

# The Network Newsletter: tackling social exclusion in libraries, museums, archives and galleries

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The Network's Website is at [www.seapn.org.uk](http://www.seapn.org.uk) and includes information on courses, good practice, specific socially excluded groups, as well as the newsletter archive.

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## Did you see ...?

### ***Library + Information Update***

The latest issue has an important article<sup>1</sup> by Margaret Sloan, reporting on her Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Travelling Fellowship to Canada and the Netherlands.

The article gives lots of examples of good practice and concludes with “Steps in developing a strategy for older people”.

Margaret’s report to the WCMT is also available on their website<sup>2</sup>.

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## National Year of Reading

### **Launch of WikiREADia**

As part of the NYR, everyone is invited to help create the WikiREADia<sup>3</sup> – “a searchable and editable online encyclopaedia of good practice in reading”.

It already includes information about, for example, working with boys, with looked-after children, and with multiple audiences, and is searchable by:

- Audience
  - Organisation (eg adult education, charities, prisons)
  - Place
  - Area of work (eg planning, partnership, evaluation).
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## Broader issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

### ***Outcomes framework for museums, libraries and archives***

MLA has just published this important (and useful) document, showing how MLAs can contribute to the new National Indicators.

Just to recap quickly, the Local Government White Paper, *Strong and prosperous communities*<sup>4</sup>, made a commitment to introducing a set of

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<sup>1</sup> CILIP *Library + Information Update* 7 (5) May 2008, pp31-33, Margaret Sloan “Expanding library services for older people”.

<sup>2</sup> See: [http://www.wcmt.org.uk/public/reports/173\\_1.pdf](http://www.wcmt.org.uk/public/reports/173_1.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> See: [http://www.yearofreading.org.uk/wikireadia/index.php?title=Main\\_Page](http://www.yearofreading.org.uk/wikireadia/index.php?title=Main_Page).

<sup>4</sup> *Strong and prosperous communities: the Local Government White Paper*. DCLG, 2007. Available to download as pdfs from: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/strongprosperous>.

streamlined indicators that would reflect national priority outcomes for local authorities working alone or in partnership.

After consultation, the definitions for the 198 indicators have been announced<sup>5</sup>. The National Indicators:

- “Will be the only measures on which central Government will performance manage outcomes delivered by local government working alone or in partnership
- Replace all other existing sets of indicators including Best Value Performance Indicators and Performance Assessment Framework indicators
- Will be reported by all areas from April 2008.”<sup>6</sup>

This *Outcomes framework* sets out, against the National Indicator Set, where MLAs can have the greatest impact, and thereby helps to strengthen the case for investment in MLAs.

At the same time, DCLG wants to ensure that local authorities work within the context of the National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy<sup>7</sup> (which sets out how central and local government will provide the support that local partnerships will need to deliver excellent Local Area Agreements). In order to improve the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of culture and sport in the delivery of economic, social and environmental outcomes in local communities, the LGA has developed an improvement strategy for culture and sport<sup>8</sup>. This *Outcomes framework* also demonstrates how MLAs can achieve this.

The Framework takes the National Indicator Set outcomes to which MLAs can/do contribute:

- Stronger communities
- Safer communities
- Children & young people – be healthy
- Children & young people – enjoy & achieve
- Children & young people – make a positive contribution
- Adult health & wellbeing
- Tackling exclusion and promoting equality

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<sup>5</sup> See:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/performanceframeworkpartnerships/nationalindicators/>.

<sup>6</sup> Taken from:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/performanceframeworkpartnerships/nationalindicators/>.

<sup>7</sup> *National improvement and efficiency strategy*. DCLG, 2008. Available to download as a pdf (300 kb) from:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/649026>.

<sup>8</sup> *A passion for excellence: an improvement strategy for culture and sport*. LGA, 2008. Available to download as a pdf (1.3 mb) from:

<http://www.culture.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/CBDCC1D5-8984-41A1-AFD8-C6ECD15C21BF/0/apassionforexcellence.pdf>.

- Local economy.

For each of these, it then charts:

- The relevant National Indicator
- The sector's contribution
- Evidence of the impact and/or best practice
- Datasets/suggested indicators.

See Appendix for an example.

This is a key tool for MLAs to use to help develop service provision and advocacy, linking our work into the national context.

### ***Framework for the Future: MLA Action Plan for Public Libraries – “towards 2013”***

MLA has also just published the final version<sup>9</sup> of the extension to Framework for the Future (which started life as *Blueprint for excellence* last year).

The front page of the document also includes a vision for public libraries:

“Individuals and communities are entitled to excellent public libraries that are integrated with other local services and responsive to local needs; offering books, information and learning resources on the high street and online for everyone at all times.”

The Action Plan begins by setting out what a ‘good’ service can look like, including:

“Public libraries make a measurable and substantial contribution to local economies, and help to bridge social divides. They support well-being, encourage reading, spread knowledge, contribute to learning and skills and help to foster identity, community and a sense of place for people of all ages, backgrounds and cultures.” [p2]

There is then a list of the features of “The best libraries”, including:

- “Are well led, entrepreneurial, efficiently managed and proactive advocates of best practice.
- Integrate with wider provision for learning and other local services, and with a wide range of culture, the arts and sport, to offer resources, books, essential information and materials that meet local needs for all people.

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<sup>9</sup> *Framework for the Future: MLA Action Plan for Public Libraries – “towards 2013”*. MLA, 2008. Available to download as a pdf (70 Kb) from: [http://www.mla.gov.uk/resources/assets/L/Library\\_Action\\_Plan\\_13241.pdf](http://www.mla.gov.uk/resources/assets/L/Library_Action_Plan_13241.pdf).

- Put the community at the heart of developing and delivering services, engaging with people and responding to their needs.
- Embed excellence, creativity and diversity; innovate and adapt to new working methods.
- Ensure sustainability and continuous improvement is at the heart of all they do.
- Broaden and deepen access to their information and resources.
- Perform to the highest levels and champion continuous professional development, through a workforce that comprises a wide range of talent, competency and skill.
- Are engaging, informative, creative and memorably enjoyable places for people to visit and use.” [p2]

There really isn't anything to argue with here, except that it would have been good to see a commitment to social justice reaffirmed.

The Plan then briefly sets the context in which libraries are operating “towards 2013” – this is bleak, but does indicate the urgency of the task in hand.

The Action Plan then sets out what MLA intends to do:

- “As a strategic leader, MLA will work with local government, national agencies, professional bodies, chief librarians and cultural leaders to:
- advocate the relevance of public libraries and highlight the advantages of integrated provision in response to local needs
  - promote ‘best practice’, innovation and community engagement, especially in relation to local authority priorities; support improvements in learning, information and reading services.
  - establish broad-based competencies for library staff and sustain investment in workforce development; plan for coherent, national digital resources and services
  - report progress six-monthly.” [pp3-4]

The Action Plan then sets out the four challenges that MLA intends to tackle:

1. Gathering research and evidence, including looking at “the impact libraries have on reading, learning and community engagement.” [p4]
2. Best practice  
This includes:
  - Identifying and promoting best practice
  - Promoting the National Improvement Strategy (and the ‘single improvement tool’)
  - Actively promoting the benefits of capacity-building
  - Consulting with public libraries across the UK and abroad “to extend the understanding of case studies and to share mutual experience, best practice and lessons learned.” [p5]

3. Innovation, including encouraging engagement with local communities
4. Digital change.

Again, these are all desperately needed, and important to pursue urgently.

The role that libraries play in community engagement is recognised (and the need for more evidence of this is also highlighted), but it is a pity that their role in creating social justice and community cohesion, and tackling social exclusion are not spelled out – my fear is that this will lead to these key areas of work being pushed down the agenda (unless people argue that community engagement encompasses these too).

This is a 'must-read'!

### ***Museums, Libraries and Archives Corporate Plan 2008 to 2011***

Finally, MLA has also just published its Corporate Plan<sup>10</sup> for the period 2008-2011.

For us, the key areas of interest are, firstly, the vision for MLAs:

“The MLA believes that museums, libraries and archives make a measurable and substantial contribution to the quality of life of us all. They support the well-being of individuals and society as a whole by helping to create a shared identity and sense of community and place. They play a vital role in generating prosperity by supporting learning and skills, providing access to knowledge and resources, and by helping to make places inspiring and attractive to live in, work in and visit.” [p3]

and, secondly, MLA's strategic priorities:

1. “**Learning and skills** – we will work with the sector to increase opportunities for learners to progress and achieve their creativity and unlock their potential.
2. **Communities** – we will ensure museums, libraries and archives are inclusive and support sustainable communities, particularly in their work with young people.
3. **Excellence** – we will strengthen capacity in the sector to innovate and continually improve across workforce, collections, services, funding and partnerships. We will also make the MLA an excellent and efficient organisation.” [p6]

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<sup>10</sup> *Museums, Libraries and Archives Corporate Plan 2008 to 2011*. MLA, 2008. Available to download as a pdf (102 kb) from: [http://www.mla.gov.uk/resources/assets//C/corporate\\_plan\\_2008\\_13176.pdf](http://www.mla.gov.uk/resources/assets//C/corporate_plan_2008_13176.pdf).

## ***The right 'man' for the job?***

This key piece of research, looking at the role of empathy in community librarianship, has recently been published<sup>11</sup>.

Firstly, I ought to declare an interest! I was consulted about the research at various stages (and am cited throughout), but was not interviewed as part of the project.

The report begins by outlining what social exclusion is and where it fits into the national policy framework; it then looks at how social exclusion has been tackled in the public and cultural sectors, specifically in the MLA sector; and the opening section finishes with a brief look at critics of social inclusion as a policy.

The report then considers the role of public libraries in tackling social exclusion, and briefly assess the reports by DCMS, CILIP and (as it was known then) Resource.

The report then moves to looking at empathy, defining it and locating it within professional practice.

After this come the detailed research findings (which are summarised in pp103-106). The summaries are grouped under the following headings:

### Skills, partnerships and professional identity

This identifies, for example:

- "...a lack of confidence amongst some public library staff working with some of the more challenging excluded target groups, including disaffected teenagers, and adults with mental health and substance abuse problems. Staff do not feel that they have the necessary skills and experience to work under such conditions, or feel that they should be expected to do so within their roles as public library staff." [p103]
- The strong benefits of partnership working

### Empathy and cultural representation

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<sup>11</sup> Kerry Wilson and Briony Birdi. *The right 'man' for the job? The role of empathy in community librarianship*. The University of Sheffield, Department of Information Studies, Centre for the Public Library and Information in Society, 2008. Available to download as a pdf (765 kb) from: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/07/85/14/AHRC%202006-8%20final%20report%2004.08.pdf>.

- This section identifies that public library staff are drawn, broadly, from the same group – “predominantly female, White-British, middle-aged and what we can describe as middle class”. [p104]
- From responses to questions about “cultural representation”, it was inferred that there was “a lack of clarity and understanding of the multi-faceted nature of social exclusion, and how those affected may feel under-represented in public services and civic life.” [p104]
- Finally, “there have been clear distinctions made between ‘older’ and ‘younger’ members of staff, with the former group more likely to be resistant to cultural change and objectionable [sic] towards the targeting of excluded groups and communities.” [p104]

### Social inclusion and community librarianship

- “The research has revealed a lack of clarity and understanding within public library services of what social exclusion means and its relationship with other social policy objectives, particularly within the access and equality agendas. Over 50% of survey respondents claimed to be partly aware of national social exclusion policy and debate, yet qualitative data suggests that awareness is considerably lower than this.” [p105]
- Training of library staff was identified as critical – and, in some cases, needed to be updated.
- “The non-inclusive organisational culture of public libraries themselves is seemingly having, in some cases, a negative impact upon staff engagement with and contribution to the social inclusion agenda. The maintenance of hierarchical management structures and executive decision making procedures, combined with a perceived lack of transparency and ineffective communication mechanisms, is causing apathy and demoralisation amongst staff, particularly front-line employees, who feel that their experience and opinion is undervalued and ignored.” [p105]
- On the positive side: “There is however strong evidence of good practice in providing successful services for targeted groups, as illustrated by case study profiles and within focus group discussions. The value of community profiling and consultation cannot be underestimated in this context, and the research has also revealed examples of good practice in this area. Outreach work in deprived areas and regeneration wards has also proven to be particularly effective.” [p105]

- Concerns were expressed by interviewees about ‘quick-fix’ solutions to problems and a differentiation between ‘core services’ and ‘add-ons’.

These summaries are then followed by the research recommendations. The overall ‘headline’ is:

“The findings of this national study present a strong argument for radical and far-reaching strategic changes to English public libraries. Given the comments made by respondents to both the quantitative and qualitative data collection phases, one recommendation would be for the development of a public library service that is managed strategically from regional centres, funded by central government, with the opportunity for match funding on charitable and project bases. Such a system could arguably allow greater flexibility in responding to local needs, particularly when not obliged to explicitly conform to local government agendas, and adhere to stringent bureaucratic procedures and policies.” [p107]

The detailed recommendations then look at:

- Redefining public library roles and services
- External partners and service networks (particularly the strengthening of partnership working)
- Staff recruitment and selection
- Internal communication and staff support systems
- Staff training and development.

The remainder of the report includes a thorough list of references and appendices containing the research data.

This is a very important piece of research which, interestingly (but probably unsurprisingly), echoes the findings of the *Community Libraries Programme Evaluation ...*<sup>12</sup>

It clearly spells out the main reasons why some public libraries are failing to engage properly with the social inclusion agenda, drawing attention not only to the skills gaps, but also the lack of empathy displayed by some staff (who have come to work in libraries for other reasons).

However, it’s a pity that the research needed to point to anecdotal evidence only for staff resistance to change:

“... anecdotal evidence suggests strong resistance to cultural change in libraries, to certain traditionally excluded groups, and to the social inclusion agenda as a whole amongst public library staff.” [p104]

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<sup>12</sup> See: *The Network Newsletter ...* 84, April 2008, pp6-7.

The research might also have benefited from some historical input as to why, ultimately, the community librarianship movement in the 1970s was unsuccessful, and, more currently, some greater discussion about library staff's involvement with social inclusion, community engagement, community cohesion and the other policy agenda areas.

The recommendations are strong (although it would also have been good to have seen a bit more emphasis on the importance of libraries working to meet other organisations' targets), and now need to be embedded in library policy – and implemented!

This is a 'must-read'!

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

DCLG = Department of Communities and Local Government

LGA = Local Government Association

MLA = Museums, Libraries and Archives Council

MLAs = museums, libraries and archives

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Outcome	National indicator	Sector contribution	Evidence of impact and/or best practice	Dataset/suggested indicators
Stronger communities	NI 13 Migrants English language skills and knowledge HO DSO	<p>Libraries provide significant opportunities for migrants to improve language skills and knowledge. Opportunities provided include language courses, provision of culturally appropriate material, and access to material a safe and welcoming environment.</p> <p>Museums provide opportunities for migrants: to meet and socialise within their own community groupings, and with people of other diverse backgrounds; provides opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to share their own cultural heritage and learn more about British culture and history; to make a contribution to improving participants' general sense of well-being, reducing their sense of isolation, and boosting their self-esteem; support children and young people to do something positive and enjoyable; providing</p>	<p>Welcome to Your Library national project connecting library services with refugees and asylum seekers. Includes best practice, advice, guidance and information on training opportunities. <i>Public Library Services to Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the North East</i> advice and guidance on effective means to meet need</p> <p>Engaging Refugees and Asylum Seekers Best practice guide (National Museums Liverpool)</p>	<p>Participation by priority group Local areas may also wish to consider surveys that investigate user/target group perception, e.g. % users/target group who feel that their ability to communicate in English has improved due to services provided by the library.</p> <p>Socio-economic and demographic user data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MUSE survey Museums</li> <li>• PLUS survey Libraries</li> <li>• PSQG Survey Archives</li> </ul> <p>Participation indicators relating to target migrant communities</p>

		significant benefits to partner community and voluntary organisations; and provide secure environments in which people can learn, play and relax.		
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