing the vehicle: ___
Other: ___

5) Why do you use this service? Local branch library closed down: ___
Difficult to reach nearest branch library: ___
Better choice of stock than NBL: ___
More suitable service than NBL: ___
Other (please specify): _____

6) If you use this service because your local branch library has closed down, please complete the section overleaf:

How have you changed your use of the library?

Borrow more: _____

Borrow less: _____

Borrow different things: _____

Visit less often: _____

Visit more often: _____

Other (please specify): _____

Do you miss anything about the branch library?

7) Please tick the boxes which show what you think of the following:

	Excellent:	Good:	Average:	Poor:
Frequency of visits:				
Location of Stop:				
Choice of Stock:				
Layout:				
Staff Knowledge:				

8) Please give some details about yourself:

Are you: In paid employment: _____

Self-employed: _____

Seeking work: _____

Retired: _____

Running a home: _____

Student: _____

Are you , or do you use this service for someone who is:

65 or over: _____

5 or younger: _____

Disabled: _____

Housebound: _____

None of the above: _____

APPENDIX 5

Table: What mobile library users miss about their former local library

Missed feature	% of mobile library users who claim to miss their former local library
Availability	51%
Choice	51%
Personal service	17%
Space	13%
Facilities	9%
Haven - browsing ability	9%
Meeting people	6%
Local information	2%