Taobh Tíre

A better library service for rural & isolated communities

December 2008

PLRP Report No. 3

Taobh Tíre

A better library service for rural & isolated communities

December 2008

PLRP Report No. 3

Public Library Research Programme

The Public Library Research Programme assists local authorities in carrying out public library research.

The Programme is co-funded by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and local authorities, and managed by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna/The Library Council.

Taobh Tíre is a research and action pilot project under the Public Libraries Research Programme which was funded jointly by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and Local Authorities.

The Taobh Tíre Project has received the following awards:

- Cooperation Ireland Pride of Place Award for Community Services Outreach (2006).
- European e-Government Good Practice Label (2007).
- An Taoiseach's Excellence in Public Service Award in 2008.

Public Library Research Committee

Laurence Kelly, Assistant Principal, representing the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government
Norma McDermott, Director, representing An Chomhairle Leabharlanna/The Library Council
Fionnuala Hanrahan, County Librarian, Wexford County Council, representing the Library Association of Ireland
Professor Michael Casey, School of Library and Information Studies, National University of Ireland, Dublin
Chair: Annette Kelly, Assistant Director, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna/The Library Council
Executive Secretary: Susan O'Toole, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna/The Library Council

Funding Bodies

Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.
Donegal County Council.
Information Society Fund.
EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation.
Údarás na Gaeltachta.

In addition to the above, the Project Management Team wishes to acknowledge funding and other support given directly to Taobh Tíre service points by a range of national and community bodies.

Project Management Team

Alun Bevan, Research and Information Officer, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna.
Brian Boyle, Head of Information Systems, Donegal County Council.
Eileen Burgess, Donegal County Librarian, Donegal County Council.
Maria Ferguson, Strategic Policy Officer, Donegal County Council.
Annette Kelly, Assistant Director, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna.
Eimear McLoone, Research Assistant, Donegal County Council.
Loretto McNicholas, Research Manager, Donegal County Council.
Donna Quinn, Project Co-Ordinator, Donegal County Council.
Roisin McBride, Research Assistant, Donegal County Council.

Acknowledgements

The Taobh Tíre Project Management Team is grateful to all those who helped in carrying out the Taobh Tíre project and in preparing this final report.

In particular, the Project Management Team wishes to thank the following:

- The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.
- Public Library Research Committee.
- An Chomhairle Leabharlanna/The Library Council.
- Donegal County Library.
- Donegal County Council Information Systems Division.
- Donegal County Council Research & Policy Section.
- The Western Education & Library Board, Northern Ireland.
- All agencies, community groups and individuals who participated in the Taobh Tíre project.
- The management and staff of the Taobh Tíre Community Partners;
  - Áislann Chill Chartha
  - An tSean Bheairic, An Fál Carrach
  - Áras Sheáin Bháin, Baile na Finne
  - Comharchumann Forbartha & Fostaíochta Arainn Mhór
  - Comharchumann Toraí
  - Earagail Éisc, Mín An Aoire
  - Halla Pobal Fán an Bhualtaigh
  - Ionad Acmhainne Teaghlaigh, Mhíobhaigh
  - Ionad Lae Day Centre, Fanad
  - Letterkenny Community Development Project
  - Letterkenny Youth and Family Service
  - Oifig an Phoist, Mín An Aoire
  - St Johnston Carrigans Family Resource Centre
  - The Forge Family Resource Centre, Pettigo
- The staff of Donegal County Library who adopted this new initiative with energy and enthusiasm.

List of Abbreviations

ADSL	Asymmetric digital subscriber line
CD	Compact disc
CDP	Community development project
CD-ROM	Compact disc read-only memory
CLS	Community legal service
DCC	Donegal County Council
DED	District electoral division
FÁS	Foras Áiseanna Saothair (Training and Employment Authority)
FRC	Family Resource Centre
GMIT	Galway - Mayo Institute of Technology
HSE	Health Services Executive
ICTs	Information and communications technologies
ISDN	Integrated services digital network
IT	Information technology
LARL	Lake Agassiz Regional Library
LCDP	Letterkenny Community Development Project
LYFS	Letterkenny Youth and Family Service
PC	Personal computer
PLRP	Public Libraries Research Programme
PLUS	Public library user survey
PSTN	Public switched telephone network
SITT	Seirbhis Iompair Tuaithe Teoranta
V.E.C.	Vocational Education Committee
WebOPAC	Online public access catalogue
WELB	Western Education and Library Board, Northern Ireland

List of Tables

Executive Summary

Taobh Tíre is a **libraries research and action pilot project** carried out by Donegal County Council with the support of An Chomhairle Leabharlanna. It was funded under the Public Libraries Research Programme with additional assistance from the Information Society Fund, Donegal County Council, the EU Peace II cross-border programme and Údarás na Gaeltachta.

Because **rural and isolated communities in Donegal** were not well served by the traditional branch library and mobile library networks, the Taobh Tíre pilot project was envisaged as a means of delivering a wide range of public library services to these communities using **new and innovative methods of service delivery**. This was highlighted as an action in Donegal County Council planning statement Saol agus Saoithiúlacht, the strategic plan for Cultural Services 2001-2004. The County Development Boards strategy, An Straitéis, has sustaining rural communities as a cross cutting theme. It was also hoped that any models developed by Donegal Library Service would have the potential to be replicated by other library authorities in Ireland wishing to provide a similar service to their communities.

The design and implementation of new and innovative delivery models centred on **developing partnerships** between Donegal Library Service and local communities in order to set up local service points in five representative remote regions of County Donegal. Successful, working partnerships were established with variety of local agencies including community development groups, commercial companies, a rural transport Initiative and other local bodies.

In all, **fourteen Taobh Tíre pilot service points** have been established to date throughout Donegal, with a total of **1,492 registered members** in 2007. Ten service points are located in remote mainland regions, two are on the northwest islands of Oileán Árainn Mhór and Oileán Thoraí and two service points were set up in disadvantaged urban areas in Letterkenny. Each service point houses a 'taster' collection of between 200 and 2,800 books and one or more PCs connected to the Internet. Service points are open for 20-60 hours per week and are staffed by people from the local community who are trained by County Library personnel. The service points are actively supported by local branch library staff who process online requests for books, arrange delivery of books and involve the service point in reading and other public events of Donegal Library Services.

In addition to partnership with local communities, the Taobh Tíre service delivery model was also centred on the **application and exploitation of information and communications technologies (ICTs)**. These technologies served as the bedrock on which to link remote and isolated communities to the full range of services offered by Donegal Library Service. ICTs were used to facilitate connectivity between these communities and the main library by providing online access to the main catalogue (WebOPAC) and allowing users to order/reserve books online and have them delivered to their local Taobh Tíre service point. Users may also access other online services such as *Ask a Librarian* as well as a wide range of databases available through the Donegal Library website.

The **project methodology** was based on desk research on innovative models of library service provision both in Ireland and abroad, as well as consultation with local communities throughout Donegal with a view to determining community needs, constructing regional profiles and exploring opportunities for partnerships with local community agencies. A full review of the Taobh Tíre service was undertaken in 2006 by means of surveys of a panel of 14 key stakeholders, all 14 service point operators and representative samples of adult and juvenile users of the service points. Use of the WebOPAC by users of Taobh Tíre service points was also analysed.

The Taobh Tíre pilot project **has met all the objectives it set out to achieve** and is proving to be an innovative and sustainable model of library service delivery to rural and isolated communities in Donegal. It has facilitated **greatly improved outreach and greater penetration of the library service** within the Donegal community and it also has the **potential to be replicated by other library authorities** in Ireland and overseas in addressing similar problems in serving their clientele.
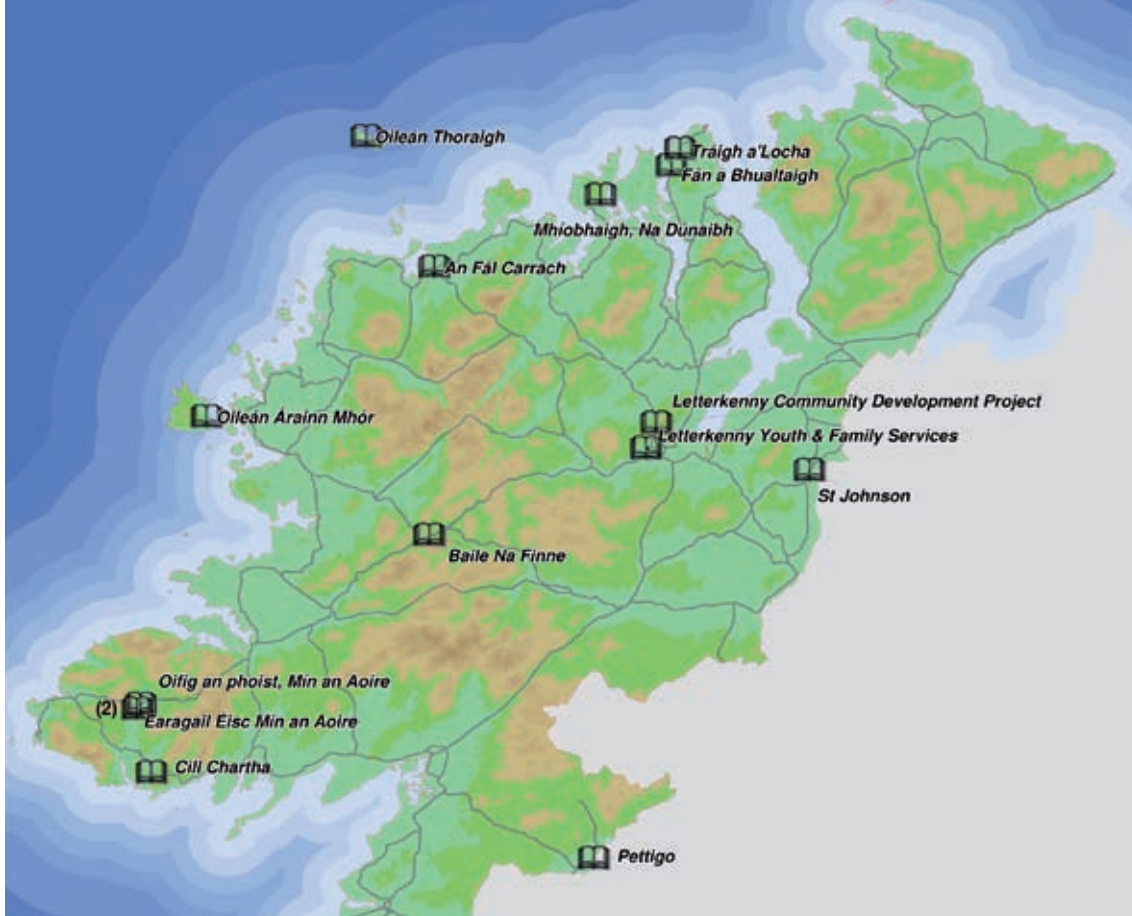
Map of Taobh Tíre Service Points

The concept of a local library authority working in **partnership** with local communities **has been tested and found to work successfully**, bringing mutual benefits to all parties. The Taobh Tíre project has also **demonstrated that availability of modern ICTs offers new opportunities to overcome the isolation** hitherto experienced by rural and disadvantaged communities and that these technologies may be adopted and more fully exploited by library authorities in order to better serve their users and non-users.

Although considerable progress has been made in the pilot project, there is much more to be done in order to consolidate and build on the achievements to date. **Communities are awakening to the benefits of Taobh Tíre and membership is growing steadily** as the services emerge as an integral part of the community landscape. The capacities of the service points have yet to be fully developed and service point operators have much to learn and to contribute to the service.

There are **many issues to be addressed** by a library authority on a continuous basis in order to maintain an efficient, effective and sustainable service to rural and isolated communities. These include the assessment of community needs; the demand, if any, for new service points; the staffing of service points and training of service point staff; buy-in of library staff to the Taobh Tíre model; improved communications between all stakeholders (service point operators, library staff, local community agencies etc.); specification and formalisation of partnership agreements; financing and resourcing of service points; and monitoring, evaluation and promotion of Taobh Tíre services.

Because of the success of the pilot project, the Taobh Tíre service has continued to operate beyond the pilot research phase to an action project through 2007 and 2008. The service is currently driven and managed on the basis of two temporary library posts of Project Coordinator and a Senior Library Assistant and all fourteen service points are administered informally as a distributed branch library network. **It is recommended that Donegal County Council should continue to support Taobh Tíre and that it be formally mainstreamed with the Donegal Library Service**. Service points should be monitored and evaluated annually and, based on the results of the evaluations of individual service points, decisions should be made as to their effectiveness and continuation.

Finally, it is proposed that the **Taobh Tíre model of library service delivery be recommended to other local authorities** as a means of addressing the needs of isolated communities.

Foreword

I am delighted to welcome this research report on Taobh Tíre, which has investigated and implemented new ways to serve rural and urban isolated communities in County Donegal.

The research carried out by Donegal County Council has put in place a significant service for those communities that are not large enough to sustain a branch library. It has developed a replicable methodology that can be easily adapted by other Local Authorities. As stated in *Branching Out Future Directions*, "Individual Public Libraries play a very important community role as centres of knowledge, information and culture. They have the added advantage of being open to everyone whatever their age, education or nationality. They are a magnificent resource for the promotion of community development, for the social integration and increasingly, a focal point for people of all ethnic backgrounds". This is never more true than when referring to the service provided by Taobh Tíre. This project has highlighted the benefits of partnership and networking in delivering local authority services to the heart of communities. This is an example of quality customer service in Local Government and the awarding of several national awards, Pride of Place in 2006 and the Taoiseach's Public Service Excellence Award in 2008, reinforces this view.

My thanks go out to all those who helped develop and deliver Taobh Tíre. Donegal County Council is very proud to lead out on this service and is grateful to the Public Library Research Programme and An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, which afforded us the opportunity to do so. Emphasis must now be placed on the continued sustainable development of Taobh Tíre in Donegal. It is my hope that the Department of Environment Heritage and Local Government will adopt the recommendations in this report and formulate a programme for national rollout.

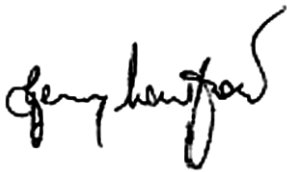**Michael McLoone**
Donegal County Manager

A Note from The Mayor

As a public representative and on behalf of Donegal County Council I am delighted to have been involved in the roll out and development of this excellent initiative.

Taobh Tíre promotes a more inclusive society by providing access to information in isolated communities so that those communities can fully exploit the benefits of the information age. The project developed and used a partnership model, working hand in hand with community development organisations, commercial companies and other bodies already active in remote areas and isolated communities.

A hunger exists for cultural services in rural Ireland. Small peripheral communities are keen to access services, which are typically found only in larger centres of population. This project has illustrated how co-operation between community groups and state agencies can work towards delivering an equitable service to isolated areas. The findings and recommendations of this report provide the basis for a new approach to providing a more accessible library service in all parts of the Country and I hope that it will continue to be built upon.

As an elected representative I am committed to the continued roll out of Taobh Tíre in Donegal as projects such as this work towards creating a better way of life for all our communities.

Gerry Crawford
Donegal County Mayor

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Public Library Service in Donegal

The first public library service was established in Donegal in 1922 with support from the Carnegie Trust and was taken over by Donegal County Council in 1924.

During the 1950s libraries were extended to various parts of Donegal. In 1961 the Public Libraries Grant Scheme was introduced and the then County Librarian prepared a development plan proposing a new headquarters, new branch library buildings and a mobile library service. Successive plans and increased investment over the following 45 years have resulted in many major achievements. The Central Library in Letterkenny opened in August 1995, and was both the first purpose-built library in the county and the first public library in Donegal to be computerised.

Before the Taobh Tíre project was initiated in 2002, the Donegal Library Service consisted of the Central Library in Letterkenny, sixteen community/branch libraries. By 2006 an additional fourteen Taobh Tíre outreach points had been added to the library network as well as a Cross border mobile that serves the Eastern part of the County. Three purpose-built libraries (Bundoran, Carndonagh and Milford) are currently integrated with other Donegal County Council services, namely Bundoran Town Council and Carndonagh and Milford Public Service Centres respectively. Eight libraries are open full time and eight are open on a part-time basis. In all, the library service employs 48 staff members, of whom 14 are part-time.

In the first national Public Library User Survey (PLUS)[1], carried out in 2002, it was revealed that library users in Donegal had to travel further to avail of services than users in any other county in Ireland. A more recent PLUS survey[2] has indicated that this situation still pertained in 2007. Public library membership as a percentage of population in Donegal is only 12.7% and is among the lowest in Ireland.

One of the major challenges facing Donegal County Library is the dispersed population and the number of relatively small centres of population. Services to these communities are being continuously improved via the existing public library network, extensive and increasing use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) and, more recently, by the establishment of Taobh Tíre partnerships within local communities throughout the county. However, there is an ongoing need to explore innovative ways of extending the public library service to reach out to new users and to improve services to existing library users.

1.2 Background to Taobh Tíre

Donegal County Council (DCC) has a pro-active agenda of inclusive cultural service provision, as reflected in its 2001-2004 strategic plan[3] for cultural services and in the Donegal County Development Board's policy implementation plan[4] for 2002-2012. With its large number of isolated communities, including the off-shore islands, the delivery of services to these areas is central to DCC's strategic plan. These services are an important element in ensuring the sustainability of small rural and otherwise disadvantaged communities and of the delivery of equitable services across the wider Donegal population.

At national level, a 1998 report[5] on a review of public library policy, *Branching Out: A New Public Library Service*, underlined the need to provide for the knowledge and cultural requirements of all citizens, including those in isolated communities. Subsequent reports supported this view, for example, the third report[6] of Ireland's Information Society Commission on *Information Society Ireland*, published in 2000 and its 2003 report[7] on *eInclusion*, as well as the report[8] of the *Taskforce on Lifelong Learning* issued in 2002. The Information Society Fund had as a key priority the support of initiatives designed to encourage the propagation of Internet access throughout

the country and the engagement of the wider population with new technologies, in particular, remote communities, farmers and fishermen.

On foot of the *Branching Out* report[5], the need to provide library and information services to isolated communities was identified as a priority for research and action in the first *Call for Proposals*[9], published in 2001, under the Public Libraries Research Programme (PLRP). The PLRP is a national initiative, funded jointly by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the local authorities, managed by the PLRP Committee and administered by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna (The Library Council).

Because the priority actions of the PLRP *Call for Proposals* coincided with DCC's strategic plan on inclusive cultural service provision, a research proposal on Taobh Tíre was submitted to the PLRP and, following an independent evaluation, was accepted for funding in 2002 by the PLRP Committee.

1.3 Taobh Tíre Defined

Taobh Tíre is a research project which aims to design and develop new and innovative ways to deliver library services to rural, isolated and otherwise disadvantaged communities that are currently not served by a full scale branch library or a mobile library service. Following a review of innovative models of library service provision, and consultation with local communities, a network of service points was established in selected regions of Donegal which served a means of piloting new methods of service delivery.

A service point consists of a small taster collection of books, provided by Donegal County Library and one or more PCs connected to the Internet. The Internet connection allows users to access the online catalogue of Donegal County Library's main collection, order books from the library online and have them delivered to the service centre.

Users may also access other online library services such as *Ask a Librarian* as well as a wide range of databases on the World Wide Web including *Britannica Online*, *Credoreference, Factfinder, Newsbank, Oxford Reference Premium* etc. Service points are staffed by people from the local community who are trained by County Library personnel and are typically open for 20-60 hours per week.

Over the course of the research project, which was carried out in two phases during the period 2002-2006, fourteen Taobh Tíre service points were established in Donegal – twelve in rural areas, of which two are based on offshore islands, and two in urban areas of Letterkenny. New service points have been established in partnership with local communities, most commonly in the form of community development associations and co-operatives. The Taobh Tíre service has been extended beyond the funded research phase and has been maintained throughout 2007-2008 by Donegal County Council and local community agencies without any significant external funding.

Taobh Tíre is run by a Project Coordinator with the assistance of a Senior Library Assistant, both of whom are seconded from the staff of Donegal County Libraries. The Project Coordinator reports to a project management team which includes representatives of Donegal County Council and An Chomhairle Leabharlanna. The Research & Policy Unit of Donegal County Council provided monitoring and evaluation services to the project. Taobh Tíre has been made possible by the active involvement and support of the staff of Donegal County Libraries at both central and branch library levels. Library staff participated in the consultation phase on community needs and, at operational level, the Taobh Tíre service points have been fully supported by the local branch libraries in activities such as processing and delivery of book reservations/loans, reader development and training of service point staff.

In addition to the resources provided by Donegal County Council, the project has received, and gratefully acknowledges, funding from the Public Libraries Research Programme, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the Information Society Fund, the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation and Údarás na Gaeltachta.

Taobh Tíre has proved to be an exciting project which has delivered the value-added benefit of demonstrating new paradigms for library service delivery that are relevant, not only in Donegal, but in every county and city in Ireland where sections of the community are geographically, socially, economically or otherwise isolated.

1.4 Project Objectives

The main objectives of Taobh Tíre were as follows:

1. To identify new and **innovative ways of delivering library services**, including lending, reference, information and cultural services to the public.

2. To explore the various **environments** in which library services could be delivered, other than the traditional branch library and mobile library network. These could include public areas such as community halls or commercial environments such as shops or post offices.

3. To identify third parties with whom **partnerships** could be established, such that the third parties cooperate with the County Council library personnel to deliver library services to their communities. These might include community development groups, parish councils, shop owners, etc.

4. To **deliver the library services**, serving the public and increasing the value of the library system to the overall community.

5. To **improve the quality of life** of the population by facilitating access to library collections and services. The project should not merely investigate new service delivery – it should deliver real benefits to the public.

6. To establish a **replicable methodology** whereby partners are selected, library service points established and the population served, in an efficient, effective and customer-focused manner. The ability to replicate the project results in other local authority areas is a critical success factor for the project.

7. To **monitor and evaluate** the project throughout its lifetime, with the particular objective of replicating the new services in other counties around Ireland.

8. The Taobh Tíre project is intended as a means of proactively complementing existing central, branch and mobile library services and addressing gaps in service provision to isolated communities. **It aims to be a proactive service with the active involvement of local communities and which, with the support of ICT facilities, brings the full range of library and information services to isolated users**. It is not designed as a reintroduction of the more passive traditional "library centre" concept whereby small book collections were deposited in various centres throughout the community with no staffing or connectivity to the wider library service.

Chapter 2: Project Methodology

This section outlines the methodology used to undertake the project from inception in 2002 to completion in 2006.

The main elements of the methodology are summarized below:

2.1 Desk research on innovative models of library service provision to isolated communities

It was essential that, before introducing new library services in Donegal, the project team should be aware of any innovations in the provision of library services both in Ireland and overseas. At the outset of the project extensive desk research was carried out by Donegal County Council (focusing on developments in Ireland) and by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna (reviewing innovative practice overseas). A recent survey by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna of the Mobile Library service also provided a valuable insight into a common approach to serving widely-distributed small communities.

2.2 Regional Profiling

A regional profiling exercise was also undertaken at the outset of the project. This involved examining remote and isolated areas of Donegal, preparing a brief overview of each area and identifying demographic profiles, existing levels of library service and access to these services, gaps in services, the status of existing community infrastructures and any potential obstacles to effective delivery of library services.

2.3 Selecting Pilot Regions

Based on the results of regional profiling it was possible to define specific geographical regions which could serve as pilot sites for the provision of experimental innovative library services designed to meet the needs of isolated communities. Nine potential areas were initially identified, each of which was geographically isolated or disadvantaged in some way (e.g. low population,

PROJECT DEFINITION

DESK RESEARCH ON INNOVATIVE MODELS OF SERVICE PROVISION

REGIONAL PROFILING: SELECT PILOT REGIONS

IDENTIFY COMMUNITY NEEDS

DEFINE SERVICES IDENTIFY & RECRUIT PARTNERS

ESTABLISH PILOT SERVICES (PHASE 1)

EVALUATE PILOT SERVICES (PHASE 1)

ESTABLISH ADDITIONAL PILOT SERVICES (PHASE 2)

PROPOSE MODELS FOR SERVICE PROVISION

INTEGRATE WITHIN MAINSTREAM LIBRARY SERVICES

high unemployment, etc.). Each area was profiled in terms of available services, infrastructure, community development activity and possible obstacles to service delivery. The areas profiled were as follows:

1. South Donegal
2. South-West Donegal
3. The Rosses
4. Oileán Árainn Mhór
5. Oileán Thoraí
6. An Ghaeltacht Láir (Baile Na Finne, Cloghan, Glenfin)
7. Rosguill
8. Fanad
9. East Donegal

Following a closer inspection of each of the above areas, and on the basis of consultations with local communities (see below), the following five regions were selected for the establishment of the **first ten pilot service points** during phase 1 of the project.

1. South-West Donegal
2. An Ghaeltacht Láir
3. Fanad and Rosguill
4. East Donegal
5. Oileán Árainn Mhór and Oileán Thoraí
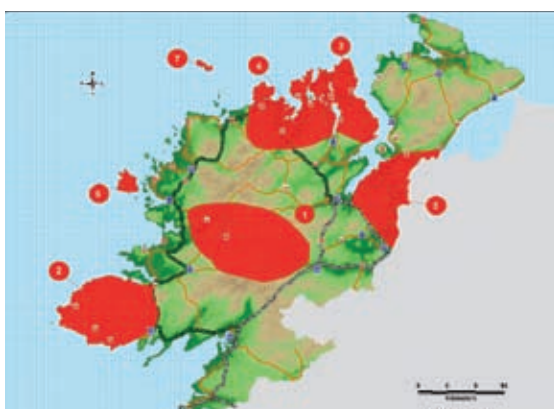
On the basis of (1) a review of national and international practice in the development of innovative models of library and information service provision to geographically isolated communities, (2) a regional profiling exercise

covering the county of Donegal and (3) consultation with local communities, the following key criteria were used to select the locations of the service points within the pilot regions:

- Distance from existing branch library.
- Access (e.g. off-shore islands have particular access issues).
- Availability of existing physical infrastructure (community hall, parish centre, shop or post office, etc.).
- Record of community development activity – an active community development group to act as the champions of the project in the community could be expected to greatly increase the impact of the project.
- Availability of ICT infrastructure, including Internet access.

During 2006, in a **second phase of the project four additional service points were established**. These included **two rurally based service points** – one in the northwest of Donegal (at An tSean Bheairic, An Fál Carrach and another in the south of the county (Family Resource Centre, Pettigo). At this stage of the project it had been recognised that certain segments of the population in large urban areas, which have no library facilities nearby, are also excluded from using the library for a variety of reasons. This resulted in the establishment of **two urban based service points** in Letterkenny – the Letterkenny Youth and Family Service (LYFS) (formerly the Glenwood Youth Project) and the Letterkenny Community Development Project (LCDP). These urban points are isolated due to their distance from the centre of town, the lack of public transport, the socio-economic problems experienced in the area and a perception that libraries are for the "elite".

2.4 Identifying Community Needs in the Pilot Regions

At the outset of the project the Taobh Tíre team consulted with relevant representatives of the local communities in the above pilot regions in order to assess their needs and to explore the potential viability of a new service in each location, the likely take-up and any special local issues, etc. In all, 61

people were interviewed and these represented a wide cross-section of the local communities, including the community and voluntary sectors, youth agencies, primary and secondary schools, libraries, Donegal County Council and other agencies. These are listed in Appendix A.

2.5 Defining Pilot Services

Following the national and international reviews of innovative models of service provision to isolated communities, together with information gleaned from consultations with local communities, local librarians, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna and other experts, the Taobh Tíre team was able to specify the services to be provided at the Taobh Tíre service point during the initial pilot phase of the project. These may be summarised as follows:

1. **A taster collection of books**: i.e. a small selection from the holdings of the County Library, with a few examples of books from many subject areas.

2. **Access to library services**: it was envisaged that the Taobh Tíre service points would facilitate access to a range of services similar to those available in a branch library.

3. **Access to ICT**: Each Taobh Tíre site should have at least one PC connected to the Internet, thereby providing access to the Web based online public access catalogue (WebOPAC) of the Donegal Library service and to the book reservations system of the County Library as well as to other Internet sites.

Pilot services are described in more detail in Chapter 6.

2.6 Exploring Partnership Models for Pilot Service Delivery

Having identified target regions for pilot services and community needs within each region, the next step was to identify potential partners in the target region and to negotiate terms for the implementation of a pilot service best suited to local needs and circumstances.

Based on the review of innovative models of service delivery and on consultation with local communities, three partnership models, or combinations of these, were considered to be

most appropriate for the establishment of pilot service points.

1. **Community Partnership Model** whereby library services are delivered to meet local needs using existing community infrastructures in the region (e.g. a community centre) on the basis of partnership between the Library service and local community agencies such as Community Development Projects (CDPs) and Family Resource Centres (FRCs) in the county.

2. **Interagency Partnership Model** whereby library services are delivered to meet local needs on the basis of partnership between the Library service and various public and/or private organisations other than community development projects. For example, linkages could be established between Taobh Tíre service points and local Day Care Centres, Health Centres, Youth Centres, as well as shops, post offices, factories etc.

3. **Public Remote Access Model** whereby users may access library services over a telecommunication network using PCs made available, on the basis of partnership agreements, at various community access points such as a public service centre of Donegal County Council, an educational institution or other public or private agency. Users may also, of course, access library services using a PC with an Internet connection at home.

Each model was considered in the context of each proposed pilot service point and relevant potential local partners were identified and approached. It soon became evident that, in the case of most pilot service points, a combination of the above partnership models, rather than a single model, was the most appropriate means of implementing services. Agreements were reached with partner organisations and several community groups. These discussions centred around the different library services that could be provided, the level of support from the Library Service, the role of the partner organisations, the inputs required, suitable locations and suitable accommodation.

2.7 Rollout of Taobh Tíre Service Points

The official launch of the first phase of the project took place in February 2004 in Áras Sheáin Bháin in Baile Na Finne. This was followed by the establishment of a further eight pilot service points in 2004 and another in Fán a Bhualtaigh in 2005 – ten Phase 1 sites in all. Phase 2 of the project delivered a further four service points in 2006, including two located in urban areas. The rollout of Pilot service points is described in Chapter 7.

2.8 Marketing and Promotion of Services

Marketing and promotional activities were undertaken over the duration of the project to ensure that potential users were aware of the facilities on offer. These activities included the following:

- Consultation with focus groups within the target communities.

- Promotion of Taobh Tíre when launching new service points.

- Online promotion and quarterly updates on the Donegal County Council website[10]

- Advertising in local print and radio media.

- Local Promotion throughout the Donegal branch library network.

- Local distribution of posters, brochures and fliers.

Full details of marketing and promotional activities are described in Chapter 8.

2.9 Evaluating the Pilot Services

Following the completion of phase 1 of the project (i.e. after setting up ten Taobh Tíre service points during 2004-2005) a comprehensive evaluation of the service was undertaken in 2006 by the Research and Policy Unit of Donegal County Council.

The methodology was as follows:

- An examination of the usage of the WebOPAC at each Taobh Tíre service point since set up.

- **A Survey of a Panel of Key Stakeholders** (14), who had been involved to varying degrees in the Taobh Tíre project. These included

some service point operators, service point committee members and some members of the Taobh Tíre Management Team. A questionnaire was distributed to panel members and a Panel Day was also held in May 2006 to discuss a wide range of issues relating to the project, including the following

- Criteria for selecting a site for a Taobh Tíre service point.

- The most appropriate model for a Taobh Tíre service point.

- Management and operation of a Taobh Tíre service point.

- Communications between key stakeholders of the Taobh Tíre project.

- The concept of accessibility.

- Defining target groups for Taobh Tíre services.

- How the Taobh Tíre service could be better tailored to meet the needs of target groups.

- Key challenges facing local authorities and local communities in reproducing Taobh Tíre as a model of best practice (at pre-implementation, implementation and post-implementation phases).

- **A Survey of Operators of the 14 Taobh Tíre service points** in order to assess their understanding of the project, to collect information on the activities and collaborative initiatives of service points and to elicit the views of operators on the administration, management and further development of service points. The survey was undertaken by means of structured interviews with the operators of all 14 Taobh Tíre service points, held between 2nd December 2005 and 8th June 2006. Some issues covered in the survey included the following

- Levels of usage of service points.

- Operating procedures within service points.

- Role of local communities in implementing successful service points.

- Selection criteria for deciding on locations of service points.

- Models of best practice for Taobh Tíre type services.

Computer Classes in the Forge Family Resource Centre in Pettigo

- Levels of community participation in the operation of service points.

- Resource sharing in the operation and management of service points.

- Staffing of service points.

- Communications between operators of service points.

- Service enhancement e.g. by improved signposting of information via web links.

- Staff training and mentoring.

- Training for existing and potential users.

- **A Survey of adult and juvenile users** of Taobh Tíre service points requesting feedback on the service. The survey was administered by questionnaire at each service point. The total survey population at the time of the evaluation was 848 registered Taobh Tíre users, comprised of 637 adults and 211 juveniles (i.e. children aged 13 or less). The survey sample was made up as follows:

  - 66 registered Taobh Tíre adult users and 24 unregistered adult users (i.e. drop-ins etc.) giving a total of 90 adults of whom 69% were identified as female and 29% were male.

  - 66 registered Taobh Tíre juvenile users and 50 unregistered juvenile users (i.e. drop-ins etc.) of whom 49% were female and 51% were male.

The following are examples of data collected in the user survey:

- Demographics - age, economic status and nationality.

- Reasons for visiting the service point (adults and juveniles).

- Frequency of visits to the service point (adults and juveniles).

- Satisfaction ratings among adult users of service points regarding the following: hours of opening, information and enquiry service, staff knowledge & expertise, staff helpfulness, range of books and other services, juveniles' services, computer equipment, ease of access inside and outside the service point, condition of service point inside and outside, layout and arrangement, provision of tables and seating, signs and guiding.

- Satisfaction ratings among juvenile users of service points regarding the following: hours of opening, library staff, homework space, help with homework, resources such as books, comics, cassettes, CDs, CD-ROMs, computers, newspapers, magazines, toys, games and videos, the online library catalogue, photocopying and fax facilities, number of tables and chairs, finding one's way around the library, the look of the library, events & activities.

- **Review and evaluation by the PLRP Committee:** Under the terms and conditions of the Public Libraries Research Programme, the project was reviewed and evaluated by the PLRP Committee, with assistance from independent evaluators, in October 2004, July 2005 and February 2007.

Chapter 3: Project Management

3.1 An Overview of the Management Structure

The Taobh Tíre project was agreed in 2002 between the Public Libraries Research Programme (managed by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna) and Donegal County Library (part of Donegal County Council). Two additional partners – the Community Development & Enterprise Division and the Information Systems Division of Donegal County Council, played essential supporting roles in the project. The Research and Policy Unit of Donegal County Council also provided a valuable input to the evaluation phase of the project.

Taobh Tíre was run on a day to day basis by a full-time Project Coordinator seconded from the staff of Donegal County Library. The County Librarian acted as Project Manager. The Project Coordinator was supported by part time resources from the Community Development and Enterprise Division and the Information Systems Division of Donegal County Council. The project management received further support from a team based in An Chomhairle Leabharlanna in Dublin.

The Project Coordinator reported to the Taobh Tíre Project Management Team, which included representatives of Donegal County Council and An Chomhairle Leabharlanna.

The project began early in 2003 with the recruitment of a Project Coordinator. In November 2004 the Project Coordinator was appointed County Librarian, Donegal and was succeeded by the current Project Coordinator.

3.2 The Role of the Project Coordinator

The role of the Project Coordinator in both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the project was to:

- manage the project on a day-to-day basis.
- support and monitor all Taobh Tíre service points.
- maintain links with the partner agencies.
- explore new opportunities for the development of Taobh Tíre.
- raise awareness of the Taobh Tíre Project on a county wide and national basis.
- be the first point of contact for the service point operators.

A Panel of Key Stakeholders (see section 2.9 above), held in May 2006, recommended that the role of the Taobh Tíre Project Coordinator be expanded following the completion of Phase 2 to include the following responsibilities:

- identify existing and future funding needs for the project.
- make funding applications for the future development of the Taobh Tíre Project as it evolves.
- develop operational procedures for each of the service points.
- take responsibility for training, developing and capacity building of the staff of the service points in relation to the Taobh Tíre service.
- design and introduce reader development programmes.
- develop and research online information resources and
- liaise with Donegal County Library staff on developments relating to the Taobh Tíre Project.

3.3 The Role of the Project Management Team

The Project Management Team was made up of representatives from Donegal County Library, the Research and Policy Unit of the Community and Enterprise Division of Donegal County Council, the Information Systems Division of Donegal County Council and An Chomhairle Leabharlanna. The role of the Management team was to ensure

that the project met its objectives in a timely and efficient manner and to make strategic decisions for the future development of the entire Taobh Tíre Project.

3.4 The Role of the Service Point Operator

As part of the partnership approach to service delivery the service point operator was responsible for the provision and maintenance of the space for the Taobh Tíre service point. Each operator was obliged to provide adequate ICT infrastructure and was also responsible for the day to day running of the service point. This included registering new members and showing them how to use the WebOPAC, keeping a record of issues from the taster collection, handling on-line requests when they arrive in the service point, allocating staff time to the day to day running of the Taobh Tíre service point, promoting the on-line resources 'Ask A Librarian' and the online databases to their patrons, assisting the Project Coordinator in implementing the reader development programmes, hosting and promoting library events locally e.g. Wainsfest, Bealtaine events etc., considering Taobh Tíre in future funding applications, working with the Coordinator on any new developments of the Taobh Tíre project. They were also expected to promote and 'champion' the project at a local level.

3.5 Meetings and Communications

Meetings between the Project Coordinator and the Management Team were held at regular intervals and these were backed up by bi-monthly reports. The Project Coordinator also liaised with all the stakeholders, including the Service Point Operators, Branch Librarians and other collaborating agencies.

However, the evaluation undertaken following completion of Phase 1 revealed that very little communication took place between the service point operators.

3.6 Reporting

Several internal reports were prepared for consideration by the Taobh Tíre Management Team at various stages of the project. These included reports on community needs and regional profiling in Donegal[11,12], a review of innovative models of library service provision to isolated communities in Ireland and overseas[13] and early and mid-term evaluations of the the Taobh Tíre project[15,16]. The Project Coordinator presented progress reports to the PLRP Committee in October 2004 and July 2005 and a final presentation was made to the Committee in May 2008.

An interim report[17] on the project was published by Donegal County Council in May 2005.

This final report provides a full description of the Taobh Tíre initiative and its achievements to date.

3.7 Current Management Structure

As indicated in section 1.3 above, the Taobh Tíre service was extended beyond the research phase which ended in 2006. Since 2007, the service has been maintained by Donegal County Council in partnership with local community agencies and the project has been subsumed within the management structure of Donegal Library Service.
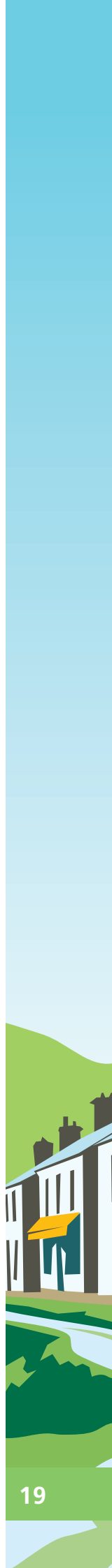
Chapter 4: A Review of Innovative Models of Library Service Provision to Isolated Communities

At the outset of the Taobh Tíre project a review was undertaken of innovative models of library and information service provision to remote communities in Ireland and overseas.

There were three elements to the review - a literature survey by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna[13] of innovative models of library service provision overseas; a literature survey by Donegal County Council[14] of related activities and services in Ireland; and finally, the results of a recent survey by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna[18] on the mobile library service in Ireland was also used as an input to the project.

4.1 A Review of Innovative Models Overseas

The international review of innovative models in providing library and information services to rural communities highlighted the following key themes:

1. Rural depopulation
2. Linking the library planning process with community planning
3. Partnership
4. The role of ICTs
5. The mobile library

4.1.1 Rural Depopulation

A study of the international literature on the provision of library and information services to remote communities suggests a dynamic in which rural populations are drawn to urban areas, primarily for economic reasons. Rural dwellers typically have a low expectation regarding the range of public and other services available to them locally and an acceptance of the need to travel to avail of services. Travel however, may not be an easy option for various reasons such as low income, lack of transport, poor infrastructure etc.

"The exclusion experienced by remote islanders in their information access and dissemination is complex in nature: a combination of physical and human barriers, including travel costs, failings in service provision and assumptions made about remote communities. In turn, this exclusion from information can lead to further isolation and greater feelings of peripherality. Conversely, particular local features such as small numbers within a community can help information flow." (Beer[19]).

Wider dispersal of people decreases the profitability of service providers and, as a consequence, makes the rural environment unattractive as a market.

"Rural areas with small, widely dispersed populations are constantly having to face deteriorating services ... Over the last few decades a strategic withdrawal of services, both private and public, has been taking place in Europe... The provision of services has been dispersed and access to various services has become more difficult; the principal victims of these developments have been people without any individual means of transport due to their being too young, too old, too poor or too ill". (Jager[20]).

In Ireland, at the launch of the Clár programme for revitalising rural areas, the Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Éamon Ó Cuiv commented

"The biggest problem and the biggest excuse offered for not providing services in rural areas has been lack of population. This has become a vicious circle: a declining population leads to the withdrawal of services and a lack of services means that more people migrate to our cities, which in turn means that even more services are lost in rural areas". (Irish Government press release[21]).

It is clear from the above trends that as public service providers, aiming to provide equal access to all members of the community, library authorities are obliged to address the issue of rural depopulation in planning for library service provision. The Taobh Tíre concept is designed to address this need.

4.1.2 Linking the Library Planning Process with Community Planning

There is ample evidence that access to library and information services contributes to the sustainability of communities and to their empowerment. The California State Libraries Info People Project has

"had tremendous success in linking communities around the library. Rural communities geographically isolated from the rest of the State have taken advantage of this library based resource to obtain state and government information". (Benton Foundation[22]).

However, the sustainability of communities cannot be achieved solely by the provision of library and information services and

"it is important that the library planning process should be linked to community planning so that the contribution of libraries to the broader priorities of local communities is identified and integrated into other service provision". (Department of Culture, Media and Sport[23]).

Beacon Council Research[24] has identified essentials of best practice. It recommends that libraries should be able to

- demonstrate their awareness of the wider local authority strategies,

- demonstrate how they support the wider strategy,

- position their proposed actions within the wider local authority, regional and national contexts,

- contribute to the community development strategy,

- demonstrate how they contribute to the social and economic well being of the community.

Communities do not remain static, either demographically or in their general level of development. Community development programmes, therefore, need to be sufficiently flexible to incorporate change:

"Rural needs and circumstances need to be included in any planning process… greater attention needs to be given to how mainstream services are targeted to overcome rural exclusion". (The Countryside Agency[25]).

4.1.3 Partnership

It is in the area of inter-agency partnership that much of the innovative approach to library and information provision to rural communities has taken place. Library authorities have forged partnerships with other public service providers and with the private sector. Some of these strategic alliances are facilitated by wide range of governmental and funding structures, some of which are not, as yet, available in Ireland. Many of these partnership models are still at an experimental stage. Some examples of alliances include the hosting of collections in village halls, shops and post offices, exploitation of local transport networks such as a post-bus and the embedding of libraries in other service centres such as community, youth and cultural centres.
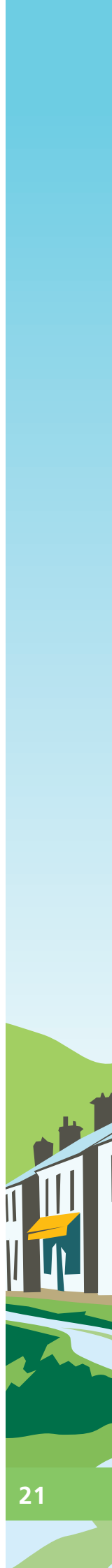
Public library authorities are well placed to act as providers, as well as mentors, for community information services. For example, Beacon Council Research[24] identified a number of initiatives:

- A youth centre with a library and information centre, ICT suite, music and art studios, fitness centre,crèche, café, performance area.

- A partnership between a medical centre, local authority and a library service has been set up to pilot access to authoritative health information for non-professionals. It contains a range of information on medical conditions, support groups and treatments.

- Integrated health and social care – Strathcarron (Scotland) pioneered an integrated health and social care service which provides nursing, residential and day care, GP services, sheltered housing and a community library - allowing older people to continue living in their community.

- Barking and Dagenham Public Libraries (U.K.) have established libraries in a number of 'learning villages' where the joint use buildings is shared by other community and 'second chance' education centres. One branch library has been extended and refurbished to provide a library, health centre and community hall.

There are many examples in the U.K. where branch libraries share facilities with village halls, council service points, cultural centres, care centres, colleges and art galleries.

Further afield, the State Library of New South Wales[26] has published guidelines which explore innovative partnership initiatives.

The literature also reveals that in communities where there is limited access to library services, perhaps due to restricted opening hours, consideration could be given to 'seeding' the community with books. Books for, and about, children could be left with pre-school playgroups. Similar initiatives could be introduced for other groups such as the elderly, ethnic minorities etc. These taster collections act as an advertisement for the library service, giving details of opening hours, information on how to join, library-based activities, etc.

4.1.4 The Role of ICTs

ICTs may be used to enable isolated communities to have remote access to the mainstream library service without the need to physically visit a branch or a main library. The literature has revealed a large number of library based initiatives using ICT which might be termed ICT Outreach – their common theme being that the library and a wide range of electronic information resources may be accessed by remote library users, in their own homes or at other community access points. Most of the following examples are taken from the Beacon Council Research[24] paper:

- **Linnet Local** terminals can be found throughout Lincolnshire in the U.K. in village shops and halls, church halls, doctors' surgeries and public houses. The terminals provide access to training, community and other information services. See also: Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions[27].

- **The Liberator Project** aimed to establish and develop regional information services in three European regions. The project established a subject gateway for, and about, the North East Region of England.

- The **Electronic Community Magazine** is an example of a local authority project which included individuals within local geographic areas trained to become editors of online magazines reflecting the interests and character of the community.

- Another library authority has made its community information available over the Internet and given leisure organisations **web design training** so they can design their own pages hosted by the council, including an events diary and bulletin board. The authority also offers community organisations an opportunity to enter their own information.

- Some library authorities are taking part in the **Community Legal Service** (CLS) initiative which is being taken forward by the U.K. Lord Chancellor's Department. One authority has become one of the CLS information providers by piloting a new touch-screen kiosk linked to the local courts. Content includes information on court procedures, a video on jury service and a dial-up videolink to the Citizen's Advice Bureau for one-to-one help.

- A network of "**electronic village halls**" has been developed by another library authority. The project, which is based on a community and voluntary group network is located in community buildings such as libraries, a further education college and a community business centre. The service offers free access to PCs, the Internet and a wide range of software programmes supported by trained staff who provide assistance and free training sessions as required.

- A metropolitan borough council has implemented a *Community Information Programme* (CIP), in order to support their strategy of social inclusion and economic regeneration. The council provided citizens with 1,000 public access PCs in more than 160 locations with access to the Internet and a huge range of community information in schools, colleges, libraries, one stop shops etc.

- A website to provide the public with information about services such as *health and community safety* has resulted from a partnership between a library service and the local police force and health authority. The library is also working with voluntary agencies to help them in developing their own information resources.

- A library authority, together with district authorities in their area, is reported to have an electronic gateway which acts as a *one-stop shop to local e-government information*.

- Another interesting initiative in Scotland involves the provision of a **public access internet point within 5 miles of all rural households** supported by a 24 hour training support line.

- In Canada, **library staff offer web development skills to local businesses** and other agencies to help create their own web presence.

Other examples of ICT related initiatives by library authorities include

- **knowledge sharing on digitisation** between libraries and local communities in order to encourage local communities to document their own area and culture.

- Compilation by library staff of **targeted Internet directories**, e.g. Seniors pages with access to information for older members of the community (e.g. health, security, concessions, activities).

There are also many examples in the literature of online reading groups and e-mail book promotion schemes, for example:

- In the USA, the *Chapter-A-Day* organisation supports many local library-based online reading clubs. Short, consecutive excerpts of books are emailed to book club members each day. Members can then decide to borrow or purchase the book. The books covered include a range of topics. Over 2,000 US and Canadian libraries use the service with some 40,000 users.

- Kenton County Public Library[28] offers users access to eight **online clubs** i.e. Original (a mixture of genres); Teens; Business; Good News; Fiction; Romance; Audio; and Question and Answer.

- Baltimore County Public Library provided a **discussion e-list** for patrons wishing to discuss books with others.

A major advantage of ICT based services is the **provision of access** to information resources. Most of the above services are predicated on easy access to the Internet. Some library authorities provide Internet access in a range of locations while others lend portable PCs to members. Derbyshire County (U.K.) provides laptops to housebound users and Newham Public Libraries (U.K.) hire out laptops. Other libraries use less hi-tech systems, for example, Seguin-Guadalupe County Public Library in Texas provides a computer and the library catalogue on CD-ROM in community centres. Users can search for an item and free-call the library and the book is then posted out to the borrower. Items may be returned using the same mailer, or in person to any branch library.

Exploitation of ICT based services, however, **requires a sustained programme of training**. Users need to know how to access and navigate the Internet. Training courses for the public are

commonplace in many library authorities and may involve library staff training users on a one-to-one or a group basis. There are also examples where parties other than the library staff take on the role of trainers. For example, children who take part in Family Computing Programmes are able to tutor their parents on the use of PCs. Some libraries employ a **'buddy' system** whereby trained persons pass on their skills to another member of the community. The 'buddies' are provided with training to an agreed level of proficiency and thereby acquire new skills and qualifications to add to their CVs. This means that the public is offered support by buddies in addition to the services which the library could provide. South Lanarkshire Council's Rural Citizens Network uses the Post Office network's Internet learning access point for 'buddy' training purposes. Sub-postmasters act as trained 'moderators' to assist members of the public in accessing public services on the Internet. These mentoring initiatives may be particularly well suited to rural communities which have a tradition of self-help.

4.1.5 The Mobile Library

Mobile libraries are a highly valued community service and one which has great scope for development. Several projects are reported in the literature which aim to re-invent the mobile library service to make it more relevant to the communities served and especially to those groups within the community that make little or no use of the service.

The **State of Vermont Department of Libraries** conducted a two-year project to discover if the mobile library service

a)   was a viable means for serving rural populations in the 21st century and, if so,

b)   did it entice citizens to use the library and

c)   was it an effective marketing tool for attracting attention to all the services Vermont's small libraries offer?" (Brigham McShane[29]).

This perception of the role of mobile services as a possible means of promoting increased use of mainstream library services has also been taken on board by Maria-Antonia Carrato[30] in Spain:

"While it is true that mobile libraries are the last link in a chain, as they take public reading services to the most remote areas having no stable library services, if we want not to cause any discrimination in access to culture, they must be considered as significant as conventional libraries. Mobile libraries, apart from being a library extension service, are in themselves a permanent advertising of stable libraries. Therefore, if their activity is adequately orientated they can become an enticement that enhances the use of all the points of the library system to which they belong".

The Vermont State Library was involved with two pilot projects. In the first, staff from the State Library and local library staff and/or volunteers from a local literacy group provided a service which included family story time sessions, advice on choosing reading materials, a limited inter-library loan service and information on events and services based in the branch libraries in the area. The project was successful in attracting users who were not registered users of other library services in the area and achieved its qualitative goals of promoting books and reading to a wider user-base. The second pilot was a targeted service to children which stopped at day care centres, parks and locations where summer classes were held.

The concept of mobiles serving specific groups has also been tried in Denmark. The **_Mobille_ service** is aimed at young children and teenagers up to 16 year olds. Partly driven by research in the mid 1990's, which indicated that Danish children were not as proficient in reading as their contemporaries in other countries, The *Mobille* carries a stock of about 1,500 items (picture books, books for reading aloud, books for adults about children; music and material aimed at stimulating language development). The *Mobille* aims to stop within 500 metres of the user, which in practical terms in the more remote areas, means driving right up to the users' front door.

*"The Mobille helps to strengthen cultural identity, awareness and debate and it also greatly helps to improve the quality and diversity of library services in the region".
(Møller Christensen et al[31]).*

Taobh Tíre point on Oileán Árainn Mhór

The **Ringsted Municipalities 'Mini Bookmobile'** takes this concept further by adapting the contents of the mobile to meet the requirements of different target groups served at different times (Trolle[32]). Depending on its route for the day the mobile varies stock emphasis. On its regular route it carries a wide variety of materials to suit people of all ages, at different educational levels and with varying interests. On the mornings it visits kindergartens and day-carers and the stock is changed to include material specially suited for the very young. For scheduled visits to the elderly the bus carries an extra number of large print and talking books. The bus is also used to visit individual housebound members of the community. People with Internet access at home or at work can order books via the library's own WebOPAC or via the national bibliotek.dk service, to be collected from the library van. It is also used to advertise the wider library service at fairs and festivals and to assist other local services when needed (the closure of a school library during rebuilding was mitigated by regular visits from the book bus).

The EU funded trans-European **MOBILE Project** was established with the following aims:

■ To assess the information needs of rural and other communities… where the public library services are currently unable to meet demand.

■ to identify ways in which the specific information needs of target user groups within these communities may be met by provision of experimental mobile library services using, where appropriate, IT applications.

■ to investigate the technical feasibility of introducing a range of information services using telematics in mobile libraries to meet the identified user needs.

■ to provide a mix of innovative services in each of the three areas to meet identified demands. (Carpenter et al[33]).

MOBILE proved beyond doubt the popularity of information in CD-ROM format as well as education and entertainment materials in mobile library environments. However, results from the Scottish Borders revealed a more traditional response (Croft[34]). One large mobile visits villages while smaller vehicles are used to reach individual farms and houses in more remote regions where road conditions would not support the use of large vehicles. Typical users of the Scottish Border mobile service were females over the age of 60 and feedback indicated that users were happy with traditional services – they wanted more books and less computers. No non-user surveys were carried out.

Lincolnshire's combined mobile trailer unit is one example which delivers both a library service and a fully equipped, self powered IT trailer. The latter provides access to the County Council community information service and the Internet. It is also used to deliver community based learning or as a small meeting space for community groups. The unit was obtained on a contract hire basis over a ten year period. Another example of mobiles supporting IT facilities includes the **CoEast consortium of libraries (U.K.)** which plans to provide telephone, fax and postal services on its mobiles.

Mobiles need to become more flexible in the services they provide. There is no reason why they cannot include technology based services but, in order to provide a real service, periods of stops must be increased. The Lincolnshire project delivers a 'traditional' book-orientated mobile service plus ICT facilities via the trailer unit which is left for longer periods of time in one location. It may be possible to develop such a service in conjunction with other educational institutions. In the case of existing mobile IT facilities being supplied by these institutions, the public library service could seek a presence via taster collections, information on other library services, introduction to the use of e-Books, sharing library staff experience with IT applications, web navigation and digitisation etc. Stops should be chosen to coincide with other community events – end of school, community meetings, meetings of clubs, etc.

The above review of mobile library services has focused on practice overseas. A review of mobile library services in Ireland is presented in section 4.2.1 below.

4.1.6 Lake Agassiz Regional Library System
The project team continued to monitor developments in library services as the project progressed. An article by Charlotte Cox[35] in *Library Journal* led the project team to establish contact with the Lake Agassiz Regional Library system (LARL)[36] in Minnesota. LARL had recently decommissioned their mobile library and were looking for ways to maintain services to rural areas with fewer resources. The resultant 'Library Link' initiative bore a strong resemblance to Taobh Tíre, both in intent and implementation. The service

Children's Storytelling event in Áras Sheáin Bháin in Baile Na Finne

is based on a partnership between the library service and local communities, using staff from the local community. The project was piloted in 2004 with LARL providing browser collections of between 300 and 350 stock items in a variety of formats, computers to access the entire stock of the Regional Library system, training of local staff and support from professional librarians. 'Library Links' are based in a variety of localities with an average population of 800, the largest serving a community of 1,411 with the smallest having a population of 247.

Taobh Tíre staff have maintained continuous contact with members of the LARL initiative and this liaison has proved to be of mutual benefit to both projects.

4.2 A Review of Library Service Provision to Rural Communities in Ireland

4.2.1 The Mobile Library Service
Mobile library units in Ireland are currently 100% grant-aided by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

The average purchase cost of a mobile unit is approximately €250,000 and most have a capacity for 5,000 stock items, including multimedia as well as books. The latest available comprehensive figures (2004) show that of a total of 32 public library authorities, 17 provide mobile libraries with a total of 31 units regularly visiting almost 1,200 sites.

Sources of statistics available on the mobile library service in Ireland include data extrapolated from the 2002 Public Library User Survey (PLUS) report[1] and a separate unpublished questionnaire survey[18] undertaken by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna in 2006. Although mobile library usage was surveyed in the 2002 PLUS study it was based on only a small sample of users and mobile users were not included in a later PLUS survey in 2007.

An analysis of the 2002 PLUS questionnaires returned by users of mobile libraries revealed that almost three quarters of users were women, two thirds (67%) of users lived within one mile of the mobile library stop and almost all users (96%) lived within five miles of the stop point. The age profile of users peaked in the 35-44 bracket with quite a strong presence in the middle and upper age ranges (see Figure 4A).

Figure 4A: Age Profiles of Mobile Library Users (PLUS 2002)[1]
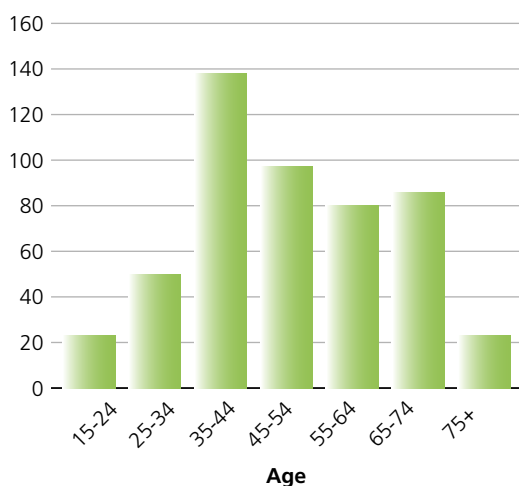
The breakdown of mobile users by occupation is summarised in Table 4A below:

Table 4A: Mobile Library Users by Occupation (PLUS 2002)[1]

Occupation	% Users of Mobile Services
Full-time employed	18
Part-time employed	16
Self employed	7
All Employed	41
Retired	28
Home	23
Student	4
Unemployed	3
Disabled	1

The 2006 survey of mobile library services by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna[18] elicited 20 responses from the 32 public library authorities. Of these, twelve stated that they provide a mobile service and eight do not. Three authorities reported that they plan to provide a mobile service in the future.

Most library authorities operated one mobile unit but those serving large populations, such as South Dublin and Cork County, had up to five mobile units in service. Mobiles stopped for periods ranging from 20 minutes to two hours mainly in either villages or dispersed areas with populations of between 300 and 1000 people. Because of the time taken in preparation and travelling, the availability of the mobile service to the public varied from 12 to 34 hours per week with most services in the 12 to16 hours per week bracket. Total mobile staffing levels per library authority ranged from one to six, depending on the size of the fleet, including library assistant(s), driver and/or driver's assistant.

The main categories of users of mobile services were reported to be household users, schools, residential homes, daycare centres and community centres. The number of registered members per mobile library, including adults, children and school pupils, varied from 247 to 4193 and the number of issues per mobile per annum ranged from 510 to 63,788.

Table 4B summaries the range of services offered by mobile units.

Table 4B: Services offered by Mobile Library Units[18]

Service Offered by Mobile Unit	No. of Local Authorities providing this service (Total Respondents = 12)
Books for loan:	
Adult	12
Children	12
Large print	12
Non-book items for loan	
CD's	6
Tapes	8
Talking books	11
Videos	3
DVD's	4
Magazines	4
Reference Services	
General reference materials	8
Public access computers	4
Printers	3
On-line reference services e.g. online databases	4
Other structured activities	
Storytelling sessions	3
Other - please specify	3
Access to:	
Library Catalogue	4
• Online	5
• Offline	1
Online circulation system	5
Internet	5
External databases	3
Community information	6
Document delivery	2
Link to HQ (e.g. for reference enquires/document delivery, etc) via	
Telephone	10
Fax	1
E-mail	4

The criteria used to select locations of mobile library stops included requests from the community, distance from a static branch library, remoteness of a region, lack of public transport, the social profile and perceived level of need of an area, proximity of nursing homes and centres for the elderly and the suitability and safety of parking areas. Many respondents indicated that there were constraints imposed on service delivery to some areas because of the poor quality and width of roads as well as parking restrictions in the area.

Most authorities identified the mobile library service as a way of serving the needs of rural and isolated communities. Many also referred to the service as a means of addressing social inclusion targets but did not specify what these targets were. Most respondents were of the opinion that the mobile library service is important in a rural environment but a small number noted that it also provided an important service in urban environments, especially in disadvantaged areas. The mobile service was also seen by many library authorities as a useful means of promoting the main library service and the authority itself because of the high visibility of the mobile vehicles in the community.

When asked to identify any disadvantages of the mobile library service, most authorities referred to stock limitations, lack of adequate space on vehicles, and poor quality of the vehicles which often results in breakdowns and consequent delays in service. Half of the respondents considered the stops to be too short, especially in busy areas and that too much time is spent travelling, leaving a very limited amount of time for direct service. Cost was also mentioned as an issue – based on the annual figures supplied by all respondents, the average cost per mobile in 2005 was reported as €85,228.

Finally, the library authorities were asked how services to isolated areas might be improved. Most said that providing more frequent stops to isolated areas and extending the time spent at busier stop points would be welcomed. Some authorities suggested that combining library services with other similar social and educational bodies would reduce the economic cost. The provision of increased access to online facilities in the community was also suggested as a means of enhancing the virtual delivery of library and information services in rural areas. Some authorities suggested organising co-operative ventures and partnerships with community leader groups and/or voluntary organisations which would provide better promotion and acceptance in the community.

4.2.2 Public Library Provision through Public Community Partnerships In Galway

As part of the pre-implementation phase of the project, a Project Group selected from the Taobh Tíre Management Committee visited Galway County Council to examine their policy to make the public library central to building a sense of local community in even the smallest town. In order to achieve this, Galway County Council had located branch libraries within and alongside other community facilities. This approach was designed to achieve optimum integration of the local library into existing community infrastructure.

Until the mid-1990s many branch libraries in Galway were located in rented premises. Many of these premises were in poor condition and it became necessary to secure improved accommodation. As capital funding from government sources is available only for towns with a population in excess of 1,000, Galway County Council examined the feasibility of cooperating with community organisations and other interested parties in the provision of library services. Local organisations were very responsive to approaches from the Council in this regard.

In most, but not all cases, the costs of providing the community building which housed the local library were carried by the local cooperating organisation, while the Council paid an annual nominal rent for the library space. Community facilities such as meeting rooms are also available for library events. The Council fitted out and stocked the library and managed and funded its ongoing staffing and operation.

The annual cost to the Council of running a local branch library in 2007 was in the region of €12,000.

The Taobh Tíre Project Group visited newly established libraries in Headford, Glenamaddy,

Killimor and Inishbofin Island, all of which were staffed by a Branch Librarian employed by Galway County Council.

Headford Library

In Headford, which has a population of 760, the library is provided in cooperation with the Headford Parish Council Committee. Library membership consists of 207 adults and 469 young people (676 or 89% of the population) and in 2007 the library issued 14,049 items. The Library is open 18 hours over five days per week.

Glenamaddy Library

The Town Hall Theatre houses a museum, the library and a heritage centre. The library space is leased from the Glenamaddy Community Development Company which began in 1995 with a view to generating extra opportunities for local employment and creating an atmosphere in the community of self-help. There are currently 159 members and the library is open five days for a total of ten hours per week. In 2007, 3,574 items were issued and 2,225 people visited the Library.

Killimor Library

In Killimor, which has a population of 318, the library is provided in cooperation with the Killimor Development Association. Library membership comprises 86 adults and 157 young people (243 or 76% of the population) and the library is open for ten hours over five days per week. In 2007, the library issued 3,457 items and a total of 2,538 persons visited the library.

Inishbofin Island Library

In Inishbofin, the library is made available in association with the Inishbofin Development Association and is open for six hours per week. Although there are only about 180 people living on the island, the library has more than 230 registered members, including visitors to the island and approximately half of the members are young people. In 2007, 817 items were issued and 1,018 people visited the library.

Other services provided in cooperation with local community organizations include **Inishmór**, one of the Aran Islands, where the library building on Kilronan has been provided in cooperation with Comhar Chumann Inis Mór and Udarás na Gaeltachta.

In **Woodford** the Credit Union building also houses the Woodford Public Library, while in **Eyrecourt**, Galway County Council renovated the former Church of Ireland national school building for library and community use in cooperation with the Eyrecourt Select Vestry (Church of Ireland). In **Letterfrack** the library is provided as part of a seamless service with the Academic Library of the GMIT Furniture College, in cooperation with Forum, Connemara.

The Project Group viewed the above services as innovative initiatives in library service provision to small rural communities in the Galway region. The advantage of establishing partnerships with local community groups in relation to the provision of premises was seen as a positive step in meeting the needs of these communities. The collections in the local libraries were geared to meet local needs but these centres did not deliver a service based on online access to the full library collection of Galway County Library. While the requirement for staffing of local libraries by local authority personnel offered stability and control in the management of the local library, it imposed severe limitations on the availability of the service to the community because of limited opening hours.

4.2.3 Cranny Virtual Public Library

As part of the review of library service provision to rural communities The Project Coordinator visited Clare County Council to examine their innovative initiative in Cranny. Clare County Library had agreed to work with The Cranny Rural Renewal Project, a FÁS supported community initiative, which had already served as a pilot site in the mid-1990s to examine the growing problems surrounding public service provision within rural areas of the west of Ireland. At the time, Clare County Library was considering new ways of delivering library services to communities in geographically disadvantaged areas and Cranny seemed an ideal location for such an initiative.

Cranny/Coolmeen Parish is situated west of mid-Clare, stretching from the Ennis-Kilrush road to the Shannon estuary. It is difficult to calculate the population of the immediate area, the 2006 census figures for the District Electoral Division (DED) of Kilfiddane giving the best approximation at 383 persons in total. The approach roads to the parish are extremely narrow and are unsuitable for a mobile library.

The Cranny Virtual Public Library was launched in July 2003 and was located in the Cranny Rural Renewal Office. The Renewal Office, housed in a small cottage in the heart of Cranny village, provided a room for the Virtual Library and Clare County Library provided furniture and six PCs. The Centre was connected to the library's online catalogue via ISDN, broadband not being available in the area at the time. The Virtual Library did not house a collection of books. Instead, the public could access the library catalogue by means of six dedicated PCs, request and reserve up to 16 books at a time, recommend books and have these books delivered to the Renewal Office. They also had online access to the same facilities as were available online in all the branch libraries in Clare, e.g. free Internet access, talking books, music and access to local studies content available on the library website. However, it has been a long-standing policy of Clare County Library that children's books cannot be reserved and children were therefore excluded from using the Cranny Virtual Library.

There was no library staff presence in the Virtual Library building. The library was managed on a daily basis by staff of the Rural Renewal Office and was overseen by the Western Region manager, based in Kilrush library, who made regular monthly visits. A member of staff in library headquarters was responsible for managing the delivery of requested items to Cranny, while the library's IT Department supported the communications network and the PCs.

All the necessary hardware to run the project was installed by the library's IT Department, including cabling, router, switch, desks and PCs. The total cost of the installation amounted to €12,750 in 2003.

This initiative was seen by the Project Management Team as an innovative step forward in service provision in so far as it offered online access to the library's catalogue from a remote service centre. As in the case of the Galway model, premises were made available at little cost to the library authority, an arrangement which could potentially offer scope for the expansion of library services beyond the conventional branch library and mobile library networks. A community partnership arrangement whereby the staff of the Rural Renewal Office would support the library service in addition to their normal duties was also seen as an innovative measure to expand traditional models of library service delivery. However, it was noted that the centre did not house a local collection and the exclusion of children from using the service was seen as a severe limitation.

Table 4C, which summarises updated information provided by Clare County Library, shows a modest increase in Internet access hours from the time the Centre was set up in 2004 until 2007. Users are not obliged to become members of the library in order to use the Internet facility in Cranny. There has been a steady decline in membership and book issues over the same period. While the continuous use of the Internet facility in Cranny is encouraging, actual use of the other library facilities has been disappointing.

Delivering the Taobh Tíre Computer to Oileán Thoraí

Table 4C: Summary Statistics on Cranny Virtual Library (CVL) 2004-2007

Year	Total Number of Registered CVL Members	Total Internet Access generated by CVL (hours)	Total Number of Books Issued to CVL Members
2004	43	663	646
2005	35	736	299
2006	22	736	120
2007	13	807	147

In an effort to combat the decline in membership and circulation figures, library staff visited local schools and held open nights in the Rural Renewal Office, but these efforts have not succeeded in attracting more members to the service. It is probable that the use of Cranny Virtual Library would increase significantly if the service was made available to children and this option is being examined by Clare County Library.

The Cranny experiment has been a useful learning experience for Clare County Library and the possibility of establishing a similar "virtual" facility to serve a more viable community of approximately 1,500 people in the combined regions of New Quay, Ballyvaughan and Fanore is under consideration. At present there is also a growing demand and need for a mobile library service in Clare. The feasibility of combining static virtual libraries with a mobile library service is also being examined.

Chapter 5: Pilot Regions and Local Community Needs

5.1 The Pilot Regions

As described in the methodology (Chapter 2), five regions were selected for the establishment of ten pilot service points in phase 1. The regions targeted were as follows:

1. South-West Donegal

2. An Ghaeltacht Láir

3. Fanad and Rosguill

4. East Donegal

5. Oileán Árainn Mhór and Oileán Thoraí

A description of each region in included in Chapter 7 – Rollout of pilot service points.

5.2 A Survey of Community Needs

One of the core objectives of the Taobh Tíre project was to explore the needs of isolated communities for library and information services and to investigate the potential to pilot new models of service delivery to meet these needs. Approximately 60 consultees (see Appendix A), representing a wide cross section of the local communities within the target regions, were invited to identify local needs for services.

In all target areas, a genuine level of interest in the role played by the Library service in a rural area was evident. Respondents in all target regions expressed a desire to have increased services made available in their local area.

Generally, it was felt that library and information services had tremendous potential for further development and that rural communities were not well catered for. There was a clear message that there was a need to move beyond the traditional ideology that libraries are only about books. There was an expressed demand for a wide range of other services such as storytelling, poetry reading, audio-visual and multi-media resources, works by modern authors, music, recordings, games/puzzles, Irish plays and provision for special needs

(e.g. literacy books). It was felt that the provision of facilities such as the above would make the Library service more relevant, particularly to young people and non-users. It was also suggested that resources covering particular interest areas such as archives, local history and school curricula, should be made more widely available to rural communities.

The pre-implementation consultative exercise also revealed that respondents were of the view that some investment was required in specific initiatives to support the needs of different age, socio-economic and ethnic cohorts within the community as well as the needs of non-users of the library service.

There appeared to be a general lack of awareness among respondents regarding the functions of the Donegal branch library service and it was felt that improved promotion of the library service was needed. It was considered that there was an absence of new publications in the branch libraries and many schools expressed dissatisfaction with the poor variety of children's stock available.

Many respondents were of the view that the Donegal Library Service has a key role to play in the preservation of the Irish language. This could be achieved through further investment in local Irish authors or by hosting performances of Irish plays in branch libraries.

The retention of the mobile library service was considered by respondents to be critical in ensuring that those living in isolated areas can continue to access services. Mobility is an issue for many who are geographically and physically isolated from many service centres. Given that in some areas there is no library service at all, for example, on both Oileán Thoraí and Oileán Árainn Mhór, a clear need for a library service was evident.

Chapter 6: Defining Pilot Services and Models of Service Delivery

6.1 Defining Pilot Services

The desk research, combined with the results of discussions with local librarians, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna and other experts, enabled the Taobh Tíre team to define in some detail the services which would be delivered in a Taobh Tíre service point. It was recommended that a Taobh Tíre site should have the following elements:

A taster collection of books: This is a small selection from the holdings of the County Library, with a few examples of books from many subject areas. The taster collection provides a selection of books for users to choose from and also acts as a shop window to the larger and more comprehensive holdings of the County Library. A considerable amount of new stock, focusing on fishing, islands and other specific relevant issues not well represented in general stock was also acquired.

Access to library services: A member of the public in a Taobh Tíre service point has access to a range of services similar to those available in a branch library. These include reference and business information services, book reservation and inter-library loan and access to public sector information.

Access to ICT: Each Taobh Tíre service point has at least one PC connected to the Internet. This provides access to the WebOPAC of the County Library, from which reservations and book requests can be made. Such requests are then delivered to the service point for collection by the user. The PC can also be used, of course, to access the greater Internet, including email and online information, reference and news services such as *Britannica Online, Credoreference, Factfinder, Grove Dictionary of Art, Gove Dictionary Of Music, Newsbank* and *Oxford Reference Premium*, all of which are available on the Donegal County Library's website.

6.2 Exploring Models of Service Delivery

Having selected the locations for establishing service points, the approach to be applied in each location was reviewed. The project team had originally envisaged that three separate approaches to the installation of service points could be tested, each in a distinct location, as suggested in the Donegal County Council short term cultural plans. These approaches were as follows:

1. Partnership with existing community groups to provide a library service point in a community-run facility such as a community hall or parish centre, perhaps in parallel with other cultural, heritage or information elements;

2. Partnership with organizations other than community development groups, for example, linkages between Taobh Tíre service points and daycare, health and or youth centres, as well as shops, post offices or factories. In one case an agreement was made with a local bus service to deliver library books door to door.

3. Partnership with various bodies such as educational institutions to provide ICT facilities to the public to facilitate Web-based remote access to the library catalogue, reservation and renewal of books as well as wider Internet access.

However, following the service definition and consultation process, it became clear that what was required was a judicious mix of these approaches, combining elements of each to create a solution tailored to the individual needs and circumstances of each target community. Thus, the first ten pilot service points were to include partnerships with community groups, cooperation with a Rural Transport Initiative, integration with a shop/post office and extensive use of computers and the Internet. The four Phase 2 service points would also involve partnerships with community groups, including a community development

project, a family resource centre and a youth project and would extend the Taobh Tíre service to an urban environment in Letterkenny.

The most common implementation model used by Taobh Tíre was **partnership with a local community development group**, with the service point established in an existing building and staffing provided locally by the partner group. The **community partnership model has significant advantages**:

- *Low cost and rapid service point establishment*. The availability of local personnel means that investment of local authority staff time is reduced to training, familiarisation and support. This allows a library service point to be established in a community which would otherwise be too small to support one. The use of existing buildings means that a new service point can be up and running in a matter of weeks.

- *Validation of the community local group* – by working in partnership with the library service to bring a new facility to the community, the partner organisation demonstrates its value to the community. A community development organisation that brings a library service into its area or village is clearly delivering results for the village. This encourages increased involvement in such community development groups by the local population.

- *Additional value derived from existing infrastructure* – the service points have in many cases been established in community halls, resource centres, parish halls, etc. The service point increases the level of use of the facility and gives local residents another reason to visit it.

- *Local community groups can act as champions for the service* – working in partnership with a local community group means that the group takes ownership of the project. The group promotes the new service within the community and can provide support to new users.

- *Sustainability* – the low costs and community involvement makes the ongoing viability of the new service easy to envisage. While local enthusiasm for the service may decrease over time, the delivery of a high quality service will mean that it remains popular. With a strong user base, the future of the service is guaranteed.

The partnership model used by Taobh Tíre depended on the availability and enthusiasm of local groups in the community development and voluntary sectors. The existence of such groups was a key enabler for Taobh Tíre and if such groups did not exist the Taobh Tíre implementation model would not be viable. However, community groups are widespread in rural Ireland and the level of enthusiasm for the Taobh Tíre service was found to be very high.

The partnership model also has **some disadvantages** which must be addressed if the project is to be successful. There is an ongoing requirement for the input of time and effort by the partner organisations. These organisations are typically community run, often with short-term funding schemes, which can create difficulties for long-term planning. This difficulty can, however, be dealt with in a number of ways:
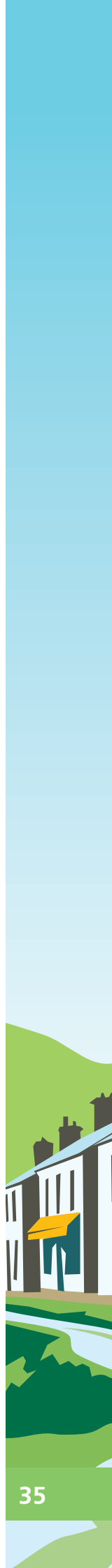
- A high quality of service, delivered by the library elements of the project, will help to establish the Taobh Tíre service as a valuable part of the community. When the project is seen locally as a success and an asset to the community, making a case for future community-funded schemes is greatly facilitated.

- Embedding the service point in a location which is staffed for other reasons greatly reduces the need for dedicated fulltime personnel. If the service point is in a busy and central location, such as a regularly-used resource centre, a shop/post office or a community centre, it will be well used and will be less of an overhead on the community.

Taobh Tíre service points relied on the local physical and communications infrastructure in order to function and in some cases this imposed limitations on the service. For example, some buildings that housed service points did not provide access facilities for disabled users and in the case of Oileán Thoraí communications on the island were confined to PSTN dial-up facilities.

Chapter 7: Rollout of Pilot Service Points

7.1 Introduction

In the first phase of the Taobh Tíre project ten service points were set up in five regions extending throughout the county of Donegal. The official launch began in February 2004 with the rollout of the first pilot service point at Áras Sheáin Bháin in Baile Na Finne. This was followed in rapid succession by the establishment of a further eight Phase 1 pilot service points in 2004 and another in Fán a Bhualtaigh in 2005, i.e. ten Phase 1 sites in all.

Phase 2 of the project delivered a further four pilot service points in 2006, including two located in urban areas in Letterkenny. All fourteen service points are listed in Table 7A below and are also displayed in the Executive Summary.

Teenagers who took part in the Ulster Scots Project with the St Johnston Carrigans Family Resource Centre

Table 7A: Rollout of Taobh Tíre Service Points (Phases 1 & 2)

Taobh Tíre Service Point	Phase	Launch Date
Áras Sheáin Bháin, Baile Na Finne	1	Feb 2004
Acmhainne Teaghlaigh, Mhíobhaigh	1	Feb 2004
Ionad Lae Day Centre	1	Feb 2004
Áislann Chill Chartha	1	Mar 2004
Mín an Aoire Post Office & Earagail Éisc (2 service points)	1	Mar 2004
St Johnston/Carrigans Resource Centre	1	May 2004
Comharchumann Forbartha & Fostaíochta Arainn Mhór	1	July 2004
Comharchumann Toraí	1	Sept 2004
Halla Pobail Fán a Bhualtaigh	1	Oct 2005
The Forge Family Resource Centre, Pettigo	2	Jan 2006
An tSean Bheairic An Fál Carrach	2	Feb 2006
Letterkenny Youth and Family Service	2	April 2006
Letterkenny Community Development Project (CDP)	2	Oct 2006

More information on each Taobh Tíre Service Point is provided in Chapter 10 including details on membership, taster collections, WebOPAC and Internet access, ICT status and reader development activities (see Table 10A).

Service point rollouts in the target regions, together with partnership arrangements for the operation of each service point, are described below.

7.2 Rollout of Phase 1 Service Points

During 2004 – 2005, in the first phase of Taobh Tíre project, ten service points were set up in the following five regions:

1. South-West Donegal (3 service points: Chill Chartha, Mín an Aoire and Earagail Eísc)

2. An Ghaeltacht Láir (1 service point: Baile Na Finne))

3. Fanad and Rosguill (3 service points: Ionad Lae, Mhíobhaigh, Fán a Bhualtaigh))

4. East Donegal (1 service point: St. Johnston)

5. Oileán Árainn Mhór and Oileán Thoraí (2 service points - one on each island)

The rollout and partnership arrangements of each phase 1 service point are described below.

South-West Donegal

The South-West Donegal target region includes all points west of an imaginary line drawn from Ardara to Killybegs. This includes a number of small, remote villages such as Chill Charta, Ardara, Glencolumcille, Malinbeg, Malinmore and Carrick. Chill Charta village was targeted as a possible Taobh Tíre site because of the presence of Áislann Chill Chartha, an active community development organization with its own dedicated, centrally located community centre which contains meeting rooms, an IT suite and many other facilities.

South-West Donegal
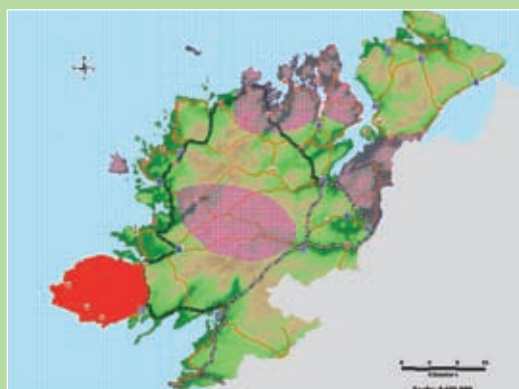
South-west Donegal is a remote corner of the county, jutting into the Atlantic to the west of Donegal Town. Its rugged landscape has separated its communities from one another since its earliest history and, because of a high reliance on the fishing industry, its centres of population are primarily small seaside villages. Small-scale farming, handicrafts and tourism are also important. Road and other infrastructure is poor and Internet penetration is very low. Nevertheless, the region has a strong tradition of community development and the local community and voluntary sector is strong. Interest in library services is well established in both communities.

Taobh Tíre Service Points
Taobh Tíre sites and taster collections were established in March 2004 in the community centre (Áislann) in **Chill Chartha**, in a shop/post-office/petrol station in **Mín an Aoire** and in the canteen of a local fish processing factory, **Earagail Eísc**. A cooperation agreement was also arranged with **Seirbhis Iompair Tuaithe Teoranta (SITT)**, a local rural bus transport initiative.

In addition to community development organisations, the project team also investigated the potential for other partnerships, including village shops/post offices, private sector companies and a local bus service.

Chill Chartha

The Taobh Tíre service point was launched in Chill Charta Community centre – **Áislann Chill Chartha** in March 2004 and very soon proved to be a popular resource. It opens for over 60 hours per week and is a good example of a working partnership between the library service and a local community development agency whereby a Taobh Tíre service point is embedded in an existing community facility. By May 2008 the Áislann had a taster collection of 1000 books and one public access PC with Internet connectivity and there were 169 registered Taobh Tíre members.

Mín an Aoire Post Office and Earagáil Éisc

Following extensive visits and consultation, a suitable commercial premises was identified to host a Taobh Tíre service point at Mín an Aoire Post Office and Shop. This is close to a national school and church and has a pub and petrol station attached. It is also in close proximity to the major local employer, Earagáill Eisc, a fish processing company. The installation of a service point (a PC, linked to the Internet and the WebOPAC, and a taster collection of books) required some reorganization of shop stock and this was greatly facilitated by the positive attitude and cooperation of the proprietor. The Mín an Aoire service point was supplemented by a taster collection installed in the Earagáill Eisc canteen. By May 2008 the combined taster collection of the post office and the fish processing factory amounted to 250 books and there were 15 registered Taobh Tíre members. The Mín an Aoire and Earagáill Eisc arrangement is a good example of a library service working in partnership with private enterprise to serve local community needs.

Seirbhís Iompair Tuaithe Teoranta (SITT) Bus Service

SITT is a local rural transport initiative operating in south-west Donegal. It serves small villages and individual houses, bringing members of the public to Killybegs, Donegal town and other centres. The service has both a driver and an assistant/conductor. Negotiations with the SITT organisation led to their agreeing to deliver books to housebound library members on their routes. However, although the opening hours of Killybegs branch library were changed to suit the timetable of the SITT bus service and several advertisements were placed in the SITT timetable, very few people used the housebound delivery service. This is an example of an inter-agency partnership that was tried but had little impact on the use of the library or the Taobh Tíre service.

An Ghaeltacht Láir

The Gaeltacht Láir area of central Donegal includes the villages of Baile na Finne, Glenfin and Cloghan. Although it is less geographically isolated than some of the other target areas, this region is sparsely populated and lacks a central focal point. It is divided by the River Finn into a number of small centres of population, of which the most significant are those mentioned above.

The **Baile Na Finne service point** was set up in a vacant craft centre, **Áras Sheáin Bháin**, in cooperation with **Údarás na Gaeltachta** and **Coiste Éigse Sheáin Bháin**, a local cultural organisation. This arrangement is another good example of a partnership with existing community development agencies. Baile Na Finne and the surrounding Gaeltacht Láir district have a wealth of local community organisations focusing on tourism, culture, enterprise and local development. Coiste Éigse Sheáin Bháin is just one example. By aligning the objectives of the local group with those of the Taobh Tíre initiative, the project was able to secure important local backing and involvement.

The Baile Na Finne service point was officially launched in February 2004. By May 2008 it had a taster collection of 2800 books and four public access PCs with Internet connectivity and there were 195 registered Taobh Tíre members.

An Ghaeltacht Láir

An Ghaeltacht Láir is a sparsely populated region with about 300 widely dispersed families. It is mainly a farming region with some small businesses, but it also relies significantly on tourism such as salmon and trout fishing on the river Finn.

Baile Na Finne, which is the most central village and is a Gaeltacht area, has been designated by Údarás na Gaeltachta as the location for industrial, social and cultural facilities to serve the Gaeltacht Láir area.

When the area was being assessed for possible Taobh Tíre partners, two organisations were obvious candidates – **Údarás na Gaeltachta** and **Coiste Éigse Sheáin Bháin**, a local cultural organisation. Údarás na Gaeltachta had a vacant craft centre available and Coiste Éigse Sheáin

Bháin had a collection of 4000 antiquarian books of Irish and Irish/American interest and was seeking a home for its collection.

Taobh Tíre Service Point

Following discussions between the Taobh Tíre project team and both parties, a working group of An Coiste, Údarás and Donegal County Library was set up. With additional financial support from Meitheal Forbartha na Gaeltachta and a number of local councillors, it was agreed that the Taobh Tíre service point would be housed in the Údarás craft centre, **Áras Sheáin Bháin** and the antiquarian book collection would be hosted by the Taobh Tíre Point. The antiquarian collection now stands alongside a taster collection of 2800 books and other Taobh Tíre facilities including Internet access.

As a spin-off of the project work, a **community Web server** was established for the Baile Na Finne area with the assistance of An Chomhairle Leabharlanna. This Community Web server (which uses technical resources developed by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna's AGORA project) enables local people and organisations to easily publish cultural, personal, business and other material online at the address www.bailenafinne. ie. Training in the use of the service was provided by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna personnel to members of the Baile Na Finne group.

Fanad and Rosguill

Partnerships were established with the **Ionad Lae Day Centre** (for older people), the **Ionad Acmhainne Teaghlaigh, Mhíobhaigh** in Rosguill and **Halla Pobal Fán an Bhualtaigh** in Fanad. Cooperation agreements were also established with the **Men's Education Initiative** in Mhíobhaigh, the **Vocational Educational Committee's (V.E.C.) Adult Learner Guidance Service** and its mobile IT unit and the **Citizens' Information Centre**.

As in the case of all pilot regions, the project team endeavoured to work with local service providers and to build on existing community facilities and infrastructures. The partnership with Ionad Lae was an effective and efficient means of targeting Taobh Tíre services at older people in the region

and the partnership agreements reached with the V.E.C. and with the Citizens' Information Centre helped to reduce the set-up and ongoing costs of providing a library service in this remote area.

The Ionad Lae and Mhíobhaigh service points were both rolled out in February 2004 and the Fán a Bhualtaigh service point was launched in October 2005. By May 2008 Ionad Lae, Mhíobhaigh and Fán a Bhualtaigh service points had taster collections of 307, 340 and 220 books respectively and each had a PC with Internet connectivity. Users of the Ionad Lae service point, being elderly, are not required to register as members of Taobh Tíre and mainly make use of books onsite. By May 2008 the Mhíobhaigh and Fán a Bhualtaigh service points had 354 and 46 registered members respectively.

Fanad and Rosguill
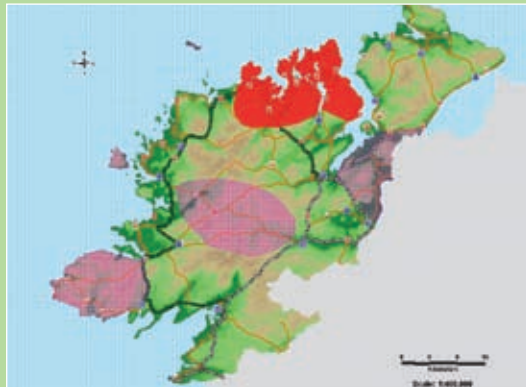
The peninsular areas of Fanad and Rosguill are sparsely populated, a large proportion of the population being elderly, single people in their eighties who reside alone in isolated, widely dispersed small holdings. The nearest centres of population are Milford and Letterkenny. Like many regions of Donegal the peninsula includes a number of Irish-speaking areas and relies mainly on farming and fisheries for employment.

Taobh Tíre Service Points
Because of the demographics of the region it was decided to target older people and a Taobh Tíre service point was set up in cooperation with Donegal V.E.C. in the **Ionad Lae Day Centre** in Trialough. The centre, which is open two days a week, serves as a meeting point and a means of keeping in touch with relatives living abroad by using the centre's Internet facilities.

The **Ionad Acmhainne Teaghlaigh, Mhíobhaigh** (Rosguill) and **Halla Pobail Fán a Bhualtaigh** (Fanad) were also recruited as partners for the project. Taobh Tíre facilities were incorporated into the Men's Education Initiative in Mhíobhaigh.

In the case of each of the service points, a taster collection and Internet connectivity were installed, with training and support provided where necessary.

East Donegal

East Donegal straddles the border with Northern Ireland and is populated mainly by widely dispersed agricultural and farming communities. Unemployment and deprivation are serious problems in the region and this is compounded by a lack of second level educational facilities. However, there appears to be a strong sense of community in the region and, because of its proximity to Northern Ireland it is the target of several initiatives promoting cross-border development.

East Donegal
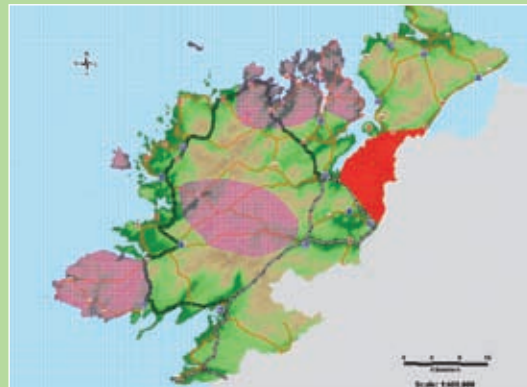
The eastern region of Donegal along the border with Northern Ireland is economically dependent mainly on agriculture. It has a high level of unemployment and the target area is characterised by pockets of severe deprivation. Because of the absence of a secondary school in the area, teenagers wishing to pursue secondary education must travel as far as Stranorlar, Letterkenny, Raphoe or Derry. Many children leave school at an early age.

Taobh Tíre Service Points
As in the case of other regions, the Taobh Tíre team endeavoured to build on existing community infrastructure in establishing a service point. **The Family Resource Centre in St. Johnston**, which also houses a Health Centre, was an obvious candidate for partnership. Following agreement with the Family Resource Centre, and cooperation with a local Youth project, a Taobh Tíre service point was established at the Centre in May 2004 with a view to focusing mainly on teenagers.

One of the unique features of East Donegal is the continued use of Ulster-Scots terminology in everyday speech. The St Johnston service point served as a base and a support centre for teenagers in undertaking an Ulster Scots project during 2005.

St Johnston

St Johnston is strategically placed at the centre of the East Donegal region and the Family Resource Centre, an obvious candidate for partnership, agreed to host a Taobh Tíre service point for the region. As there was a dearth of secondary educational facilities in the area, it was decided to join forces with an active local Youth Project and focus on providing services to teenagers. Following discussions with representatives of the Youth Project, text-messaging (SMS) software was purchased for the purpose of communicating with members. The usual Taobh Tíre resources were also installed in the Resource Centre i.e. a taster collection of 395 books and a public access PC with Internet and Web OPAC connectivity.

The St Johnston service point was rolled out in May 2004 and by May 2008 there were 69 registered Taobh Tíre members, most of whom (70%) were juveniles and teenagers.

The partnership arrangement employed by Taobh Tíre in East Donegal once again demonstrates the value of embedding library services in an existing service environment, in cooperation with appropriate local community agencies.

Oileán Árainn Mhór and Oileán Thoraí

Oileán Árainn Mhór

The Arranmore Development and Employment Co-operative was identified as a possible partner for a Taobh Tíre service point on the island. The Cooperative gave its full support to the project and a service point was set up in the island's Community Centre in July 2004. The operation of the service point was greatly facilitated by the availability of wireless broadband from a large mast on the mainland. In May 2008 there were 187 of the island's population of 540 registered as Taobh Tíre members and the service point had a taster collection of 650 books and a public access PC with Internet and WebOPAC connectivity.

Oileán Árainn Mhór and Oileán Thoraí
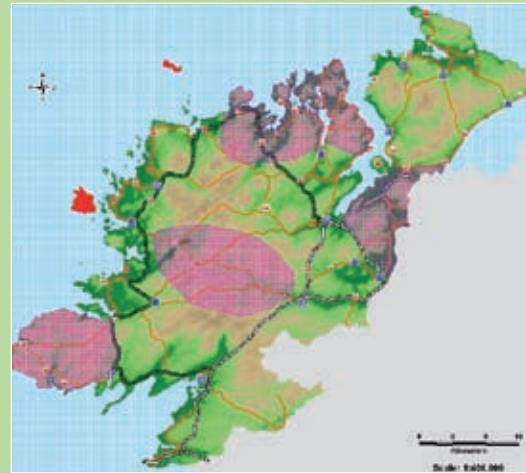
Islands, by definition are isolated and the communities residing on Oileán Árainn Mhór and Oileán Thoraí are among the most isolated in Ireland. These islands lie off the west and north-west coasts of Donegal and are regularly ravaged by heavy winds and seas and cut off from all but large helicopter traffic.

Both islands have viable, vibrant communities but continuously face the challenges of limited and often unreliable services, poor employment opportunities and increasing emigration to the mainland and overseas, especially the U.K. and North America.

Taobh Tíre Service Points
Taobh Tíre partnerships were established with the Cooperatives on both islands. On Oileán Árainn Mhór, the Community Centre hosts the Taobh Tíre service point, while on Oileán Thoraí, the service point is located in the Co-operative.

Oileán Thoraí

As in the case of Oileán Árainn Mhór, a partnership was established with the Oileán Thoraí Cooperative and a service point was launched in the Cooperative's Centre in September 2004. However, unlike Oileán Árainn Mhór, the Oileán Thoraí service point does not have access to broadband communications and relies on PSTN dial-up for Internet access. In May 2008 there were 51 registered Taobh Tíre members out of the island's population of 133. The service point was stocked with a taster collection of 400 books and a public access PC with Internet and WebOPAC connectivity.

Summary of Phase 1 Roll-outs

In the first phase of the project, **five target regions** were identified and **ten service points** were installed. In each case, the existence and cooperation of one or more suitable partner organizations, as well as the availability of suitable premises, were essential for the establishment of a viable service point in the region.

In the cases of seven of the ten phase 1 installations the involvement and support of **active community development groups** was the key to success. This element of the partnership arrangements augers well for the potential replication of the Taobh Tíre concept by other Irish local authorities, since community development groups are a common feature of rural society in Ireland.

The partnership arrangements in the cases of the remaining two installations in South-west Donegal are also important – one with a **post office/shop** in Mín an Aoire and another with a **local rural bus service**, Seirbhis Iompair Tuaithe Teoranta (SITT). These service points illustrate the potential for other types of partnership which may exhibit certain advantages of their own. Shops and post offices serve as a focal point for the local community, have a steady stream of customers and afford an opportunity to position the Taobh Tíre facility permanently in the public eye. Shops are also more numerous and widespread than community centres and a partnership with a shop will facilitate service delivery in all but the tiniest villages. Although the housebound delivery service, which was set up in partnership with a local rural transport initiative (SITT), had a very limited take-up, it remains a potential mechanism for future consideration and testing in the provision of house to house book delivery and collection services in other remote regions.

The establishment of a taster collection within a local employer's premises featured as a partnership model in the case of Earagáill Eisc, also in Southwest Donegal. However, it was not a full service point and the number of registered users was small. Nevertheless, it represents an interesting form of library outreach and has the potential to promote the local service point and the library service as a whole.

7.3 Rollout of Phase 2 Service Points

Due to the success of phase 1 of the project, and the fact that many communities in other areas of Donegal began to express an interest in hosting service points, it was decided to extend the network of service points in Phase 2. In the course of discussions with community groups and with all stakeholders in phase 1 of the project, it became obvious that many communities are subjected to isolation for reasons other than geographical remoteness from centres of population. Isolation may occur within urban as well as rural areas due to social, economic, cultural and other forms of deprivation and, given that geographical isolation had been the focus of phase 1, it was decided to extend the Taobh Tíre concept in phase 2 to address other forms of isolation.

As a result of a combination of the above factors, four pilot service points were rolled out during phase 2 in 2006. These included one in the Forge Family Resource Centre in Pettigo, a small border village of about 500 inhabitants in the extreme south of Donegal; one in the northwest Gaeltacht area at An tSean Bheairic in An Fál Carrach, a busy tourist town with a population of about 1000; and two service points in urban areas of Letterkenny - The Letterkenny Youth and Family Service (LYFS) and The Letterkenny Community Development Project (LCDP).

The phase 2 service point rollouts are summarized in Table 7B below and their locations may be seen on the map in Figure 7A.

Table 7B: Rollout of Phase 2 Taobh Tíre Service Points (2006)

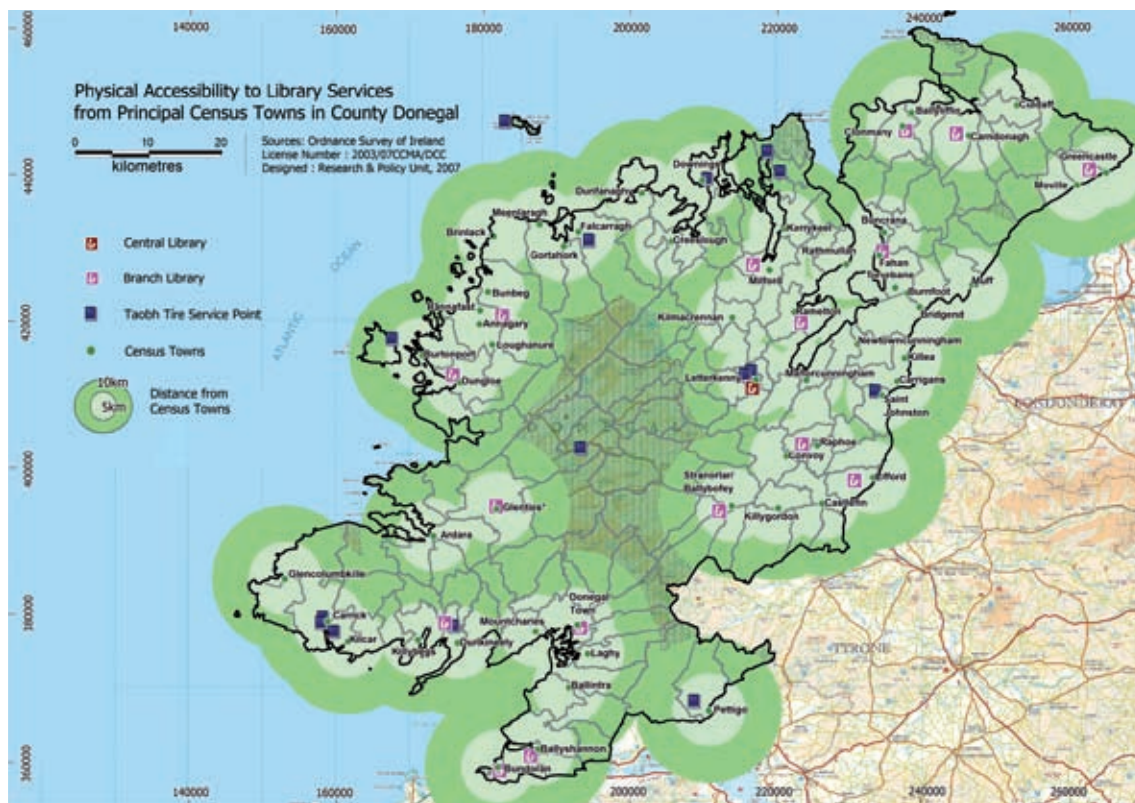| Taobh Tíre Service Point	Phase	Launch Date
The Forge Family Resource Centre, Pettigo	2	Jan 2006
An tSean Bheairic An Fál Carrach	2	Feb 2006
Letterkenny Youth and Family Service	2	April 2006
Letterkenny Community Development Project (CDP)	2	Oct 2006

Figure 7A: Map showing Locations of Phase 2 Service Points

The Forge Family Resource Centre, Pettigo

The Forge Family Resource Centre (FRC) in Pettigo which is the first and only cross-border Resource Centre in Ireland, was established in 2006. Its mission is to act as a catalyst and focus for the development of the community with a view to supporting social inclusion and promoting the educational, cultural and economic welfare of all citizens. The Resource Centre is playing a vital, role in rebuilding the community spirit in Pettigo and Tullyhommon and there is great enthusiasm for a Taobh Tíre service point in Pettigo.

Pettigo

Pettigo is a small village in the extreme south of Donegal. It is divided by the Termon river which forms the border between Donegal in the Irish Republic and Fermanagh in Northern Ireland. The Donegal side of the village has a population of approximately 440 and the Fermanagh side, officially known as Tullyhommon, has a population of about 80.

Pettigo, once a thriving market village on the Great Northern Railway line, has suffered greatly because of partition in 1922, the decline of rail transport in the 1950s and later, The Troubles, during the closing decades of the 20th century. Road closures by the British Army at the height of the Troubles divided the village into two separate communities and paved the way for further economic decline.

Taobh Tíre Service Point
A Taobh Tíre partnership was established with the Forge Family Resource Centre in Pettigo village and the service point was rolled out in the Resource Centre in January 2006.

The Taobh Tíre Service Point

It was evident from the initial meetings with the Manager of the Forge Family Resource Centre that the addition of the Taobh Tíre service would greatly enhance services to the community. Their mission statement reflects one of the overall objectives of the Taobh Tíre project and their enthusiasm for the provision of a library to the

town made for a fruitful partnership. Taobh Tíre targets the whole community in Pettigo, and as this is a cross border resource centre, people from neighbouring County Fermanagh have joined the library service and have attended events in the Forge FRC organised by Taobh Tíre.

The Taobh Tíre service point was launched in the Forge FRC in January 2006. In May 2008 there were 117 registered members from both sides of the border and the service point was stocked with a taster collection of 270 books and a public access PC with Internet and WebOPAC connectivity.

An tSean Bheairic, An Fál Carrach

An tSean Bheairic (The Old Barracks) is a visitor resource centre situated in the main street of An Fál Carrach. The visitor centre has an educational remit and holds many evening classes on various subjects including Irish language classes. It also has a shop and a café as well as tourist information office. Before the partnership with Taobh Tíre the centre also provided Internet access to the public.

The Taobh Tíre Service Point

The Taobh Tíre service point was officially launched in February 2006 in the the Visitor Centre - An tSean Bheairic. The service point was stocked with a taster collection of 180 books and an additional public access PC was installed to complement the existing visitor centre's public access PC. There is a large room at the back of the centre which has been used by Taobh Tíre to hold storytelling sessions, creative writing workshops and other events.

In An Fál Carrach, Taobh Tíre has targeted the whole community and in May 2008 there were 197 registered Taobh Tíre members.

An Fál Carrach

An Fál Carrach is a market town with a population of almost 1000 and is situated in the North West Gaeltacht area of Donegal on a narrow inlet of Ballyness Bay. It is the main commercial town between Letterkenny and Dungloe and is also a busy tourist centre because of its scenic attraction and proximity to Donegal's mountains and lakes as well as access to islands such as Oileán Thoraí.

The Irish language, culture and heritage are an inherent part of the values, traditions and activities of the local community and this is reflected in collection of artefacts and exhibitions on display in the town's Visitor Centre - An tSean Bheairic (The Old Barracks). The Visitor Centre was originally built in 1890 as An Fál Carrach Police Barracks and permanent exhibits of the history and culture of the barracks are on view in the Centre. At one stage there was a public library in the town but this closed in the 1960s.

Taobh Tíre Service Point
A Taobh Tíre partnership was established with An tSean Bheairic in An Fál Carrach and the service point was rolled out in February 2006.

Letterkenny Youth and Family Service (LYFS)

The Letterkenny Youth and Family Service (LYFS) (formerly Glenwood Youth Project) is based in a community house in Glenwood Park, a housing estate in Letterkenny consisting of 101 houses. The service is funded by the North West Health Services Executive (HSE). The area has suffered as a result of social and economic deprivation and, in an effort to tackle to problem, the LYFS organises and promotes a wide range of activities designed to engage children, young people and families in their community. The community house serves as a focus for the whole community by providing support and information.

The Taobh Tíre Service point

Following discussions with the LYFS, a Taobh Tíre service point was set up in April 2006 in the community house in a room that hosts the homework club. Before the installation of the Taobh Tíre service point the group had attempted to visit the local library on a regular basis. However this proved to be quite difficult to sustain, as there was not always a parent or guardian available to accompany the young people. The enthusiasm and energy of the staff and young people, coupled with the work already being undertaken by the LYFS, made it an ideal urban partner for the Taobh Tíre project.

Teenagers were the target in the LYFS and, to promote a sense of ownership among the young people, they were invited to take part in the selection of their own taster collection. They travelled with their youth worker to a library supplier in Sligo to assist the Taobh Tíre Co-ordinator in choosing stock for their taster collection.

In May 2008 there were 43 registered Taobh Tíre members at the centre and the service point resources consisted of a taster collection of 300 books and a public access PC with a broadband connection to the Internet and the WebOPAC.

Letterkenny Community Development Project

The Letterkenny Community Development Project (CDP) is a very active community group which aims to establish, promote and operate a community development support programme which will advance the economic, educational and cultural welfare of the people of Letterkenny and surrounding areas. The community development programme is particularly focused on generating benefit for, and empowering specific disadvantaged groups to effectively participate in a programme of personal and social development.

In a community audit carried out by the CDP in 2003 the lack of public transport was highlighted as a barrier to accessing services in the centre of town (where the Central Library is situated).

The Taobh Tíre Service Point

After initial consultations with the manger of the Letterkenny CDP it became evident that the installation of a service point would greatly complement the work of the group. As the CDP has a separate child care facility it was decided to target parents and young children with the introduction of rhyme time sessions and reading skills.

This service point was officially launched in October 2006 and by May 2008 there were 43 registered members. The service point was equipped with a taster collection of 300 books and a public access PC with broadband access to the Internet and the WebOPAC.

Chapter 8: Marketing and Promotion of Services

Marketing and promotional activities were undertaken over the duration of the project to ensure that potential users were aware of the facilities on offer. These activities are briefly summarized below.

8.1 Consultation

The consultation phase involved large numbers of potential users of the services from the target communities. Those involved in the consultation phase often took part in focus groups and became involved in the specification of what the project would do and how it would achieve its objectives. Such focus group members are well positioned to act as local champions for the project, both by using its services and encouraging others to do so.

8.2 Launches

The launches of the individual service points provided excellent opportunities to raise the profile of the project, particularly within the host communities. In general the launches involved a number of local elected representatives as well as voluntary and community groups. The most recent launches have been notable for the number of elected representatives who have asked to be involved. This demonstrates the perceived value of the Taobh Tíre services to the constituents of these representatives.

While the launches have established the Taobh Tíre service points in the collective consciousness of their communities, their impact is limited in duration. The project team is aware that if the project is to remain prominent and to attract both new and existing users, it must continue to deliver a service that is valued by the community. Fortunately, this is indeed the case to date and the popularity of the service, as shown by its use and by requests for new service points, is growing.

8.3 Online Promotion and Updates

The management team has published a periodic update of the project's activities on the Donegal County Council website10. These updates, twelve in all, published at approximately quarterly intervals, described the work of the project as it happened. Printed copies of updates were circulated to all City and County Librarians, Local County Councillors, all partner organizations and other interested parties.

8.4 Media Advertising

Advertising space was taken with local print and radio media. While these raised consciousness over the short term, the medium-term impact was less than was hoped for. This led the team to conclude that other forms of promotion may be more appropriate for a service of this nature.

8.5 Local Promotion

The Taobh Tíre service is promoted throughout the Donegal branch library network. Posters, brochures and fliers are distributed throughout the communities served by the project. These inform the public about the new service, the facilities available and the opening times of their local service point.

In conclusion, in view of the findings of the evaluation of phase 1 (see evaluation of Taobh Tíre by users, Chapter 9), it is imperative that the means used to market and promote the service are designed to suit local conditions. The media and the Internet may not be the most effective means of promoting the service – in the survey of Taobh Tíre users it was found that two in every three people first heard about the service by word of mouth and less than 8% heard about it through the media and the Internet.

Chapter 9: Evaluating the Pilot Services

The Taobh Tíre pilot services were evaluated in 2006 by the Research and Policy Section of Donegal County Council. The review covered the period December 2002 to June 2006 and was undertaken by means of surveys of the following:

1. WebOPAC use at Taobh Tíre Service Points.

2. A Panel of 14 key stakeholders (including a one day Panel meeting held in May 2006).

3. All 14 Service Point Operators.

4. Adult and Juvenile Users of the Service Points.

Full details of the methodology are provided in Chapter 2.

9.1 Use of the WebOPAC

The WebOPAC enables registered users of Donegal County Council Library Service to check details of their usage of the library. When registered users are logged on to the WebOPAC system they may check what they have on loan, request items, check how much they owe in fines and/or renew books and other materials they have on loan.

At the time of the WebOPAC survey there was a total of 848 registered Taobh Tíre users, of whom 372 (44%) used login facilities on the WebOPAC (see Table 9A below).

9.2 Evaluation of Taobh Tíre by a Panel of Key Stakeholders

There was clear evidence from the survey of the Panel of 14 Key Stakeholders (and from a one day meeting of the panel on 3rd May 2006) that all parties fully understood the concept, objectives and potential of the Taobh Tíre project. It was encouraging to note that the various agencies that were cooperating, or in partnership, with Taobh Tíre were also actively involved in a wide range of collaborative actions with other bodies. The discussion topics and the results of the evaluation by the stakeholders are summarised below.

Table 9A: Use of WebOPAC by Taobh Tíre Members

Category of Member	No. of Active Taobh Tíre Members	No. of Active Taobh Tíre Members using WebOPAC	WebOPAC users as % of Member Category
Adult (18yrs+)	471	208	44.2%
Student (12-17yrs)	166	58	34.9%
Junior (up to 11yrs)	211	106	50.2%
Total	848	372	43.9%

Criteria for Selecting a Site for a Taobh Tíre Service Point

Panel respondents were presented with a number of criteria for selection of a location for a Taobh Tíre service point and their recommendations were as follows:

Table 9B: Criteria for selection of location of a Service Point

Criteria for selection of location of a Service Point	No. of Responses (Total No. in Panel = 14)
Remoteness of a region	10 (71%)
Submitted expressions of interest by local communities	10 (71%)
Regions with high degree of economic and social disadvantage	10 (71%)
A need identified in a development plan	7 (50%)
A region lacking in cultural, recreational and/or community infrastructure	6 (43%)
Regions (in Donegal) that offer opportunities for cross-border cooperation	5 (36%)
Other model	4 (29%)

The Most Appropriate Model for a Taobh Tíre Service Point

The Panel was also asked for its views on the most appropriate model, or models, for a successful service point. The results are presented in Table 9C below.

Table 9C: Most Appropriate Model for Taobh Tíre Service

Most Appropriate Model recommended by the Panel	No. of Responses (Total No. in Panel = 14)
Community Development Project	7 (50%)
Family Resource Centre	7 (50%)
Youth Project	4 (28%)
Commercial Business	3 (21%)
Community Centre	3 (21%)
Areas where there is a structure of Community Development	3 (21%)
Other Model	4 (28%)

In addition, to making the above recommendations, respondents made the following observations:

- There was an opportunity to link with primary, secondary or third level colleges, pre-school or after school in conjunction with Donegal county childcare committee.

- A Family Resource Centre and a Community Development project might be more inclusive of targeted and vulnerable groups in the community.

- There was a need for the development of a model involving some form of semi-permanent staff and/or community project staff to ensure structure and ownership in the project.

- A combination of all options may be necessary because the characteristics of one model may be well suited to one area but not to another. An assessment of each potential location is required prior to the selection of a model.

Management and Operation of a Taobh Tíre Service Point

Members of the Panel were asked to indicate who, in their opinion, was best placed to carry out the tasks necessary for the smooth operation and management of a service point. Given that the most common implementation model used by Taobh Tíre was partnership with a local community development group, it would be expected that the community group should take ownership of the project and act as local champions for the service and the local authority staff should play a background role focusing on areas such as

training, familiarisation and general and technical support. However, this expectation was not reflected in the response of the members of the Panel who were of the view that the Donegal County Library Service and Taobh Tíre coordinator should have the main role and responsibility in the operation and management of the service point and the community and voluntary sector should play only a minor role.

Communications between key stakeholders of the Taobh Tíre project

Members of the Panel were asked to highlight how often they felt communication should take place between the key stakeholders of the Taobh Tíre project. The suggested and actual frequencies of communications are summarised in Table 9D below.

Table 9D: Communications: Suggested versus Actual Frequencies of Communication between Key Stakeholders of Taobh Tíre

Stakeholder	Frequency suggested by Panel	Actual Frequency of Communication
Taobh Tíre Management Team and Taobh Tíre Service Point Committees	Quarterly	There was no formal arrangement for communication between these stakeholders
Taobh Tíre Management Team and Taobh Tíre Coordinator	Monthly	Both parties met every 2-3 months. In addition, bi-monthly reports were prepared by the Taobh Tíre Coordinator for the Management Team
Taobh Tíre Coordinator and Service Point Operator	Monthly	The Taobh Tíre Coordinator met with service point operators as and when required. Communication was in the form of phone calls, letters and site visits. Site visits were more regular at the pre establishment phase of the project or if the Taobh Tíre Coordinator was making a presentation at the Service Point.
Service Point Operator and Branch Library	Monthly/ Quarterly	The Taobh Tíre Coordinator has taken all Branch Library Staff to meet the service point operators in their area. This was a recent occurrence, due to the likely mainstreaming of the project within the general library service.
Service Point Operator and Other Service Point Operators	Quarterly	There was no formal arrangement for communication between service point operators.

The respondents were of the view that the most urgent need for improved communications was between service operators and this was also highlighted in the survey of service operators (see below).

Concept of Accessibility

The underlying rationale of the Taobh Tíre project is based on improving accessibility to the world of information in all its forms. The first phase of the project focused on addressing the needs of geographically isolated communities by setting up service points in selected rural areas of Donegal. However, as the project progressed, forms of isolation other than physical geographical isolation were explored as possible impediments to information access. These included isolation resulting from social exclusion of those with limited or no formal education, poor literacy and IT skills, the unemployed, the disabled, socio-economically deprived groups, ethnic minorities and those living in disadvantaged urban areas.

Issues of accessibility were explored in the survey of key stakeholders and it was the opinion of the panel that the Taobh Tíre project should address issues of social inclusion as well as physical isolation.

Issues relating to physical accessibility were identified by the panel as follows:

- Rurality of a region.

- Physical distance to the nearest service point or library.

- Service should be provided as close as possible to the community.

- Impediments in getting to the service point should be minimised.

- An outreach approach should be adopted in providing services and promoting accessibility.

Issues of accessibility in the context of securing social inclusion within the community were identified as follows:

- Access should be underpinned by principles of equality and inclusion – i.e. access to all members of the community.

- Opening hours should suit the maximum number of people in the community.

- Ease of use should be facilitated, including access to information resources, large print books, help with reading, literacy problems etc.

- Access should be provided for disabled people (provision of external and internal ramps, lifts, Braille equipment etc).

- Provision should be made for homebound users.

- An outreach approach should be adopted in providing services and promoting accessibility.

Specifying Target Groups for Taobh Tíre Services

Table 9E presents the stakeholders' ranking of the groups to whom the Taobh Tíre service should be targeted. These results clearly indicate that the Taobh Tíre concept is perceived by the respondents as addressing more than the geographical isolation experienced by rural and island communities. Urban environments are also included as are the demographic extremes of the young and the elderly.

Table 9E: Taobh Tíre Target Groups identified by Key Stakeholders

Target Group	No. of Responses (Total No. In Panel = 14)
Rural communities (i.e. farming communities)	14 (100%)
Isolated communities (i.e. Islands, Urban & Rural)	14 (100%)
Youth and children	14 (100%)
The elderly	12 (86%)
Areas with low levels of literacy	10 (71%)
Irish or Gaeltacht communities	10 (71%)
Disadvantaged urban areas	9 (64%)
Disadvantaged CLÁR areas	8 (57%)
People with all forms of disabilities	7 (50%)
All vulnerable groups (as defined under the Employment Equality Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2002)	7 (50%)
Ethnic minorities	6 (43%)
Other (Please specify)	4 (29%)

How to Improve Taobh Tíre Services

Respondents were asked to indicate how Taobh Tíre services could be better tailored to meet the needs of target groups and the following is a summary of their suggestions:

- Taobh Tíre services should be continuously promoted.

- Opening hours should be increased.

- Improved physical access is needed to (some) service points, particularly for disabled people.

- Taster collections should be better suited to local needs.

- Taster collections need to be regularly updated.

- More large print books and other specialised materials.

- Tailored reader development and literacy programmes.

- Organised poetry, reading, storytelling and other cultural events and competitions.

- More online reference services including newspapers online etc.

- Promote use of the WebOPAC and links to other Internet sites.

- Improved ICT and broadband facilities.

- Convenient delivery and collection points.

- Provision of regular minibus services.

- Door to door delivery and collection of library materials.

- Continue to locate service points within Community Development Projects, Family Resource Centres and Cooperatives.

- Improved contact with local representative groups, extending the champion approach.

- More surveys to study local needs.

- Provision of improved and more regular training for staff and users.

Key Challenges facing Local Authorities in Reproducing Taobh Tíre as a Model of Best Practice

The panel members were asked to identify any key challenges which, in their view, might be encountered by local authorities when attempting to reproduce services similar to the Donegal Taobh Tíre project in other counties of Ireland. Respondents were asked to consider all stages in reproducing models of best practice i.e. the pre-implementation phase, the implementation phase and the post-implementation phase.

The main challenges at the **pre-implementation phase** were identified as follows:

- Specifying selection criteria for the establishment of service points.

- Location of service points, appropriate buildings, accommodation.

- Specifying needs for services.

- Accessibility – opening hours, availability of transport services.

- Effective partnerships – identifying and recruiting appropriate partners.

- Management and operation – identifying roles and responsibilities of all parties involved.

- Staffing and volunteerism.

- ICT and telecom infrastructure.

- Promotion.

- Funding – who will pay and how will expenditure be shared by all parties involved in the service?

Challenges facing local authorities at the **implementation phase** were identified as follows:

- Implementation of selection criteria and procedures agreed at the pre-establishment phase.

- Management and operational procedures – including staffing, opening hours, health and safety, roles and responsibilities.

- Effective partnership – ensuring that all partners come on board as agreed at the pre-implementation phase.

- Active promotion of services.

- Monitoring and evaluation of services.

- Service improvement based on evaluation and feedback.

Finally, the survey of key stakeholders revealed the following as the probable main challenges arising for local authorities at the **post-implementation phase** of a Taobh Tíre project within their jurisdictions.

- Continuity and sustainability. This involves ensuring that a complex mix of elements is in place e.g.

  - Resources – human, financial, physical, library materials, PCs, ICT etc.

  - Effective partnerships.

  - Support – general, technical, IT, research etc.

- Monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of the service – service point collections, accessibility, partnerships, circulation statistics, patterns of user needs and behaviour, development of research and monitoring tools, etc.

- Planning – medium and long term planning for maintaining and improving services, adapting to changing needs, integration of Taobh Tíre services within the local authority's general library services, cooperation with national programmes and initiatives etc.

Key Challenges facing Local Communities in Reproducing Taobh Tíre as a Model of Best Practice

Having secured their views on the likely challenges facing local authorities, the key stakeholders were also asked to identify any major challenges which, in their opinion, might be encountered by **local communities** when attempting to reproduce services similar to the Donegal Taobh Tíre project in other counties of Ireland. Since local authorities and local communities would be expected to work in close partnership in the management and operation of Taobh Tíre service points it is probable that both parties would face very similar challenges. However, in addition to those listed above for local authorities, the following challenges were considered by the survey

respondents to be particularly relevant to local communities engaging in Taobh Tíre services.

At the **pre-implementation phase** the community may have difficulty in identifying a dedicated local community leader or leader agency willing to serve as a project champion. It may be difficult to sell the Taobh Tíre concept to local agencies and to persuade them to make suitable premises available. Funding may represent a serious problem, for example, if capital expenditure is required to refurbish or refit a premises which is to accommodate a service point. Funds are also likely to be required for overheads such as heating, lighting, office supplies, rent etc and expenses will also be incurred for staff. There may also be a dearth of staff to operate the service and the level of skills of those willing to serve may not be adequate.

Challenges facing the community at the **implementation phase** were considered to be similar to those listed above for local authorities. Respondents were of the view that it is important that community agencies should actively engage in the project through effective partnership with the local authority and with each other and stressed the role of good communications between all parties for a successful outcome. The panel also indicated that it is incumbent on the community to promote awareness of the service at local level on an ongoing basis and to ensure that equal access is provided to all members of the community.

The most important challenges for the community at the **post-implementation stage** were identified as staff turnover and ensuring the future development of the service. Service points generally experienced a high rate of staff turnover and this led to problems in maintaining a continuity of skills required to run the centres. The ongoing development, expansion and consolidation of the Taobh Tíre services were seen as a major challenge to local communities.

9.3 Evaluation of Taobh Tíre by Service Point Operators

There was clear evidence from the survey of the operators of all 14 Taobh Tíre service points (December 05 – June 06) that they fully

understood the concept, objectives and potential of the Taobh Tíre project.

The service point operators provided very useful feedback on the day to day running of service points and also on wider strategic and policy issues. Some of their observations included the following:

Users of Service Points
Most of the 11 service operators (9-10 or 80-90%) who responded to this question reported that children, young people and students were regular users of service points. Unemployed people and single parents were identified as regular users by approximately two thirds (7/11) of service operators while the elderly and people with disabilities were named as regular users by 5 (45%) of the 11 operators. Other groups identified as regular users by a relatively small number of service operators included, in descending order, early school leavers (reported by 4/11 or 36% operators), different ethnic groups, tourists and business people (3/11 or 27%) and members of the travellers community (2/11 or 18% of operators).

Operating procedures in Service Points
It was apparent from the survey that different operating procedures pertain in each of the service points depending on local circumstances. Differences were evident in most aspects of operations, including staff, the amount of time devoted to the operation of the service, the use of IT, communications, promotion and advertising, and training procedures for staff and users.

The Role of the Local Community in the Success of Service Points
Service operators were of the view that communities that actively seek the provision of a service point are more likely to embrace the project with enthusiasm. Some communities had strategic development plans that identified a need for information dissemination within the community and Taobh Tíre service points were seen as part of a solution to meeting this need.

Selection Criteria for Location of Service Points
The criteria used to select the locations for establishing pilot service points were identified

on the basis of regional profiling and consultation with local communities. The survey of service point operators revealed that further refinement of selection criteria was needed. In addition to the original criteria used to select the 14 service points (see Chapter 2: Methodology) it was recommended that the following considerations be taken on board as a basis for prescribing a more general template for defining selection criteria for service points.

- Better use of statistics on demographics and social inclusion indicators e.g. demographics on age, employment status, educational attainment, disability, Haase Deprivation Index etc.

- A clear definition of what constitutes a record of community development, e.g. number of community projects, number of sectoral community groups, community development as an element of a community strategic plan.

- A clear definition of physical infrastructure, e.g. as well as roads, rail etc, should it include access infrastructure such as telecoms, social and educational infrastructure such as schools, V.E.C.s, training institutes etc.?

- An assessment of literacy levels in a region, including IT skills, uptake of education and training courses etc.

- Evidence of significant economic decline and outward migration.

Models of best practice
The survey indicated that service point operators were of the view that there was a need to tailor implementation and operational models to meet the specific requirements of particular communities – i.e. no single model can be designed to fit all situations.

Levels of Community participation in the operation of Service Points
The most common implementation model used by Taobh Tíre was a partnership with a local community group. It was therefore interesting to investigate the role of the community in running the service points. An examination of the procedures in the 14 service points revealed that there was very limited community participation in the day to day operation of the service points. However, in most cases, the community had a significant input to decision making via an active community partner, a management committee, a committee representing the local community or some other means. The community also shared in the task of raising awareness by including information on the Taobh Tíre service in local newsletters and Church bulletins and on noticeboards in community centres, parish halls, churches and schools.

Resource Sharing
There was little evidence of any formal arrangements for resource sharing among the partners operating service points. For example, there did not appear to be any guidelines or agreements between partners to share the cost of staff, office administration, general overheads (including heating, lighting, telecoms etc), rent for premises or advertising and promotional activities. The main concern seemed to be to get the services up and running rather than setting up formal mechanisms to operate services on an ongoing basis. A high turnover of staff (Community Employment workers) seemed to be an issue and was identified as an area for further investigation in order to provide sustainable services.

Communications between Service Point Operators
The survey revealed that little or no horizontal communication took place between service points. Many operators were of the view that all service points, and especially newly established centres, would benefit significantly from the presence of a network of service point operators which could serve to share experience and strive for excellence and best practice. There was also an expressed need among respondents for more frequent and regular communication between service operators, the Taobh Tíre Project Coordinator and the Donegal County Library Service.

Staff Training
Many service point operators expressed an interest in training and indicated that varying levels of training were required, depending the library experience (if any) of the operator.

9.4 Evaluation of Taobh Tíre by Users
A questionnaire survey of Taobh Tíre users was undertaken at each service point between December 2005 and June 2006. The total survey

population at the time of the evaluation was 848 registered Taobh Tíre users, comprising 637 adults and 211 juveniles (i.e. children aged 13 or less).

The survey sample was made up as follows:

- 66 registered Taobh Tíre adult users and 24 unregistered adult users (i.e. drop-ins etc.) giving a total of 90 adults of whom 69% were identified as female and 29% were male.

- 66 registered Taobh Tíre juvenile users and 50 unregistered juvenile users (i.e. drop-ins etc.) of whom 49% were female and 51% were male.

Of the adult and juvenile respondents 13% were under 15 years of age, 31% were aged 16-34 years, 31% aged 35-54 years, 11% aged 55-64 years and 13% aged 65 and over. In the case of adult respondents, approximately one third (32%) were employed, almost one quarter (22%) were students, 18% were homemakers, 13% were retired and 10% were unemployed. The nationality of adult users was predominantly Irish (90%) with a small percentage of respondents originating from the U.K. (5.5%) and elsewhere (4.5%).

Four of every five users (81%) were of the view that the Taobh Tíre service was meeting their needs and that they had benefited from using it. The following are examples of positive comments on the service.

<div style="background:#d6e9b8;padding:8px">

Typical Comments

"It meets my needs having the use of the computer and the use of getting books because when you have a book you are never alone, it is a great pastime"

"Tá sé deas go bhfuil seirbhís chomh cóngarach le dhá mhíle de mo theach cónaithe"

"It is the only place in town you can get books free"

"It helps me study"

"Great range of books. Great and peaceful to research"

"It has every book needed for me to complete my studies if I require them"

"I can find out information from the Internet"

"Homework and reading"

"Research"

"Its Local"

</div>

A small minority (6%) stated that the services provided in their local Taobh Tíre service point did not live up to their particular needs. Some typical comments are listed below. (The remaining 13% of respondents did not answer the question).

<div style="background:#d6e9b8;padding:8px">

Typical Comments

"Would appreciate a wider variety of reading material"

"Wider variety of books needed or easier availability of unusual books"

"Needs more books, particularly children's books"

"It did previously, but not now as I have read a wide section of what is available at the Centre."

</div>

The main reasons given by adult users for visiting a Taobh Tíre service point were access to literature (41% of respondents) and use of computer applications (29%). Other reasons included research (12%), reading (8%), meeting friends (6%), doing homework (3%) and borrowing CDs (1%).

The main reasons given by juvenile users for visiting a Taobh Tíre service point was access to literature (39% of respondents). Other reasons for visiting the centre included , looking around (14%), school work/research (13%), social visit (12%), using computer applications   (7%), using games (6%), multimedia (3%) and photocopying (2%).

Approximately one in four adults (23%) said they visited the service point more than once a week, 36% claimed to visit weekly and 31% stated that they made a monthly visit. This means that, in all, 90% of respondents indicated that they frequented a service point at least once a month.

Almost half of juvenile respondents (45%) claimed to visit a service point once or more often weekly and approximately one third (35%) visited less than once a week. Most children tended to be accompanied during their visit to the centre e.g. by a parent (31%), teacher and classmates (19%), friends (15%) or siblings (12%).

Tables 9F and 9G below summarise the satisfaction ratings of adult and juvenile users respectively.

Table 9F: Assessment of Taobh Tíre Service Points by Adult Users

Item/Service available at Taobh Tíre Service Point	Positive Ratings (good & very good)	Adequate Ratings	Negative Ratings (poor & very poor)	No Response to Question
Staff Knowledge & Expertise	81%	3%	0%	16%
Conditions of Service Point Inside	78%	8%	0%	14%
Staff Helpfulness	78%	6%	0%	16%
Conditions of Service Point Outside	73%	6%	1%	20%
Ease of Access inside the Service Point	72%	12%	0%	16%
Information & Enquiry Service	71%	10%	1%	18%
Layout & Arrangement of Service Point	69%	14%	0%	17%
Computers	68%	10%	0%	22%
Hours of Opening	67%	13%	2%	18%
Range of Books & Other Services	62%	14%	7%	17%
Provision of Seating & Tables	62%	12%	10%	16%
Children's Services	61%	12%	3%	24%
Signs and Guiding	55%	16%	7%	22%
Level of Charges (Membership)	49%	8%	0%	43%
Level of Charges (Overdue Loans)	43%	11%	0%	46%
Ease of Access entering Service Point	33%	11%	42%	14%

The feedback from adult respondents is extremely positive in most respects and the staff who operate the service points are certainly held in high regard. The main complaint appears to relate to ease of access when entering service points and presumably this is a physical problem which can be addressed and resolved in the majority of cases.

Table 9G: Assessment of Taobh Tíre Service Points by Juvenile Users

Item/Service Available at Taobh Tíre Service Point	Item/ service not available	Positive Ratings (good)	Adequate Ratings (ok)	Negative Ratings (bad)	No Response to Question
Library Staff	-	75%	12%	3%	22%
Books	0%	70%	26%	0%	4%
Finding your way around the Library	-	58%	16%	3%	23%
The look of the Library	-	58%	16%	6%	20%
Computers	2%	54%	9%	5%	30%
Opening Times	-	48%	23%	7%	22%
Someone to help with homework	4%	28%	11%	16%	41%

Table 9G: Assessment of Taobh Tíre Service Points by Juvenile Users *(Continued)*

Item/Service Available at Taobh Tíre Service Point	Item/ service not available	Positive Ratings (good)	Adequate Ratings (ok)	Negative Ratings (bad)	No Response to Question
Events or Activities	3%	26%	24%	9%	38%
Toys & Games	3%	26%	21%	11%	39%
Homework Space	3%	25%	29%	11%	32%
Number of Tables & Chairs	3%	25%	29%	11%	32%
Information to help with Homework	3%	23%	24%	6%	44%
Comics	3%	22%	28%	16%	31%
Newspapers/Magazines	3%	22%	28%	16%	31%
CD-ROMs	5%	21%	16%	9%	49%
Photocopier/Fax Facilities	3%	20%	17%	9%	51%
Library Computer Catalogue	3%	19%	22%	8%	48%
Cassettes or CDs	6%	18%	17%	11%	48%
Videos	5%	13%	22%	16%	44%

The results presented in Table 9G would appear to indicate that juvenile respondents are somewhat less enamoured by Taobh Tíre services than their adult peers. However, the generally lower levels of positive ratings may be partly accounted for by the relatively higher levels of non-response to most questions by children compared to non-response levels by adults. A high proportion of children (70-75%) were well satisfied with the library staff and the book collections in the service points. Approximately half of respondents assigned positive ratings for opening times, the physical aspects of the library and the computer facilities. The remaining aspects of the centres are positively rated by only one, or less, in four respondents, although this increases to one in two respondents if "adequate" ratings are added to "positive" ratings.

Finally, adult respondents were asked how they had heard about the Taobh Tíre services (see Figure 9A below). The majority indicated that they had heard about the service by word of mouth. Such a passive means of promotion is useful in a small locality or community as word of mouth travels fast, but the mechanism is unpredictable and difficult to manage and sustain

unless supplemented by more formal marketing techniques. The apparent promotional impact of the Internet and radio was very disappointing.

Figure 9A Marketing - How did you hear about the Taobh Tíre Service
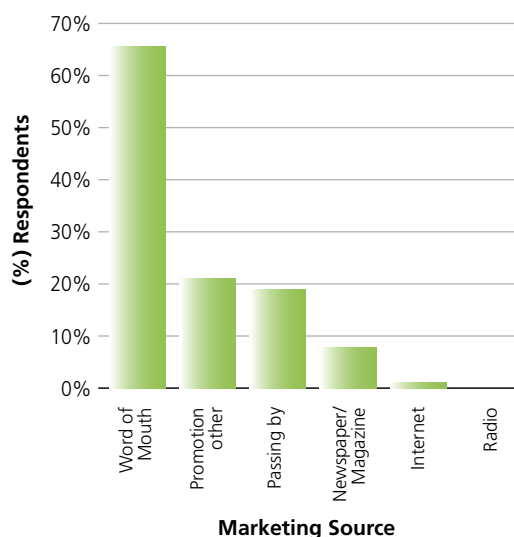
Chapter 10: Summary of Progress and Achievements

This chapter examines the achievements of the project from its inception in 2002 to the completion of phase 2 in 2006, as well as the further development and consolidation of services during 2007-8. A summary of the status of Taobh Tíre service points is presented in table 10A at the end of the chapter.

10.1 Meeting Objectives

The Taobh Tíre project has achieved all its stated objectives i.e.

■ As a forerunner to the study, a comprehensive **national and international review** was undertaken of innovative models of library and information service provision to isolated communities.

■ **New and innovative means of delivering library services** to isolated communities in both rural and urban settings **have been identified, explored and implemented**, based on lessons learned overseas and in Ireland and on primary, empirical research undertaken in County Donegal.

■ Various **environments** in which library services could be delivered, other than a traditional branch library network and/or a mobile library service, **have been explored**.

■ **Local communities were consulted** in order to construct regional profiles, to define the kinds of services needed by isolated communities and to select appropriate sites for Taobh Tíre service points designed to deliver such services.

■ The project has successfully identified parties in a wide range of rural and urban communities in County Donegal with whom **partnerships** could be established to implement new and innovative ways of delivering library services locally.

■ Various **partnership models** were designed and implemented to suit the various regions in which service points were established.

■ In all, **fourteen Taobh Tíre service points, with a total membership of 1,492**, have been established throughout the county **to deliver new and innovative library services** in partnership with local community agencies.

■ The project has been objectively **monitored and evaluated** throughout its lifetime by surveying all interested parties, including key stakeholders, service point operators and end users - both adults and children.

■ As evidenced by feedback from users of the service, Taobh Tíre has made a significant contribution to **improving the quality of life** of local communities in Donegal by facilitating access to library collections and services.

■ There is evidence to suggest that, in addition to addressing issues resulting from geographical isolation, the project has had significant relevance in **catering for the needs of disadvantaged urban communities who are isolated or ghettoized** because of other circumstances such as economic, social and cultural deprivation manifested by high levels of unemployment, illiteracy, crime and delinquency etc.

■ Taobh Tíre has been unique in Ireland in its extensive investigation of issues surrounding service provision to isolated communities, because of the extent of the research, the models of investigation, implementation and evaluation that have been designed and applied in the course of the initiative. This project, therefore, affords an ideal opportunity to establish **a replicable methodology** for the establishment of similar services elsewhere in Ireland and abroad.

■ Due to the success of this research initiative, Taobh Tíre services have continued beyond the funding period of the project and are being **integrated within the Donegal Library service**.

10.2 Benefits to the Community

The Taobh Tíre project delivers a wide range of benefits to the isolated communities which it serves. These include

- *Improved access to the full range of library services*: the Taobh Tíre project has delivered significantly improved access to isolated communities to the Donegal Library service. The provision of **faster collections** and **access to the WebOPAC** means that users may avail of the full range of library services including immediate physical access to their local taster collections and remote access via the WebOPAC to the full collection of the Donegal Library service. Communities served by Taobh Tíre service points may browse through the online catalogue, order books for delivery to the service point and return books via the service point. They also have access to the full range of services such as reference queries, business information services, Ask-a-Librarian, and inter-library loans are also available. In the evaluation surveys undertaken as part of the project, these services have been reported by users of Taobh Tíre service points to improve their quality of life and help to address the inequality of service provision which is experienced by isolated communities in rural and urban areas.

- *Improved Internet access to the global information environment*: free Internet access is available at all Taobh Tíre service points and Internet PCs may be reserved in advance in blocks of one hour. This facility literally opens the world of information to these hitherto disadvantaged communities and offers an extensive range of new opportunities for entertainment and leisure activities, travel and tourism, healthcare, e-commerce, education and training, communications and personal development. Further down the road, as service points become established and a more familiar feature of the community landscape, there is enormous potential for expansion of access by isolated communities to the global networked environment.

- *Reader development*: in consultation with local communities, the project team identified the need to promote literacy and reading among the community as well as providing library services, in order to advance the Taobh Tíre concept on a self-sustaining basis. The availability of library services alone will not create demand for such services, particularly in communities where no such service was previously available, or where services had been very limited. The project therefore introduced a reader development programme, which included the provision of training for library staff and Taobh Tíre service point staff, as well as measures designed to encourage the public to make greater use of the library service. These measures included attempts to (re)introduce reading as a day to day activity and to encourage social discussion and other activities centered around books and other media. Staff training was arranged with a U.K. based reader development company, Opening the Book, and the most recent event was a training day held in April 2007 for staff of Taobh Tíre service points. Reader development programmes located in the service points have included a **book chain** (Áislann Chill Charta), **adult reading groups** (Áras Seáin Bháin, Oileán Árainn Mhór, Ionad Acmhainne Teaghlaigh, Mhíobhaigh, Oileán Thoraí, Forge Family Resource Centre, Pettigo), **teenage reading group and library stock pick by teenagers** (Letterkenny Youth and Family Service), **children's reading group** (Letterkenny Youth and Family Service, Forge Family Resource Centre), **parent and toddler rhyme time** (Letterkenny Community Development Project), **men's video discussion group** (Ionad Acmhainne Teaghlaigh, Mhíobhaigh) and an **Ulster Scots Project** carried out by students at St Johnston Carrigans Resource Centre. Reader development projects met with varying degrees of response, the most successful being those at Mhíobhaigh, St Johnston Carrigans Resource Centre and both of the Letterkenny projects.

- *A catalyst in promoting increased community involvement in local activities*: The Taobh Tíre service points serve as catalysts for increased involvement of the community in local activities. They serve as an attraction and focal point for community facilities and are an example of the additional services and value that local community groups may provide to their constituents. This encourages local people to engage with community groups and so contributes to their activities.

- *Promoting a sense of connection to the wider community*: the availability of new services via the Taobh Tíre service points reinforces the fact that, even though they are remote or isolated for whatever reason, the communities being served remain part of the wider county, provincial and national community. By making available services which would otherwise be accessible only by traveling to a centre of population, Taobh Tíre helps to address the sense of isolation of these communities.

- *Achieving improved proximity*: The Danish National Association of Local Authorities has identified three types of proximity in the context of a community environment, namely, **geographical proximity** (physical distance), **technological proximity** (IT society) and **cultural proximity** (local/regional community spirit). Where there is poor geographical proximity, as in the case of rural areas, a library authority may enhance technological proximity through the use of ICT and may also maximise cultural proximity by embedding the library service within the wider cultural landscape of the community by means of active and effective partnership with a multiplicity of community agencies. This is exactly what has been achieved by the Taobh Tíre project.

- *Filling the gap*: the conventional approach to serving isolated communities has been by means of mobile library services. However, mobile services are expensive to set up and maintain and are unable to cater for all forms of isolated environments, particularly widely dispersed populations residing in regions with poor roads infrastructure. The Taobh Tíre approach builds on local community involvement and ownership to serve specifically local needs and deliver services via local community focal points and networks. For a given community, the Taobh Tíre approach may offer a more realistic and cost effective approach to service provision than a mobile library service in that costs will depend on the scale of operation (which can be decided on locally) and may be shared between the library authority and local community development and/or other local agencies.

10.3 Benefits to the Local Authority

The Taobh Tíre project has facilitated **greatly improved outreach** and **greater penetration within the community** being served by Donegal County Council. By establishing service points like those set up by Taobh Tíre, the local authority is able to **deliver services in new locations** which would otherwise not be large enough to support a library presence or, as noted above, because of poor infrastructure, may not be accessible by a mobile library service.

Unlike the mobile service, which is provided and funded solely and directly by the library authority, the **Taobh Tíre service involves partnership** with local communities resulting in the **sharing of human and financial resources** in the provision of a wide range of library, information and other services. Cooperation with the local community establishes a sense of ownership and involvement within the community which in turn promotes uptake and ongoing use of the services being delivered. This approach is both **effective and efficient** in providing services which are tailored to meet specific local needs and which are driven largely by local interest, enthusiasm and effort with support from the library authority.

Finally, in terms of service provision per catchment population, the Taobh Tíre model compares very favourably with the traditional branch library network. In 2007 the Taobh Tíre service had a total of 1,492 registered

members, which represented 16.3% of the estimated Taobh Tíre catchment population of 9,139. The corresponding figure in 2007 for the county-wide branch library network was 18,703 registered members representing 12.7% of the total Donegal catchment population of 147,264. Comparing the Taobh Tíre statistics directly to a larger static branch such as Buncrana Community Library with a total of 3,167 registered members, which represents 49.8% of the total catchment population of 6,360 and a smaller branch such as Donegal Town with a total membership of 315, which is 7.3% of their total catchment population of 4,290 illustrates that Taobh Tíre serves a significant population similar to that of a mid sized branch library.

10.4 Benefits to other local authorities

The benefits of Taobh Tíre to Donegal County Council may be **extended to other local authorities** that are considering a similar approach to service provision within their jurisdictions. Taobh Tíre has provided **a methodology, for establishing and delivering cultural and online services to isolated communities** in both rural and urban environments. This methodology is based on the principles of partnership with the local population and re-use and improved exploitation of existing infrastructure. It can be effectively applied in the case of any isolated community, in any county in Ireland or elsewhere. The applicability of the Taobh Tíre model in other local authority jurisdictions is discussed in Chapter 11.

10.5 Spin-off Benefits

The Taobh Tíre project led to discussions between Donegal County Council and the **Western Education and Library Board (WELB) of Northern Ireland** with a view to developing cross border library services. Following the approval of a joint proposal by the two authorities to the *Peace II* Initiative of the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, a **Cross-Border Mobile Library** service was established in 2005 to serve East Donegal and the Western Tyrone/Derry regions of Northern Ireland.

The new mobile library provides Internet access, ICT training, life-long learning, general literacy and personal development opportunities to the often-deprived communities of the border corridor. It has a particular focus on community information, local studies and cultural information, thereby promoting improved interaction and reconciliation among the border communities. The new cross-border mobile service has been mainstreamed within the Donegal Library service since the Peace II funding expires and the long-term impact of the new service is expected to be significant.

Table 10A: Summary of Taobh Tire Service Points May 2008

Taobh Tire Service Point	Total No. of Registered Members	Taster Collection	WebOPAC available	Who processes WebOPAC requests	No. of PCs	Internet Access available	Telecom connectivity status	Targeted Reader Development Activities
Áras Sheáin Bháin, Baile Na Finne	195	2,800 books	yes	Dungloe Branch Library	4	yes	Eircom broadband	Adult reading group 2007
Ionad Acmhainne Teaghlaigh, Mhíobhaigh	354	340 books	yes	Milford Branch Library	1	yes	ISDN	Men's video discussion group 2005: Adult reading group 2007
Ionad Lae Day Centre*	n/a	307 books	yes	Use of onsite books only	1	yes	PSTN dial-up	Taobh Tire Centre was included in reading & other events of Donegal Library Services
Aislann Chill Chartha	169	1000 books	yes	Bundoran Branch Library	1	yes	Satellite broadband via Digiweb	Book chain 2005
Mín an Aoire Post Office & Earagail Eisc (2 service points)	15	250 books	yes	Bundoran Branch Library	1	yes	PSTN dial-up	Taobh Tire Centre was included in reading & other events of Donegal Library Services
St Johnston/Carrigans Resource Centre	69	395 books	yes	Lifford Branch Library	1	yes	ISDN	Ulster Scots Project 2005
Oileán Árainn Mhór	187	650 books	yes	Dungloe Branch Library	1	yes	Wireless broadband	Adult reading group 2007
Oileán Thoraí	51	400 books	yes	Dungloe Branch Library	1	yes	PSTN dial-up	Adult reading group 2007
Halla Pobail Fán a Bhualtaigh	46	220 books	yes	Milford Branch Library	1	yes	Wireless broadband	Taobh Tire Centre was included in reading & other events of Donegal Library Services
The Forge Family Resource Centre, Pettigo	117	270 books	yes	Bundoran Branch Library	1	yes	PSTN dial-up	Adult & children's reading groups 2007
An tSean Bheairic An Fál Carrach	197	180 books	yes	Dungloe Branch Library	1	yes	Eircom broadband	Taobh Tire Centre was included in reading & other events of Donegal Library Services
Letterkenny Youth and Family Service	43	300 books	yes	Letterkenny Central Library	1	yes	ADSL	Book stock pick by teenagers 2006: Teenagers' & children's reading groups 2007
Letterkenny Community Development Project (CDP)	49	300 books	yes	Letterkenny Central Library	1	yes	ADSL	Parent & toddler rhyme time 2007
Totals	**1,492**	**7,343 books**			**16**			

Ionad Lae is a day centre for older people who are not required to register as Taobh Tire members

Chapter 11: An Overview of the Taobh Tíre Model and its Applicability in Other Local Authority Areas

11.1 The Taobh Tíre Model

The Taobh Tíre mode of service delivery may be represented as an input/output model with expected and measurable outcomes, as outlined and discussed below.

11.1.1 Inputs

The **inputs** to the model consist of all the **activities, procedures and resources that are invested in designing, implementing, maintaining, monitoring, evaluating, refining and improving the service** and eventually, if the pilots prove to be successful, it will be desirable to **mainstream the pilot service** within the local authority's branch and mobile library services. Resources include all **physical resources** (such as premises and accommodation, furniture, shelving, office and IT equipment, communications equipment, library materials etc.); **human resources** (such as a coordinator, a project team, a management team, library staff involved in the project, service point staff, book delivery staff, technical staff, etc.); and **financial resources** (for example, salaries and financial overheads for library staff, service point staff, technical staff, maintenance and delivery staff etc.; service point overheads such as rent, heating, lighting, telephone, postage, transport, advertising and promotion etc.; purchase of library and resource materials for service points etc.).

Inputs for the Donegal Taobh Tíre project included the following:

1. Defining a Taobh Tíre pilot action plan for the county in the context of existing branch and mobile library service provision and any existing community development or other relevant local authority, provincial or national plans.

2. Defining a project management structure.

3. Appointing a coordinator and project team.

4. Constructing a regional profile of the county.

5. Selecting pilot regions for Taobh Tíre service provision.

6. Identifying community needs in the pilot regions.

7. Defining pilot services to meet community needs.

8. Identifying and recruiting potential partners.

9. Defining operational procedures and responsibilities in the case of each service point.

10. Acquiring and fitting out premises for service points.

11. Recruiting and training staff for service points (in the case of Donegal Taobh Tíre, existing staff of the partner organizations were employed in the service points).

12. Rolling out service points.

13. Marketing and promoting the service locally and throughout the county.

14. Managing and operating the county-wide Taobh Tíre Project on a day to day basis (Project Coordinator)

15. Monitoring and evaluating the project.

16. Integrating the pilot service within the local authority's branch and mobile library service (mainstreaming).

17. Finance, including budgets, interagency funding and local financing models for service points.

11.1.2 Outputs

The outputs of the model emerge as the physical and practical results of the inputs. **Outputs** could include **new administrative arrangements** for the provision of services, such as new forms of partnership between the library authority and other agencies. The outputs also include the provision of **physical resources** which had not been previously available to the community e.g. a building which houses a library collection,

computer and communications facilities and accommodation for reading and relaxing or holding meetings and social gatherings such as children's storytelling etc. The core outputs include **any new services that are provided to local communities**, together with any means employed to **promote the maximum use of these services** e.g. by user education and training, reader development programmes and other outreach activities.

The following include the outputs of the Donegal Taobh Tíre project:

1. Establishment of partnerships with local communities.

2. Provision, maintenance and management of 14 service points for the benefit of local communities in regions that were not previously adequately served by conventional branch and/or mobile library services.

3. Provision of taster collections, multimedia resources and other local service point resources e.g. museums, posters, art exhibitions, etc.

4. WebOPAC access to the full range of local authority library services.

5. Book loans delivery and collection to/from the service points.

6. Provision of PCs for Internet access to global electronic information services.

7. Provision of reader development and other outreach services e.g. book clubs, adult, teenager and children's storytelling sessions, discussion groups, language and literacy classes, etc.

8. Provision of end user education and training.

11.1.3 Outcomes

The performance of the above model may be examined in terms of outcomes – i.e. **expected outcomes**, as defined by the project objectives, and **measured outcomes** as revealed by an evaluation of the Taobh Tíre service.

The following measured outcomes, as determined by a comprehensive evaluation of the pilot services, described in Chapter 9 above, were evident in the case of the Donegal Taobh Tíre project.

1. Establishment and development of a growing membership base distributed over 14 service points (a total of 1,492 persons were registered as Taobh Tíre members in May 2008).

2. Improved access by isolated communities to library, information and cultural resources.

3. Reduction, to some degree, in inequalities, disadvantages and social exclusion experienced by isolated communities.

4. Increased use of the local authority's main library service (because of increased access by isolated communities).

5. Increased levels of reading and participation in literary and cultural activities by isolated communities.

6. Improvements in literacy levels resulting from outreach activities delivered by service points.

7. Improved ownership of library and outreach services by local communities because of library authority/community agency partnerships.

8. Increased levels of all community activities as a spin-off of the establishment of Taobh Tíre service points.

9. Improved awareness of, and participation in the wider national and international community because of global access to the Information Society.

10. Improved quality of life for isolated and disadvantaged communities.

11.2 Finance Models

The **finance model** employed in the Taobh Tíre project was experimental because of wide variations in the nature of service points in relation to scale of operation, partnership arrangements, staffing, catchment areas, library materials etc. As

indicated in the survey of service point operators, financing arrangements were ad hoc and in many cases no provision had been made for overheads and operational costs. Costs may be defined in terms of experimental **pilot setup costs**, annual **pilot operational costs** and annual **costs of an integrated Taobh Tíre element** within the local authority's mainstream library service.

11.2.1 Stage 1: Setup Costs – Taobh Tíre Pilot Service

This stage of the project is concerned with the initial capital costs of setting up a service point. Typical cost items are listed below but actual costs will be determined by several factors such as whether or not the service point is to be built on a green field site or involves renovation or alteration of an existing premises, or simply entails moving into part of an existing community centre. Costs will also be determined by the floor space available, the scale of equipment installed, the size of the taster collection etc. which in turn will depend on the catchment area covered and the expected number of users.

- Premises (including new building, conversion or renovation work to an existing building), accommodation, furniture

- Utilities – electricity, water, waste disposal, telephone, broadband etc

- Equipment: office, IT (public PCs, printers, copiers, etc) and communications (telephone, fax, broadband, etc.)

- Library materials: taster collections, multimedia etc.

- Labour

11.2.2 Stage 2: Operational Costs – Taobh Tíre Pilot Service

This stage is concerned with the recurring costs of operating a pilot service on a day to day basis and includes expenditure on staff, library materials, equipment, utilities and other overheads. Examples of typical cost items are listed below.

- Taobh Tíre Coordinator (costs distributed over all service points).

- Service point operational staff (library, service point, technical, maintenance and cleaning staff, driver).

- Library materials – rotating and updating taster collections and other materials stocked in service points.

- ICT – all aspects.

- Staff travel.

- Transport (e.g. book loans collection & delivery costs).

- Marketing and promotion.

- Overheads e.g. utilities, office equipment, maintenance of premises etc.

11.2.3 Stage 3: Operational Costs - Integrated Taobh Tíre Service

Once the Taobh Tíre service has been fully integrated within the local authority's library service - i.e. when or if it moves beyond the pilot phase, costs will need to be absorbed within the existing library budget. The cost elements are identical to those listed for the operation of the pilot service, although the role of the coordinator may be absorbed within the management structure of the library authority. Partnership arrangements between the library authority and local community agencies may have cost sharing implications for the provision of services which could impact positively on the integration of Taobh Tíre services within the main library service. The cost elements are summarized below.

- Management and coordination of service points.

- Service point staff.

- Library materials.

- ICT and technical support.

- Travel and transport.

- Marketing and promotion (Taobh Tíre element could be included in general marketing and promotion of the library).

- General overheads

11.3 Applicability of the Taobh Tíre Model to Other Local Authorities

The model described above for the Done gal Taobh Tíre project is widely applicable in other local authority environments. The preliminary research on innovative models of library service provision serves as an informed backdrop to launching pilot services in other regions in Ireland, although regular updating of the review would be required. The step by step processes needed to design, implement, monitor and evaluate pilot services have been clearly articulated, tried and tested and may be easily adapted by individual library authorities that are considering launching such a service in their jurisdictions. The evaluation exercise highlighted some do's and dont's to be followed during the various stages of a Taobh Tíre project and the following is a list of some key elements that have been found to contribute to a successful Taobh Tíre service.

- A Taobh Tíre **action plan** by a library authority should be drawn up in the wider context of overall community policies and plans at county, provincial and national levels.

- **Management structures** should be effective, efficient and appropriate for the task. It is important to have a management committee in place which is representative of all key stakeholders, to oversee the project. An enthusiastic and fully committed project team is also needed to undertake day to day operations and the role of the Project Coordinator is vital to the success of the project. Within the management structure, the role, if any, of the branch library nearest to a service point should be clearly defined – for example, book requests at the service point could be collected/delivered at the branch library, or the branch librarian might make regular visits to the service point, organise staff training etc.

- **Regional profiling** should be based on a wide range of demographic data and should take account of all forms of isolation, disadvantage and exclusion. The profiling exercise also serves as a means of identifying potential suitable partners in the region.

- The **selection of pilot regions**, identification of community needs and definition of pilot services should be undertaken with the full involvement of the local communities concerned. Communities that request a service point and/or are prepared to actively engage in the Taobh Tíre project are most likely to produce successful service points.

- Securing **good working partnerships** with local community based agencies is a prerequisite for a successful service point.

- No single **partnership model** was found to fit all situations and the most appropriate model will be dictated by local circumstances. The Donegal Taobh Tíre project identified three possible models of partnership, namely, a **community partnership model** where Taobh Tíre services are made available by means of an existing community infrastructure such as community development centres or family resource centres; an **interagency partnership model** which operates by linking Taobh Tíre service points with various public and/or private organisations other than community development groups, for example, local day-care, health or youth centres, shops, post offices, factories; and a **public remote access** model where users may access library services using ICT facilities at various community access points such as a local authority public service centre an educational institution or other public or private agency. In practice, the Donegal Taobh Tíre project developed a combination of community partnership and inter-agency partnership agreements as the most suitable working arrangements for the 14 service points. The public remote access model, although possible, was not pursued as a Taobh Tíre model in Donegal.

- In setting up service points, it is important to clearly define the **responsibilities of each partner** in the management, operation and financing of the service point.

- Given that the communities to be served are typically isolated or disadvantaged in some way, **good communications** are essential to the success of Taobh Tíre services. The coordinator will serve as an intermediary

between all parties from the management committee to the project team to the service point operators. However, it is also important that the service point operators talk to each other in order to compare experiences, discuss problems and arrive at solutions where appropriate.

- If the ultimate aim is to develop a Taobh Tíre service that will move beyond the pilot phase and be fully integrated within the local authority's mainstream library service it is imperative that this has the support and agreement of library staff and their representatives. Local authorities should therefore involve **library staff in all aspects of Taobh Tíre initiatives** and issues such as the use of partner organisation staff to operate service points, if appropriate, should be addressed and agreed as part of a Taobh Tíre action plan.

- **Staff training** is also a key element in the success of Taobh Tíre services. The local authority would normally provide training for library staff who are involved in providing library services. In the case of Taobh Tíre service points that are manned by staff from within the local community a mentoring system could be used whereby library staff from the nearest branch library (or from headquarters) train local staff to operate service points.

- **Training users** is also necessary to ensure that full use is made of the service points. This training could be provided by library staff, service point operators or by use of the 'buddy' system whereby a user who has been trained, trains other users. User training could involve short sessions or modules on topics such as information seeking skills, reading and literacy, use of the WebOPAC, IT and communications, Internet searching, adult education and life-long learning.

- The performance of a Taobh Tíre programme should be **monitored and evaluated** by the local authority, or by an external agency on behalf of the authority. This ensures that the service is meeting its objectives and, if not, it may be tweaked or significantly altered in some way as necessary. Alternatively, it may be decided to close down a service point it is not functioning as intended. The methodology used in the Donegal Taobh Tíre project was found to be an effective means of securing feedback from all stakeholders i.e. the management team, the local community, the service point operators and adult and juvenile users.

- Careful consideration should be given to **marketing and promotion** of the service to ensure that the most appropriate means are used to suit local conditions. The media and the Internet may not be the most effective means of promoting the service – in the case of Donegal Taobh Tíre two in every three people first heard about the service by word of mouth and less than 8% heard about it through the media and the Internet.

Chapter 12: Main Conclusions

12.1 Meeting Objectives

The Taobh Tíre project has achieved its primary objective of identifying and implementing new and innovative ways of delivering library and information services to isolated communities. The project has succeeded in devising a viable means of addressing the needs of communities who are not well served by conventional means of service delivery such as a branch library network and a mobile library service. In all, 14 Taobh Tíre service points have been established in County Donegal and by May 2008 there were 1,492 registered users.

12.2 Addressing Community Needs

The needs of isolated communities in both rural and urban environments have been investigated. Rural isolation due to geographical remoteness, as well as urban isolation resulting from social, economic and/or cultural deprivation has been addressed.

12.3 Response of Local Communities

Isolated communities have shown a great enthusiasm for library, information and cultural services as well as an eagerness to engage with the library authority in making such services available locally.

12.4 Cooperation and Partnership

A new dimension in cooperation between a library authority and local communities has been stimulated by the project. Local communities have been actively involved in, and have taken ownership of, Taobh Tíre service points in their areas and this has resulted in services that are vibrant, sustainable and tailored to local needs.

The project has generated new forms of partnership with local community agencies in the provision of library services in a wide range of local environments. The use of existing community infrastructures and resource centres and the wide application of ICTs were shown to be the most effective means of delivering services to isolated communities.

12.5 Model Building and Replication

The project has delivered the value-added benefit of serving as a very effective means of model building for the development of similar services by other local authorities in Ireland and overseas. For the purpose of replication by other local authorities, the project has been described and documented in terms of an input/output model with designated, measurable outcomes. A fully replicable methodology is provided for all aspects of the project with key elements ranging from an initial action plan, management structures and pilot region selection to community partnership models, service implementation, monitoring and evaluation, marketing and promotion, finance, communications and training of staff and users.

12.6 Staff and New Methods of Working

Because of the innovative nature of the service and new methods of working with local communities, there are issues which need to be addressed by local authorities intending to provide sustainable Taobh Tíre services. For example, there are service point staffing issues which require the full support and agreement of permanent library staff of the local authority and their representatives. Service points may be viable only on the basis that they are manned by staff from the local community who are not employed by the Donegal Library service. These service operators need training and the existence of service points creates extra work for library staff in the local branch libraries and at headquarters. These issues need to be addressed and agreed at the outset as part of a Taobh Tíre action plan.

Chapter 13: Recommendations

13.1 Consolidation and Further Development of the Donegal Taobh Tíre Pilot Service

The enthusiastic response of local communities to the Taobh Tíre service and the positive feedback from the evaluation surveys clearly demonstrate that the project has had a significant measure of success in meeting the needs of hitherto neglected communities in Donegal.

Thanks to the continued support of Donegal County Council and the efforts of the project team, the Taobh Tíre service has been extended beyond the specifications of the research project to include further development and consolidation of the service. The pilot service has already advanced to a third phase, without the benefit of major external funding, in which services have been further developed to meet local needs, for example, by expanding the reader development programme and engaging in further awareness raising, promotion and capacity building. A considerable amount of work has also been invested in adopting measures to refine and formalize partnership agreements between the local authority and community agencies, including financing mechanisms for service points.

Within the existing level of human and financial resources provided by Donegal County Council, the maximum number of Taobh Tíre service points that can be supported is 14 and it is recommended that this level of support be continued by the authority. Any further development of the service in order to respond to additional areas of need, or to increase the number of service points, would require additional resources.

13.2 Monitoring and Evaluation

It is recommended that all Taobh Tíre service points should be monitored and evaluated annually and, based on the results of evaluation, decisions should be made as to their effectiveness and continuation. Service points that are deemed to be working successfully should receive the full support of the Library service in cooperation with the local community. However, if a service point is not functioning adequately and is not receiving local support, the Library service should withdraw from the partnership.

13.3 Mainstreaming Donegal Taobh Tíre Services

On foot of the proven success of the pilot project and the subsequent further development and consolidation of the pilot service, it is recommended that the Taobh Tíre service should be fully integrated formally within the Donegal Library service. The integration of Taobh Tíre services within the main library service would help to fill the gaps left by branch and mobile libraries in serving the widely dispersed population of Donegal.

In specific terms, it is recommended that the Taobh Tíre service be mainstreamed within the Library service in terms of staff, organizational and financial structures. The current temporary full-time posts of Taobh Tíre Coordinator and Senior Library Assistant should be adopted by Donegal County Council as additional permanent posts within the Library service and the Taobh Tíre service should be formally adopted as a distributed Branch Library and funded as such.

13.4 Taobh Tíre Management and Coordination

Although considerable progress has been made in setting up 14 Taobh Tíre service points, there is much to be done in order to build on the foundations that have already been laid in this innovative initiative. Communities are awakening to the benefits of Taobh Tíre and membership is growing steadily as the services emerge as an integral part of the community landscape. The capacities of the service points have yet to be fully developed and service point operators still have much to learn and to contribute to the service.

Communications channels between service points are not yet fully operational and mechanisms of improving communications between service points and local branch libraries need to be further explored. There is also a need to strengthen and formalize existing partnerships and to develop new ones.

Library staff, service point staff and end users all need to be trained and various mechanisms such as mentoring and 'buddy' systems need to be explored. Awareness raising and capacity-building are also areas that require attention if the service is to achieve its full potential. All of the above tasks will need to be managed, organised, driven and coordinated at county level if the project is to develop beyond the pilot phase into a meaningful proactive, community-centred service for isolated and disadvantaged users.

It is recommended that the Taobh Tíre service be further advanced using the current management structure and Taobh Tíre Co-ordinator together with the current level of support staff i.e. one Senior Library Assistant and technical support staff of Donegal County Council as required. If Taobh Tíre services are to be increased throughout the county appropriate additional staff and other appropriate support should be provided.

13.5 Staffing issues

The success of the Taobh Tíre project will depend on the agreement and cooperation of all levels of library staff of Donegal County Council, and their representatives. It is recommended that library staff be fully consulted in the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of the Taobh Tíre service. It is clear that library staff have already afforded good will to the project as reflected in their cooperation at branch and central library levels and this augers well for the future success of the venture.

The staffing of Taobh Tíre service points may be problematical in that staff are likely to require training before taking on the role of service point operator as well as continuous on-the-job training while they are in post. They may also be engaged on a part-time basis, are not normally employed directly by Donegal Library service and may not have the same degree of commitment as existing library employees. The pilot services have already demonstrated that there can be a high rate of staff turnover as service point operators come and go. There is therefore a clear need for a workable, sustainable staffing policy for the service points which has the support of library staff. It is recommended that these issues be addressed by the management team, and at local level, with input from the Taobh Tíre coordinator.

13.6 Promotion of the Taobh Tíre model to other local authorities

There is a significant value-added element to the Donegal Taobh Tíre project in that it provides a readymade methodology and replicable model elements which may be adopted and applied by other local authorities wishing to develop similar services in their jurisdictions. It is strongly recommended that the Donegal Taobh Tíre model be promoted directly to other local authorities in Ireland. A national workshop on Taobh Tíre services would serve as an initial platform on which to launch a nationwide programme of promotional events. Such a programme would require planning and coordination at national level and would need support from bodies such as the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and An Chomhairle Leabharlanna.

The Taobh Tíre model should also be promoted overseas by means of presentations at international conferences and publication in learned and professional journals in library and information studies and in journals covering other disciplines such as community development, social, rural and urban studies etc.

13.7 A National Programme to serve rural and isolated communities

In addition to promoting the Taobh Tíre model to individual local authorities, it is recommended that consideration be given to the formulation of a National Taobh Tíre Programme which could be developed and implemented in cooperation with local authorities, community development agencies and other local organisations. Such a programme could examine wider issues such as the role of the library service in addressing problems of isolation, disadvantage and deprivation through partnership with the community and how the library service may better contribute to social, economic and cultural development in a modern Information Society. Such a programme would also fall within the remit the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and An Chomhairle Leabharlanna.

References

1. An Chomhairle Leabharlanna (The Library Council) (2002), *Public Library User Survey 2002: A summary report*, Dublin, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, http://www.librarycouncil.ie

2. An Chomhairle Leabharlanna (The Library Council) (2007), *Public Library User Survey 2007*, Dublin, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, in press, http://www.librarycouncil.ie

3. Donegal County Council (2001), *Saol agus Saoithiúlacht: Strategic Plan for Cultural Services – libraries, arts, museum, archives 2001 – 2004*, Donegal, Donegal County Council.

4. Donegal County Development Board (2002), *An Straitéis: Donegal County Implementation Plan 2002 – 2012*, Donegal, Donegal County Development Board.

5. Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government (1998), *Branching Out: A New Public Library Service*, Dublin, Stationery Office, ISBN 0-7076-6174-9)

6. Information Society Commission (2000), Information Society Ireland: *Third Report of Ireland's Information Society Commission*, Dublin, Stationery Office, ISBN 0-7076-6599-X.

7. O'Donnell, S., McQuillan, H. & Malina, A. (2003), *eInclusion: Expanding the information society in Ireland*, Report to the Information Society Commission, Dublin, Information Society Commission.

8. Taskforce on Lifelong Learning, Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment and Department of Education and Science (2002), *Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning*, Dublin, Stationery Office.

9. An Chomhairle Leabharlanna (The Library Council) (2001), *Call for Proposals*, (Public Libraries Research Programme), Dublin, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna.

10. Donegal County Council website, www.donegallibrary.ie/findit/taobh/default.htm.

11. Research and Policy Section, Community Development and Enterprise Division, Directorate of Community, Culture and Enterprise, Donegal County Council (March 2003), *Taobh Tuaithe – New Ways to Serve Smaller Communities, First Report to the Project Management Team*. Unpublished report.

12. Research & Policy Section, Community Development and Enterprise Division, Directorate of Community, Culture and Enterprise, Donegal County Council (October 2003), *Taobh Tíre – A Better Library Service for Rural Areas: A Report on Consultation with Key Stakeholders: Final Report to the Project Management Team*. Unpublished report.

13. An Chomhairle Leabharlanna (The Library Council) (2003), *Review of Library and Information Service Delivery to Remote Rural Communities*. Unpublished report.

14. Research & Policy Section, Community Development and Enterprise Division, Directorate of Community, Culture and Enterprise, Donegal County Council (2003), *A literature review of innovative library service provision in Ireland*. Unpublished report.

15. Ross, J. (2004), *The Taobh Tíre Project, A Better Library Service for Rural Areas; Initial Pre-implementation report*, Infologistix. Unpublished report.

16. McBride, R. & McNicholas, L., Research and Policy Section, Community Development and Enterprise Division, Directorate of Community, Culture and Enterprise, Donegal County Council (2006), *Evaluation of the Taobh Tíre Project, First Draft Report to the Taobh Tíre Management Team*. Unpublished report.

17. Donegal County Council (2005), Taobh Tíre – *A Better Library Service for Rural Areas: Interim Report, Public Library Research Programme Report No. 1*, Dublin, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna (The Library Council).

18. An Chomhairle Leabharlanna (The Library Council) (2006), *Survey of Mobile services in Ireland*. Unpublished report.

19. Beer, S. (2004), Information flow and peripherality in remote areas of Scotland. *Libri*, 54, 148-157.

20. Jager, H. (1995), The Future of Services in Rural Areas, *Leader Magazine* 9, Summer 1995.

21. *Ó Cuiv launches programme for revitalizing rural areas*, Irish Government press release, 5/10/2001, http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/index.jsp?file=pressrel/2001/199-2001.xml

22. *Local places, global connections: libraries in the digital age*, (ERIC Report No. ED407943), Washington, DC. Benton Foundation, 1997, p.15.

23. Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2003), *Framework for the future: libraries, learning and information in the next decade*, London, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, p.41.

24. Cookman, N. (David Hayes Associates) (2001), *Beacon Council Research, Round 3 Theme Report: Libraries as a Community Resource*, London, Department of Communities and Local Government.

25. The Countryside Agency (2002), *Local Strategic Partnership and Community Strategy rural checklist*, retrieved August 18, 2008 from http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/publications/ca93localstrategicpartnershipand communitystrategyruralchecklist

26. State Library of New South Wales, *Guidelines for Joint-use Libraries*, www.sl.nsw.gov.au/plb/policies/jointuse.cfm

27. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2000), *Our countryside: the future – a fair deal for rural England*, London, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. www.defra.gov.uk/rural/ruralwp/whitepaper/chapter3.htm

28. *Kenton County Public Library offers users access to eight online clubs i.e. Original (a mixture of genres); Teens; Business; Good News; Fiction; Romance; Audio; and Question and Answer*. Retrieved August 18 from (http://www.supportlibrary.com/su/su.cfm?x=83521)

29. Brigham McShane, S. (2001), *Mobile library literacy: solutions for a rural environment*, First Monday 6(4). http://www.firstmonday.org/ISSUES/issue6_4/mcshane/index.html#m5

30. Carrato, M. A. (1997), *Mobile libraries and social change: a view from Southern Europe, in, Information on the move: mobile libraries and new information services*; selected papers from the MOBILE Conference, 4-5 April 1997, Veria, Greece.

31. Møller C.E. & Sørensen, L. B. (2001), Oh, to be a child once more, *Scandinavian Public Library Quarterly*, 34, (3), 2001, 7-9.

32. Trolle, M. (2001), Mini bookmobile in the fast lane!, *Scandinavian Public Library Quarterly*, 34, (3), 10-13.

33. Carpenter, J. & Trohopoulos, I. (1998), Mobile libraries and new information services in public libraries: issues arising from the MOBILE Project, *IFLA* journal, 24, (2), 97-101.

34. Croft, B. (1997), *MOBILE in the Scottish Borders*, in, *Information on the move: mobile libraries and new information services*; selected papers from the MOBILE Conference, 4-5 April 1997, Veria, Greece.

35. Cox, C. (2005), The new library outpost, *Library Journal*, 130, (16), 42-45.

36. Lake Agassiz Regional Library website, www.larl.org

Appendix A: Survey of Community Needs
List of Representative Bodies Consulted

Donegal County Library Staff

- Branch Librarian, Lifford
- Branch Librarian, Donegal Town
- Branch Librarian, Killybegs
- Branch Librarian, Glenties
- Branch Librarian, Derrybeg
- Branch Librarian, Milford
- Branch Librarian, Dungloe

Donegal County Council

- Corporate Services Area Manager for Milford/Dungloe
- Housing Area Manager for Milford/Dungloe

Community & Voluntary Sector

- Manager, Forbairt na Rosann
- Ardara Parish Council (Manager and five other members)
- Manager, Aislann Chill Chartha
- Mhíobhaigh Resource centre, Downings
- Dunfanaghy Playhouse Project, Dunfanaghy
- Care of the Aged, Fanad
- Glen Community Development, Glen, Carrigart
- Fán a Bhualtaigh Community, Fanad
- Dunfanaghy Resource Centre, Dunfanaghy
- Men's Education Initiative, Mhíobhaigh Resource Centre, Downings
- Milford Integrated Rural Development Office, Milford
- Port na Blagh/Marble Hill Development, Port na Blagh
- Kerrykeel Resource and Development, Fanad
- Derryveigh Glens development Association, Churchill
- Library user/disability representative, Glen, Carrigart
- Island resident, Island Roy, Carrigart
- Rural resident, Downings

Donegal Youth Council

- Youth Development Officer
- Youth Councillors (5)

Secondary Schools

- Principal, Oileán Árainn Mhórl
- Principal, Carrick Vocational School
- School Librarian, An Fál Carrach Vocational School
- Community Liaison Officer, Milford Community School

Primary Schools

- Principal, St. Eunan's NS, Laghey
- Acting Principal, Scoil Cholmcille
- Principal, Moyle N.S., Newtowncunningham
- Principal, S.N. Dhubhthaigh, Anagaire
- Principal, Cashel N.S., Glencolumbkille
- Principal, S.N. Cholmcille Naofa 1, Castlefin
- Principal, Scoil Naomh Cholmcille, Oileán Thoraí

Other bodies

- Regional Manager, Údarás na Gaeltachta
- Community Development, Údarás na Gaeltachta
- Adult Education Centre, V.E.C. Letterkenny
- Adult Literacy Co-ordinator, Gortahork/Milford Area
- Department of Social and Family Affairs
- Holywell Trust
- Chief Executive Officer, Donegal V.E.C.
- Adult Learning representative, Donegal V.E.C.
- Donegal Local Development Company (DLDC)
- Citizens Information Centre (2 representatives)
- Milford Citizens Information Centre
- National School, Dungloe
- Chief Librarian, Western Education and Library Board, Northern Ireland

Notes