

## **The Modernisation Review of Public Libraries – a Policy Statement**

On 1 December 2009 DCMS launched a consultation seeking the views of a wide range of people on the future of public libraries. The 154 responses we received have now been analysed.

Produced March 2010. The Public Library Modernisation Review Policy Statement provides a blueprint for England's public library service, to help ensure it is fit for purpose in the 21st century. It aims to help libraries adapt to the internet revolution, grasp the opportunities of digital technology, and to respond to the decline in use of existing services, the current economic climate and the public's expectation of more customer-focused public services.

### **Empower, Inform, Enrich - The modernisation review of public libraries: A consultation**

This consultation has now ended. The consultation period was 1 December 2009 - 26 January 2010.

On 1 December 2009 Margaret Hodge launched a two month consultation seeking the views of a wide range of people on the future of public libraries.

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

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?

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

**Below is OCC's response.**

**Empower, inform enrich**

**Consultation responses from Oxfordshire Libraries**

**Role for Libraries**

Question 1

Public libraries do and should continue to share a common purpose. This purpose was relatively well

described in Framework for the Future and the recent APPG report and it remains relevant. The means by which library services are procured and delivered do not change their fundamental purpose; that is to support reading, learning, education, communication and knowledge through the provision of access to books, information and other media by whatever means are appropriate. This is the core purpose for libraries. Others such as *libraries at the centre of communities* or *digital inclusion* are important but they are products and outcomes of the core purpose for libraries.

Public libraries often suffer by attempting to be too many things to too many people; a statement of common purpose set out clearly and succinctly would be useful, although the way in which this purpose is manifested locally may vary.

Public libraries should also share a common vision. Providing equality of opportunity and promoting social justice should underpin the statutory provision of books, media and information which is free at the point of access. Digital inclusion and helping the disadvantaged flows from this.

If there is to be clarity about a common purpose, then there should also be clarity about the role of public libraries' traditional specialisms, eg. explicit support for continuing libraries' work with children, with the housebound, in local and family history, etc. Without such clarity, acknowledged by central and local government, such services may suffer from variable responses in different authorities.

### **National and local leadership**

#### Question 2

The current roles for central and local government are broadly appropriate. The legislative framework also remains broadly appropriate although "comprehensive and efficient" needs a clearer definition. The public library standards were a good development to this end and although not perfect, their demise has weakened the national framework within which authorities operate. Consideration should be given to defining "comprehensive and efficient". Revised legislation (possibly through the use of Statutory Instruments, rather than a new act, could help define a national vision and some common benchmarks.

Central government should have a role in articulating and communicating the common purpose for public libraries and in enabling the development of national offers in support of this purpose but local authorities should manage the development of local vision and objectives, ensuring relevance for local people. Central government leadership is needed. The People's Network demonstrated what can be achieved by a nationally-directed programme, delivered locally.

#### Question 3

There appears to be a staggering lack of knowledge about public library services across central government departments and as a consequence the potential of public libraries to support a raft of initiatives is frequently overlooked. There is no doubt that better communication of information between DCMS, DCSF and Health in particular would be beneficial.

There is certainly evidence and information about the extent to which public libraries can and do contribute to other public service initiatives and objectives. A useful product of this review would be a clear articulation of the potential of public libraries to contribute to a raft of government agendas and a commitment to ensure the role of public libraries is referenced and communicated in relevant policy documents produced by central government departments.

The same difficulties may also be found locally and have been exacerbated in recent years by the change to Cabinet governance arrangements which have, in many authorities, reduced the time spent between officers and members, generally to the detriment of smaller services such as libraries. Good library authorities with clear objectives, making positive contributions to other services generally

benefit from clear political and professional leadership. A single national body dealing with library matters, as suggested in the paper, could improve communications and be a focus for a fruitful dialogue between central and local government.

Libraries could certainly be used to better communicate government initiatives but often this role is reduced to providing printed leaflets. Given that we are trying to reduce clutter in libraries and the fact that usual government practice is to announce their availability in libraries before materials are dispatched, this is not ideal. If one outcome of improved communication was that libraries were given the information before an initiative was publicly announced this would be a great step forward. It appears trivial but such processes do not reflect well on either national or local government.

### **Organisational structures, governance and funding**

#### Question 4

The structures in government lead to a fractured approach which contributes to the sense that the national leadership of libraries is fragmented and ineffective. Placing responsibility for funding and policy for public libraries in one government department should be a priority. A Development Agency has proved beneficial in the capital and a national library development agency, if it operated with significant authority could be of benefit. The MLA has been relatively ineffective in recent years both as an advocate for library services at government level and as a body promulgating best practice and there is little evidence to date that the slimmed down version will be any more effective. It is possible that changing the role of MLA would have benefits if the government wished to take a more prominent role in setting public library vision and objectives.

There may be value in a greater central function around particular issues such as marketing, publicity and digital services but only if the services referred to are provided to fundamentally common standards. Unless this is the case, audiences will be invariably disappointed. Probably the best existing examples are Bookstart and Summer Reading Challenge.

The notion of a national library service could best be achieved through clear standards, regularly reviewed, applicable to services for all sectors of the population, not just adults, (see above), rather than by some kind of national bureaucracy. Well conceived standards, (output and outcome driven), could help authorities prioritise resources to address national challenges such as digitisation and virtual lending. National funding arrangements, reflecting national priorities would be logical and enable local delivery; again People's Network and Book Start are excellent examples of what can be achieved. A nationally conceived library service, particularly one which provides digital information through a national agreement could be of great benefit to services such as local studies libraries. (eg. consider the myriad of digitised historic collections which JISC already gives academic users access to; parliamentary papers, historic mapping, and many more).

There could undoubtedly be benefits in establishing new governance structures locally, including strategic commissioning, Trust models, contracting out to the commercial sector or cross authority arrangements. However, governance structures per se will not deliver better library services; clarity of purpose and vision, achievement of customer centred standards and well targeted resources will do so. A mixed economy of governance arrangements is likely to develop and should be welcomed but this too points to the need for clearly articulated common standards.

#### Question 5

The issues in this section are poorly conceived; the significant point is not local authorities' unwillingness to explore options. The market for alternative delivery models is currently very poorly developed and reflecting on how long it took to develop a strong market for the management of leisure services, it is possible that this will remain so for the next 10 years. While the market remains relatively undeveloped the incentives for good library authorities to adopt alternative governance

models (without a legislative requirement) may remain weak. It is already clear that alternative governance does not necessarily produce overall revenue savings (which would otherwise be an incentive) and that there are no clear blueprints that may be easily replicated and adopted. Additionally, establishing new governance arrangements consumes significant resource and energy which might be better spent enhancing services within existing management arrangements, albeit with a much greater lead from central government and/or a national body for libraries.

Funding models such as the academy model for schools or the foundation trust for hospitals would be useful to consider but they would need to be linked to local democratic control and (again) need to operate within a common standard framework.

### **Question 6**

The issue of income generation has been fully investigated and no obvious sources that would consistently support core activities have been identified. Working in partnership with other agencies, in both the commercial and voluntary sector, can sometimes open up funding streams not normally available to a statutory service. For example, grants from the Learning Revolution Transformation Fund. However, these opportunities are unlikely to significantly (or consistently) enhance spending on core service provision.

Income from audio-visual loans has helped in the past but this is now in serious decline with competition from other suppliers and a much stronger home buying market. Library services are also mindful of the need to remove barriers to use and one way to do this is to keep charges low; it is unlikely therefore that paid for services will become a major revenue stream. The market for added value information services is small, given almost universal access to the internet. Selling books and advertising is already done well by companies such as Amazon. Advertising might help, but there is a risk of compromising libraries' much valued neutrality and the possibility of considerable resistance from communities.

### **Digital**

#### Question 7

The development of digital services is vital for public library services. This is a clear area for improved national leadership (and funding).

The assumption behind the questions in this section seems to be that libraries have been slow to see the benefits of digital services and reluctant to take the opportunities presented. This is erroneous. Amongst public services and especially those provided by local government, public libraries have been at the forefront of using digital technology. The vast majority of public library services are already providing 24/7 services, subscription online services and digital content – the latter, particularly in the field of local history. The vast majority of transactions, other than physically borrowing an item, including, catalogue searches, renewals, reservations and membership, can already be handled electronically in most library services.

The slow development of digital services is the result of poor national vision (eg. excluding public libraries from access to the resources of JISC), poor levels of investment and the low priority given in local government to digitising cultural and heritage materials.

Virtual lending will certainly and desirably become part of the mix of services offered by libraries but it will undoubtedly form part of a mixed economy, alongside print and other traditional media, at least until the quality and quantity of virtual resources rival the print medium. There are particular areas of stock, children's picture books, for example, where the technology is not yet developed enough (or even at all) to rival print resources. Those that do exist for children and young people are predominantly American and do not necessarily meet the potential demand.

Access to library resources can certainly be enhanced by digitisation but the biggest obstacle to this is sufficient resource (both money and staff). Digitisation programmes are in place in many authorities but slow progress and backlogs are the norm.

Access to end users must be free. It is indefensible to charge for a service based on its format. A move to charging for access to online information would exacerbate the digital content divide and be counter to the current statutory obligations of the public library service. Evidence shows that people's access to heritage resources such as national newspapers plays a significant part in supporting their sense of identity – finding out “who they think they are” – which ties in with personal and societal wellbeing. Ref Online, e-books, e-audio books and heritage collections should all be free. A clear commitment to providing a free loan service whether print or electronic is now necessary.

Library services must develop a broad understanding of the uses of the Internet as a means of social communication and information sharing, particularly social networking. This needs to be embraced wholeheartedly and with commitment rather than being regarded as “jumping on the bandwagon” otherwise the public library service will become invisible and irrelevant to an increasing number of the population. The hard work done to develop children's reading and use of libraries could be particularly affected.

Social networking can benefit in two-way consultation and communication with readers (especially young adults) and also reader to reader interaction. Can set up virtual reading groups, blogs, forum for book discussions, wikis, newsletters, YouTube guides to libraries (e.g. Newcastle Central), Twitter for news items, content for community groups' websites can all be delivered as well as opportunities for professional networking. However – all this needs considerable staff input to moderate, keep up to date, develop content etc. as if online presence becomes static it will not be visited.

Web 2.0 demonstrates people's enormous generosity in sharing information and public library services have a powerful role in harnessing this to develop local history and community information resources. Working in partnership with the BBC on a national and local basis, developing the RaW model possibly, could be an effective means to achieving this.

Libraries already support the digital inclusion agenda, through the provision of internet access, (used frequently by those without internet access at home), e learning opportunities, advice and first level support. Some of the obstacles, however are:

- Rural areas- speed of broadband- recent research suggests rural areas are particularly disadvantaged.
- literacy levels,
- lack of staff time and sometimes training) to give support to customers who do not have many technical skills.
- access (physical ie public transport and opening hours, no. of terminals)

The challenge of library customers' expectations in terms of content development and access will make it necessary to work nationally with online publishers in order to breakdown current barriers and funding models which make online content affordable only by higher education. This is an area which would benefit from consistent and authoritative leadership.

Serious consideration should also be given to national management of licensing and behind the scenes technical issues which would allow increased efficiencies. This would then complement library services' local content offer.

Raising the profile and priority of public library services so that ICT support from local authority ICT

services was treated with the same seriousness as schools is essential otherwise the digital offer will inexorably continue to decline as customer expectations increase. Another option would be to place public library services on an entirely separate network (JANET?) and remove them from the competing demands and many of the constraints of the rest of local government.

#### Question 8

Best practice in the use of digital technology for back office functions is and can continue to be, spread via SCL regions and within consortium arrangements such as CBC or SELMS. The varying size of local authorities mean there is unlikely to be a one size fits all solution.

Self service should be available in all libraries, although, there may be fewer benefits in very small, part time libraries, it generally confers significant benefits to both customers and the organisation. It has the potential to free up staff to deal with more complex customer enquiries and/or added value services but it will increasingly be used to achieve significant revenue savings, particularly in medium to large libraries. Self service (especially RFID enabled self service) has clear customer benefits, in particular speed and privacy, and the evidence is that it is enthusiastically welcomed by them. To this end there is a case for installing self service in every library. Many authorities, however, (as with digitisation) would struggle to find the capital investment required to do so and this therefore needs a lead from government. This is particularly so as self service in smaller libraries with fewer staff is unlikely to generate a revenue return from staff savings, which might otherwise form the basis of an invest to save business case.

Libraries should make more use of stock management tools such as Smartsm to save staff time and make better use of stock.

#### Question 9

Regrettably at least in our experience, they impede innovation. Because library services are such a small part of the Council's business and ICT Services inevitably concentrate on systems that have the greatest number of internal users, we have had to fight every inch of the way to introduce innovations; the advent of Government Connect has made this significantly worse, as it stifles openness and innovation in the name of security.

The severe budget cuts to local ICT functions may have significant implication for library services. Our own experience is that digitisation initiatives involving libraries, museums and archives are going to have to be self funding; having seen library service ICT budgets move to establish corporate services, we will now also have to additionally finance ICT project time in future. Other authorities are likely to be in a similar position. Locally, it is going to be extremely difficult to make progress with the basic maintenance of existing digital services, let alone make enhancements. Many libraries will therefore be seeking '2.0' technological alternatives, independent of their own authority; that's often where our users are to be found.

A national portal to local authority library catalogues may be a good option for libraries but clear consideration would need to be given to the purpose of a national web presence.

A number of key points concerning digital provision were made by contributors in the essay section of the consultation document. They were all worthy statements, but there will need to be active support in terms of binding legislation and performance standards if they are to have any true meaning:

- Expectation to forge links with the British Library in the provision of content, helping to create digital content at community level. [BL Chief Exec - Idea 2]
- Raise the profile and improve the exploitation of digital cultural assets owned by (local authority) museums, libraries and archives. [Director of Culture 24]

- Address the rise of the digital information consumer and the shift of society at large into virtual space, and reverse the decoupling of libraries from their user base. [Director of the Department of Information Studies, UCL]
- Libraries need to ... transfer transactions, live enquiries and more digital content online, making it accessible 24/7. [Head of Library & Information Services,

### **What services should be available to users?**

#### Question 10

Free core services should be:

- Books (irrespective of format) and reading
- Information services
- Internet access
- Children's services including Book Start and Summer reading Challenge
- Local History/Local Studies

Consultation with users and non users (nationally and locally) over the past 10 years has indicated some key determinants of library use. The key ones are good book stock, good opening hours (similar to retail) and modern, up to date environments. There is fairly consistent evidence that getting these factors in place (often related to new building projects) is very effective in growing demand for library services. Prescribing these factors as a national offer would be challenging but (as noted above) a framework of standards might be an option. Some national offers, most notably the Summer Reading Challenge and Book Start have worked very effectively, others such as provision for young people have not. National offers could be beneficial to the public library "brand" but they would need to relate to and indeed work to embed the core purpose of public libraries, (reading, learning, education, communication and knowledge), to be effective. Further national offers would also need broad agreement on levels of resource to be allocated by (and to) authorities or additional resources, appropriately apportioned.

#### Question 11

The quantity of opening hours will always be finally determined by the revenue resources available and the ways in which these are deployed. Decisions about opening hour patterns should be made in relation to evidence of known demand, evidence of potential demand (based on customer consultation) and local factors such as retail activity levels. Library use for the majority of customers does not consume a great deal of time (average length of stay is less than 10 minutes) and is often related to other activities such as shopping. Determining library locations is therefore critically concerned with accessibility (parking, bus routes etc) and the proximity of other high volume activity.

Library membership should be simplified across all libraries and be interchangeable. A national return anywhere policy is attractive but would need careful planning; it has the potential to cause more problems than would justify any benefits.

The cost and logistics of home delivery services look at present to be prohibitively expensive to offer on a universal basis. Moreover, research undertaken by Opening the Book, clearly indicates that most library borrowers are browsers ie. They are not looking for specific items. Home delivery services are most likely to suit purposive borrowers who are likely to be in the minority and therefore there may not be a significant demand for such a service. It is possible that such services could operate on a fee

paying basis but they would then be unlikely to rival commercial services such as Amazon.

Encouraging young people to use libraries begins with encouraging library use by younger children, so that they are comfortable with it and see the value of the library; then even if they do drift away in their teens/twenties, they are very likely to come back. Specifically, an introduction to library services could become part of the PSHE curriculum, where young people join as matter of course.

National marketing would help to create a more positive image of libraries in the media. Libraries have been trying to achieve this for years and we still get the knee-jerk use of “Shh!” and “quiet” in news articles about libraries.

Widening usage extends beyond the library’s walls and includes library staff and volunteers working in the community, for example with people who cannot leave their homes unaided, with community groups and in schools and children’s centres.

#### Question 12

Not enough is done to market or explain library services. However, the recent publicity given to interchangeable library cards – the one library card initiative from SCL– demonstrates how a simple message given good exposure can be effective. Any national information or marketing must be simple, direct and succinct. It must be based on services or value that can be seen and experienced everywhere. Without such consistency a national marketing campaign will struggle to resonate with the intended audience or to have any significant effect.

In government, DCMS should identify more effective ways of promoting and explaining the benefits of libraries (based on sound evidence) to other government ministers and civil servants. This would give a lead which if effective could permeate to members and other (non cultural services) officers in local government.

The use of ideas such as those pioneered by Norfolk would be valuable; go to where people are – virtually as well as in person - set reading in a cultural context, reading for pleasure being the largest cultural activity; using these approaches could raise libraries’ profile.

National marketing campaigns for services such as *learnirect* and *UK Online* have included TV advertisements with a website and telephone number to enable people to locate and contact their local provider. Something similar could be done for libraries, giving a clear and simple message.

Although national publicity can help to raise the profile of the public library service, engagement at a local level is even more important and can include every form of local communication and engagement, including volunteering and participation. The target should be that everyone knows what the library service has to offer and how to access it, whether or not they choose to do so. Marketing also includes seeking the views of local people so that we can better provide what they want, and when they want it.

#### **Commercial activities and partnerships**

#### Question 13

Again the question is poorly formulated. Local authorities (rather than library services) are risk averse.

Commercial activity in a public service is not a good thing per se. Commercial activities will be successful if there is a market for the service or product, if a market can be developed for a service or product, and if the product or service can be provided at the right price, the right time and the right quality for the market. The examples given, book selling, coffee shops, rental materials or national partnerships may all work successfully in specific circumstances but will not work everywhere all the time. Commercial activities that do work are most likely, therefore to be specific to time and place.

The primary benefits they are likely to bring are the provision of added value for customers (through additional services or products) and/or additional income for services which could offset revenue reductions and/or support investment in new services. There are, however, two potential disadvantages. Firstly, there is a wealth of evidence that library users place a very significant value on the neutrality of library services; associating services with commercial activities has the potential to undermine the trust placed in services by users. Secondly, placing reliance on income from commercial activities to fund new or existing public services can pose significant problems if the commercial activity ceases or declines. The decline in AV income in recent years has clearly demonstrated this. The constraints of operating within local government (and operating a statutory service) make commensurate commercial responses (eg shedding staff quickly) extremely difficult, if not impossible. It is possible that some alternative governance arrangements may alter this situation but it is likely that commercial activities will remain specific to time and place and generate income only at the periphery of services.

National or local partnerships with private companies (such as those already in place with publishers, for example), to deliver specific services (rather than purely additional commercial activities) are more likely to be sustainable and of value to users and potential users.

Broadly speaking, commercial activities which support and promulgate public libraries core purpose are likely to be most appropriate; those that undermine or contradict libraries core purpose should be avoided.

In Oxfordshire, Oxfordshire Studies and the Oxfordshire Record Office have long had a fruitful relationship with Oxfordshire family History Society and Oxfordshire Local History Association, and the former uses our service points as an outlet for its publications, a focus to provide volunteer support, and a means of sharing its considerable research data assets with the general public. Both of these are charitable organisations and can be described as significant stakeholders. Whether, in times of straitened public sector funding, these organisations should be relied upon to assist service delivery is an open question. They certainly have a strong continuing role, but you still need professional librarians / archivists to manage and plan services and to be accountable for their actions.

#### Question 14

Libraries can and are learning and adapting techniques from the commercial book selling sector, particularly regarding the positioning and display of stock and (from some booksellers) the value of staff product knowledge.

There is a lot to learn from the commercial sector about marketing (as opposed to promotion) but as noted above successful marketing relies on a consistency of product, service, value and quality that is challenging to achieve in one authority, let alone across all public libraries.

Best practice is and can continue to be, spread via SCL regions and MLA but as noted above there is unlikely to be a one size fits all solution.

#### **Location and buildings**

##### Question 15

Most library services are challenged with at least some poor buildings in poor locations and most will have some relatively poorly performing services. Closure of such services can be justified in a number of circumstances:

- If closure is part of a clear strategy for improvement, that has been tested with stakeholders and communities

- If, following productive consultation, users and potential users do not substantively oppose the closure
- If there is good evidence, following productive consultation, that alternative provision can meet the articulated needs of users and potential users
- If the local authority has considered the articulated needs of users and potential users and has demonstrated that the best response to these within the resources available requires closure.

Robust judgements about closures should be based on the “best fit” between the needs of users and potential users and the resources that are available to deliver services. Poor levels of use and poorly located buildings are not necessarily sufficient alone to justify closure; levels of use may be increased, for example, with good management and community engagement. The access and visibility of poor locations may be improved by good information or the inclusion of additional services. Continuing restraints on public service expenditure will make these judgements increasingly critical in the coming years.

Levels of use are not necessarily the most important indicators of need. Some communities may be better served by alternative methods of provision, whilst others may have a low take up of services even though their needs are high. Those needs may be unarticulated and require a more proactive approach from the service ; for example in areas of low skills levels or of people from other cultures.

The number and location of library buildings should change over time as our communities change, and understanding the changing nature of our communities is a key management function.

#### Question 16

Co-locating services is most successful if

- The building location suits all component services. For libraries in towns, this generally means adjacent to or in retail areas
- The co-located services are “destination” services for relatively substantial numbers of users
- There are synergies between co-located services which are expressed in both the building design and in the management of services provided ie. services do not operate as silos in the same building but are presented and managed for the benefit of all users and potential users
- Resources are managed jointly for the benefit of users and potential users

Local authorities making co-location decisions should consider the benefits (or otherwise) to service users and potential users, the factors related to success as noted above and the potential capital and revenue costs of co-location (there is no guarantee that co-located services are cheaper to provide).

#### Question 17

Decisions about the make up of library services should be informed by building and location issues as noted above and elsewhere, together with a range of other factors, such as

- Demographic and socio-economic profile of populations served
- User profiles and patterns of use/demand
- Retail and other business activities undertaken by potential users
- Other public service activities undertaken by potential users

Decisions about library buildings' accessibility and fitness for purpose should be based on regular suitability surveys carried out to a high standard and managed jointly between library managers and building specialists at least every three years. The results of such survey should inform building improvement programmes.

Library services in small rural communities are often inexpensive in net expenditure terms but expensive in value for money terms, for example as measured by cost per visit. However, libraries in small rural communities are often the only remaining public services and they invariably attract strong and loyal support. In Oxfordshire, (one of the most rural counties), we are currently reviewing how best to increase the use of rural libraries. Through consultation with users and potential users we will consider a number of options, including the use of self service, the use of volunteers to help extend opening hours, co-location with other services, different patterns of mobile use, different patterns of opening hours and partnership with other providers such as parish councils.

There do appear to be benefits from providing unstaffed mini libraries (as seen in Wigan?) but these are most likely to be realised in joint use buildings where there is at least some supervision (and capacity to shelve books). Feedback from users in rural areas suggests that many (young and old) value the social interaction gained from a library visit and permanently unstaffed libraries would not be attractive.

It is much more important that library buildings are well located (accessible- opening/ access) for users and potential users than that they occupy dedicated buildings.

### **Training, leadership and services for staff**

#### Question 18

Again the question is oddly formulated. The vast majority of staff in libraries and library services are not qualified librarians, so the skill mix is not primarily based on traditional librarianship; university based library courses are providing only a tiny minority of the public library workforce.

Libraries require staff with three key levels of skill:

- At the first level, excellent customer skills, an ability to interact and respond equally well to the needs all users and potential users. This can be challenging for library staff, with some customer groups, for example, young people, noting that they do not feel always feel welcome in libraries. In an effective service, excellent customer skills will be combined with an interest in, and knowledge of, books, IT and other media, together with an ability to present these attractively to entice customers
- At the second level, in addition to excellent customer skills, libraries need staff with excellent resource and product knowledge, together with the ability to organise and signpost resources so that they can easily be found. Libraries are based on self help principles, so making them work effectively on this basis is important.
- At the third level, communicating expertise and/or detailed knowledge to advise or support users with specific tasks or questions

The vast majority of staff working in libraries need only to work with first level skills.

Libraries require managers and leaders with diverse skills:

- Service, product, customer and professional knowledge including understanding of the benefits of ICT – digital opportunities
- Operational management skills

- Highly developed people skills
- Strategic and creative thinking skills
- Financial management skills
- Project management skills
- Developing/ maintaining partnershipsMarketing
- Entrepreneurial skills - key to making the fundamental changes necessary to respond to a changing society.

More emphasis should be put on motivating and training existing managers to take on new roles. Attracting skills and entrepreneurial attitudes from outside the service can be useful, but knowledge and experience within the service should also be valued.

Attracting and nurturing leaders will be aided by good national leadership, national training embedded locally in each authority, clear career structures and professionally comparable pay structures at every level.

#### Question 19

Volunteers can, and already are, a component of the library workforce; many home library services or local history services would not operate as they do without volunteers. Volunteers can support developmental work which would otherwise never be undertaken, while extending their own skills and 'giving something back' to the community in an area deemed to be of public benefit.

Volunteering arrangements will be used to best effect if:

- Volunteers are lead and managed with the same care as salaried staff
- Volunteering activity contributes to the overall objectives of the service and is planned both strategically and operationally.
- Both volunteers and service users benefit from the volunteering activity

A clear commitment that volunteers are best utilized undertaking clearly defined, value added roles (as per examples given above) where they can make a real contribution, rather than undertaking core, routine tasks, would be of value.

#### **How should we monitor library performance and what should we aspire to?**

#### Question 20

If public libraries are to remain a vital part of a democratic society offering universal equality of opportunity and intellectual freedom, it is important that they remain a statutory responsibility. The evidence from other non-statutory parts of the cultural sector is that this universality of opportunity and intellectual freedom is not otherwise achieved.

Most library leaders would regard more detailed statutory guidance as a useful means to secure a

reasonable baseline of provision; political leaders might regard these as a minimum and discourage excellence but such judgements must be made locally in the light of competing resources and priorities.

#### Question 21

The obligation to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service is the correct one but as noted in the responses to earlier questions, it does need further definition and guidance. The previous PLSs were input driven and this was useful to a certain extent. The inclusion of standards based more clearly on outputs and measurable outcomes would provide a better balance for customers and services.

#### Question 22

A core service must be defined, (see many previous comments), to ensure that valuable activities, outputs and outcomes are measured.

There is an urgent need for a good national measure; the current NI19 is woeful; it omits significant user groups (children and young teenagers) and excludes some entirely legitimate use of library services.

Book issues and visits are still hugely relevant. Both are output measures which indicate levels of core business. In particular, the majority of library users expect to, and do, leave a library building with one or more books. Library services which regard these measures as unimportant may not be attracting as many users as they could.

More important, however, than simple output measures, such as issues and visits, are measures that illustrate a) the quality of effort in producing outputs (how well was the service provided?) and the b) the quantity and quality of the effect of providing the service (ie. was anybody better off?). The approach to outcome based accountability described by Mark Friedman in *Trying hard is not good enough*, could provide a useful and simple tool for identifying measures that illustrate both the efficiency and effectiveness of library services.

An accreditation scheme for libraries or a requirement that library services meet the standards of an existing scheme such as Customer Service Excellence could be useful. To be most useful a scheme would need to focus on good practice for customers and potential customers, together with continuous improvement and not simply on inputs or processes.

The Secretary of State's power to intervene is still appropriate given the statutory nature of the service.

#### Question 23

A national research programme which informed national and local government thinking and priorities would be of enormous benefit.

There is, however, already a good deal of research and evidence which demonstrates the value of libraries. More could undoubtedly be undertaken but it is vital to ensure that the research and evidence that exists is disseminated and promulgated to other professional and public services.

Library services need to demonstrate that they can successfully increase outputs (such as issues and visits), make a difference to people's lives and contribute to other public service objectives. It is not enough to do one or two of these, all need to be achieved, Most significantly if the first can be achieved and long term usage trends can be reversed, national and local leaders may be more inclined to give greater credit to evidence about the value of libraries.

