

2010 | 11

LibrariesWest Annual Report





## Foreword

‘LibrariesWest is an essential part of the South Gloucestershire Library Delivery Plan; through working in partnership we are able to provide the best value for money to our residents and strive for the highest quality library service’

**Cllr James Hunt,**

Executive Councillor:  
Communities, South  
Gloucestershire Council

Welcome to the LibrariesWest Annual Report for 2010/11, which includes information on the consortium, together with performance data, our achievements during the year, and details of plans for the future.

The past year has been difficult for many public library authorities, notably Somerset which decided on its planned reductions during the year and is implementing those during 2011/12 and beyond. However, whatever each authority may face over the next few years serves to put the value of the Consortium into ever greater focus.

In my view, that value is primarily seen in the benefits LibrariesWest creates for library users: the access to two million items and to a range of other online resources via the website, being able to use their membership throughout the region and to return items at any library. Also, of course, in how our partnership gives us the framework to share services and so reduce costs – notably the Library Management System, but also Bibliographic Services (which deals with the procurement of stock) and the Enquiry Centre.



This sharing is invaluable and the credit for this goes to the staff in the teams which provide those joint services. Likewise, the free sharing of skills and knowledge between colleagues in the various LibrariesWest groups adds value in a significant way. We see that in the Heads of Service group and are committed to building on these benefits.

As LibrariesWest, we're looking forward in 2011/12 and beyond to planned system upgrades and developments, notably the new public website for the consortium. These are described in more detail elsewhere.

As ever throughout the 15 years (and counting) of Foursite/LibrariesWest, congratulations and thanks go to all the staff across the five authorities for the partnership working which makes this Consortium such a success.

**Phil Nichols**

Libraries and Information Manager, Somerset County Council,  
and Chair of LibrariesWest Board



## What is LibrariesWest?

LibrariesWest is one of the leading public library consortia in the UK, and is a partnership between Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset, Somerset and South Gloucestershire library services. It is seen as an example of good practice where authorities work together to achieve savings and efficiencies, and to bring fresh thinking, new ideas and innovation to the service offered to customers.

LibrariesWest is about doing things better together, and we have adopted the strapline 'Get more from your library'.

Customers can use their membership card in any one of the 100+ libraries across the consortium to borrow, return and reserve items, and use the computers to access the internet and office programmes. They also have access to a joint catalogue of around 2 million items, with the facility to interlend all stock, including DVDs, CDs, spoken word and computer games.



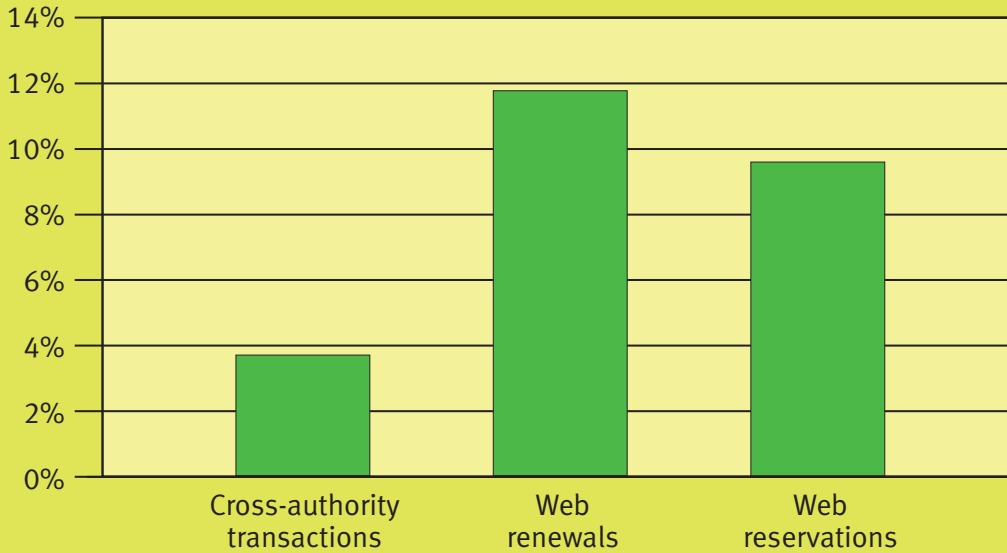
## Facts and figures

- LibrariesWest serves a growing resident population in excess of 1.6 million across an area of 1,847 sq miles, through a network of 98 static libraries and 11 mobile libraries.
- We also provide a Library Management System to 2 Schools Library Services and a number of schools and Learning Support Centres.
- In 2010/11 267,873 people – around 1 in 6 of the population - borrowed items from our libraries, a slight decrease from the previous year.
- Our catalogue contains almost 2 million items and around 770,000 individual titles.
- 366,910 items were supplied to customers last year from within the stock of the 5 authorities to satisfy reservations, a 4.4% increase on the previous year – 79% were supplied within 15 days, a 1% decrease on the previous year.
- Our website [www.librarieswest.org.uk](http://www.librarieswest.org.uk) received almost 10 million visits over the year from customers searching the library catalogue, reserving items, renewing their loans and using a range of online resources among other activities.
- 534 borrowers made comments online about the library service during 2010/11, an increase of 45% over the previous year. All had individual responses.
- 345 reader reviews were submitted on the web during the year, making a total of 2087 reviews in total for customers to view.

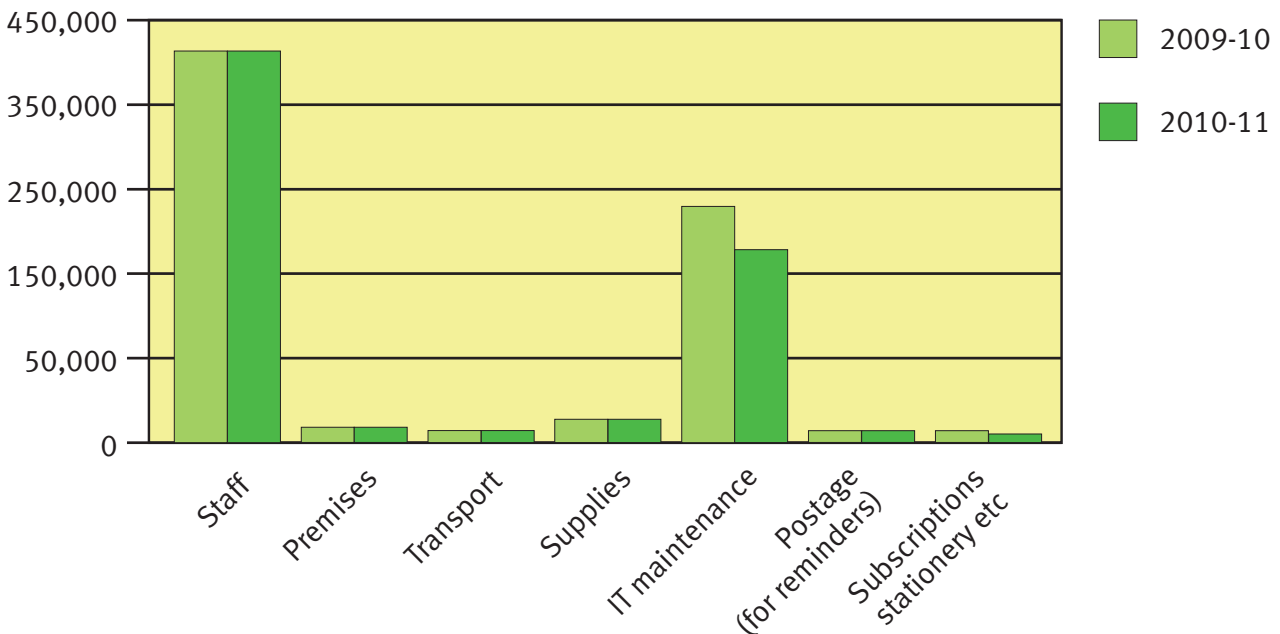
## Key performance data

During the year we saw significant growth in use of the web as an access channel, and a continuing increase in the number of customers using their membership cards to borrow, return and reserve between authorities.

### % increase from 2009/10 to 2010/11



## Cost of running the consortium



We are pleased to report that overall running costs reduced by 9% between 2009/10 and 2010/11, most significantly in IT maintenance costs. Fewer reminder notices for overdue items and available reservations are now being sent by post as increasing numbers of customers opt for email notification instead, allowing us to make further cost savings each year.



**'I do like the new website. Well done. I recommend the online service to my friends at every opportunity. I can systematically work through an author's entire list. It's saved me a fortune'**

**Peter Baxter** from Wells



## Key developments during the year

**'New design/layout of website superb – well done for making my life easier'**

**Steve Smetham**  
from Bristol

**'I used the renewal site for the first time today.**

**It was brilliant! It was quick, I could see where to go clearly and it only took seconds. Well done. Thank you for making my day easier'**

**Laura Worsdell**  
from Nailsea

### **Improving our web presence**

In September we took the first step towards enhancing the LibrariesWest website by upgrading to the latest version of our supplier's web product. A new web server was installed in July which allowed us to improve the speed and performance of the site, and following testing and configuration the new site went live in September. Although the core functionality remained the same, the upgrade allowed us to improve the 'look and feel' of the site, and in particular the home page which became a platform for trailing new services, promotions and events to users. A bulk email was sent to all members with an email address alerting them to the changes and encouraging them to use the site.

Since the new site was launched we have received some very encouraging customer comments, such as the examples quoted on these pages.

### **Downloadable audiobooks**

In June Bristol Libraries launched an audiobooks download service. Within three months almost 400 members had registered to use this free service and the number was growing fast. As a result, the rest of LibrariesWest decided to join in and on November 1st the service was launched consortium wide with a major feature on the homepage of the newly relaunched Librarieswest website. Within a couple of months almost 2,000 members had created accounts and between them accounted for over 5,500 downloads. The core collection of 600 fully unabridged titles included modern fiction, crime, thrillers, classics, non-fiction and young adult titles, and was added to at the rate of 5 new titles each month. Users were attracted to the service by unlimited, simultaneous access to each title and automatic expiry dates – so no waiting lists or late return fees!



In February, we launched a 3 month promotion to target the commuter market, many of whom hadn't previously used libraries, by handing out business cards and flyers at the five busiest rail stations across the consortium. Each new user registered was automatically entered into a free prize draw with the chance to win iTunes gift cards. The marketing materials and prizes were funded by referral fees paid to us by [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) for items directly purchased through links from our website, along with sponsorship from the service provider. Press releases were sent out, highlighting the consortium angle, which resulted in coverage in local newspapers and local radio stations. The promotion resulted in a 188% increase in new members setting up an account during the first week, and the number of titles downloaded more than doubled.

#### **Use of the web as an access channel increasing**

We are continuing to see an increase in the amount of business carried out over the web. The number of items renewed on [www.librarieswest.org.uk](http://www.librarieswest.org.uk) during 2010/11 was 1,256,820 (which represents 14.4% of all issues), and an increase of 10.4% on the previous year. Use of the automated phone renewal service (Callpoint) now represents just 1.2% of all issues and fell by a further 9% during the year as more customers turn to the web. The increase in web business supports our plans to significantly enhance our web presence during the coming years.



**'This site is SO much better than your old one. It actually works – and fast! May it stay that way!!'**

**Judith Carr** from  
Portishead

**'Absolutely love the new look and ease of navigating the site. Thanks for the new and improved site.'**

**Anupa Ram** from  
Bradley Stoke

### **Improving communication and awareness among library staff**

Following the launch of a staff extranet in 2009/10, designed to improve communication and staff awareness and provide centralised file storage, our focus during the year was to add and develop content. The extranet provides staff across the consortium with a single point of reference for information, resources and communications relating to work that takes place at consortium level. It is hosted on a free external web platform and is accessible to all staff across the consortium. Use is continuing to grow as it becomes a key method of communicating among staff and we anticipate it being central to our development over the coming years.

During the year we added a significant amount of content relating to the background and development of LibrariesWest including policy statements and staff briefing notes, and it now acts as the primary means of communication for LibrariesWest group meetings, in particular the Board. We anticipate it being used for the development and delivery of e learning modules and virtual meetings in the future as it becomes increasingly difficult to provide face to face training for staff due to constraints on time and budgets.

We have also started to add resources created as a result of staff training days. For example, resources to support children's story and rhyme time sessions in libraries with an element of interactivity so that staff can recommend suitable books and resources to each other.

Quarterly staff newsletters are also produced each year and focus on developments and new services within the consortium, reports from staff training events and articles on



initiatives within each authority that are likely to be of wider interest and relevance. During the year, articles included a report on the lottery funded refurbishment of Yate library, and a 'Lit Hop in the Café' event at Bristol Central Library.

### **Cross authority business still increasing**

The number of customers carrying out transactions (loans, returns and renewals) in an authority other than the one they originally registered with increased by 3.5% during the last year – to 19,018 - which demonstrates the value placed by customers on our flexible policy of being able to use any library across the consortium. During 2010/11 254,977 transactions were carried out in an authority other than the borrowers' registration authority – an increase of 7.6% over the previous year.

### **Expanding the consortium**

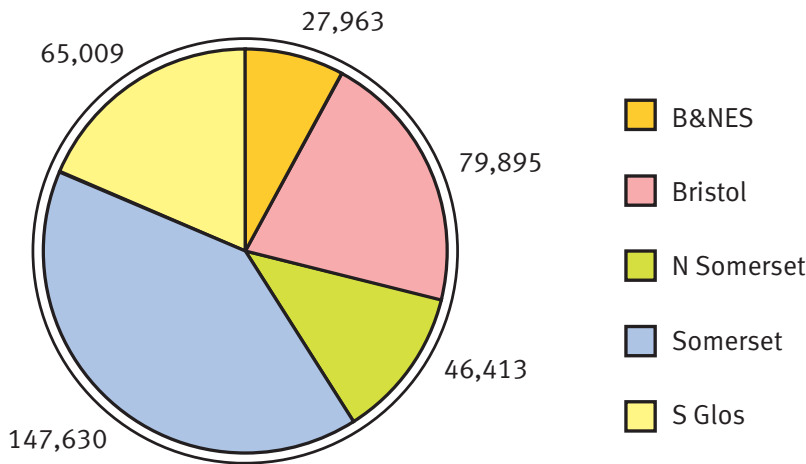
During the year we engaged in dialogue with a number of neighbouring authorities to explore the potential for expanding the consortium and sharing more services. As part of this process we developed an 'offer' to other authorities potentially interested in joining LibrariesWest. Although talks were positive it became apparent that due to legal and procurement restrictions we were unable to admit new authorities under the existing Library Management System (LMS) supply contract without going out to competitive tender, which none of the authorities were in a position to do.



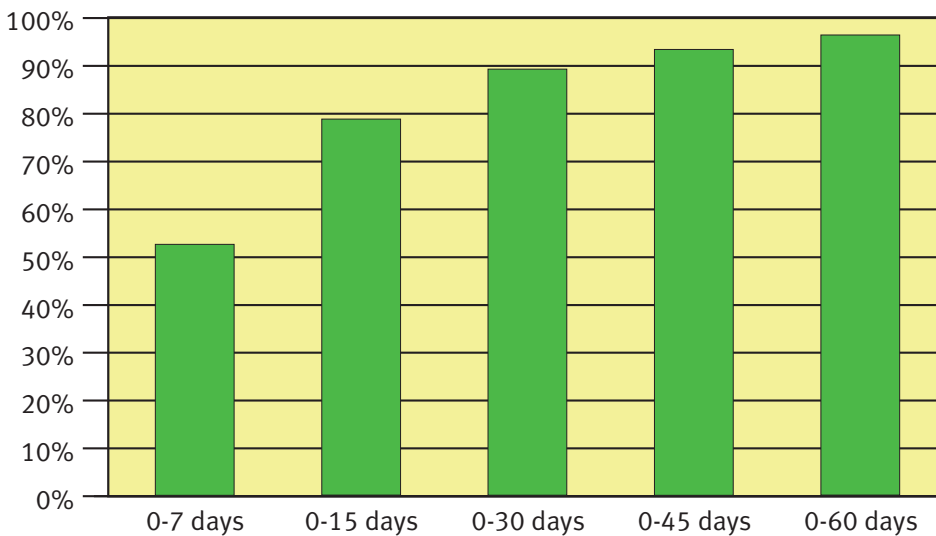
## Bibliographic Services

The Consortium Bibliographic Services Unit in Bridgwater currently handles the acquisition and processing of all stock for four of the five LibrariesWest authorities, including 3 prisons and Resources for Learning (Somerset’s Schools Library Service). Bristol runs its own Acquisitions Unit and currently has a contract with another purchasing consortium.

### Reservations satisfied 2010/11



### Speed of supply for reserved items all LibrariesWest authorities



- The total annual spend on books and other materials was £1,597,030
- In 2010/11 189,035 new items were purchased across the consortium

Better value for money is achieved by having a significant total combined spend, and a single point of delivery which allows the suppliers to pass on cost savings to us. Fully automated (EDI) invoicing is used to improve speed of supply and reduce back office costs. We use the full range of EDI messages to achieve maximum efficiency.

For the past three years we have been awarded ‘e4libraries’ accreditation for the promotion of beneficial technology in the library supply chain.



## Training

One of the key benefits of working as a consortium is the added value we can bring to the design and delivery of training events. The five authorities work together to deliver better value training opportunities and during 2010/11 we delivered 6 joint training events that were attended by more than 150 staff from across the consortium.

We deliver joint training where any one authority would be unable to deliver it alone, thereby sharing cost and workload.



Staff value the opportunity to meet with colleagues and visit other libraries across the consortium. Often good ideas and examples of best practice can be picked up and applied locally, an excellent by-product of these events.

Wherever possible we take advantage of being able to use libraries in the consortium as free venues on their closed days.

During the year we delivered the following staff training events:

**The LibrariesWest Development Day** showcased much of the innovative work from within the consortium, including work with under fives in Bath & North East Somerset, building and developing strong links with local communities in Bristol and the flagship Enquiry Centre in Somerset.

**Pushing the boundaries: extending library services with volunteers** explored issues around using volunteers in libraries, with workshops focussing on some of the practicalities involved, as well as learning about good practice in other authorities.

**Top of the class: every visit a success** provided front line staff with guidance in planning and running successful school class visits. Participants shared examples of good practice and took part in workshops to plan and run visits.



**Making Reading Count** helped library managers demonstrate the impact their reading services have on local authority priorities and Local Area Agreement targets.

**Cracking Displays: getting it right for readers** was run for frontline staff working in self service libraries, and staff interested in and responsible for promotions and displays. The course provided very practical advice on how to present books in a way that promotes maximum use and encourages the non-purposive user (around 3 out of every 4) to browse and find something suitable to borrow.

**Enquiry Skills: terrified to confident in easy steps** assisted frontline staff in the effective handling of basic enquiries. The aim of the day was to increase staff confidence in handling enquiries and to enable staff to know when it is appropriate to pass an enquiry on, making effective use of the Enquiry Centre.



### Some key service developments planned for 2011/12

- Complete redesign of [www.librarieswest.org.uk](http://www.librarieswest.org.uk), using a new platform to significantly enhance our web offer
- Launch an E books service
- Upgrade the Library Management System (LMS) to improve workflow and usability
- Make use of external funding to explore options for the further sharing of services to achieve greater efficiency savings
- Develop email communication with customers to market the range of library services, events and promotions
- Explore the potential for joining a larger book purchasing consortium which would allow us to realise further savings

## How LibrariesWest works

- The LibrariesWest Board comprises the Heads of Service from each of the 5 library authorities and provides strategic direction.
- Somerset County Council is the lead authority and employs staff on behalf of the consortium – mainly in the areas of systems management and Bibliographic Services.
- A Development Officer co-ordinates activity and provides the capacity to further develop the efficiency and effectiveness of the consortium, in liaison with a range of service development groups covering areas such as reader development, social inclusion and marketing.
- A Service Level Agreement outlines the scope of activity and responsibilities within the consortium, and Somerset as the lead authority has a contract with Axiell for provision of the Library Management System.
- Costs are re-charged to the partners.
- A quarterly staff newsletter is produced and an annual staff development day delivered, alongside other training events.



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**[www.librarieswest.org.uk](http://www.librarieswest.org.uk)**

We hope that you have found this report helpful, and welcome any suggestions for next year's edition. Please send any comments to:

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