M-Libraries Community on the web

Introduction
The objectives and outputs of the m-library community support project are:

Objectives:

1. to build a body of evidence and practice around the notion of libraries and the provision of services and content to mobile devices
2. to seed and develop a sustainable community of practice around the development of m-libraries
3. to provide resources and evidence in usable formats, for example web-based resources, that will enable libraries to make informed choices and effectively develop their m-library provision

Outputs:

a. A web-based resource recording information about existing initiatives and highlighting best practice in m-libraries
b. A sustainable community to support continuing conversation and sharing of good practice in m-libraries

Following a wide ranging survey of the community a number of requirements for an online community were identified, including a number of specific areas of interest for those investigating, implementing or using mobile technologies to deliver library services. Based on these findings the project setup a proof of concept community at http://m-libraries.info/community. This community site complemented the existing blog already established by the support project at http://m-libraries.info.

These two sites between them contribute to achieving Objectives (2) and (3) and help us understand the best approach for the outputs.

Feedback on this proof of concept has been requested through the community site, and through a community workshop event run by the support project.

Observations and use
The blog and community site have attracted substantial interest from the community evidenced by the number of subscriptions to the blog (307 as of 14/06/2012) and members of the community (198 as of 14/06/2012).

However, the number of contributions to the community discussion boards has not been large, and many have been from the core project team.

At the community support workshop there was some feedback which suggested that the blog was an excellent way of communicating “resources and evidence in usable formats” as in Objective (3), and an ongoing blog might fulfill the requirements for Output (a).
However, for ongoing discussion and community there was a strong feeling that email was a key mechanism for supporting discussion, and although the proof of concept community site supports email updates from discussions, the possibility of a simpler email list was raised.

In terms of having a sustainable approach there is no doubt that a JISCMail list is a lightweight mechanism, requiring little or no maintenance compared with the proof of concept community site which requires a certain amount of maintenance (e.g. deleting spam) on a daily basis.

There is some question of whether a blog is sustainable in the longer term if there is no dedicated resource to update it regularly. While existing content could be maintained indefinitely adding new content would take some dedicated resource.

**Recommendations**

- All discussion aspects of the online community are moved to a simple email list. This is both sustainable and likely to encourage the most participation, although we can expect traffic to be relatively light.
- JISCMail is the obvious and ideal place to host an email discussion list, and the sustainability of the list, and archive content, would be linked to the sustainability of the JISCMail service.
- Ideally the blog content, and related content such as case studies, would be hosted on a JISC owned blog, and have some small dedicated resource for regular (e.g. monthly) updates.
- The blog could also serve as a location for case studies created during the support project lifespan, and any future case studies created or contributed by the community.