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The
modernisation
review of
public libraries:
A consultation
document

{ Our aim is to improve the quality of life for all through cultural and sporting activities, support the pursuit of excellence, and champion the tourism, creative and leisure industries. }

Contents

The Challenge For Public Libraries

Introduction

The public library service has a vital role in a democratic society. Libraries help to promote equality of opportunity and intellectual freedom and public libraries embody a commitment to open access to information and education for all.

Libraries contribute to a wide range of National and Local Government targets – improving literacy and early years education, community cohesion, learning and skills development, health and well being, digital inclusion, citizenship, business support and entrepreneurship (see table at Appendix A).

However, there are five significant challenges for the library service:

• How can the library service demonstrate to citizens, commentators and politicians that they are still relevant and vital?

• How can we reverse the current trend of decline in library usage and grow the numbers using their local library?

• How can all libraries respond to a 24/7 culture and respond to changing expectations of people who want immediate access to information?

• How can all libraries grasp the opportunities presented by digitisation?

• How can the library service cope with limited public resource and economic pressures?

This Review aims to address these challenges by questioning the structures, services and skills of the public library service to ensure that libraries are a major player in creating skilled, informed, creative citizens and communities for the 21st century.

The world is a different place to that set out in the 2003 document, Framework for the Future, the Government's strategy for public libraries[1].

Changes in consumption and customer expectations mean that people are used to free and instant access to information on multiple platforms, in the home, at work and 'on the go'. Digital TV, radio, free newspapers, internet, mobile phone technology means that information is ever more available. The average person now spends 30 hours a week[2] on the internet with 99% of children between 8 and 17 using the internet[3]. A recent survey for the Digital Britain Report suggested that 70% of adults had used the internet in the past month and four out of five internet users accessed the internet every day or most days.[4]

Reading is still a treasured national pastime and the most widely practised leisure pursuit – 64% of adults read for pleasure[5]. But printed books are cheaper and more accessible than ever and retail models like Amazon make book buying much simpler for the consumer. Like other creative content, literature and information is available on multiple platforms – hard copy books, e-books, audio books, online, on MP3 players and e-readers.

The library service is diversifying its service in response to this transformation in demand. Whilst access to a wide range of up to date reading material is still the primary reason given for engagement with libraries, on its own this is no longer enough. Demands of the services are changing and library users are much less accepting of poor standards. They place value on convenience and accessibility.

Some authorities continue to attract increased attendance and children's book issues as a whole are up for the fourth year running[6].

[1] http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/publications/4505.aspx
[2] Source: Hooked on the internet, uswitch.com
[3] Source: Safer children in a digital world: the report of the Byron Review
[4] Source: Digital Britain: Attitudes towards Internet Content among adults – BMRB Social Research, http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/bmrb_internetcontent_amongadults.pdf
[5] Source: DCMS Taking Part Survey
[6] Source: Cipfa Public Library Statistics

However, the proportion of people using libraries has fallen every year since 2005[7] and book borrowing has fallen by 41% in the last ten years[8]. At the same time local authority investment in library service has gone up[9] while book stock is down 20 per cent.

Local Authorities in England spend around £1 billion a year on libraries[10] but the pressure on public funding and, therefore, library budgets, mean that libraries are tackling the challenges of a 21st century library service with fewer resources.

This consultation document aims to capture the findings of the Library Review process so far. The Review was launched at the Public Library Authorities Conference last year by the then Secretary of State, Andy Burnham.

With contributions from a wide range of individuals from different perspectives, disciplines and professions, there have been a series of round table and reference group meetings. We have spoken at a number of conferences and hosted stakeholder events. We estimate that the pre-consultation phase of the review has involved well over 100 people and organisations.

Alongside this process there have been a number of other developments: the Inquiry into the Wirral Library Service, the publication of the All Party Parliamentary Group Report[11] and the CILIP Guidelines on What Makes a Good Library Service[12].

All of this has generated a wide range of ideas, proposals and perspectives. This document reflects some of those issues through a series of essays commissioned by government and provided by people inside and outside the library service.

The consultation questions set out in this document provide an opportunity for a comprehensive survey of views from as wide a range of people as possible including Local Authority Leaders, chief executives, people working in the Library Service, public and private partners, business interests as well as library users. We shall publish a policy statement in the spring which will set out the Government's vision for the future of public libraries.

Responding to the consultation

If you would like to respond to this consultation about the public library service in England please send emails to libraryreview@culture.gsi.gov.uk by Tuesday 26th January. Please note that all information in responses, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed to any correspondents, and will only be possible if considered appropriate under the legislation

This consultation is guided by the Government's Code of Practice on Consultation which is available at: http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file47158.pdf

[7] DCMS Taking Part Survey
[8] Cipfa Public Library Statistics
[9] http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/localregional/localgovernmentfinance/statistics/
[10] http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/financialstatistics192009
[11] http://www.cilip.org.uk/get-involved/advocacy/public-libraries/Pages/appg.aspx
[12] http://www.cilip.org.uk/get-involved/advocacy/public-libraries/Pages/goodlibraries.aspx

In developing this document we asked a range of thinkers, commentators and leaders in library services, as well as individuals working in retail, digital media, education, publishing and local government to write a think piece about how we might make libraries fit for the 21st century. We are greatful to all the contributors for their essays which provide a collection of opinions, ideas and perspectives as a back drop for this consultation.

Essays

Contributors:
Margaret Hodge
Dame Lynne Brindley
Shirley Burnham
Richard Charkin
Tracy Chevalier
Roy Clare
Professor Jon Drori
Tony Durcan
Guy Garfit
Tim Godfray
John Hicks
Kathy Kirk
Miranda McKearney
Bob McKee
Chris Meade
Martin Molloy
John Newbigin
Professor David Nicholas
Adrian Olsen
Nicky Parker
Gail Rebuck,
Amanda Ridout
Michael Rosen
Terry Ryall,
Andrew Smith
Mike Thorne
Cllr Chris White
Fiona Williams
Darcy Willson-Rymer

Margaret Hodge

Minister for Culture

Public libraries have a beloved status in UK democratic life. They provide a universal opportunity for enriching experiences, for learning, studying and informing individuals in their local area and for coming together in a place valued by the community. They enable everyone to read and enjoy great literature, research family history and study a multitude of subjects. There are more library branches in the UK than branches of McDonalds or Boots. Ten times more people visit libraries than go to football league matches and the average City library has a whopping 700,000 books on its shelves . Our Public Library Service is the envy of other nations and we must be united in our efforts to build on the strong tradition of the past to provide a relevant and valued service for the future.

Data from the DCMS Taking Part Survey shows a consistent decline in public library use now for many years, and this trend is most prevalent among young people aged 16-24. Whilst investment in our libraries has grown over the last decade, book loans have declined. Many library buildings are aging and some staff in libraries find it difficult to respond to the challenges of the digital age and the changing demands from customers.

There is of course great innovative practice in many libraries – more flexible opening hours, using practices which work for retailers , attracting new users, developing new governance arrangements, partnering with public and private companies and securing new streams of revenues through commercial ventures.

But I want libraries across the country to learn from the best – to create a collective drive to increase membership and to spread the word. If we don't, libraries could become an easy target for cuts when local authorities are faced with stringent financial constraints.

So what are some of the ideas we should think about?

- Book stock is vital and so are the location and quality of library buildings. Let's not lose sight of that.
- Opening hours should reflect the changing pattern of people's lives. We can't drive up usage if the local library is closed when people want to go there.
- How do we spread best practise to the rest? Many libraries are getting creative in the services they provide in order to appeal to different interest groups.

For example:
- All local authorities participate in the universal Bookstart offer as well as providing ranges of books for babies and toddlers. What more can we do to encourage all parents to take out library membership for their babies from the earliest weeks of life?
- The Society of Chief Librarians launched the Universal Library membership scheme in September allowing a library member to use any library they like. Why can't we take that further and let people borrow in Bromley, but return their book in Birmingham?
- What other services could be offered in our libraries? Why don't more libraries contract with coffee shops, as many book shops do, or provide a crèche? Why couldn't more libraries co-locate with Post Offices, Job Centres or Health Centres?
- Why shouldn't more libraries sell books as well as lend them?
- How can we make it easier for everyone to borrow online, or provide a universal home delivery service in addition to the schemes for elderly or disabled people?

I know that some people were expecting a final policy document from us and some are disappointed that we are having a further period of consultation. But I want to take on board the comments from the All Party Parliamentary Group and CILIP, reflect on the process of the Wirral Inquiry, and I want to provoke a debate on some of the more radical suggestions which have emerged over the last 12 months.

I am particularly interested in looking at some of the radical ideas on governance structures. The responsibilities of central government with respect to libraries were put in place in the 1964 Act and the Local Authority role dates back to the 1850s. Given the considerable social and technological changes which have taken place in the interim it is worth reconsidering those arrangements now. We need to assess the right balance of national and local roles to address the challenges of the 21st century. Could a new balance help ensure national minimum standards whilst enabling local areas to determine their own services based on local priorities. For instance, could a national library service delivered locally better position the library service to address national challenges such as digitisation, whether that be a future of virtual lending to the home or a bigger role in up-skilling the digitally excluded? And could we find a way to gain economies of scale through multi-area or national procurement deals (e.g., digital activity, book stock, national partnerships)?

Other governance structures are being developed by local authorities, like trust models and outsourcing the service to private companies, for instance in Wigan, Luton and Hounslow which are detailed in case studies in this document.

And has the library service anything to learn from the new academy structures for schools, from social enterprise models, like community interest companies or Foundation Trusts in the Health service where Trusts can 'peel off' from Local Authority accountability once they obtain certain standards?

Do these models help us provide a better service and do they help secure new funding streams?

In a time of limited public resources is there anything the library sector might learn from the best library fundraisers or indeed from International libraries or other public services?

Digitisation may appear a threat to many traditionalists, but I think it provides great opportunities for both extending access to new readers and realising cost savings to the service. We already enjoy the success of the People's network. But what about the future?

The e-reader may become the way many people want to read, learn and study. Some libraries are experimenting with audio books and e-books, but will digitisation lead to virtual lending and what does that mean for libraries, authors, publishers and book-sellers?

Finally, what about the legislative framework under which libraries function? Does it need to be reformed? I know this is a controversial debate but we have just announced the outcome of the Wirral Inquiry and we need to consider what can be learnt from that. I think we can all agree that the process needs modernising, I believe that the Government should retain an ultimate power of intervention. Only with that authority can we maintain a universal library service. I don't think Government should prevent authorities from taking local decisions to close libraries if that makes sense locally and the needs of the community are taken into account, but we do need to have a national power to ensure that a comprehensive and efficient service is available to everyone in every community.

The modernisation review of public libraries

Dame Lynne Brindley

Chief Executive, The British Library

Public libraries hold a special place in the minds of many people of all ages and social backgrounds, and could and should sit at the heart of every community. Their appeal to such a broad spectrum of people offers enormous potential to provide a range of services and information, although the first challenge is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity open to them, through raised awareness, encouragement, tailored opening hours (late, early, Sunday etc).

This 'think piece' aims to make a contribution through the challenge of four ideas. It is not intended to answer the whole challenge of making libraries fit for the 21st century, nor do I wish to rehearse again the debates around the importance of reading v digital activities. I believe that a core of activities and services that contribute to making a 'good library service' should be stated, championed, and evaluated and that, through local engagement and accountability, there are many opportunities for differential services to be offered. The recently published CILIP guide 'What Makes a Good Library Service' is a particularly welcome addition to the tools that help to encourage consistently high standards in public libraries.

Idea one

The recent launch of a universal library card to enable access to books at any public library is a significant step in widening library access to an ever-more-mobile population. There remains however a huge leap to greater access by providing many more people with library cards that will unlock the vast resources, expertise and support available to them.

Issuing a universal library card alongside birth certificates would literally ensure every child is very visibly offered the chance to be a member of, and benefit from, the public library system and beyond. It would become a citizen 'birth-right' and could be linked to Bookstart which currently provides books to babies, along with information on reading to their parents.

Whilst there are often informal links between university libraries and the British Library, and in the case of the latter we certainly play a part in supporting public libraries through a range of activities, these links could be better promoted to increase public access to a wider range of materials. The Inspire scheme already plays a valuable role in supporting libraries across England in working together, whether they be public, higher education, health, specialist or national libraries. Together these libraries offer a hugely powerful resource and the challenge is to create seamless access to all citizens.

Idea two

A recent visit to the National Library of China gave me the opportunity to learn of plans there to establish a nationwide network of 70,000 digital grass roots cultural centres, 33 regional centres, and a national centre. The National Library of China will coordinate activity and training, and contribute its digitised book collections and archives to this programme, which aims to create at village level a digital community archive in traditional languages, dialects, local affairs, photographs and oral history. Alongside these community cultural archives it is hoped that this initiative will act as a catalyst for IT skills development. As is often the case in China, the sheer scale of the project is awe-inspiring, but it offers a valuable vision on what it is possible to achieve.

The British Library has touched upon some of the areas covered by China's programme; for example our 'Sounds Familiar' website provides access to recordings of a broad range of dialects from across Britain, whilst our newspaper website provides access to three million pages of digitised and fully searchable newspapers online. These and many other similar projects have obvious local relevance, and there is the potential for extending such projects much more widely at local level. This would give opportunities to add user-generated content, adding richness to local collections and developing digital skills and involvement of local communities.

Idea three

The Digital Britain report highlighted the need to increase digital/media literacy levels for those of all ages and backgrounds. Libraries can and should play a significant role in this work. Increasingly they have been equipped with computers for public use, offering invaluable access to resources for those who would otherwise be disenfranchised. Of course it is desirable that all homes have high speed broad-band, but meanwhile, why not use and promote public libraries as trusted and safe spaces to carry out this role, and to lead the development of citizen media literacy skills alongside reading skills. This would help fulfil a vital role to ensure that no member of society is locked out of the modern world through any lack of capability or access routes to an increasingly digital society.

Idea four

Since it opened in March 2006, the British Library's Business and IP Centre has helped more than 100,000 people to start their own businesses. Initial discussions have already taken place with a few large public libraries interested in delivering the services we offer in London to their communities, through a combination of an online portal and local business support using the British Library model. The idea resonates particularly in large urban centres and with libraries which already have skills and services in business information

Whilst public libraries already play a significant role in communities across Britain, there is enormous scope to increase their value, and to make them a lively, welcoming and indispensable part of the public service landscape for the 21st century.

Shirley Burnham

Save Old Town Library Campaign, Swindon

Old Town Library is the focal point of our community. It is much used by young mums and their children, by older children to support their homework, by the three local primary schools, by the elderly, the unemployed and the disadvantaged. Volunteers working with our library staff regularly select and take books to several retired people's homes nearby and children's special facilities. The library is also a unique point of contact for local information and a safe place for young and old to meet. Old Town Library is a very special place which enriches and sustains our community.

The building in which the library is housed is not attractive, but it is currently in a prominent position in our small local shopping area. We love it because it is filled with books and a couple of computers, and particularly because it is staffed by two excellent part-time library assistants who know and understand the diverse needs of our community. When its future was under threat, we campaigned hard all the way up to the Prime Minister to ensure that we could keep it. Some 3,000 local residents supported our campaign, as did the local media and even prominent national commentators.

After a full year of vigorous opposition to the library's proposed closure, we are grateful that our Council has recently promised to retain a branch library in Old Town, Swindon. Our community will be much richer and stronger because of this decision and many, many people, young and old, in our community will benefit. We are now trying to ensure that the facility to be provided will be of a good quality and properly staffed.

I am aware that the task for the Minister is not an easy one but – before our excellent network of branch libraries is irrevocably lost – I very much hope that the she will conclude that governments are but the temporary custodians of Britain's cultural heritage, in trust for future generations. Ministers do not come into ownership of the library service when taking office. Our leaders have a mandate from the public to protect and enhance the library network for the benefit of its users.

Surely it is not only the credit crunch that has threatened the existence of community libraries; they were under threat long before, in times of plenty. Local councils might see various reasons for interfering with a library network:

(a) create something big and shiny, to make the incumbent administration's mark on history, but whose lavish creation at high cost will destroy the smaller libraries – disregarding local need and community cohesion. New buildings are, of course, welcomed by residents, but people are not told of the impact such expenditure will have on their library network, until it is too late.

(b) slash library budgets every year, to feed money into the black holes in other budgets (unrelated to any coherent strategy for a quality library service).

(c) refuse to scrutinise library budgets, to identify areas for savings which do not impact on front line services.

(d) threaten residents with the choice of library closures or neglecting services to the elderly: a cynical ploy that obscures the issues surrounding whether public money is wasted by a council in many other areas.

The needs of residents seem not to date to have been the focus of government.

Richard Charkin

Executive Director, Bloomsbury Publishing

1. Too much time has been spent thinking about 'libraries of the future' . The reason for falling use is that too little attention has been given to what people have wanted in libraries of today. The balance of resources has swung too far away from the obvious daily need. The reason why use has declined is not because people have lost their desire or need for reading or what books contain or because technologies have changed, but because public libraries haven't got what they want. And in their turn because of that have lost their reputation for being useful places to visit.

2. So the first thing to do is to encourage those who run libraries to stock more books, be open longer, and be attractive, welcoming, well designed and equipped buildings. The buildings are important and we have kidded ourselves that the internet will answer every question – it doesn't and it won't although initiatives like our Bloomsbury Library Online – www.exacteditions.com/bloomsbury – can supplement physical books, project libraries into the homes of the community they serve, engage with 'digital natives' and improve class mobility through education.
The encouragement to go back to the basics is the leadership that people are crying out for – a flag to follow that can easily be seen.

3. This is easy to say – and certainly works where it is done (vide Hillingdon, Westminster, Oxfordshire etc), where the libraries have become more popular and book borrowing has increased – but it does appear to be difficult to get councils to do these obvious things.

4. There are management reasons why the service fails which are more important than the cultural and technical ones that are so often quoted. And the management failure comes because neither is it clear who is in charge nor do those responsible know what they are trying to achieve. Those councillors who are in a position to set priorities that will make libraries improve are not properly informed about the issues nor do they share an objective for what the service should be like. It is fine for councils to run their own libraries, but that does not mean they can decide what a library is. A pub can be a 'local' but it is still a pub.

5. A minister cannot manage – but she can give leadership – and if one minister would say: 'libraries are about making available what authors (of all kinds) have written both recently and in the past', then that one simple thing would reset the direction of the library service.

Tracy Chevalier

Author

Libraries have always been valued as sources of entertainment and information, and will doubtless continue to be so. Until relatively recently, most library users expected to get what they wanted from books, which formed the backbone of the library service. Now, however, people increasingly find information online, and entertainment away from library books. Though they still read plenty – after all, the internet is full of words, and the publishing industry has not gone out of business – expectations are different. Many prefer to look at Wikipedia on a screen rather than pull an encyclopaedia down from a shelf, and buy books rather than borrow them

Moreover, the library as a physical space is no longer as necessary as it once was. Many other services – e.g. banking, grocery shopping, DVD rental, book buying – are done online by an increasing percentage of the UK population. Like these services, visiting a library for many users may no longer be seen as an important physical experience when online searches and home delivery can replace it.

On the other hand, the Book is still a cherished object that represents what libraries offer, even if people no longer make as much use of them there. We still measure libraries' health by the number of books borrowed. Press and public complain when book stock goes down. The Building too is sacred, even when it is little used; complaints skyrocket when library branches are shut. At the moment both issues are a public relations disaster.

If the physical – the Book, the Building, the Book in the Building – has become symbolic rather than a true reflection of use and need, how do we redefine the character of libraries in a way that users will recognise as being what they want – and indeed, in some places already have?

The answer may be simultaneously to pool resources and to free them from site-specific locations. The library needs to be validated as an idea rather than an item, a service rather than a place, carefully constructed and balanced between an overarching national offer and a local delivery.

Here is how it could work:

Every UK resident is offered a lifelong national library card, allowing access to every UK library and its contents. Those contents are searchable on one main database, and you can order online or in person at any branch whatever you want from that database. It will be delivered within one week free of charge to the branch of your choice, or in the post to you for the price of postage (like mail order DVD rentals).

As a result, book stock in particular will be considered a national collection, akin to the British Library. Local branches will still carry stock specific to its area and needs (e.g. Dorset books about Dorset, etc), though it will be available to users nationwide. In this way users will regain confidence that they will have access to the books they need.

Also available via a main internet site will be a core of online resources available to every card holder, such as the Dictionary of National Biography, the Encyclopaedia Britannica, and others.

Such a system – a national collection of books and digital services, underpinned by a stellar delivery system – does not have to render buildings obsolete, however. One thing libraries are already popular for is their free online access. This should be strengthened with a faster broadband service, and the offer extended by providing free wifi in every branch. It will encourage people to bring in laptops and use library buildings as places for work, socialising, and exchange of information – the regeneration of a community, digitally based but physically present. Finally, every library branch will be open 7 days a week, 9am-9pm. (Of course the online library service is available 24/7.)

For such a vision to be achieved, an almost unprecedented amount of cooperation, coordination and good will needs to exist between national and local government. Library users want a fast, comprehensive, reliable service. They don't care how that is accomplished, who runs it, or who is responsible, as long as it is set up well and doesn't squander public funds. National and local governments need to repair their damaged, ambivalent relationship, so that library users can regain confidence in Books, Buildings, and Beyond.

Roy Clare

Chief Executive, MLA

Entitlement and opportunity

People are entitled to local public library services delivering to local needs, free at the point of delivery, as part of a national network.

A network fit for modern consumers – fulfilling the democratic right to books, information and personalised advice in a digital age.

Everyone is entitled to be a customer of public libraries. The habit of reading and learning starts early and extends throughout life. Libraries create and develop a love of reading and have the capacity to change lives by inspiring people to learn and to develop new skills.

Quality and scope

The quality of services is rightly a matter for elected councillors, but the scope must be defined nationally and accredited. Performance is best assessed by local consumer response, informed by best practice.

Leading library services already work in partnership with each other and with a wide range of other organisations; the rest need to be shown how to catch up with the best.

However, a single national library authority, responsible for all public libraries, would jeopardise the progress being made in many places and would throttle local delivery.

Physical space

The physical spaces that are provided depend on patterns of local demand; some places merit buildings on a vast scale, but neighbourhoods and communities need attractive provision that reflects what local people want.

Currently there are too many buildings and too many decrepit buildings. Local political leadership has to recognise that buildings do not equal services; buildings can be closed to improve services. Opening hours, the range of books, information and services must reflect consumer expectations, derived through engagement with the community.

Digital space

Digital technologies present the biggest opportunities. The 24/7 public library already exists, but most local authorities do not promote or market it.

The internet does not respect Council boundaries, and neither should a customer focused national network.

The digital space that is provided for modern consumers must provide a 24/7 complement to physical services. The principles of on-line library delivery can match the speed and character of commercial offers.

A nationwide, publicly-searchable database of library books and other products should be provided. Faster broadband access and greater capacity are available; local authorities can use existing educational networks like JANET, which can also provide access to additional high quality on-line resources.

Shared delivery

Library services ought to be an integral part of local delivery, synthesised with services for adults and young people and supporting education for personal, family and community development.

Delivery partners vary by location, but typically include other branches of the local authority, plus schools, colleges, universities, museums, archives, surgeries, nurseries and centres for children and for adult day-care.

Marketing and non-users

Councils need to do more to market their books and information services, both physically and digitally.

Research indicates that people are pleasantly surprised when they go into a library, which suggests a lack of prior knowledge of what is on offer.

More than half the population never use a library; many non-users are potentially new consumers. Their perceptions and attitudes need to be understood, locally and nationally, and used to drive change.

Staffing

An accent on consumers demands new skills and more rounded leadership. Qualified librarians are needed alongside experts in learning, digital and customer services, complemented by greater use of volunteers for specific tasks.

Council-wide volunteering programmes can improve service delivery to communities, involving people and helping them to share and develop skills and experience, with benefits for employment and the economy.

Governance

Various models of governance are available, offering a variety of business plans and professional and funding partnerships. Councils can choose between out-sourcing; strategic commissioning and charitable trusts, with the latter known to stimulate improvement and creative thinking.

Not all these options suit all locations; choices are best made locally. Revenue-generating activities already exist and can be encouraged where they do not compromise the principles of 'free services for all at the point of delivery'.

Legislation

The governing Act (1964) does not reflect modern local government, nor the accent on localism, nor the push for quality and innovation through new ways of working, with partners and shared services.

The legislation should be recast with the concept of 'membership' replaced by openness to all, for personal, individual development, and with expert services characterised by welcoming experiences and new business models.

National organisation

A single national body can provide advice and guidance on best practice and innovation; collate evidence of outcomes and impact; oversee self-assessment and accreditation; and support improvement led by local government.

The MLA, recently-restructured and reorganised, now doing more with less, is equipped to undertake this role. It needs only to be mandated accordingly.

Efficiency and value

Public investment in libraries pays dividends in terms of benefits for individuals, the community and the economy. Results are reflected in performance indicators, the CAA and public audit of VFM.

There has never been a greater need for local public library services.

Jonathan Drori CBE

Compelling experiences are those that human beings wish to return to again and again. For a product or service to be compelling, it needs to be well-defined, fresh, accessible, immersive, significant and transformative. These factors underpin sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, and are well understood by businesses such as The London Eye and Disneyland. Without wishing libraries to become like theme parks, I believe we can usefully apply this checklist to make libraries more attractive – compelling even.

Defined – Do you know what it is? Can you describe it easily to others?

There should be a clear nationwide promise to provide a basic suite of services such as book borrowing, access to newspapers and magazines, free wi-fi and the provision of skilled and empathetic librarians. Local decisions will need to be taken about the emphasis on these different services and the provision of others, such as celebrity readings, book clubs, computers, classes and community meetings.

Some new services should be centrally run, including a national digital e-book service, a country-wide library membership scheme with automatic membership for every citizen, and possibly a comprehensive book recommendation engine.

Libraries must stop trying to be all things to all people. That way, nobody will rate them very highly. On a local basis, decide which target groups are important and go for them, hell-for-leather. Decide who is less important and stop going after them. This is not easy for public servants whose reflex is to cater for everyone.

Pubs, clubs retailers and restaurants all define their clientele. People like to be with others of like mind and similar attitudes. Each local library must be fabulously attractive to its key target groups and every user should feel that this is 'my club'. This doesn't mean that every library should feel the same. On the contrary, when almost every English high-street has become boringly similar to every other, there is an opportunity for libraries to be exciting, full of local character and exuberantly unique, as long as the basic offer is well-defined.

Fresh – Is it new and interesting each time?

Retailers know to refresh their stock. Bookshops constantly rotate merchandise on their displays, and so should libraries. The more that featured items are quirky and idiosyncratic, the more they make unusual juxtapositions, the more people will remember and value them. 'Fresh' doesn't have to mean that all the books are new. Indeed, one of the attractions of libraries is that they can combine new and old books in novel and interesting ways.

**Accessible – Do you know how it works?
Can you find what you want?**

While continuing to use their school libraries, children should be taken to local and regional public libraries frequently, encouraged to borrow from them and taught how they work. They should learn to 'own the space' while being considerate of others and should get to know the library staff. All libraries that serve young people should have enthusiastic, knowledgeable children's librarians.

And of course, libraries need to be situated in places that people will naturally visit now and in the next twenty years, which isn't necessarily in a place that was popular in the nineteenth century.

Immersive – Can you lose yourself in the experience?

The ability to concentrate and read deeply is very precious and children need to be taught this skill. It's so very much easier for a young person to take part in the digital interactive world, than it is to become a confident participant in the world that requires focus – easier to be distracted than not distracted. Yet we need citizens with tenacity, who can appreciate slow-burn gratification, not just instant. I sometimes wonder whether the 'digital divide' is really as important as the 'attention divide'. Teach children to play chess and they might well appreciate and use libraries more.

Perhaps some libraries have the opportunity to become temples to focus and concentration, quiet havens in a sea of media that compete for our attention, where we can choose to be alone yet part of a like-minded community. Other libraries will choose to serve a different audience and be energetic, with a constant hubbub. Either is fine.

Details matter. Libraries need to be attractive destinations in their own right. Bookshops and coffee outlets that aim to be popular destinations avoid ghastly institutional fluorescent strip-lighting and so must libraries. They need to be lit with daylight or warm artificial light.

Significant – Does it help you develop, or connect? Is there something that matters to you?

Connection to stories, information, and ideas, need to be at the heart of what libraries offer. However, efficient recommendation of books and information sources needs to be balanced with the joy of serendipity. It should be easy to develop interests you didn't know you had. There must be opportunities to meet others, whether via book clubs, or professional networking or story groups for toddlers. (Just remember not to try to cater for all of them, unless the library is large enough to accommodate them properly)

Transformative – have you changed, do you have something to show for it?

Libraries should encourage intellectual journeys. People will start and finish at different places and take different routes but ultimately, libraries should be celebrations and homes human advancement and every visitor should feel that they have made at least some small step on their personal journey, for work, for their children, or just for fun. Libraries may have many purposes but one of them is surely to foster the intellectual betterment of individuals and society.

Tony Durcan OBE

Head of Culture, Libraries and Lifelong Learning,
Newcastle City Council

We need to acknowledge two things. The need for significant and urgent improvement in how public libraries deliver and present their services, and the fact that many of England's library services already provide fit for purpose services for the 21st century, (with some striving to exceed this). Perpetuating the myth that all is poor will hinder overall modernisation. We need to promote and celebrate the best, and use this best practice to challenge the others to improve.

But will it be possible to drive change and improvement, especially in stubbornly poor performing services, without some prescription or compulsion? Clearly it won't, otherwise it would have already happened.

Key issues to address

Workforce reform

Ensuring excellence in customer service is essential… so why not make it a requirement for all public library services to gain the Customer Service Excellence Award, or equivalent. Better that, than the endless debate pro or against the qualification requirement. Underpinning knowledge is critical, but so is the "can do" attitude that characterises the very best services.

Partnerships

Some services do well, but even the best have new partnerships to make. Take reading as an example.

Instead of 'why don't libraries sell books', ask why don't libraries and bookshops work together in new ways for the customer's benefit? So, why can't you order books (out of stock or out of print) to borrow when it's not possible to buy there and then in a book shop. And if you want to, why can't you, in your library, order a book to buy from your local bookshop, with a paid for delivery option? Why can't we have a joined up/ seamless reading service delivered by public/private partnership?

Delivery models (and governance)

Digital technology, new customer requirements and a changing community landscape make it really timely to look at new physical and organisational delivery models. We need to be clear that there are different types of public library, and make it clear what they deliver. We cannot have a universal model for every community library. There should be different models, appropriate to local need;

public and community;

public and commercial;

the traditional

the Trust.

We need government not only to endorse mixed delivery models, but also to make it clear that such models go hand in hand with reconfigured networks ensuring that investment is most appropriate (the right library, the right place, with the right partners).

Digital role and content

There is no compelling vision for the public library's digital future. There is excellent work in parts of the country, but none of it is connected. The People's Network has been a huge modernisation success, but is being allowed to flounder. MLA is pulling together enablers – but without a national vision. We have most of the ingredients for an excellent meal, but no menu.

21% of the population are not digital enabled. Why can't government and the key agencies see that the public library network, with its community use pcs, could (with strategic direction and some investment) be poised to resolve this problem? Or at the very least significantly reduce the 21%?

And can we have a truly 21st century library and information service without shared e-content? We need clear national drive and ambition to sort copyright and license issues so that we can feed our appetite to effectively deliver universal digital access for study and research, for business, and for leisure and pleasure.

Space and access

Libraries at the heart of communities? Increasingly, traditional community buildings (pubs, post offices) are closing down, and public libraries become one of the few remaining community facilities. Where else is there free and safe community access?

Communities need quality and safe community space. We had hoped for something like a 'Building Libraries for the Future' building programme. We urgently need more investment opportunities – for new model, partnership, and stand alone library buildings – but contingent on new network models offering customer responsive service and access, including community responsive opening hours.

Profile

Rather like the comments on digital above, many public library services work hard on their own profile. But there is no national 'push' (though it has been repeatedly promised in recent years). How can we promote the key messages/benefits of the public library service in a fragmented and piecemeal way. Yet the best national messaging has come from the Society of Chief Librarians with initiatives such as Universal Membership. This has been achieved in desperation at the lack of national advocacy leadership, but is not a sustainable position.

Guy Garfit

The Largeprint Bookshop

When Margaret Hodge suggested, at the Public Library Authorities Conference in October, that libraries begin selling books, there was dismay amongst booksellers and a forthright response from The Booksellers Association. But there is one vital and underprivileged sector of the community, the visually impaired, where being able to buy large print books at the library would be warmly welcomed.

Historically, libraries are where you go for large print books.

Very few bookshops stock large print books and the recent RNIB initiative, Focus on Books, whilst very welcome, has only resulted in about 100 titles being available for booksellers to stock (the vast majority of these being print-on-demand titles).

Nearly all Public Libraries have a section of large print titles, normally limited to a few hundred titles, predominantly fiction.

Within the RNIB's Right to Read report, Overdue, issued in 2003, whilst discussing the difficulty people with sight problems and reading disabilities have in finding out which titles actually exist in a format they can read, they appealed: "We call on publishers and booksellers to come together to create a database of all large print and unabridged audio books produced commercially."

To the best of my knowledge our company, www.largeprintbookshop.co.uk, is the only organisation to respond to this appeal. (However, we have recently removed all audiobooks from our website so that we can devote all our attention to large print books). We have the most comprehensive list of what is available in large print, and our database comprises about 20,000 titles. We buy a monthly bibliographic data feed from Nielsen Data, and supplement this with an immense amount of manual work, adding titles from publishers who do not inform the bibliographic agencies of the existence of their titles. We also spend a lot of time amending the records, as many publishers neglect to tell Nielsen when a title is no longer available.

The result of this is that we have a resource of unrivalled accuracy which is free to use by anyone who logs onto the website. We are only too pleased when libraries make use of the resource.

The opportunity exists for libraries to partner with us in order to enable the general public to buy large print books, because they cannot get them from normal bookshops.

Greater access to large print books is very much in accord with the brief for the 'Framework for the Future' where 'books, reading and learning' and 'community and civic values' should be at the heart of libraries' modern mission.

Reading and learning: One in six people in the UK struggle with literacy. Larger print sizes are a proven aid to reluctant readers and those seeking to improve their literacy. "Research and action studies confirm that Large Print improves reading speed and comprehension and is an extremely effective alternative tool for students reading below grade level. The larger font and additional white space between lines slows the eye and increases the care that students take with the text. Because Large Print books appeal to struggling readers they are more willing to pick up books and read, often encouraging their classmates to do the same. (www.galeschools.com).

Community and civic values: The RNIB estimates that there are 3 million people in the UK who have a visual impairment or a reading disability that makes them unable to read conventional print. The figure is probably growing with an ageing population with declining vision. At the moment there is no realistic alternative to the Public Libraries to satisfy the large print reading needs of this sector of the community. The Public Libraries could recognise that they are the first port of call to the visually impaired, enabling them to continue their lifelong pleasure in reading, and increasing the range of accessible titles.

Summary

I have mentioned that there are 20,000 large print titles in print at the moment but this is a minute proportion compared to regular print titles. Less than 1.5% of new books are issued in large print, and they remain in print for a very short while. For example there is very little backlist of large print books (no Birdsong, no Captain Corelli's Mandolin); the improvements in print-on-demand technology has meant that the out of copyright classics have now been made available, and they need never go out of print again (Thomas Hardy, Jane Austen, Dickens, etc).

If the Library Service Modernisation Review recognises that it is ideally placed to provide a lead in the promotion and provision of large print books, either for borrowing or buying, they could prove the catalyst that encourages mainstream publishers to produce their own large print editions, with the eventual result that many more large print books are published, and become available through normal booksellers, both independents and chains.

Tim Godfray

Chief Executive, The Booksellers Association
of the UK & Ireland Ltd

I am not a librarian. I have been a book retailer (and prior to that worked with PriceWaterhouse), so my input might be a bit different to the feedback DCMS has been receiving from the library world. But it seems to me that the library service has to go back to the basics. In my view, you have to have:

The right books that the people want to borrow.

The library situated where the borrowers can have easy access.

The library in premises that borrowers really want to enter.

The library open – if at all possible – at the best times at which people want to have access.

A clear management structure.

I believe the Governance issue has to be sorted out. At present, when people moan about the inadequate book stock, DCMS says it is up to the local authorities. When people moan at local government, they say It is not us, Guv, it's those lot up there at DCMS in London.

In my view, one new body has to take total responsibility and accountability for the library service, both for the management and the funding. The library service will continue to have problems if the buck can easily be passed from one body to another.

In the future, I see tensions increasing between the librarians and the rightsholders over Intellectual Property Rights.

I think the libraries must be directed to operate in such a way that they don't undermine the position of the authors, publishers and booksellers. The way in which e-books are loaned by libraries in the future will deserve special consideration to ensure that copyright is respected and supported.

I think there might also be a danger in the future of information previously being held by libraries in the public sector being transferred to one company in the private sector, with shareholders to please.

Finally, I know that Mrs Hodge is particularly keen for libraries to extend their activities to include selling books in some way, but libraries are there to lend, not to have a competitive advantage over the commercial sector that helps provide the funding for libraries to operate in the first place.

John Hicks

Partner, Kentwood Associates

For the past decade we have been discussing the role of the public library service as if it were a single organisation. But we do not have a single public library service. In England alone we have 151 services, an increase of over 50% from the number of services in the mid 1990's. The number of services, separately provided by local Councils with their own goals for their service, inhibits clarity of purpose and the setting of shared objectives. It also means we are spending more on management and back room activity than is necessary.

Whilst public library services are moving more towards partnerships, overall the pace of change has been glacially slow and the number of services has increased. In April 2009 two more services were created by the division of the services in Cheshire and Bedfordshire. Others may be in the pipeline. More voices, more local initiatives, more management costs. Collectively we are spending too much behind the scenes and, when reductions are needed, taking too much from the public service.

Behind the scenes costs include not only the library service's own overheads, but those budgets for the Council's central services (finance, property, ICT, legal, etc) that are characterised as "below the line". The head of the library service rarely has any control over these, which can in total account for up to 20-25% of what appears on paper to be the library service budget. When the hunt is on for savings it isn't unusual to find these budgets protected from reduction. Even the reverse can happen: in one county council when 10 small branches were transferred to be run by volunteers – and the library staffing budget accordingly reduced – the budget for central services went up.

This background matters because until we sort out the funding and governance of public libraries, argument over what it should be doing is secondary. Unless we can improve the financial position we will not be able to pay for the service in the first place. An increasing number of Councils are examining other options for governance. These options include concepts of joint services and contracting one with another. They also include moving the library and other services into trusts and inviting competitive bids to run the library service from the private sector. Public libraries provided by trusts already exist in Wigan and Luton (and in Scotland, in Glasgow), and by the private sector in Hounslow.

However, moving from a position in England of 148 Council run services, two trusts and one private sector supplied service to an environment where there are 151 services delivered by a mixture of all three, isn't on its own going to offer much scope for major improvement. It changes the method of delivery, and variously this will offer opportunities for savings in management and backroom services, tax advantages and access to new income streams. But it doesn't provide the scale of operation to offer significant savings for re-investment. To do that there need to be fewer services. This need not necessarily mean reducing the number of Councils designated as Library Authorities but it would mean reducing the number of separate services.

Councils should be encouraged to form joint services, to create joint trusts and to invite joint bids from the private sector.

None of this is new; it was proposed in the DCLG paper Developing the Local Government Services Market in 2007, but with some exceptions Councils have been slow to act, particularly as regards joint service provision. The metropolitan areas have too many small services. For example, London could be reduced to five services (inner and four outer London services) jointly provided by boroughs working together; Merseyside to one service centred on Liverpool; Greater Manchester to one led by the city that provides the area with its identity. Regional services could be created between two or more counties and the unitaries contained within them. Northern Ireland, where one service has been created out of five, points the way ahead.

Until we are prepared to reduce the myriad of small services there will be no major savings to pay for service development. So long as the doors remain open, the stock is comprehensive and the computers work, few members of the public will care who provides the public library service. We should not fear alternative forms of public library governance; we should be wary, however, of jumping from the frying pan of poorly funded Council services into the fire of underfunded trusts and unprofitable contracts.

Kathy Kirk

Interim Head of Culture and Community Services,
Worcestershire County Council

Libraries of the 21st Century must review their function and fully utilise their key role of integrating and supporting the whole community. Translating world changes, functions and information into a local setting that is understandable and accessible by the local community. Libraries have a key role in promoting change and presenting the friendly face of political rhetoric on such things as social cohesion and the economy, they are the focal point for cohesion in action.

Libraries should not be buildings full of books; they should be menu driven services flexibly responding to local need to encourage independence. The best libraries will offer virtual and face to face services shared with other local agencies and services public, private and third sector focussed on the needs of the local neighbourhood. Libraries must actively look for partners with whom they can integrate, not just co-locate.

Sole ownership of buildings is not important now, and even less so in the future. It is the role that libraries play to add value to strategic plans and priorities and bring understanding and meaning to individuals that is crucial.

Good libraries already prioritise Literacy, Reading and Learning. In order to do this well excellent libraries are actively involved in partnerships at local and strategic level. They are safe community places with an integrated multi skilled workforce to make the most of working with specific groups around unemployment, job search, health promotion, environmental sustainability and learning. Libraries are integral to the delivery of the personalisation agenda.

Libraries provide information and access to a range of services and organisations. Local people still look to the library to provide that. People trust libraries. Libraries of the future, whether virtual or physical, need to capitalise on this to continue to help people make sense of the world. Libraries are uniquely placed to do this. They provide knowledge; their role is to actively encourage people to explore the virtual and literary resources available. Even better, Libraries support the learning journey by providing information literacy to enable us to understand and evaluate what is being revealed. In short, library staff translate information into knowledge that can be learned. It is easy to overlook this vital role, but more important than ever in the 21st Century. Everyone can find Wikipaedia but can everyone judge its validity?

Local Authority led Libraries empower local communities and develop social capital. They provide the opportunity to get involved with local activities, not only volunteering but also the opportunity to meet, think and act for your own neighbourhood, the collective good is still a value to hold dear, expectations are high and budgets are more challenged than ever before.

Libraries essentially recycle books, surely a core value of our communities and society generally? Libraries can learn from the retail sector but the role of Libraries is wider but should be clearer, it is too confused at present.

The retailer will sell high volume popular stock cheaply but will never have a role in providing scarce material or helping a customer to interpret it and learn.

The lending function of libraries is largely a processing function as part of a much wider spectrum of services that require skilled, passionate staff that open doors to all, proactively marketing opportunities for people and role models for social inclusion and self awareness.

Outdated library staff structures, attitudes and culture have no place in the library of the 21st Century.

There is a valuable role for the librarian's professional skills, but for the majority of staff it is the core values, behaviours and skills of communication, sharing, understanding, lifelong learning and self actualisation of the diversity of individuals in society that is crucial.

This needs to be underpinned by a strong performance management framework and that should come from Central Government who can bring clarity around standards that are sorely missing. Outdated Key Performance Indicators "Active Borrowers" do nothing to measure the use and impact of libraries.

This is why integration is vital; to piggy back other services' customers to continue to give access to the world of books and pleasure, but also to actively engage non readers/users to tempt them to explore and feel comfortable and safe to learn and to interpret information and knowledge. And we need to be able to demonstrate the impact of that cross sector working to government and beyond. So that we can build bridges between cultural and religious differences in the world and make them real for people locally in a way that are understandable and achievable.

Miranda McKearney OBE

Chief Executive, The Reading Agency

I have many thoughts on generic issues that would help libraries move forward including: Uniting responsibility for policy and finance at national government level and changing the National Indicator for libraries to include children's use

But I can be most useful in concentrating on my specialism, reading.

Clear vision

We're lacking a clear vision for libraries; that's a real problem.

Libraries were set up to create a nation of learners and readers by giving everyone free access to the world's knowledge. Let's hold fast to that radical, enduring purpose but reinvent how we achieve it.

We're not going to get modern consumers reading and learning simply by providing access to rows of books – the future needs to be much more multi-media and dynamic

Libraries' reading role should be of profound interest to local authorities because of its impact on the population's literacy levels, educational progress, employability, well being and sense of community.

"In a time of huge pressure to be everything to everyone it is absolutely important to clamp hold of the central pillar that holds the whole thing together – reading. Reading is your jewel- make it your future" Liz Forgan, Chair Arts Council, 2009 PLA conference

A new reading role

To appeal to a 21C public a much livelier, interventionist reading service is needed. This should be shaped with the public and delivered with broadcast, booktrade and other partners.

The last fifteen years has seen the emergence of libraries' reader development movement. This is starting to position libraries as the community place bringing reading and learning alive and drawing us together to share it, and is pioneering interventions with targeted groups. This can be massively built on.

The most intense work has been with children's reading and it's no accident that children's book issues are rising.

Social justice

56% of UK adults have literacy skills below the level of a good GCSE

25% of young offenders have reading skills below those of the average 7 year old.

If libraries build on the reader development movement they can make a serious contribution to tackling these and other problems.

Research shows this way of working has profound implications for helping people enjoy reading, for bringing communities together, building literacy skills, for helping people feel better in themselves, even for increasing community volunteering.

New ways of working to achieve a marketable common core offer

With falling visitor figures, there's a desperate need to tell the public what's on offer.

To do this there needs to be a common core of resources, activities and opportunities to market and a proper annual marketing drive.

Recent pilot work on shared offers and programmes could be rolled out– eg the Youth Offer (endorsed by DCSF) and the national database of library readers groups.

Analyse the trends and get ahead of the curve

We could carve out a new strategic position for libraries in light of market trends, especially the contraction of the high street book retailing sector and a whole new digital world. There are new opportunities to relate to readers in new ways.

The socialisation of reading through festivals, author events, reading groups and on line conversations gives libraries a huge role in connecting readers to each other.

We need to combine all the exciting piloting of the last few years into a big, exciting new programme of action. Partners are waiting to help – from publishing to health, from BBC on a digital literacy campaign to CCE on targetting disadvantaged families.

I hope the action campaign the Reading Agency is talking about with the Arts Council, SCL and MLA can have as much impact as the Music Manifesto.

A new relationship with the public

Libraries' reading role could be the springboard for a huge community engagement and volunteering push – young people supporting children doing the Summer Reading Challenge; volunteers running telephone groups for isolated older people.

Local people can volunteer to help select library stock, interview staff, design areas of the library.

There are models waiting to be rolled out, including HeadSpace, currently running in 20 authorities.

Partnership sparkle: a new relationship with the reading industry

Changes to reading's business model offers new chances of harnessing the interest of publishers, booksellers and writers.

"publishers, broadcasters and arts organisations all want to work with you on new distribution models for reading... sprinkle a bit of stardust on the scene" Liz Forgan.

The Reading Agency is talking to its 34 publisher partners about new workforce development approaches – skills sharing, shadowing, shared training. Anyone interested in words could move fluently between jobs in bookselling, publishing, gaming, libraries.

Just as film has FindAnyFilm, the reading world could co-operate to signpost the public to the right book in the right place – on or off line

A workable book sales model

Let's roll out the model that's starting to work through Reading Partners author events.

In return for publishers sending their authors to libraries in all kinds of communities, libraries guarantee to have books on sale through partnerships with local booksellers.

This results in happy readers, publishers, authors, booksellers.

Economies of scale combined with innovation

It's interesting that some of the functions the APPG calls for in a national development agency are ones The Reading Agency carries out.

Including helping libraries share best practice and create economies of scale through innovative national reading programmes like the adult literacy 6 Book Challenge.

We're small but have managed to make quite an impact, and could do more in a more effective national framework.

Bob McKee

Chief Executive, Charted Institute of Library
and Information Professionals

We know that good libraries – animated by a good mix of library staff – can benefit people and strengthen communities. The CILIP Guidelines, What makes a good library service? outline what is required and what can be achieved. Modern times make the core purpose of libraries more important than ever, as is shown by the upturn in library use during the current economic downturn.

Libraries reach into every neighbourhood and every family, giving free access for everyone to all of the world's knowledge whether of the intellect or of the imagination, whether in print or online, all mediated by skilled and helpful library staff. That core purpose addresses some of the most pressing challenges facing our society. With seven million people in Britain lacking basic literacy skills, at least six million excluded from access to digital technology, and over four million experiencing multiple social and economic deprivation, libraries should be central to our strategies for literacy and learning, digital inclusion, regeneration, equality of opportunity, and personal well-being. To fit libraries for the future, government needs to recognise the contribution they can make to key policy objectives.

Where libraries have risen to these challenges – and have invested in strategic planning, improved opening hours, better buildings, skilled staff, and an in-depth range of print and digital resources – the graph of library use is rising, not falling.

Investment in libraries produces a rich return in terms of innovation, use, and impact. We need to accentuate the positive, not reinforce a negative narrative in the discourse around libraries, public policy and popular use.

Positives such as:

Investment in fine new or re-provisioned buildings like the new Newcastle City Library opened by Her Majesty The Queen on 6th November 2009. The Public Library Building Awards provide many examples, large and small, of brilliant library buildings.

Examples of innovation and impact evidenced from a number of sources: the many inspirational projects considered over the years for the Libraries Change Lives Awards; the public library services that have won Beacon Council status; the current programme of projects funded by the Big Lottery.

Development of effective and successful national partnerships delivering important local outcomes – such as the partnership with the BBC to encourage reading development, or with NHS Choices to encourage access to health information, or with organisations such as The Reading Agency and the National Literacy Trust to deliver the annual Summer Reading Challenge or last year's hugely successful National Year of Reading.

The track record of investment in new technology not just to transform library systems and spaces (with library management systems and automated self-service operations) but also to transform library services. The People's Network is recognised as a world class initiative to bring Internet access and help with ICT skills within the reach of everyone in the UK. Libraries don't just embrace new technology: they do so on time, within budget, and to powerful effect.

This is not the story of a failing service and a defensive, change-averse profession. This is the story of a successful service and forward-thinking staff – and the recent response of local communities in places such as Swindon and the Wirral show how passionately local people continue to value their local library service.

But Swindon and the Wirral also highlight the major challenge facing public libraries – the inevitability, following the banking crisis, of serious and sustained reductions in public spending. Closing libraries simply to cut costs is not acceptable, as politicians in Swindon and the Wirral have discovered – but the challenge of reducing costs will not go away. Public Library Authorities need to focus on the core purpose of libraries, look closely at matching service provision to local need, and consider opportunities to drive down cost within a strategic framework of service provision.

The process of taking cost out of library services had already begun when I became a Chief Officer responsible for public library provision in 1988, twenty one years ago. After many years of seeking "efficiencies" only one opportunity remains to make significant reductions in the overall cost of public library provision other than wholesale closure of local libraries – collaboration across administrative boundaries either of place or of profession. One option is to look holistically at the public services offered in one place with a view to rationalisation of provision. The other option is to look holistically at the public library service across a region or sub-region.

A system delivered by 151 separate Public Library Authorities in England is inherently inefficient. While continuing to recognise the need for local democratic accountability, more needs to be done to explore options for collaboration and collective operation – perhaps with an eye on the development of LibrariesNI, established earlier this year as one public library service for the whole of Northern Ireland.

The challenge of achieving greater efficiency is matched by the challenge of sustaining investment in new technology, in three distinct ways: by using new technology to improve library operations (such as investing in RFID technology to introduce self-service to a library system); by providing access to new technology for library users (thus contributing significantly to the digital inclusion agenda: is there a librarian on Martha Lane Fox's Digital Inclusion Task Force and, if not, why not?); and by taking the public library itself into the digital space. Universities invest in virtual learning environments. Should not public libraries, as the nation's most cost-effective agency for lifelong learning, invest in virtual library environments?

The proposition of increased investment in libraries has come up several times in these comments. When money is tight, value for money is paramount. So a key challenge for libraries is to demonstrate their value and the return – educational, social, economic – on investment in public library service. Research shows that the Summer Reading Challenge makes a positive difference to children's literacy levels and educational attainment. More research on impact and outcomes is needed – and the Research Councils, particularly AHRC, need to be encouraged to support such a programme of research.

Britain has a world class reputation for research and a world class reputation for libraries. But where, in Britain's higher education system, is there a locus for world class research into the impact of public library provision?

The public library is both a local resource – at the heart of its community – and the gateway to a wider, national and international, network of resources. This presents both an opportunity and a challenge for public library services. The opportunity is to develop more national initiatives such as the introduction of a genuinely national library membership card, and the Society of Chief Librarians is well positioned to do this. The challenge is to achieve consistency so that library users experience a good quality of library service wherever they are in the country. The CILIP Guidelines provide an outline of the guidance needed, and the most useful outcome of the Wirral Inquiry could be guidance on how the statutory duty placed on Public Library Authorities might be interpreted. The task then will be to find a process which will drive a "levelling up" of public library service quality – perhaps by a process of peer review or by the use of the sort of "public library quality improvement matrix" used in Scotland.

Taking libraries forward at a time of reduced resources, increased aspirations, and changed lifestyles will require clear leadership at political and professional levels. A stronger locus for libraries within government (reappraising the roles of DCMS, MLA and ACL as recommended in the All-Party Parliamentary Group report) needs to be matched by a stronger focus on leadership within the ranks of public library professionals. When I was a Chief Officer in local government I had opportunities to understand and develop my leadership role through a variety of sources: the SOLACE Scheme of Continuous Learning for Chief and Senior Executives in Local Government; the "Top Managers" Programme run by the then LGMB; and the partnership programme between my local authority and the Local Government department of the Warwick University Business School. Where is there a similar and coordinated range of opportunities for present and future public library leaders?

The way we think about libraries reflects the way we think about society – and indeed about ourselves. If we believe in community, opportunity, equality, and democracy – then we'll invest in our libraries even when (particularly when) times are hard. And the reverse is also true.

Modern times make the core purpose and contribution of libraries more important than ever – and the best library services show the levels of investment that are required and the levels of innovation, use and impact that can be achieved. The challenges are clear – to reduce the core cost of the service, to sustain investment in new technology (and in new buildings and new books), to demonstrate value for money in terms of the educational. social and economic return on investment, and to "level up" so that library users experience a consistently good quality of library service wherever they are in the UK. All of this requires leadership – and a relentlessly positive approach. Positive leadership has no time for the damaging and misleading narrative of a failing service and staff who cling defensively to an outdated concept of professional status. The right levels of investment, innovation, use and impact will only be achieved if those of us in leadership positions move beyond the negative narrative and focus on the positive outcomes which can be achieved by libraries – animated by good librarians – for local communities and for society in general.

Chris Meade

Director, if: Book

Once upon a time books were made of parchment and carried around in buckets. Then came the codex, designed by early Christians as a means to fix the canon and make sure no one glued extra bits onto the end of scrolls. The first books, hand written by teams of monks, cost a fortune. Gutenberg invented the printing press but went bankrupt when his invention failed to catch on. It took the Reformation to make publishing commercially viable, when every faction going was producing new tracts and pamphlets. The paperback provided cheap portable fiction for the troops and the workers.

The e-reader briefly bridged the gap between page and screen, but soon every laptop and mobile was a platform for prose. Far from killing literature, new devices led to a renaissance of artworks mixing text and images, sounds and conversations. The book was no longer defined as an object but as an experience, a unit of meaning, some of which were produced in beautiful, customised printed form, others in lavish online editions. But perhaps surprisingly the term remained—thanks to Macbooks and Facebook, Audiobooks, Digibooks, Skybooks, ifbooks etc, but the term was used to include events, performances, recordings, websites which demanded a certain level of attention. And all books were also communities, though mostly quiet ones, like library users silently sharing the same virtual space.

Libraries used to contain copies of works that were otherwise inaccessible to people without parting with their cash. Books were chained to desks, then loaned out for short periods, then after culture went up to the cloud, their role became really important, providing a safe local space in which to meet real people with the expertise and ideas to help us each explore our particular interest.

Where once people had been intimidated but uplifted in places of culture such as theatres and libraries, now all content emanated from the same devices. There was no longer any need to differentiate much between movies, books, ifbooks, pop music and opera. Whereas once these commodities were sold and performed in completely different places for different prices, now all was stuff, funded from the licence.

So we needed to create new means to uplift the spirit and encourage deeper attention and focus. Unlibraries flourished—designed to inspire and intrigue through displays, events and atmospheres which helped minds to expand; they sold and loaned out souvenirs of intellectual journeys undertaken there, were havens for debate and the simple, basic pleasures of social networking.

Martin Molloy OBE

Strategic Director, Cultural and Community Services,
Derbyshire County Council

I am unapologetic in my advocacy of libraries. For a large county such as my own, they offer the dream ticket: local delivery of services tailored to community needs, coupled with a strong contribution to strategic and partnership priorities. The Local Area Agreement recognises that delivering high standards across the public services in challenging times depends on effective partnerships.

Whether or not local partnerships have adopted National Indicator 9, experience shows that libraries give local people an opportunity to engage with service providers. They are a hub for community activity, a focus for engagement through consultation, advice surgeries and information events, and a place where families can learn and grow. Libraries narrow the gap between the haves and the have-nots; they are places where a fresh start is always possible.

This starts with reading and literacy, and libraries should concentrate on adding value to the reading experience for children and young people as well as adults, building on the sense of ownership which distinguishes libraries from commercial bookshops.

The increasing range of work which libraries undertake with health services, with learning and skills providers and with community safety agencies reinforces the case for co-location, with all its associated efficiencies. We have the chance to create a new kind of public space – one which combines efficient delivery of public services with an accessible and inviting place where people want to spend time.

Derbyshire's county-wide strategic partnership is not alone in appreciating the scope and value of libraries' contribution to shared priorities. Many agree that the right locus for this activity is the local authority. Top tier councils have the resources and strategic reach to make the best use of libraries – and leading councils combine this with effective political leadership and advocacy. I am not therefore convinced of need to create a new national agency.

I do believe that local authorities need clarity from Government about its aspirations and expectations for libraries. These aspirations will be delivered more consistently if they are supported by real resources from the Department of State which is responsible for libraries, as is the case with many other local authority services.

For example, there is a continuing digital divide, which risks excluding many from participation and engagement in social and democratic processes. Libraries have been outstandingly successful in improving digital skills, and I welcome the Learning Revolution's proposal to realign some of the funding which has gone to traditional adult learning to enable libraries to achieve even more.

In return, Government should expect local authorities to spend their money on what it was intended for. So those expectations should include a requirement to invest in adequate stocks of books and electronic resources, together with opening hours which meet local needs.

Whether libraries are in stand-alone premises or shared facilities, their users deserve a good range of resources, and professional management combining effective local delivery with strategic development at regional and national level.

Emerging models of community ownership are interesting but they can never achieve this joined-up approach. Nor should they be used to fudge difficult political decisions about use of resources. We should be careful about committing public money to the ongoing support of local facilities for which no realistic business case exists. I began my career as volunteer-run village centre libraries were being replaced by modern, professional and inclusive local libraries: I would not wish to turn the clock back.

Increasingly, we need to recognise and respond to changing preferences in the way services are accessed. More flexible delivery options and greater personalisation should not merely be about creating premium services for those who can afford them , but also about supporting the most vulnerable – disabled people, those with learning disabilities, and the frail elderly – to help them lead independent lives. This will need refocusing of existing resources, but also a new commitment from Government.

In conclusion, I recognise that public libraries are unlikely to be a 'headline' service, but they deliver a broad agenda cost-effectively. They can make the difference between acceptable and truly excellent public provision. To make that a reality they need effective political and managerial leadership at all levels: in Government, in LSPs, and in local authorities. That, I believe, should be the focus for debate over the coming months.

John Newbigin

Chair, Culture 24

Who would want to be a librarian today, caught in the middle of a jumble of seemingly irreconcilable demands;

• How to retain books at the heart of all they do but at the same time embrace the landscape and behaviours of the digital world;

• How to stay true to local needs but also find ways to build integrated national services;

• How to resist surrender to market forces but still find new and financially sustainable models of partnership?

Yet anyone who was fortunate enough to be unaware of these raging debates, and who stumbled across local libraries for the first time, might reasonably think they had hit on a fabulous asset, a mechanism perfectly positioned to help enrich the nation's cultural and community resources. They might even feel a little quickening of the pulse...

• Here's a pretty robust and comprehensive broadband infrastructure with the huge added bonus of 4,000 'retail outlets', many of them in High Street locations.

• Here's a system which has long adopted the basic business model that the music industry is only now struggling to embrace in the digital world – you don't sell the book, you sell the right to read it (via the Public Lending Right) just as spotify doesn't sell the song but the right to listen to it.

• Here's a much-loved and trusted public resource which for almost a hundred and fifty years has been seen not just as a store-house for books but as a window to the wider world, especially for those with limited resources; what better brand positioning could there be at a time when the 'wider world' has been made so much wider and more confusing by digital technology?

• And at a time when many people feel the public realm has become much too outcome-driven to be comfortable, here's a set of institutions where no one tells you what to think or do. That puts local libraries amongst the very few public buildings into which teenage boys can stroll, in 2009, without fear of being challenged for just being there. It makes them places where you can browse without interference, but seek assistance when you want it – which is how most of us explore the online world.

These are assets and attitudes of incalculable value that can readily be built on.

Libraries are under local control and should remain so, but that doesn't preclude the need for a common approach to digital services – a branded national online presence, or a national library card.

In the world of museums and galleries Culture24 is already demonstrating that small institutions can benefit hugely by having an additional, national 'front door' – something that amplifies their value and makes them part of a bigger picture. The local and national energise and enrich each other, just as the virtual and the physical each add value to the other. This is not about getting rid of books; it is about the promotion of reading, about learning some tricks from amazon, Wikipedia, google, and perhaps even from Richard and Judy.

Librarians will need new skills. Much of that may be done simply by sharing what the brilliant best are already doing, but there are more fundamental changes that need to be taken on board, to do with business models and brand management. If the PLR really is an analogue version of what appears in the digital world as legal music download services, how is it to be enlarged to accommodate e-books and other online content?

Libraries already act as a door to a wider body of cultural assets, owned by museums, galleries and archives. That's why it makes sense to have an 'MLA' and not just an 'L'. But if that vast mass of content is to be shared in the most open and effective way online, there must be protocols in place that facilitate the building of common architecture, navigation systems and services.

Of course, many libraries already have data and image archives of their own. Together with the dozens of local and regional film archives they form a hugely valuable but under-exploited resource. How can their profile and their value be raised? One way might be for the national curriculum to point schools a little more forcefully towards requiring students to use local archive material in history projects. And perhaps there's a further role for libraries in helping build the archives of the future, curating and guiding new online social networks – facebook with a community twist.

Herbert Samuel's description of the library as "thought in cold storage" may have had resonance in the twentieth century. We have the possibility of making the library of the twenty-first something a good deal warmer, more dynamic and inter-active.

Professor David Nicholas

Director, Department of Information Studies and the
CIBER research group, University College London

My research group, CIBER , has been chronicling the rise and rise of the digital information consumer and the demise of bricks and mortar information institutions and hard-copy publications over the past seven years. We have done this by means of a pioneering methodology called deep log analysis which enables us to visualise what goes on in cyberspace in respect to the viewing and using behaviour of millions of people. The massive and robust evidence base accumulated opens out a world to us not seen before and what we see convinces us that the public library is rapidly decoupling from its user base, mainly, but not exclusively, as a result of the digital transition (people moving their reading, study, leisure and information seeking activities into the virtual space). With this transition comes disintermediation, the removal of the intermediary (typically the librarian) from the information chain, which means we are all librarians now, and have to behave like them – constantly reviewing and validating data. But of course we are not librarians and we tend to behave like e-shoppers which has all kinds of consequences for the future – and I will deal with this later.

What with the advent of e-books this process is about to rapidly accelerate, bringing into the virtual space a large body of new people – students, humanities and social science scholars and, of course, the general public. Indeed, generally people are being fast-forwarded by Government and other organisations into this virtual space (in an attempt to create e-citizens of all of us) and yet the public library seems incapable of adapting to the realities of this and the needs and behaviours of the newly enfranchised digital information consumer . For any institution or profession to decouple from their audience, constituency or market represents its death knell. And in terms of the key metrics of loans, membership and visits, as your letter points out, we can already hear the bell ringing. For a much-loved information institution, public libraries, to face possible melt-down in an information age, when information has never ever been so important, is unpardonable and something we should all be ashamed of. Yet it will happen because nobody seems to understand the need to look at the big picture and that the tail (the digital) now wags the dog.

There has been so much change, indeed a fundamental shift in behaviour, especially amongst the young, which appears to have been completely missed by public library policy makers and many practitioners. They seem to be re-arranging the chairs rather than moving house, which is what they must do. This is partly because much of today's information seeking and consuming goes on remotely and anonymously (and few people look to see what goes on behind the curtain, much to their shame) and partly because librarians fear the worse and are in denial. Without this knowledge of the digital information consumer librarians are working on the basis of an old and false paradigm. There is too much looking to the future and too much blaming the kids for a form of information behaviour and reading which is endemic to the whole population, which essentially reflects a failure on the part of the profession to deal with what is happening now.

Government, society and professions need to face up to the consequences and a good start would be to wake up to what has actually happened to our users, library members etc; they have opted for fast information as they have for fast food. Only then can we deal with the consequences that result from this – lack of attention, lack of a mental map, no sense of collection, and a poor idea of what is good and relevant. Understanding information seeking behaviour in the digital space is a prerequisite to determining academic, education, cultural and personal outcomes – positive and negative. Then we shall be in a position to determine whether we are really benefiting from the information society and always-on information, and not blowing it as seems to be the case. If we are right about this – and we have better data then anyone, then whose responsibility it is? If it is to be public libraries – the logical choice, then they show little signs of helping e-citizens to survive in a digital world where almost all of their strategic activities are conducted. These concerns should be driving the public library agenda not defending increasing tired and bankrupt provision and policies. I am afraid I remain very pessimistic.

Adrian Olsen

Retired member of CILIP and former Head of Libraries
and Lifelong Learning, London Borough of Southwark

There is talk of a crisis in public libraries (although from the inside of a Discovery Centre or Idea Store it is perhaps harder to see what this crisis is), and the all-party parliamentary review originated by Lyn Brown MP recently proposed a National Development Agency as a possible solution to the need for national leadership. I would wholly support this idea but it is, of course, not new. It was first suggested by Charles Leadbeater and Demos in the April 2003 report "Overdue – how to create a modern public library service", commissioned by the Laser Foundation and launched at a seminar in July 2003. The report is well worth reading or re-reading for a trenchant analysis of our current situation and potential solutions.

It is time to end the situation whereby individual local authorities just do their own thing (some well, some badly, some plain mediocre), with MLA/DCMS exhorting them from the sidelines (but exhorting them to do what?) and trying to tackle every problem with a bureaucratic tangle and another form to fill in. Also, DCMS does not have the vital control of the purse strings which would enable it to have real influence and, for example, practical enforcement of the Public Libraries and Museums Act. At the moment, the impact of the public library service, as a national "force", is less than the sum of its parts, and this has to change. It is not fundamentally the fault of local authorities, individually or collectively, or indeed of MLA/DCMS and their staff – they do what they are enabled to do; rather it is a national structural failure, of organisation and budget responsibility, as Leadbeater pointed out in his report. Moving around the deck-chairs within MLA, etc will not change anything!

I think most practising librarians would probably agree that the only successful thing that MLA has done (i.e. with a real outcome and impact) is the People's Network – a national initiative, with mainly national funding but delivered locally. The Reading Agency's Summer Reading Challenge is a similar success story where a national initiative is implemented locally, with significant cost savings. The former had largely central funding whereas the latter doesn't, but both are successful in doing something real and practical, out there with the public, and getting the best of both worlds – national co-ordination, efficiency, publicity, profile, etc but with a strong local character. Both are examples of how a National Development Agency could work where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Any review should run as fast as it can from the red-tape solutions that are likely to fudge the real issues, and show real blue-sky thinking by defining a vision for a national public library service with a strong local face and by concentrating on converting the public libraries element of MLA, and its inward-looking bureaucratic and peripheral role, into a National Development Agency to implement the vision.

Its brief should be to define, enable and enforce a high quality national public library service but also to do "real" things for the service, on the model of the People's Network/Summer Reading Challenge; its remit should be robust in terms of the Public Libraries and Museums Act, but also carefully balanced between national initiatives and control and local needs and implementation. It would not run the public library service but lead it. And, of course, it should have a proper budget – "golden teeth" perhaps?

The creation of such an organisation is the only way to provide the national leadership that is now so lacking. Of course, there is the question of potential tensions between national and local agendas and budgets, but the two models I have given above are practical examples of fruitful co-operation between the national and the local and I am not aware that they have caused too much friction. And frankly I don't think the national infrastructure could be much worse than it is now. With a high-profile, dynamic head (please not a Tzar!) – a leading author or "sensible" media person perhaps – and a mandate for excellence and real, direct improvements, a National Development Agency could transform the lack-lustre national image that the public library service currently has (even if not wholly justified) but without trampling on or destroying its local identity.

The above is a slightly edited version of a letter published in CILIP Update in December 2008.

Nicky Parker

Head of Library and Information Services,
Manchester City Council

If popular TV shows are a good barometer of public opinion then it is heartening to see that two of the most watched programmes, Who Do You Think You Are? and Secret Millionaire both feature several weekly trips to libraries. They reinforce that libraries are places to go in every neighbourhood, contain a wealth of material to help people understand where they have come from and help people play a more active role in their community.

Place shapers, community glue, street corner universities; those libraries that recapture this territory, that understand the concept of the library as the heart of the community and its impact on real people will be the ones carrying off the BAFTAs.

So what New Tricks are required to get back to basics and reinvigorate the public library? There are those who have gone down the route of rebranding into Ideas Stores and Discovery Centres and in those places the Gok Wan approach to looking good may be the answer. There are others though who are taking a more fundamental approach and stripping back the clutter to reveal the real heart and soul of public service, the House Doctor methodology. Excellent, public service is what will fix libraries – providing services that people want, in a timely manner, by customer focused, well trained staff in accessible locations. Mine is not an argument for more books or new gimmicks, the focus and the effort should be on the customer and a free core offer.

It's less about changing the name and more about developing a new customer service ethos, about being ambitious like our library fore fathers were and about meeting community need. This renewed effort is also about listening, involving and sharing. Our customers' Points of View should be informing strategy, our political leaders and Friends Groups, should be overseeing scrutiny and they should be our Watchdog and our Question Time.

Our buildings need to look good, we need Grand Designs and they need to be in the right place. We all know the Location Location Location mantra but how far will we go to relocate, co-locate and integrate? Here lies the answer to creating the new public library and it's not just a question of shoving random services under the same roof. We need to interweave the golden thread that links co-located services and helps make them integrated, gives them a make over and turns them into something new. This is the new library. This is Britain's Next Top Model. It joins together books with learning spaces for adults, it melds children's libraries with Surestart centres and it puts the People's Network into supermarkets.

Empower, Inform, Enrich

We need joint management arrangements, new financial models and a rich and diverse pool of talent amongst the staff team with a focus on excellence. This is the new X Factor. X is for excellence. Volunteers, drawn from our neighbourhoods add value, care passionately about their locality and have skills to compliment the staff team. We must nurture them and offer them the route maps into employment or volunteering with us, a new partnership.

We need to make libraries more popular and less Lost. We need to recapture the essence of the words Public Library and reinvent them for a new digital age. The broadcasters have fixed this with iPlayer solutions so you catch up at your convenience. Libraries need to do the same, transfer transactions, live enquiries and more digital content online, making it accessible 24/7. If libraries really are at the heart of our communities then let's do more events in neighbourhoods away from the shiny iconic buildings and let's cement all that rich culture right at the heart of every place.

What about the library leaders? Have we taken our eye off the ball? Have we slipped back into Lazy Town? Is our management style more David Brent than Alan Sugar? We need to extend our skills, show more leadership and develop styles that are entrepreneurial and encourage risks. Are we encouraging new ideas, transforming our services and enticing partners into the Dragon's Den? Does your Working Lunch involve regeneration partners, property developers and the Third Sector, have you worked out who your stakeholders are and how they influence the strategic planning of your service?

It's not Old Library or New Library it's Next Library. Do you know what your Next Library looks like? Is it a world of Web 2.0, co-creation and Third Places or is it wonky notices, closed on a Wednesday and management by byelaw? Are we Tomorrow's World or Antique's Roadshow?

Gail Rebuck

Chair and Chief Executive,
The Random House Group

Reading and free access to books are fundamental rights and our libraries act as the democratic gateways to knowledge for all: no matter what your circumstance, your reading ability, your ambition or your taste.

A society which values the public library, values books and their capacity to amuse, entertain, educate and maybe even change lives. Free access to all is the guiding principle and the only criterion for entry is interest.

But libraries cannot afford to stand still. The modern library must still promote reading and learning but alongside this they must provide access to digital skills and services; work to tackle social exclusion and truly build their own unique identities within the communities they serve.

Make it easy for people to love libraries

In the age of view on demand and catch-up services, we no longer live in an 'appointment to view' era.

Libraries are recognising this with greater flexibility in their opening hours and already some are experimenting with 'lovefilm'-style online ordering where books can be reserved online and returned to libraries in pre-paid envelopes.

Should we introduce a system where all residents are automatically made members of their local library and would need to 'opt out' of the library services? Could more be done to encourage groups to come together using the library as a focal point: a national book club if you like?

There are many examples of hotspots of excellence, but without a national framework of best practice which allows libraries to retain their unique localness, service innovations will remain patchy.

Engage with young children

Libraries do incredible work to engage with young and pre-school children and the number of children's books borrowed from UK libraries has risen in each of the last four years, which the Reading Agency attributes to an increase in investment in libraries' reading services for children and families and the development of powerful local partnerships coupled with big national interventions such as the Summer Reading Challenge.

Hard to reach teens

But what of older children? Teenagers who have not grown up with a reading habit are hard to reach.

Research from the National Literacy Trust confirmed that reading, for some, has an image problem; perceived

as a boring and solitary endeavour undertaken by 'Johnnie-no-mates'. These professed non-readers cannot see a relevance to reading outside of the classroom and fail to see how improved literacy could improve life chances or the extent to which reading is both fun and rewarding.

The challenge for the modern library is to become an attractive haven for all demographics.

Digital

The proliferation of new hardware such as ebook readers and handheld devices to access audiobooks will help grow the market for books. These advances, however, generate a number of challenges around sale and distribution and as such, measures must be put in place to ensure the fair protection of content whilst meeting the needs of authors, publishers, libraries and readers alike.

The digital space offers some terrific opportunities to the modern library; opening up new channels through which to promote reading.

Indeed The Random House Group trialed its own virtual book club – Readers Place – with library users in the West Midlands. There is a huge amount of scope to make available downloadable promotion materials from colouring-in books to serious readers guides – anything which can make the reading experience ever richer. Focus too will be needed on overcoming the hurdles which prevent libraries and librarians greater access to social networking sites such as Facebook – essential tools when talking to generations who expect to see, feel and hear their brands.

Facetime

Whilst digital is undoubtedly a growth area, we must never forget the importance of face-to-face interaction between reader and writer, and libraries play a key role in doing this.

The best libraries we work with have excellent librarians with a good knowledge of books – but they also have so much more. They act as community centres with mums and babies clubs; exercise classes in free spaces; further education classes; open access to digital resources and even coffee shops.

Get the users to evangelise

Libraries have access to millions of 'brand advocates' walking, talking word-of-mouth champions who can help spread the message about the fantastic facilities available. I'd like to see libraries do more to harness that power.

Could more be done to inform communities of just what rich treasure houses of knowledge libraries are? I count myself as blessed to be part of a generation brought up on the value and importance of libraries, though I wonder how many people out there today fail to be aware of just what is on offer and indeed does everyone even know that the service is free?

Resource

Another issue for us is that the number of professional librarians working in public and schools libraries trained to specialise in children's and family reading continues to decline. We support the Campaign for the Book calling for a national provision of school library services and the improvement of training and professional development of public and school librarians.

Amanda Ridout

Advisory Council on Libraries

Of course libraries have a huge cultural and social significance and should be 'protected'. Of course they offer services that contribute to a whole range of Government priorities and should receive the appropriate taxpayer investment.

But these reasons alone are not enough to justify the endless hand-wringing, inquiries, reviews and reports. Libraries need to engage more effectively with their consumers who will become their greatest advocates. Once consumers understand – through personal experience – what their local library either physical or digital can offer and how they themselves can benefit, can contribute and above all enjoy they – as voters – will demand a high level of service appropriate to the 21st century and will do more to persuade local government to resource properly and prioritise than any amount of ministerial hectoring. Let's not get bogged down in endless governance and structure debates – of course libraries should sit at the heart of the community, funded and run locally – let's spend time and energy (and some money) on getting the user experience right and trumpeting the extraordinary resource that libraries are from the rooftops.

So to 'the how'. Reinvention of the wheel is costly and unnecessary. We are surrounded by examples of best practice – and how to make libraries 'fit for purpose' in Manchester, Newcastle, York, Devon and many other places. Their excellence and efforts need to be actively shared in a practical way with all Local Government chiefs and should form one of the key communication strategies of the MLA. Consumers care about buildings open when the high street's open (particularly Sunday); about 24 hour digital access. They care about up-to-date stock and books and e-products they've just heard about in the media. They care about clear shelf navigation , visually exciting displays, author visits, reading groups, story times, readers picks, discovering new writers (increasingly not available on the high street)- risk and cost-free. Much good work around all this is already being done now by the Reading Agency and its partnership project with the publishers – Reading Partners – and this needs to be extended and championed.

Upgrading the universal consumer library experience is key – physical libraries need to be a nice place to spend time in with facilities that any leisure destination would have with coffee shops and loos and the best practitioners have achieved it through focus, effort and in many cases partnerships with other local services and private business.

If it means shutting some small non-viable remote libraries and replacing them with 'outreach' services such as mobile libraries and digital access this needs to be done.

And while some local councils are being shown and encouraged by their peers to improve their library services we should start a vigorous national campaign of marketing to the consumer what the library offer is: hundreds of thousands of books at your fingertips; meet authors, join a reading group, discover new writers – all for FREE. A marketers dream with – in addition- the environmental and community messages to boot and hundreds of high profile advocates waiting and willing to participate: authors, publishers, teachers. When the first 'positive' library marketing campaign was done for some time as part of the National Year of Reading in 2008 around library membership it had a huge response. This needs to be done annually and as part of this we need to adopt the consumer entitlement statement that the Love Libraries campaign drew up with the SCL (again no need to reinvent the wheel) so that users and voters know what to expect.

From this improved advocacy and consumer messaging will naturally flow the other key aspect of a 21st century library service – the recruitment of an engaged and energetic workforce who feel motivated and excited by customer service. There are declining opportunities in the publishing and book retail sector for recruitment so a real opportunity for the library sector to scoop up some highly-talented individuals.

Let's look at training/buddying with retail and publisher partners – something already being trialled under the Reading Partners banner. And not just paid employees – library 'volunteering' should be on the agenda for students, retirees, stay-at-home mums and busy professionals. Their contribution will be invaluable both in time and expertise.

So, in my view, making the library sector a vibrant 21st century consumer experience is there for the taking. In more affluent times I would be advocating a 'Renaissance' type fund to kick-start many of the improvements around fabric, opening hours, digital investment – and I think this should be kept firmly on a future government's agenda. But in the short term let's focus our resources more wisely: there are efficiencies to be made in book procurement which the publishers and the library suppliers could energetically participate in with encouragement; there are more private sector partnerships to be explored at local and national level: most consumer businesses would kill for the still very impressive footfall and visitor stats from the sector. Above all there is the messaging: about best practice and opportunity to local government and about what a wonderful destination the library is for the consumer. And that marketing leadership needs to be urgently sought from one of the existing bodies – MLA and/or The Reading Agency with one champion to drive and coordinate. No more reviews and reports – just action please!

Michael Rosen

Children's Author and Former Children's Laureate

My main concern is the relationship that libraries have with schools – but also with museums, galleries, heritage sites and National Trust properties. At the moment this is an extremely patchy landscape and I think there is a desperate need for this to be improved across the board in every locality and for it to be formalised as policy attached to receipt of public funding. The very best provision I have seen either already involves most of the following or if not, should:

Regular meetings between local librarians and teacher representatives from every local school to discuss how the provision of books into schools and getting children into libraries can be improved.

A clear, simple local authority map of local libraries to be provided to every parent upon the arrival of a child into the education system. This map (and sheet) should carry the essential, basic information that every child is entitled to 10 (in some areas, it's 12) books out at a time, and that fines are not charged to children for late returns. It should also show in an attractive, simple way just what kinds of books a child might find in a library.

By whatever scheme is possible, it should be arranged that all a child (and parent) needs to do is turn up at the library with the form issued in school, and the child will be given a library ticket. (This can be done, I gather, if the form is partly filled in with name and address of the child – which the school could do. This is particularly important for households where English is not a main language.)

It is vital that schools make space and time for librarians to come into school to do demonstrations both to children and to parents, showing them the range of books that they have. This can take the form of daytime or twilight sessions. Ideal is the face-to-face encounter at going-home time for Nursery, Reception and Year 1 and 2 classes.

The old arrangements for schools making regular visits to the local library need to be re-introduced. Great care needs to be taken to make these sessions interesting and helpful for the children. Where libraries provide homework clubs for secondary-age school students, this needs to be made clear to all students so that they all know what is available for them.

The School Library Service is in great need of repair. I understand that specific ring-fenced funding has not been provided to require that schools subscribe to these where they exist.
I suggest that this is a luxury that we cannot afford. The provision of books to match the curriculum is essential. It is only through the regular provision of a wide range of attractive new books that children from homes where there are no books will get access to the world of complex ideas that only books can provide. Both the SLS and schools access to it have to be properly funded and specifically funded in a secure ring-fenced way.

All holiday and out of school events organised by libraries should be co-ordinated and publicised through schools and school librarians. At present, this is a very patchy affair across the country as a whole, i.e. in some places it happens, in others it doesn't. This means that schools and libraries must work together so that every child and every parent knows of the events that libraries lay on in the way of reading clubs, story-telling sessions, author readings, competitions, exhibitions, performances and the Summer Reading Challenge. Every area must learn from the areas where there is the best practice in this respect. I understand that Rochdale is one such example. I have witnessed excellent work in Hackney, Basildon, Brighton and Bournemouth. It is vital that this kind of work is continuous and not sporadic.

More and more areas are running literary festivals. Sometimes libraries are involved, sometimes not. Where not, this is a great opportunity missed of getting people of all ages into libraries in order to support the interests aroused by sessions at the festivals. One of the conditions attached to public funding of literary festivals should be that formal arrangements should be made to involve the local libraries e.g. through some of the author sessions being in the libraries, (as already done in some places); that a free place (e.g. a tent) should be made for the library service, that a library stand should be placed next to the book stall; that the library service should be allowed free advertising in the festival brochure and so on.

The relationship between museums, heritage sites, National Trust sites etc and libraries needs to be improved. It's quite possible to make visits to such sites and exhibtions without being made aware of how the exhibits are supported by what's available in the local library. So, for example, it is not obvious to all who visit that not far from that particular visitor's home, there will be a free borrowable book that can support any or every aspect of what the visitor has seen. I suggest that free and specific leaflets, making this clear should be available at all sites that receive public funding. So, at a castle, there should be a free, attractive library leaflet available giving examples of the kind of book that the visitor could find in their local library on medieval life, buildings and history.

Terry Ryall

Chief Executive, 'v' - the National Young Volunteers' Service

At 'v', through our work with hundreds of thousands of young volunteers, I see everyday how young people want to learn, want to help others, want to make a difference.

I'm excited about how libraries are already engaging young people in volunteering and about how we can do more to unleash this potential even further.

Building on good foundations

Attending the recent Public Library Authorities Conference, I was fascinated to learn about all the great work that libraries are doing in partnership with others to encourage young people to volunteer.

I've worked with young people for all of my professional life and I've noticed how over recent years, all political parties, government departments and local authorities realise more than ever the vital importance of positive youth engagement. They understand the important role that volunteering can play in changing lives and improving communities.

Research shows that young people volunteer more than any other group. It shows that they do so to develop their own skills and experience, and to help their communities and the planet.

Libraries are so well placed in our communities as places where young people study, meet and congregate. Involving young people can give a library a more vibrant image, the involvement and excitement of young people providing a fresh impetus to what a library does and offers.

What we do at v

At v, The National Young Volunteers' Service, we aim to revolutionise volunteering for 16 to 25 year olds and inspire a new generation of young people to change their communities for the better. By bringing volunteering directly to young people and providing them with opportunities that excite them, we've helped create over 900,000 new volunteering opportunities.

We work with over 500 voluntary and community organisations throughout the country, providing funding and support to enable them to harness the talents of young people.

We encourage youth-led action and have a 20 strong youth advisory board called v20 who are helping us to shape the future of volunteering.

We've engaged with consumer brands, through our Match Fund projects, to deliver an extra £84 million so far into youth projects.

Our youth fund – vcashpoint, jointly backed by HSBC, puts money directly in the hands of young people to develop the initiatives they care about for community benefit.

Our nationwide network of teams and projects provide high quality access to volunteering opportunities. We have 107 teams covering every local authority area in England. They are supported by 107 Youth Action Teams whose role is to inspire their peers to volunteer.

Our fulltime programme vtalent year forms the core of our national service pilots. It offers high quality, structured volunteering placements for young people in public and voluntary services.

Working together for young people, for libraries and for our communities

The mission of libraries to promote reading and literacy forms the perfect platform on which to build a unique volunteering offer to young people.

I'm delighted that next year v will be working in partnership with the Reading Agency to assist recruitment of young volunteers for the Summer Reading Challenge. We're doing this so it can be bigger and better than ever before and reach many more children than ever before. Over the next few months we'll be creating a national campaign to promote the project with our local teams and across our online platform, vinspired.com. It's critical that volunteering opportunities for the young are presented in a compelling way that will inspire them to engage.

Reading to a child can change the lives of both the reader and the listener.

We'll work with libraries and the Reading Agency to examine how we can build on current ideas, as well as developing brand new ones. 95% of 4000 libraries took part in the Reading Challenge, reaching 750,000 children. This is highly impressive but we hope, together, we can do even better. We need to think more broadly, for example promoting the Reading Challenge in schools via our local Youth Action Teams. We need to explore the private sector, especially where libraries already have existing relationships. And, most importantly, we must engage young people more through their worlds and lifestyles, such as through the digital world and with language and images they can identify with.

One of the great joys of reading is how it fires the mind and soul... and so must our appeal to young people. Together, we can inspire young people to learn, to help others, to think, to imagine...

Andrew Smith

Chief Executive, Hampshire County Council

Our Vision:

"A creative service at the heart of Hampshire communities which prides itself on meeting their evolving needs for reading, information, learning and enjoyment."

Introduction

Hampshire is a large county with a population of 1.3 million living in a mix of large cities, market towns, coastal areas and rural communities.

Our Library Service is one of the biggest in the country with 53 libraries and Discovery Centres and 24 mobile library vehicles. Nearly 7 million people a year pass through the doors of our libraries and mobile libraries to access our services and many more access services via the web.

The Challenge

The challenge that we have taken up is to ensure that, as we move into the 21st century, we continue to offer services to meet the changing needs of our residents whilst making the most of the resources that we have available to us.

We believe that the way to do this is through collaboration:

- With local communities and community groups so that we understand and can respond to their needs

- With our colleagues in other County Council departments and other public sector organisations so that we make best use of our combined resources, knowledge and skills

- With partners with whom we have shared goals and values, whether that be by providing spaces for them to meet with local people, by signposting their services or by collaborating to ensure that opportunities are made easily available to our residents

- With our staff to ensure that we retain their commitment and develop the skills and experience to respond to the changes ahead

We must also respond to the ever changing and developing technologies both in our libraries and in the range of services that we offer.

The delivery of these services will continue to be through a mix of static libraries, mobile libraries, our School Library Service and our website. Our service must be driven by the communities we serve and the services that they need.

Our Approach

In response to this challenge we have reviewed every element of our service and set new standards for ourselves arising from local customer feedback, our commitment to excellence and the national debate about libraries.

Static libraries

The provision in our static libraries is led by the offer in our flagship Discovery Centres which offer:

- Full borrowing and reference services

- Access to e-resources and e-books

- Provision of a wide range of community/performance/visual arts activities and events

- Public IT access

- Provision of and signposting to County Council services, including the developing personalisation agenda

- Access to a range of learning opportunities

- Facilities for partner services

- Spaces for community use

- Local studies and family history materials and facilities

- Opening hours – 55+ hours a week

- Open on Sundays where appropriate

All our 50 other libraries aspire to offer a similar service, constrained only by the needs of smaller communities, the facilities available, the viability of that offer and the size and shape of the building they are in.

Where it is not possible for the Library Service to provide and staff a static library we are eager to reach agreement with communities to enable them to run and manage their own library, using self-service technology and operating within the terms of a management agreement with us.

In addition we would like to create new Library Service access points in non-traditional settings, such as sports or community centres and managed by the staff at that location. These would offer a more limited range of books that customers could issue and return themselves, using self-service technology.

Mobile library service

Where a static library or access point is not appropriate library services will be supplied by our mobile service with the following priorities:

- Isolated rural communities – where there is very limited/no public transport and the residents do not have good access to their own transport

- Priority areas of urban deprivation

- Pre-school and children's centres

- Residential and nursing homes

- Sheltered accommodation located where public transport links are poor

- Individuals who are housebound

Virtual library service

Increasing numbers of residents are accessing our library services via our website including:

- Requesting and renewing books and other materials

- Accessing information from reference on-line

- Finding out about activities, classes and events

We will continue to build and develop this remote access to our services.

The Future

We are convinced that we can continue to provide a library service that meets the needs of the residents of Hampshire. We will achieve this by working increasingly closely with, and listening to, the communities we serve, our partners and colleagues. We must ensure that our communities know about all the services that we offer and that our staff is fully trained and supported to respond to the challenges ahead.

Professor Michael Thorne

Chair of the Advisory Council on Libraries

The core purpose of libraries has always been reading, information and enlightenment. But people now no longer collect piano-duet scores from their library so as to enjoy music at home: rather they take out music CDs. They no longer collect sets of play texts: rather they take out DVDs.

Evidently public libraries have adapted to changes in the world around them. My vision maintains this core purpose but recognises that too many public libraries have been too slow to adapt to changing user needs. Local delivery of the public library service has enabled it to respond better to local needs but has got in the way of the national marketing so essential to a consumer service. Indeed it is the only statutory service without an "attached" national marketing campaign of some kind. The very best libraries are changing fast. It is therefore even more important for them to communicate these changes to their users and it follows that local marketing of their services is also essential. Hence my vision is for a public library service with markets its offering in a commercial way, is constantly seeking new users and constantly finding new offers within the core purpose, not only to bring in new users but also to assist local and national government in the delivery of services relevant to the core purpose. Some public libraries have NHS health information desks with staff from the NHS operating them and collection of materials promoting healthier lifestyles. Some public libraries help you set up your own business. Many will help you with housing and planning issues. In my vision there is no government department without a presence in public libraries.

My vision recognises that the DCSF has had a very poor engagement with the public library service given the central role of libraries in learning. In recent years there have been excellent initiatives in connection with reading. But for a government committed to the role of science and technology as a key driver for the economy, the science book stock of our public libraries is a national disgrace. State intervention is crucial in this area for, while the latest novel may well be available at Tesco's for a bargain price, science books are very expensive and increasing in price.

Much learning nowadays is online. Much information is online. We used to go to our reference library to consult ordinance survey maps. Much of what we need is online. The People's Network was a superb and cost effective initiative which did so much to democratise online learning and information, but it is now out of date. We need a new national network in our public libraries and it is obvious that this should be JANET, the academic network. Its power would mean the raft of online information services which have to be paid for (those of the highest quality and most up to date) would be made available cost effectively in public libraries.

In my vision, public library staffing would reflect that necessary for a consumer oriented service, not history. In my vision, the various public library professional bodies would focus on new ideas, new futures and proselytising these with local and national government much as the engineering professional bodies do today. They would also force through the necessary revolution in professional training to underpin this vision.

Without doubt, for a long time universities and colleges have thrived better and served local and national interests better and more cost effectively once they become stand-alone independent financial entities. Suddenly consumer orientation, marketing, the provision of new services became essential, not add-ons. The advantage of this approach has of course most recently been recognised by government for schools. It is my vision that public library services should be granted this freedom and established as public library corporation free of direct political control but rather accountable to local needs through the constitution of their boards. This freedom would allow effective managers to make savings in one area and reinvest them in another without fear of the cash saved being hived off by some over-arching body. It would also expose ineffective managers.

In my vision, the availability of a public library service is paramount. Every public library service should be open for at least two nights a week and on Saturday and Sunday, though not in every branch. The whole public library system should be capable of being accessed online with material made available for collection at a nominated public library or through the post. It should be possible to return material at any public library. It should be a requirement that self-issue and self-return stations are in every public library to free up staff for the non-mechanical aspects to service delivery. And finally all public library buildings are within a single national "brand".

Cllr Chris White

Hertfordshire County Council and Chair of the Local Government
Association Culture, Tourism and Sport Board

Information, unedited, unrationed, is the foundation of a free society. The libraries service councils provide is therefore an essential part of democracy. Where it is healthiest, the service adapts dynamically to reflect the changing society it serves. In John Henry Newman's words, "to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often": if national policy is to foster a living, thriving libraries service, it must be a policy that helps change happen.

So a review of libraries policy needs to understand the ways in which current policy might stand in the way of change and growth. To my mind, there are four barriers we should be trying to lift, and the fourth encapsulates the first three.

First, policy's enduring focus on the physical detail of the tools that deliver the service – books, buildings, and so on. This is not inevitably backward-looking, but in a world of performance management where we measure what we had last year, it is much harder to think about what we need next year.

If elected councils believe the wrong book stock is getting in the way of delivering the service their communities want, it is right for them to dispose of books and provide something that gives a better service. If elected councils believe the wrong buildings are tying the service to a substandard offer in the wrong places, then it is right to replace those buildings with something that gives a better service.

Secondly, and related, a besetting confusion about professionalism.

The people who deliver the service need to be consummate professionals, with clear values, focussed on providing the information service citizens want to high standards. That professionalism may or may not be reflected in specific qualifications; but in my view it is a professionalism that is not directly related to the technical skills required to manage the service's assets.

Libraries need people who know how to care for and access book stocks, just as they need people who can manage budgets. But those skills are only the servant of the library service's larger purpose in informing and empowering citizens. The possessors of those skills should not have a privileged voice in informing policy, especially where they plead for producer interests under a threadbare ethical covering.

Thirdly, the library service is weakened by being seen as islands of specialism. The gateway to information it provides is most empowering when it improves citizens' access to all public services – and not just public services – and helps people learn more about the opportunities they have to shape the way they are governed. For this to happen, the library service needs to make lively linkages with other services from adult learning to health, from the police to the Jobcentre. National policy that encourages the library service to look up a narrow pipeline of accountability to the centre, be it a quango, an inspection, or a government Minister, diminishes the library service and reduces the good it can do for the people who use it.

I hope it is obvious by now what I believe the fourth, overarching and most problematic element to be. The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 is a barnacle-encrusted sheet-anchor dragging the national debate on libraries back into the ooze of the Wilson era. It describes a service whose principal function is "the borrowing of books", not the provision of empowering information.

What is a twenty-first century government doing holding statutory inquiries into how to provide modern services, when the statute itself prescribes the provision of "films and gramophone records" as its vision of modernity?Moreover, the Act gives the Secretary of State a "superintending" role that, as we have recently seen demonstrated, prudent Ministers hesitate to exercise, but that distorts accountability upwards to Whitehall and the quangocracy rather than outwards to the communities the service is working for. It entrenches the role of policy advice from those who "have experience of ...administration", and ignores both political leadership and the voices of users.

It is time for a new Libraries Act: one that puts local accountability to the citizen and service user first, recognises that the library service is valuable for its outcomes, not its inputs, and awards national government its true role as strategic leader, not superintendent. That would be the best conclusion for a libraries modernisation review that aims to encourage the service to evolve in line with a changing democratic society that still desperately needs what the libraries service has to offer.

Fiona Williams

President, Society of Chief Librarians

The core purpose of public libraries, providing knowledge and information, has not changed. However, the way public libraries deliver this purpose has always and will always change as they shift to accommodate the ways people want to access information and knowledge.

Members of the Society of Chief Librarians consistently deliver these changes on behalf of local people. SCL would propose that public libraries are already making themselves fit for the 21st century. They are making themselves fit for the communities within which they work by being relevant to today's needs. That means access to jobs and careers advice, tackling literacy through reader development, improving health through information and bibliotherapy, supporting digital literacy and serving as an access point for all national government and local council services.

However, improvement is needed, and SCL feels that the following areas should be focused on in order to create a better service.

Recognition of Public Libraries' Contribution

Public Libraries contribute to many agendas across Government. We would want to see these contributions recognised and built on. Partnerships in health, education, business and the economy, basic skills, literacy, elderly care, social inclusion and others are helping improve people's lives every day, but sadly go unnoticed in the debate on public libraries. SCL gathers and publishes case studies that illustrate these partnerships but more support is needed to ensure these best practices reach a wider audience and are replicated.

Delivery Models

There are different delivery models for public services which need to be investigated so they might be better understood and described so authorities can make informed choices. SCL facilitates peer support to make access to good practice easy so authorities can learn how to improve.

There are many examples of good practice, radical thinking and leadership in public libraries across the country. These need to be communicated and understood so they can be replicated.

Libraries should be actively working with the private sector to learn new and better ways to innovate. They should make effort to understand how modern corporate responsibility works and how they can work within it. Marks and Spencer, Tesco, Starbucks, Borders: they all have innovated through the recession and there are lessons for libraries to learn from them on rebuilding links between customers and library services.

Digital Opportunities

In an age where public libraries are testing e-books for public use, bridging the digital divide and, increasingly, commanding a large number of followers on social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, isn't it time there was a clear lead on digitising the nation's content? Public libraries play a major role in the delivery of digital literacy, this role needs to better understood by government and supported through the Digital Britain agenda.

Shared Services

Many regions, including the North East, North West and Yorkshire, and the South East are sharing services and seeing significant savings. SCL would like more attention focused on the best practices in this area that are working, with support and incentives being identified for further work.

Measuring Success

Today, there are many ways in which people use public libraries. SCL would like these ways better understood and measured. The traditional means of measuring public library use are out of date and yet are repeated in the media as if they tell the whole story. We need ways to capture the impact of using library services and we need ways of measuring the rising numbers of people accessing their library service online.

Leadership and Governance

Libraries should remain a part of local authorities to ensure they can deliver meaningful local services. But they also need strong central government leadership that makes strong recommendations on all of the above points. This leadership should be a combination of library drivers—ie, made up of people who are running the service day to day—and professional communications, advocacy, development and education specialists. A Libraries Development Agency would be welcomed in the sector. The statutory duty underlines the importance of the work by public libraries and should remain – if a little better defined.

Conclusion

In the face of cuts, some up to 20%, in local library services, now more than ever, public libraries need strong leadership. The positive ways that public libraries help people change and improve their lives every day also need to be recognised and promoted. The Society of Chief Librarians, through its website www.goscl.com and its network, gathers and actively promotes these success stories, but a national movement is needed. There is no need to reinvent the public library service to make it fit for the 21st century. It already is. What we need now is leadership and strategic thinking.

Darcy Willson-Rymer

Managing Director, Starbucks UK & Ireland

How much time do you spend buying your coffee at Starbucks in the morning? Maybe it's just a few impatient minutes, before you jump back into the car or catch the train to work. But if you spent a whole day there – like our baristas do, you would notice something different. There's a group of customers who stay a lot longer, concentrating hard with hefty chemistry textbooks open in front of them. Others are ploughing their way through Dickens or Austen. Sometimes they're alone and sometimes in groups of two and three.

Starbucks has become a cosy, welcoming place to study for students across the country. During the day business men and women sit alongside them for impromptu meetings and in the evenings, book groups gather. Despite the age of the internet and laptop, people still want a place to meet or to feel a sense of connection with the wider world as they read, study or chat.

In the UK a lot of kids are leaving libraries and heading to coffee shops. In the US, many libraries at universities have noticed the trend and have put Starbucks coffee shops into the library. One of 30 colleges that have a Starbucks is the University of South Florida in Tampa. The number of students using the library there rose by a staggering 145,000 a year following the opening of Starbucks and the library is once again the hub of campus life. Closer to home, here in the UK, Starbucks has been working with, among others, the local authority for the London Borough of Hillingdon to provide quality coffee for members of a number of libraries in the district.

Making the library the hub of community life in the UK may be the best bet for its survival – at a time when the library is no longer the only place where knowledge can be found. That's the role that coffee houses have fulfilled in the UK since the first ones opened in the late 17th century. By the 18th century, it was natural for wits to gather to hear John Dryden at Will's Coffee House in Covent Garden or for others to debate politics or conduct business in the 500 plus coffee shops in London.

Can libraries learn anything from the coffee shop experience and can they continue to thrive? I hope so because as a parent I know how important it is for children and students to have a place where they can study and be safe away from the distractions of siblings and their peers. I know how useful I found it when I was studying all those years ago. Everyone needs a place to go. It's something we call the "third place". It's neither home nor work, but a comfortable spot where you are welcome to stay as long as you like. Libraries need to be a "third place" of choice rather than a last resort for increasingly isolated or marginalised groups.

The good news is that there's a real hunger for communities to have a place to meet in large or small groups where they can be comfortable and feel at home. So perhaps libraries can have quiet rooms and spaces for concentration, but space too for discussion and the exchange of ideas where silence is not a prerequisite.

Like a coffee shop, no appointment is needed and no-one will turn and stare as you come through the door. Join in however you want, in whatever size group or if you're alone.

Of course they might need some good coffee to keep the conversations flowing.

That search for a community hub is a growing trend and it's no coincidence that our new store designs focus heavily on creating meeting places with long tables and sofas drawn up alongside coffee tables. Additionally, over 580 Starbucks coffeehouses throughout the UK offer free Wi-Fi through our rewards programme. Could libraries follow suit? I think they can.

We know too that the future success of libraries is vital in promoting literacy in the UK. That's why we joined the National Literacy Trust, over seven years ago, in a partnership to create exciting events for children to hear stories and to receive free books. We recently held an event in Dundee, but we didn't hold it in a Starbucks, we held it in the Central Library with 250 children from five primary schools. We call our employees "partners" and dozens of them have volunteered to read stories and listen to children read.

It would be a tragedy if libraries declined and faded from our lives. They offer equal access to knowledge and give kids and adults a chance to learn and to share ideas. However, as the world changes, they have to change too and Starbucks wishes them well as they face the challenge ahead.

Consultation Questions

ROLE FOR LIBRARIES:

The Government believes that the public library service is vital to a democratic society, which offers equality of opportunity and intellectual freedom. Each local authority has a duty to provide a user responsive library service and the variety of demand across the country is currently met with a mixture of complementary services in different areas:

- **Providing books, learning, information and entertainment to customers:** All libraries provide a range of books and written material, often in a variety of formats, eg hard copy, audio, online and e-books. Most libraries also offer Music and Film material and provide computers with free internet access.

- **The library at the centre of the Community:** in many areas libraries are centres of the community, facilitating community meetings such as social groups or book clubs. Often, libraries work in partnership with other public services, providing signposts to customers or integrating health, learning, skills or education provisions.

- **The library as an education resource and proactive provider of information and learning** – In many areas libraries have a strong role in guiding customers through a morass of information, providing opportunities for education by linking to digital inclusion initiatives, improving literacy, offering reading events and providing learning opportunities within the library.

However, new challenges require new responses by libraries and give us an opportunity to consider afresh the role of public libraries.

Q1

Does every library authority have to share a common purpose? Are these purposes complementary and relevant? Are some more important than others? Are there other purposes we should consider?

NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEADERSHIP

Library services are delivered by local authorities who have a large amount of flexibility around which services are delivered to the community and the allocation of funding from LA budgets. Central Government has a leadership role (the Secretary of State for Culture has a duty of oversight under the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964) and provides funding to Local Authorities (this money is distributed by the Department for Communities & Local Government). National programmes rolled out to all libraries, such as the introduction of the People's Network, are initiated by central government.

Q2

Do you think the current roles as defined for central and local government are still appropriate? Is the 1964 legislative framework still appropriate or does it need review? If so what changes would you like to see? Is there any value in central government having a more direct role in setting the vision and objectives for the library service or is the service better managed entirely at local level.

Q3

Could (a) central government departments, and (b) local authorities better use the public library service to communicate initiatives and contribute to other public services? Do you have any ideas on how this might work?

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES, GOVERNANCE AND FUNDING

Funding for libraries is provided by the Department for Communities and Local Government and policy responsibility for public libraries rests with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. However, many other departments have an interest in ensuring that libraries continue to contribute to a number of national and local government priorities – health, literacy & learning, business support and entrepreneurship, job hunting and employability, community cohesion, citizenship and digital inclusion.

Two DCMS public bodies – the Museums, Libraries & Archives Council or MLA (a strategic Non Departmental Public Body promoting best practice) and the Advisory Council on Libraries (providing strategic advice to the Secretary of State on public libraries) – support central government policy making. In addition, third sector organisations like The Reading Agency and BookTrust work with central government and libraries to deliver programmes supporting literacy and learning.

During the early stages of this review we spoke to the library authorities that are testing new and emerging governance models such as Trust structures and procurement to private companies, and those that are opening up new revenue streams, fund raising opportunities or radical efficiency measures. Case studies on these authorities are included in the final section of this document.

Q4

A recent report by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Libraries, Literacy and Information Management concluded that central Government structures complicate the delivery of library funding and policy. The Report also called into question the suitability of the MLA and ACL and recommended a Library Development Agency.

- Are there benefits in changing the structures in government?
- Are there benefits in changing the structures or roles of the public bodies?
- Is there a value in a greater central function around particular issues? Eg Marketing and publicity, digital services?
- Do you see any benefit in establishing new national/local structures as set out in Margaret Hodge's essay?

Q5

In 2007 the Department for Communities and Local Government published Developing the Local Government Services Market: New ways of working and new models of provision within the public library service but only a handful of local authorities currently deliver libraries through a trust or private company. The case studies show that alternative delivery models can be effective so how might we best encourage Local Authorities to explore the opportunities they offer? What other governance models might be suitable for library services or are there barriers to introducing these models? For instance:

- What could libraries learn from other sectors including the private sector?
- Would other models of delivery and funding – eg the academy model for schools, social enterprise models or Foundation Trusts for hospitals – be appropriate for library services?

Q6

How can we prioritise investment in libraries, especially at a time of financial constraints? You may like to consider:

- How we might ensure that all libraries are able to develop successful funding models which are based on a diversity of funding streams.
- How could we help open new and more revenue streams for libraries,
- What could libraries learn from other sectors?
- How do we effectively spread best practice?
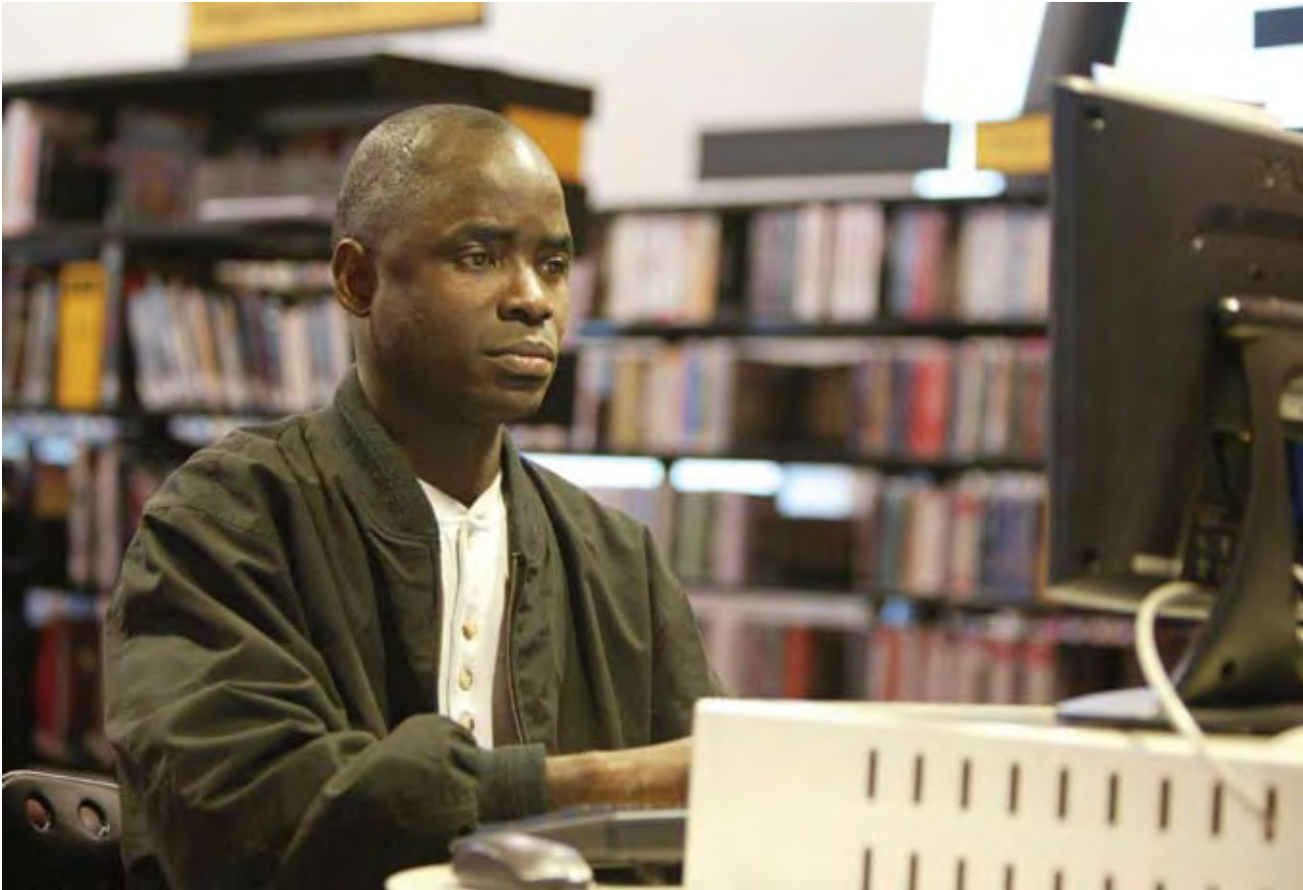
DIGITAL

For libraries to remain useful and usable they must be responsive to changing circumstances. The internet revolutionalises the opportunities for how libraries make their content available to the public and there is now a growing demand for 24/7 access to libraries with people wanting to access what they want, when and where they want it. The popularity of the download shows how libraries will have to adapt and the arrival of e-book readers will no doubt stimulate a market for books in new formats which libraries will have to embrace. The case study on Essex library service shows that this is already happening, that in a digital age libraries can capitalise on the opportunities available.

Q7

Digital Services: What is the future of library services in a digital environment? What changes do you envisage as a result of changes in technology over the next 5-10 years? You might like to consider –

• How can we use the digital revolution to extend access to library resources?

• Should virtual lending (ie lending downloads to the home via the internet) be the future of the public library service either generally or in some areas? What challenges would virtual lending present?

• What digital content should libraries provide? For example should all libraries make subscription online services available to users? Should this be a free service?

• Web 2.0 enables people and communities to contribute web content? Do you think that there is a role for libraries in Web 2.0? If so, what?

• Is there other content or technology which you think should be guaranteed to users?

• How can libraries support the Digital Inclusion agenda? What are some of the potential obstacles to greater digital engagement within libraries, and how might these be overcome?

• What other opportunities does new technology present for libraries? Do you have ideas for innovative ways in which new technology could be applied in local libraries?

Q8

Digital technology is already helping with the back office and administrative functions of many libraries

- How can we spread best practice and maximise those opportunities?
- Self service and return technology is intended to free up library staff to deal with more complex customer enquiries. Should this technology be available in all libraries?

Q9

Do Local Authority IT strategies support or impede libraries' digital innovation? Should libraries have a national web presence? Would a national online catalogue covering all public libraries be beneficial?

WHAT SERVICES SHOULD BE AVAILABLE TO USERS?

The Government believes that the public library service should continue to be a local service which is shaped by the characteristics of its community.

We know that the services libraries offer vary across the country from opening hours to e-books to other community services. We know that there is a striking variation in the use of libraries across authorities. This must be linked to the services on offer and the responsiveness to customer demand. If we want the library service to flourish in the future we need to reverse the established downward trend in usage and ensure that libraries are relevant, popular and used by local communities. So we need to think about what libraries offer to their communities and what is effective in growing the demand by customers for libraries.

Contributors to the library review discussed whether a clear national 'offer to consumers' of the library in the 21st century needs to be articulated or whether the service content should be entirely locally led. A national offer would have the benefit of enabling coherent national marketing.

Q10

Are there any services which you consider should be prescribed across all library services or should services be entirely determined at local level? Is there any value in having a clear national 'offer to consumers of the library in the 21st century'. If so which elements would be vital components? Besides hard copy books do you think there are other services which should be free at the point of delivery on a national basis?

Q11

How can we widen usage and make libraries more accessible to the public? For instance:

- On what basis should library leaders make decisions about opening hours and location?
- Should library joining and membership arrangements be simplified across all libraries? Indeed should library membership be national so that citizens can use any library and borrow and return material anywhere.
- Do you think there are particular services which would encourage more library use? You might wish to consider a universal home delivery service (in addition to the scheme for housebound people), and enabling people to request a book online.
- Only a third of 16-24 year olds now visit public libraries. How can we ensure that young people who leave full time education remain library users?
- How can we improve our understanding of the people who use libraries – and of the people who do not – in order to improve services to them?
- How might library users have a greater voice in decision making

Q12

Do we do enough to market library services? If not, what more could/should be done to promote or explain the benefits of libraries?

COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES & PARTNERSHIPS

Research shows that over 80% of library services already operate a procurement partnership; over 60% are co-located with another service and over 30% have developed shared services. While there are excellent examples across the country of partnership working – as illustrated by our case studies – sometimes library services remain risk averse and unwilling to drive change.

Q13

Commercial partnerships through libraries are not common. How might we bring more private funding into the public library service?

- What commercial activities should we encourage libraries to operate? (Examples of commercial activities or partnerships might be book selling or partnerships with bookshops, provision of coffee shops, rental of certain materials, contracts with local business, national partnerships with private companies?)
- What benefits do you think these might bring to the library service?
- Are there any commercial activities which you think are not appropriate for libraries to undertake?

Q14

Where can libraries learn from the commercial sector and what private partnerships can you think of which have been useful for library services?

• How can we better spread good practice here?

LOCATION AND BUILDINGS

In 2006 estimates prepared for MLA identified a need for £760m to make the library estate fit for purpose and Disability Discrimination Act compliant. But how many buildings and in which locations are needed to deliver a modern public library service?

Q15

What are the circumstances in which a Local Authority would be justified in closing a library?

Q16

Co-location of libraries with other public services, schools and colleges or business is becoming increasingly prevalent. When is co-location successful and what factors should LAs consider in making co-location decisions?

Q17

There is a mixed economy of library buildings including large central libraries, smaller local libraries and mobile libraries. What should library leaders consider in making decisions about the make-up of their library service? For instance:

• What kind of customer information should library leaders have in deciding where to locate libraries?
• How should Library leaders make decisions about library buildings' accessibility and fitness for purpose?
• How should the library service be provided in small rural communities?
• Are there benefits from unstaffed mini-libraries, library machines and self service check out of books?
• How important is it that libraries should be housed in dedicated buildings?

TRAINING, LEADERSHIP AND SERVICES FOR STAFF

Library services need a flexible and user responsive workforce to offer the level of customer experience that the public expects, but while we have discovered excellent best practice while preparing this paper, we know that many services remain unable to meet this challenge.

Traditional information skills – such as good understanding of information resources – remain important to the delivery of library services, but other skills are becoming increasingly critical for their future success.

Q18

How could we encourage a greater skill mix beyond traditional librarianship in the library service?

• Do you think library courses have the relevant content and teach the right skills to equip the library workforce?
• How can we ensure that the library service attracts and nurtures leaders with the ability to drive improvement, engage in partnerships and innovate services?
• What other skills and/ or qualifications are required to staff a modern library?

Q19

Do you think that volunteering is a useful component of the library workforce? How can we ensure that volunteering arrangements are used to best effect?

HOW SHOULD WE MONITOR LIBRARY PERFORMANCE AND WHAT SHOULD WE ASPIRE TO?

Local Authorities have a statutory responsibility to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service under the 1964 Act and the Secretary of State has a power to intervene if a Local Authority is in breach of that responsibility but 'comprehensive & efficient' is not defined in statute or guidance. Contributors to the initial stages of this review questioned whether introducing such a definition would discourage excellence by incentivising library services to work to the definition and provide the 'minimum required.'

Q20

Is it important that libraries remain a statutory obligation for local authorities?

- What might be the advantages and disadvantages?
- For instance, would the removal of statute allow greater flexibility for fundraising or different modes of operation currently off limits?

Q21

Is the obligation to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service the correct one?

- Does it need further definition or guidance around what that means or should the interpretation be left to local authorities?
- For instance, should there be more prescription around opening hours, web presence, service provision, staff skill mix?

Q22

How should we measure performance? You might like to consider:

- Is there a need for less, more or different local or national monitoring?
- Are visits and books borrowed still relevant?
- What else should we consider and measure when determining the efficiency and effectiveness of our libraries?
- Would an accreditation scheme for libraries be beneficial or are there other systems which might incentivise libraries to deliver more effectively?
- Is the Secretary of State's power to intervene still appropriate?

Q23

What research do we need to do to best demonstrate the benefits of the library service to local and national leaders? Who would be best placed to initiate this research?

Case Studies

East Riding of Yorkshire

When a prize winning new mobile library brought modern library services to residents in predominantly rural communities in the East Riding user satisfaction improved significantly.

To meet the needs of residents in both agricultural communities and commuter areas, evening and Saturday visits were introduced and the new service brought free computer and internet access as well as a selection of high quality book stock. By providing a broad range of services within the one vehicle, rural communities now have the equivalent of a one-stop-shop on their doorstep.

As Libby Herbert, Libraries Manager, said, "Community value has been created. Alongside a substantial improvement in library provision village schools gained access to broadband services and networking, some village halls have created local IT suites utilising the broadband link at no cost to the community, Police Community Support Officers are using the Travelling Library as a base for village visits and other agencies use them for one-off contact and advice sessions. School visits to introduce the library service in rural areas are based on the travelling libraries."

Essex

A service that began as a pilot project funded by the Laser Foundation and managed jointly with Co-East and Loughborough University is proving that there is a market for e-books in UK public libraries.

In Essex libraries, US suppliers Overdrive and ebrary provide content that can be read on multi-purpose, generic devices such as a home computer or laptop, and are proving popular with users – 2,500 people regularly use the Overdrive service, with another 50-100 people signing up each month. The services enable the authority to have a far greater selection of titles, as well as providing remote access, and are now considered a permanent feature of the library offer.

Essex now also offer e-audio through Overdrive, whose material is also compatible with iPods and iPhones. This is attracting a new range of users, many of whom go on to use e-books as well. As demand grows, additional suitable content from further suppliers – Bloomsbury and W F Howes has been added.

Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL)

Greenwich Council's Leisure Department, facing significant budget reductions in 1993, took a risk and allowed the staff to form Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL), a 'non profit distributing' social enterprise that is now the UK's largest leisure trust managing 18 public sector partnerships (70 leisure centres), employing 3,500 staff and generating £75m in revenues.

The social enterprise model gives local authorities an alternative to either lethargic in house management or wholly commercial private externalisation. GLL's entrepreneurial nature borrows much from the private sector mentality of sales, income generation, pricing, marketing and raising capital but uses its surpluses to support its social and community objectives. The model increases investment, increases usage and satisfaction and at a lower cost to local authorities and, in addition, a dedicated community development team ensures local health, regeneration, social inclusion; employment and education issues are delivered in the local areas.

London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham

The new £2 million Shepherds Bush Library and Workzone was built and fitted out at zero cost to the taxpayer thanks to an innovative partnership between the Council and Westfield Ltd which was designed to deliver key community gains from the Section 106 planning agreement for the new Westfield Shopping Centre.

The new library is proving popular with local residents with an astonishing 700% increase in membership compared with the previous year, a 50% increase in visits to the site compared to the old library and a 45% increase in book loans and has also led to increased book issues and more active customers in libraries across the authority.

The Workzone area of the library is an innovative partnership with Ealing Hammersmith & West London College, Job Centre Plus and Hammersmith & Fulham Council to provide a dedicated recruitment and retention service for retailers on the Westfield site and for other employers helping them to fill their jobs locally. Individuals benefit from all the services offered by all the agencies involved, from financial help with childcare costs to help with job interview techniques.

London Borough of Hounslow

LBH remains the only local authority to outsource the management of its library and cultural services to a private sector company, John Laing Integrated Services (JLIS).

JLIS has a self monitoring process which is also available via the web to the Borough and is designed to ensure that real improvements are delivered and can be evidenced. Library attendance has increased by 7% in the last 12 months.

Over the last eighteen months, to deliver improved local services and increased community participation and engagement, JLIS have introduced

• new HR expertise and management

• new IT infrastructure

• new performance management systems

• new financial management systems

A Community Service Development Team will work across the whole portfolio (libraries, parks, arts and heritage), maximising staff resources, increasing capacity, reducing silos and generating more events and outreach services.

An agreed library improvement programme will improve the fabric of the boroughs libraries, address layout, decor, accessibility, and usage and make further improvements to IT. Co-location of services and facilities is central to plans and work has started on the development of two new community hubs, bringing leisure centres and libraries together and expanding the services they provide to include community space, crèches, café facilities, new IT and security systems.

Luton

In 2007, Luton Borough Council agreed to transfer their museums, libraries and arts activities to a charitable trust and company limited by guarantee in order to enhance the services and protect them from local authority cuts.

Currently 73% of the trust's funding comes from the Council, but the ability to be more flexible and entrepreneurial will enable the trust to develop a new business model over the next 10 years, reducing its dependency on council funding.

The Trust is represented on Luton's Health and Wellbeing Management Group, Children's Trust and Safer and Stronger Communities Board, and so contributes to wider outcomes.

Cllr Hazel Simmons, Leader of the Council commented on the Trust, " A charity running the services on a not-for-profit basis has meant resources not available to the Council have been accessed and speedier decisions made, meaning the focus has been on providing first class services to customers."

Manchester

Manchester Library and Information Service (MLIS) is in year 5 of a major service improvement journey designed to enhance services and improve efficiency. Satisfaction with the service has already improved by 5%.

The programme has focussed on:

- Improving key indicators and delivering better value for money

- Refurbishing and replacing buildings

- New training for staff

- Partnership working across the public sector and with developing partnerships with FE and HE, health, and the voluntary sector

- Extending opening hours in 9 libraries within existing resources and opening six libraries on Sundays

In order to deliver a 21st Century library service, MLIS has demonstrated that its work contributes to overall Council priorities, the LAA and other national indicators. The service has, therefore, received additional resources, 600 public facing PCs, the introduction of RFID technology, and the development of on-line services including an upgrade of the Library Management System.

Newcastle

Newcastle's new library building which, was mostly funded by a PFI consortium, is a significant part of wider regeneration projects taking place across the city.

The design of the library offers a high-profile entrance and bold signage to make the building visible from all aspects; providing light and transparency through large glass facades and; creating an attractive, high quality open-plan building. The furniture and furnishings create a welcoming environment.

The library has extended opening hours and is 100% self-service – with nine download stations or consoles which have facilities to sample CDs and DVDs and download music and which offer access to the online catalogue – leaving staff available to walk the library floor assisting users. A vending machine enables people to borrow a range of books and DVDs when the building is closed.

Between 7 June and 31 October there were 528,000 visits to the library and 263,000 loans of books, CDs and DVDs. Councillor Pauline Allen, Executive Member for Culture, Leisure and Customer Services, Newcastle City Council said, "We value our library service, even in difficult times, perhaps even more so in difficult times because this is when people really need help, advice and in my view, a good book".

The modernisation review of public libraries

Norwich

The Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library is the busiest library in the country. Visitors have remained at over 1.5m, and issues at over 1.1m since 2005/06. Some of this has to do with the library being in the centre of Norwich, in a landmark building, but largely its success is due to Norfolk Library and Information Service's approach to marketing.

The Service focuses specifically on the questions: who is using and not using the library, what do they want, and what does the library do to support their needs? Community profiling, consultation and data analysis help answer those questions. Increasingly the service is using marketing tools such as Mosaic to find out more about its customers.

As Jennifer Holland, Head of Norfolk Library and Information Service at Norfolk County Council explained, "We try to ensure that messages about the library service are directed at particular audiences with information about what will be relevant to them. Our activity programme, and the way we deliver our service is targeted at specific market segments while also ensuring we are linking in to council and county-wide priorities. An example of this is our approach to reading groups – the Millennium Library supports a large number of reading groups but puts extra effort into those for groups identified in the community profile as our target audiences – such as parents with small children, people reading books in translation, children and young people, people with sight disability, people with mental health problems. "

Young people were involved in the design and stocking of the children's library at the Millennium Library. They continue to help with stock selection and lead many of their own activities; disabled groups advise on adjustments to make services more accessible and local gay and lesbian community representatives advise on the selection and display of stock. The library is regularly mystery-shopped by people from target groups and as a result services are continuously improved.

Wigan

In the six years since it was established the Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust has demonstrated considerable improvements and major investment in Wigan Council's libraries, archives, museums and leisure centres. Business rate savings of half a million pounds a year have enabled investment to flow back into services.

As a result of investment of £1.5 million over the last five years and a re-energised service, residents enjoy a more efficient and effective library service with extended opening hours, new stock and better partnership projects with schools, health and children's centres.

Peter Gascoigne, Executive Director of Wigan Libraries, Heritage and Arts, said: "It's very easy to think that all your problems will be solved by setting up a Trust, but a whole range of other factors have to be in place. Much depends upon the size of the organisation and what savings can be released from the business rate. In Wigan's case, there were minimal savings from libraries; however, libraries have been able to benefit from the exemption of the business rate on our leisure centres, which are also part of Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust's mandate."

Worcester Library and History Centre

The development of a new joint university and public library and history centre in Worcester, funded by PFI and partnership funding, will raise the aspirations of the community across the county – encouraging the retention of skills and knowledge in the region and providing an integrated site to fulfil a wide variety of information, interest and learning needs.

The project, which will be completed in 2012, involves the development of one building which will house integrated collections from both the public and university libraries. Spaces will be accessible to all and audio visual technology will ensure that physical barriers are removed.

The partnership approach was able to leverage funding not available to a single organisation. In addition to HEFC funding, Advantage West Midlands granted funding because of the regenerative impact of the scheme which is considered an exceptional example of an holistic approach to service integration, urban regeneration and enhanced service delivery.

Extensive community consultation has been important to the new centre's development. A dedicated area for young people (which they have helped to design) is located adjacent to one of the social study areas that will be used by students of all ages. This is intended to inspire the young library users and make them realise that higher education is accessible to anyone.

As Kathy Kirk, Head of Culture & Community Services, said, "The parent who comes with a child to look for a picture book. The home owner seeking planning advice. The student researching 17th century conflict. A carer seeking advice on claiming a benefit. This could be one and the same person. This new service will provide ease of access to all the community's knowledge, and information requirements and we hope that it will excite and inspire them to aspire for more as a result of their visit."

Model of Impact

Appendix A

PUBLIC LIBRARY ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

- Free book loans
- Journals and newspapers
- Reference collections
- Access to ICT & Internet
- Information, advice & guidance
- Dedicated expert staff
- Council information and guidance
- Reading groups
- Study support
- Formal & informal learning, including basic skills
- Job-hunting support
- Outreach
- Public space
- Activities & events
- Third sector information
- Community information
- Health & well-being information, signposting and support
- Personalised service
- Access to partner and shared services
- MP and council surgeries
- Volunteering

IMMEDIATE PERSONAL BENEFITS

EMPOWERED

INFORMED

ENRICHED

SAVING MONEY

ENJOYMENT

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES

SOCIAL CAPITAL
- Involvement in democratic process, service design, participation & volunteering
- Supporting the development of social networks and relationships
- Capacity building the third sector
- Awareness of rights, benefits & external services

NON-COGNITIVE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT
- Personal, social and emotional skills

WELL-BEING & HEALTH
- Increased health information
- Enable better choices about health
- Self management abilities
- Reduced boredom & social isolation
- Improved mental and physical well being
- Access to online transactions such as appointments booking

COGNITIVE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT
- Speech, language & communication
- Literacy & language development
- Other adult basic skills (e.g. ICT, numeracy, health literacy)
- Business support & career management skills

Empower, Inform, Enrich

LONG TERM OUTCOMES

• Stronger communities
• Increasing 'pro social' behaviour and reducing anti-social behaviour
• Enhanced local democracy & legitimacy
• Reduced prejudice and hate crimes
• Reduced crime & fear of crime

• Improved employability
• Improved ability to maintain stable relationships

• Increased life expectancy
• Better quality of life
• Better health & well-being
• Increased self management and independence
• Reduced costs of health & social care

• Social mobility
• Higher earnings
• Improved employability
• Better physical & mental health
• Reduced offending

NATIONAL INDICATORS (SUMMARISED SELECTION)

NI 1 % of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together

NI 2 % of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood

NI 3 Civic participation in the local area

NI 4 % of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality

NI 5 Satisfaction with local area

NI 6 Participation in regular volunteering

NI 7 Environment for a thriving third sector

NI 9 Use of public libraries

NI 11 Engagement in the arts

NI 13 Migrants English language skills & knowledge

NI 15 & 16 Violent & acquisitive crime rates

NI 17 Perceptions of anti-social behaviour

NI 19 Young offenders – reduced rate of reoffending

NI 23 Perceptions of respect and dignity

NI 45 Young offenders engaged in education, employment, training

NI 50 Emotional health of children

NI 72 – NI 117 Children and young people – Enjoy and Achieve & Positive Contribution

NI 119 People's overall health and well-being

NI 120 Mortality rate

NI124 People with a long-term condition supported

NI 138 Satisfaction of people over 65 with both home and neighbourhood

NI 139 People over 65 receiving information, assistance and support to live independently

NI 140 Fair treatment by local services

NI 141 & 142 Vulnerable people achieving & maintaining independent living

NI 144 Offenders in employment at end of order/ licence

NI 146 Adults with learning disabilities in employment

NI 148 Care leavers in employment, education or training

NI 150 Adults in contact with secondary mental health services in employment

NI 161 Learners achieving a Level 1 qualification in literacy

NI 162 – NI165 Contribution to outcomes

NI 179 Value for money

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