Open to All? The Public Library and Social Exclusion

Volume 2: Survey, Case Studies and Methods

Dave Muddiman
Shiraz Durrani
Martin Dutch
Rebecca Linley
John Pateman
John Vincent

Abstract

Open to All? reports the findings of an 18 month research project, "Public Library Policy and Social Exclusion", based at Leeds Metropolitan University and conducted in partnership with the London Borough of Merton (Libraries), Sheffield Libraries, Archives and Information Services, and John Vincent, an independent consultant. Volume 2 presents the detailed empirical findings of the project, together with an overview of its research design and fieldwork methods. It reports the findings of a survey undertaken in Autumn 1999 of the 208 United Kingdom public library authorities which was designed to assess the nature of social inclusion policy and practice in UK PLAs. It also reports in detail the findings of eight qualitative case studies, also undertaken in 1999, of public library authorities and their social exclusion strategies.

Authors

Dave Muddiman (Project Head) is Principal Lecturer, School of Information Management, Leeds Metropolitan University, Beckett Park Campus, Leeds LS6 3QS.
Shiraz Durrani is Strategy and Commissioning Officer, London Borough of Merton (Libraries), Merton Civic Centre, London Road, Morden, Surrey, SM4 5DX.
Martin Dutch is Group Manager, Sheffield Libraries, Archives and Information Services Highfield Library, London Road, Sheffield, S2 4NF
Rebecca Linley (Project Researcher) is now Policy Officer at Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries,19-29 Woburn Place, London, WC1H 0LU.
John Pateman is Head of Libraries and Heritage, London Borough of Merton.
John Vincent (Project Consultant) is an independent consultant and researcher.

Contents

Preface and Acknowledgements

Open to All? is the report of the research project "Public Library Policy and Social Exclusion". The project has been funded by the Library and Information Commission and, subsequently, Resource, the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, as part of its *Value and Impact of Libraries* programme. It has been based at the School of Information Management, Leeds Metropolitan University and conducted in partnership with the London Borough of Merton (Libraries), Sheffield Libraries, Archives and Information Services, and John Vincent, an independent consultant. The research was conducted between October 1998 and April 2000.

Because of the wide-ranging scope of the research, comprising working papers, case studies in the field and a survey, its findings are published in three volumes. This volume (Vol. 2) contains the detailed empirical findings of the project – analyses of the project survey, eight case studies and an account of the research design and methodology. Other volumes are organised as follows:

- Volume 1 *Overview and Conclusions* (LIC Research Report 84) contains summaries of the key issues and findings of the research and its overall conclusions and recommendations.
- Volume 3: *Working Papers* (LIC Research Report 86) gathers together the working papers produced during the course of the project.

These volumes are obtainable from: British Thesis Service, British Library Document Supply Centre, Boston Spa, Wetherby, West Yorkshire LS23 7BQ, UK.

services which address social exclusion. Many other colleagues and contacts, too numerous to mention singly, have, of course, also contributed their ideas to the project by commenting on drafts of working papers and contributing to conferences, workshops and seminars. We thank them all for their time, ideas and commitment.

Dave Muddiman
Shiraz Durrani
Martin Dutch
Rebecca Linley,
John Pateman
John Vincent

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1. Introduction: Project Design and Research Methods

1.1   Volume II of the project report contains the detailed empirical evidence of the research. Section 2 comprises a detailed analysis of, and commentary on, the survey of public library authorities undertaken in Autumn 1999. Subsequent Sections 3-10 report in detail on the eight case studies undertaken between June and December 1999. This section aims to provide, as an introduction to this material, a brief account of the overall design of the project and an explanation of, and commentary upon, the research methods employed.

1.2   The overall aim of the project was defined as an investigation of "the potential value and impact of the public library in overcoming specific aspects of contemporary social exclusion", and in this way the project was linked to the overall objectives of the Library and Information Commission "value and impact of libraries" research programme. A number of specific objectives were developed linked to this general purpose. These included:

(a) a review of public library policy towards disadvantage and social exclusion from both a historical and comparative (international) standpoint;

(b) an assessment of the impact of current public library policy relating to social exclusion;

(c) an investigation in detail of examples of public library initiatives currently directed towards excluded individuals, groups and communities and an identification of both good practice and of barriers and problems;

(d) an exploration of the links between public library policy in this area and local authority policies/initiatives as a whole, and an analysis of the potential of cross-sectoral/inter-agency initiatives;

(e) the development of recommendations and guidelines which will aim to enhance and strengthen public library activity in this field.

Overall, these objectives were geared to production of a comprehensive analysis of public library attempts to address social exclusion. This analysis aimed to be both generalisable in terms of coverage, and specific in terms of detail. It also aimed to link theory (for example in terms of analyses of inclusion/exclusion and of public library purpose) with practice, in terms of matters such as managerial strategy and service development. Such broad goals, it was quickly concluded, could only be achieved through a diverse and multidimensional approach to research design, and the employment of a number of triangulated "methods" of investigation.

1

1.3   Linked to particular objectives, four main research strategies were thus adopted. In outline these comprised:

(a) the production of sixteen project "working papers" - linked especially to objectives 1.2 (a) and (b) above;

(b) a detailed survey of policy and activity in all UK public library authorities - linked especially to objective 1.2 (b) and (c) above;

(c) eight case studies of responses to social exclusion in UK public library authorities - linked especially to objectives 1.2 (c) and 1.2 (d) above;

(d) a series of networking activities with practitioners, including feedback from case study authorities and the development of the *Social Exclusion Action Planning Network* - linked especially to 1.2 (e) above.

1.4   This work was undertaken collectively by a research team of six. The team comprised the Project Co-ordinator; Project Consultant; Research Assistant and three practising Librarians part seconded to the project by Merton and Sheffield Libraries. Details of authorship of particular parts of the project are given in the appropriate sections. Working papers were usually researched and written by individuals or pairs in the project team; case studies were usually undertaken by teams of two or three with one member designated lead researcher. The survey was undertaken by the Project Co-ordinator and Research Assistant based at LMU.

In general, work was allocated according to interests, experience and time available, but a particular concern was to balance "academic" field research and practitioner experience in most aspects of the project. This was, by and large, achieved successfully through both the creation of small teams incorporating a balance of experience, and through the mechanism of regular team meetings every two months. Through these meetings, all members of the team had an input into key matters of research design such as choice of case studies and survey design, and all members contributed to the analysis process through which key findings were generated.

1.5   *Working Papers.* In total a series of 16 working papers have been produced as part of the project, and these are reproduced in full as Volume III of the Project Report. The working papers explore a wide range of themes relevant to the research including:
- contextual themes such as theories of social exclusion, UK policy and "political correctness" ;
- responses by the public library to exclusion by class, race, gender, age and disability;
- historical and international aspects of the public library focus on exclusion;
- analysis of particular service developments such as literacy initiatives and ICTs.

Taken together, the working papers provide a comprehensive review of the literature of the public library and social exclusion, but most are also discursive and challenging in

that they develop and advance particular perspectives or arguments. A large number of papers have been disseminated as the project has progressed, and feedback and comment from readers has, where appropriate, been incorporated into the final findings and recommendations of the project.

Working papers have thus contributed to the progress of the project in a number of ways. As a result of some papers, detailed issues for investigation in the survey and the case studies were identified. Other papers focused on particular strengths and weaknesses of public library provision and generated specific recommendations in their own right. Others generated useful feedback from readers, and provided us with new, or different, avenues for exploration. Finally, the papers taken together enabled us to develop a broad overall view of public library responses to social exclusion (see Volume 1 *Overview, Summary of Findings and Recommendations)* and to link these with, and compare them to, social exclusion policy in other spheres and contexts. We are thus able, to some degree, to identify what the public library can learn from other professions, institutions and places.

1.6   *Survey of UK Library Authorities.* In order to develop a broad picture of the extent and nature of contemporary PLA responses to social exclusion, we had originally proposed to undertake a content analysis of the 1999 Annual Library Plans submitted to DCMS by English PLAs. However, because of difficulties in obtaining access to this material in the time frame of the project, and because DCMS ultimately undertook this work themselves (DCMS, 2000) it was decided to replace this part of the research with a survey of our own aimed at all UK PLAs. This would have the advantage of providing overall coverage of the UK, and of allowing us to focus on practice and service delivery as well as policy aspirations. However, we could not, it was realised, expect the 100% response rate that DCMS enjoyed.

Our survey was conducted in August and September of 1999 and was sent to all public library authorities in the United Kingdom - 208 now in total. It consisted of a postal questionnaire (see Appendix 1) which was completed by the Head of Library Services or a Senior Library Service Officer with responsibility for exclusion issues.

The core aim of the survey was to establish the *extent* to which public library authorities are addressing social exclusion issues, and to identify national patterns of activity. It thus focussed upon delineating measurable policy and practice in the field, rather than the attitudes of librarians or debates about the problematics of policy and provision (these are covered in the case studies and working papers). For this reason, the questionnaire consisted, in the main, of questions which were geared towards obtaining data about behaviour rather than attitudes: i.e. levels of service, finance, staffing, targeting and other tangible activities. It incorporated specific sections on Policy and Strategy; Structure and Staffing; Service Development; Resources, Book Stock and Materials; Community Links and Outreach; Partnerships and Special Initiatives and Finance and Monitoring.

Overall, 129 out of 208 library authorities responded to the survey, a response rate of

62%. This level of response is typical of this type of survey: the joint Library Association / Community Development Foundation / Community Services Group *Libraries and Community Development* survey (McKrell, 1997) obtained a 63% response from a slightly smaller population of authorities. It is perhaps tempting to infer that the PLAs who did not reply are less interested in, or active in, addressing social exclusion. However, it is difficult from these figures to conclude this with confidence: we received many responses from PLAs who were quite candid about their *lack* of activity in this area. There thus seems to be no special reason to believe that our sample is not representative of the public library activity as a whole in the social exclusion field, except for the general and obvious fact of its incompleteness.

Survey responses were analysed using Minitab data analysis software. In general, analysis focussed on estimating the *extent* of PLA concern with social exclusion. In the case of specific aspects of service activity (such as policy development, services to excluded groups; community activity; staffing; resourcing and so on) we attempted to estimate the total proportion of authorities who had:

(a) developed sustained strategy, "best practice" and service wide operational initiatives;
(b) developed a concern with inclusion but had less than comprehensive strategies and uneven/ intermittent activity;
(c) little apparent strategy and service developments which were rare or opportunistic.

These particular analyses were then combined in an attempt to produce, for each PLA, an overall index score which gave a general indication of the level of its activities relevant to social inclusion (see Appendix 2 to this volume). As a final part of this analysis, the overall levels and patterns of these index scores were correlated with independent variables (such as size, authority type and levels of deprivation) in order to establish whether these latter variables influenced PLA activity in the social inclusion sphere. The results of this analysis are contained in Section 2.7 of this volume.

Overall, the results of our survey, like any survey dealing with such a relative concept as "social exclusion", are open to interpretation and debate. However, it is perhaps worth noting here that many of our conclusions do relate to straightforward questions about *activity* (as opposed to questions about attitudes, beliefs or indeed policy) and this, we believe, gives some underpinning to their validity. Moreover, we have no reason to believe that respondents in any way tried to exaggerate the extent of PLA service development relevant to social inclusion: indeed, many were very forthcoming about their *lack of* relevant development and our overall findings, which are much more pessimistic than those of the DCMS analysis of Library Plans, certainly show little evidence of any "halo" effect.

1.7   *Case Studies.* Detailed qualitative case studies of eight UK public library authorities formed the core of the empirical work of the project. The case studies aimed to focus on the processes by which PLAs were developing policy and services which addressed social exclusion, and to provide some understanding of the various forces and influences which determined how the issue was tackled. The studies were not,

especially, studies of "good practice", although good practice certainly emerged in the course of the majority of cases. Neither were they intended to be an "evaluation" of the performance of a particular PLA, although, as the reader of Sections 3-10 will see, most of the reports do identify strengths and weaknesses, in part because our hosts asked us to do this. What the studies did attempt to identify were those factors which seemed to contribute to success in developing social inclusion policy and practice, and those factors which most clearly led to problems and barriers. In other words, we wanted, in the case studies to draw up a picture of the *kind of library service* that might successfully address social exclusion, and the kind that might not.

Case study authorities, for these reasons, were not especially chosen to "represent", in any statistical sense, UK PLAs as a whole. For one thing, all authorities who took part in our work had to have a commitment to and interest in tackling social exclusion and some, our survey suggests, clearly do not. Beyond that, however, in our eight chosen authorities we looked for contrasts which would allow us to explore the specifics of this enterprise in a range of communities and institutional contexts. Such contrasts included:

- social criteria to give a broad coverage of differing manifestations of social exclusion in informational societies (i.e. "inner city" communities; suburban poverty; rural isolation / deprivation);
- regional criteria to incorporate coverage of all geographical areas of the UK;
- institutional criteria to reflect differing size, governance and management structures of PLAs;
- service criteria to reflect the history of service development in the field; the diversity of initiatives; patterns of service provision etc.

As the project progressed, approximately 25 PLAs offered to participate as case studies and eight were chosen from these. These eight comprised:

- Southshire, a county in Southern England;
- Innerborough and Outerborough, two London Boroughs;
- Welshborough, a Welsh urban authority;
- City, a large English Metropolitan District;
- Millborough, a small semi-rural English Metropolitan district;
- Caledonia, a large (geographically) rural Scottish regional authority;
- CELB, a Northern Ireland Library Board.

Some local authorities have requested that findings remain anonymous, and so case study reports are written using pseudonyms.

Within each case study our work was progressively focused to enable us to highlight a particular set of issues or concerns. Such themes typically comprised:

- a focus on a particular social group (for example, Black community; people with disabilities; refugees);
- a focus on a specific development or initiative (for example the provision of Internet resources, learning centres);
- a focus on policy or service strategy development (for "Best Value"; "Friends" groups; community consultation);

- a focus on services to particular communities (inner city; rural/isolated; deprived peripheral estate).

In practice most of our case studies consisted of interlocking combinations of these kinds of themes, set in the context of a general analysis of library service policy and strategy.

Generally, our orientation in each case study was that of collaborative researchers. Senior library management were usually initial contact point for each case study and we sought, though the research, to assist them with policy and service development. We did, however, seek to validate and triangulate evidence by obtaining the views and perspectives of other groups of "actors" involved in each case as appropriate including users, "non"-users and their representatives; front line staff; other local authority managers; elected members and community leaders. In most cases this process was successful in that our studies incorporate a wide range of perspectives on the future of public library services and their relevance to social inclusion. However, one perspective that is certainly underrepresented is that of "excluded" non library users themselves - in this respect our research replicates the failings of the many other research projects on use of public libraries which have by and large failed to overcome the problems of reaching this group [1].

Some degree of comparability between the 8 eight case studies was ensured through the development of standard interview guides, covering, for example, local authority policies and strategies on social exclusion. These were used, with appropriate local amendments, in interviews with senior library managers and other policy makers (see example at Appendix 3).

Fieldwork in the case studies utilised a range of conventional field techniques as noted in qualitative methods texts such as Burgess (1990) or Walker (1985). These comprised individual and group interviews, participant and (mainly) non-participant observation. Interviews were recorded where permission was given, otherwise data was recorded in field diaries. Interviews and field notes were transcribed and analysed in line with techniques recommended in texts such as Sapsford and Jupp (1996). Case study findings were initially written up as interim papers, which were presented to host PLAs for feedback and comment. Final versions of each report were then developed, and these are published as Sections 3-10 of this volume of the findings.

Case study reports are not identical in structure as each reflects the particular circumstances and issues highlighted in each case. However, each contains some analysis of the background to the library service and social exclusion in the locality, a detailed report on fieldwork undertaken and a concluding analysis of key issues and findings. These "key issues" were finally subjected to comparative analysis and synthesised to produce a concluding overview of the findings of the case studies as a whole. After discussion of a draft version of this overview at a seminar of case study authorities on March 27th 2000 (see Section 1.8 below), the final version of this report is presented as part of Chapter 4 of Volume 1 of the project findings, *Summary of Findings and Recommendations.*

6

1.8   Such were the formal elements of the research design of the project. There were, of course, a good number of other less structured visits, interviews and communications with individuals and organisations which have influenced our findings. The most significant of these are noted in our overall preface, but here it is perhaps important to acknowledge that such *networking* with policymakers and practitioners has played an important part in the process of this research. In particular, the development of the *Social Exclusion Action Planning Network*, part funded by LIC and co-ordinated by the consultant to this project, has resulted in a number of workshops and meetings (in London, Bradford and Manchester) which have enabled public librarians; community workers; policy consultants and others to share their ideas with us and provide us with feedback (especially) on working papers. Representatives of the 8 case study authorities also attended a seminar on March 27th 2000 where they provide not only invaluable feedback on the case studies themselves, but also perceptive discussion of the preliminary findings of the project as a whole.

More formally, we have also been well served by an excellent advisory group of senior members of the LIS community, who have contributed invaluable ideas, opinions and support. We have also closely linked with current policy developments affecting both social exclusion and libraries: one member of our research team, has, for example been a member of the DCMS working group compiling the policy proposals in *Libraries for All* (DCMS, 1999), and as a Project Team we have formally participated in the consultation process around this document. Another member of the team has also co-ordinated a research project on *Black Quality Leaders in Library and Information Work*, which explores specific ways of addressing one particular facet of social exclusion.

1.9   Overall, these activities and links have resulted in a research project that has attempted, at least, to operate as a real partnership between an academic and a practitioner led approach, both within the research team and as part of the wider network described above. We have, throughout the research process, made a real attempt to listen to information and library workers concerned about social exclusion, and we hope that our findings will at least reflect some of the things they said. We hope too, as a result, that our findings will be widely debated both inside and outside the profession, as both an analysis of where public libraries are, and as a blueprint for what they might be.

Note

[1] see Working Paper 9 in Volume III (Dave Muddiman, *Images of Exclusion: User and Community Perceptions of the Public Library*) for further analysis of this problem.

2. Survey of Public Library Authorities

2.1 Introduction: Aims and Scope of the Survey; Responses and Authority Types

This section presents the findings of the survey of public library authorities (PLAs) undertaken as part of the "Public Library Policy and Social Exclusion" research project. The survey was conducted in September and October of 1999 and was sent to all public library authorities in the United Kingdom - 208 now in total. It consisted of a postal questionnaire (see Appendix 1) which was completed by the Head of Library Services or a Senior Library Service Officer with responsibility for exclusion issues.

The core aim of the survey was to establish the *extent* to which public library authorities are addressing social exclusion issues, and to identify national patterns of activity. It thus focussed upon delineating measurable policy and practice in the field, rather than the attitudes of librarians or debates about the problematics of policy and provision (these are covered in the case studies and working papers). For this reason, the questionnaire consisted, in the main, of questions which were geared towards obtaining data about behaviour rather than attitudes: i.e. levels of service, finance, staffing, targeting and other tangible activities. It incorporated specific sections on Policy and Strategy; Structure and Staffing; Service Development; Resources, Book Stock and Materials; Community Links and Outreach; Partnerships and Special Initiatives and Finance and Monitoring.

Overall, 129 out of 208 library authorities responded to the survey, a response rate of 62%. This level of response is typical of this type of survey: the joint Library Association / Community Development Foundation / Community Services Group *Libraries and Community Development* survey (McKrell, 1997) obtained a 63% response from a slightly smaller population of authorities. It is perhaps tempting to infer that the PLAs who did not reply are less interested in, or active in, addressing social exclusion. However, it is difficult from these figures to conclude this with confidence: the low response rate from English Metropolitan Authorities is perplexing given that many such areas clearly exhibit severe and multiple manifestations of exclusion.

80%	(4/5)	Northern Ireland Education and Library Boards
77%	(26/34)	English Counties
73%	(24/33)	London Boroughs
61%	(28/46)	English Unitaries
55%	(12/22)	Wales
53%	(19/36)	English Metropolitan Districts
50%	(16/32)	Scotland

Table 1: Response rates by authority type n= 129 [1]

Moreover, as we shall see, we received many responses from PLAs who were quite candid about their *lack* of activity in this area. There thus seems to be no special reason

8

to believe that our sample is not representative of the public library activity as a whole in the social exclusion field, except for the general and obvious fact of its incompleteness.

Response rates varied according to authority type as detailed in Table 1. Respondent authorities were also categorised according to size (in terms of numbers of staff employed) and political control, as illustrated in Charts 1 and 2:
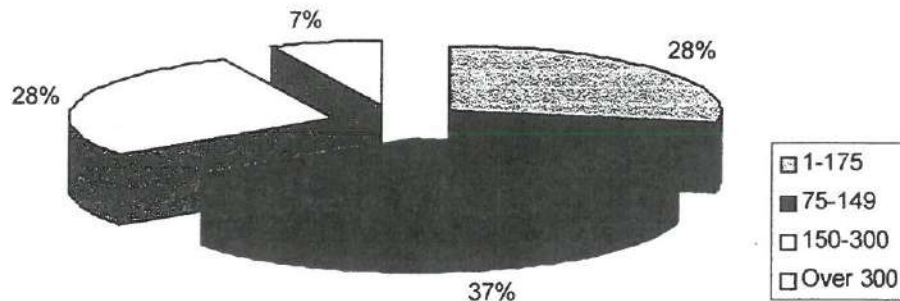
Chart 1: Size of respondent authorities by numbers of staff (n=123)
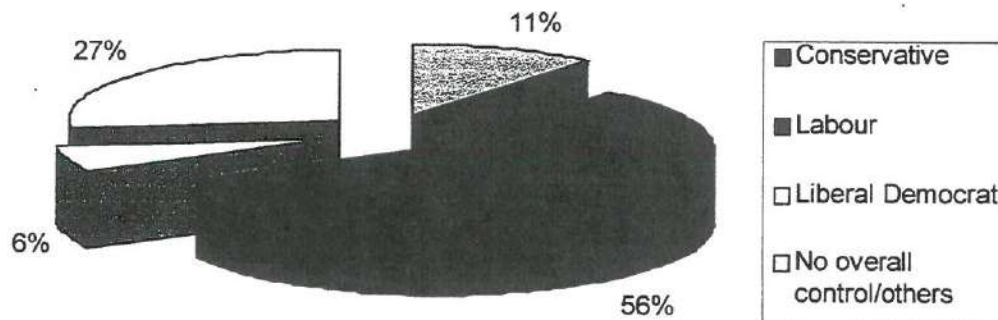
Chart 2: Political control (n=123)

Region of origin and type of directorate (education; leisure etc.) were also used as variables which categorised PLAs. Additionally, the 96 English local authorities who responded to the survey were distributed into quartiles according to current DETR indices of deprivation as a way of isolating most deprived and least deprived local authorities [2].

These categorisations of authority type were later utilised in attempts to analyse variations in library authority activity and to construct independent variables which might explain differences in responses to social exclusion. Such variations are, where significant, discussed in the particular sections which follow.

2.2 Social Exclusion Policy and Strategy

How important a policy determinant for local authorities are the (relatively) new concepts of social exclusion and inclusion? Our responses suggest that, perhaps under

Government influence and pressure, social inclusion / exclusion is becoming increasingly important. 40% of respondents now say that their local authority as a whole has an inclusion / exclusion policy or strategy, while a further 29% have one in preparation. Around one-third of our respondents were also able to offer us working definitions of inclusion or exclusion which were being utilised in their local authorities, and about 10% supporting this with detailed examples of policy and other working documents. Slightly more (22%) focussed on social "exclusion" than upon social "inclusion" (13%).

Nevertheless, it is clear that greater numbers of local authorities still approach exclusion issues through related policies and strategies rather than by addressing the concept head on. 59% claim to have community development policies, and 52% anti-poverty strategies, the latter being especially common in English metropolitan authorities. Equal opportunities policies are, predictably, the most widespread, although 19% of respondent authorities do not yet have them, including 42% of Welsh and 50% of Northern Ireland authorities.
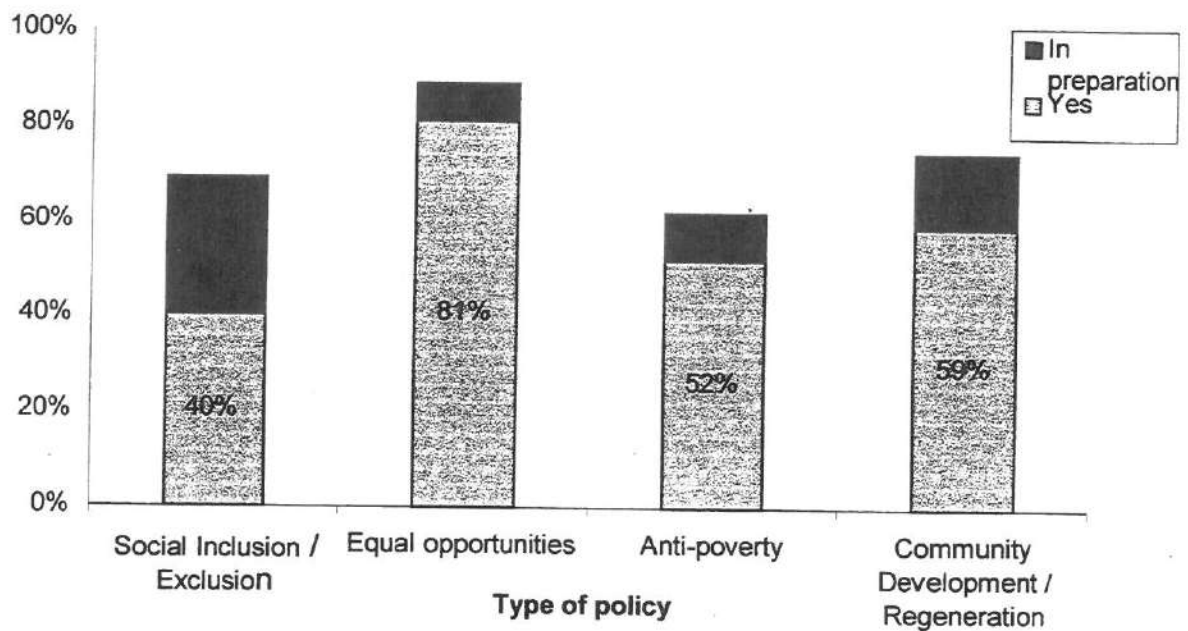
Chart 3: Local authority policies and strategies

Predictably, public library authorities lag behind their local authorities as a whole in developing and utilising policy guidelines in these fields. 35% of PLAs now say they use social inclusion / exclusion strategies, and these are generally, but not entirely, those PLAs where the local authority as a whole has developed policy (six PLAs in fact replied that they had developed exclusion strategies in the absence of general local authority policies). Authorities utilising such policies were distributed relatively evenly over region and authority type.

Of other related types of strategy, only equal opportunities (61%) and racial equality/ cultural diversity (44%) are more commonly utilised by PLAs than exclusion strategies. Quite low numbers were utilising community development or regeneration (29%) and anti poverty (20%) strategies, the former figure perhaps confirming the findings of the

survey by McKrell (1997, p.17) that only 16% of PLAs had a strategy for working with communities. However, worse than that, 26% of PLAs have not developed strategies in any of these fields at all, and only 25% of library authorities in Wales and Northern Ireland utilise an equal opportunities strategy.

Overall, these figures suggest that perhaps around one-third of library authorities have developed a social exclusion or inclusion strategy, whilst a further third utilise policies in at least some related areas. However, a final one-quarter of PLAs are seemingly inactive in developing or utilising policies designed to combat disadvantage.
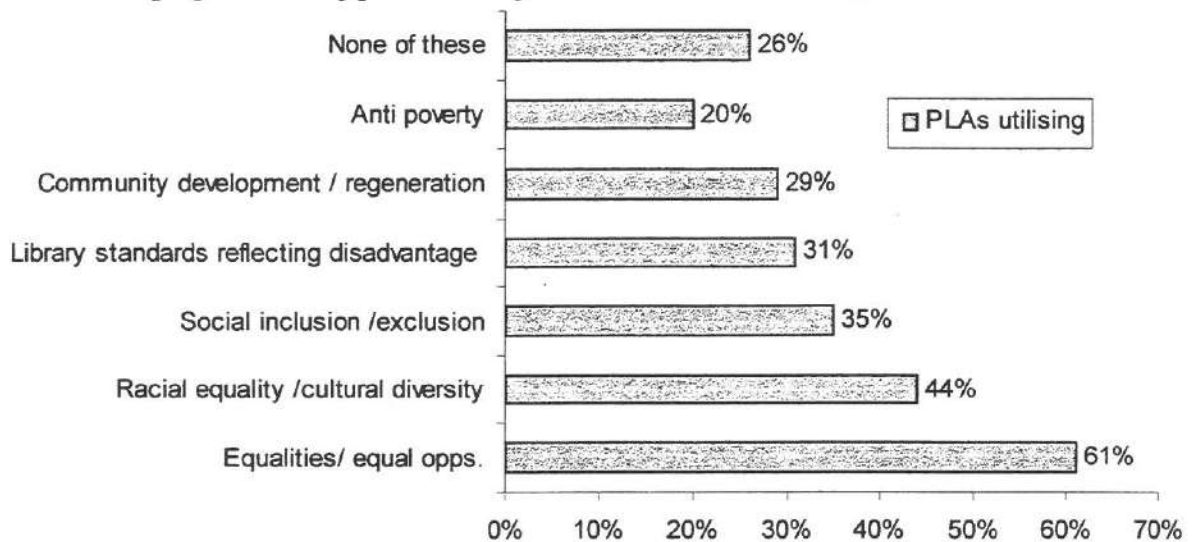
Chart 4: Public Library policy and strategy

There are some indications, however, that strategic and policy activity may be increasing, or at least that inactivity is no longer an option. Whereas 59% of English respondents claimed they addressed social exclusion somewhere in their 1999 DCMS Annual Library Plans, this figure rises to 97% who intend to do so in 2000. Moreover, 61% of all respondents (n=122) now report that the Best Value planning framework is beginning to be applied to exclusion issues.

However, we must be cautious about the detail and depth of this strategic activity. In a question which asked whether the structure of the library service had been affected by considerations of social exclusion (see Appendix 1, Q12), 26% of authorities provided no response at all. In contrast, a small number (10%), told us that exclusion issues are reflected in the grouping / structuring of library services, and 22% claimed that their "whole service was structured around a philosophy connected with social exclusion". More limited structural strategies included the setting up of special services or units focussing on excluded groups or neighbourhoods (49%), or the setting up of a strategy group or working party related to exclusion issues (40%).

11
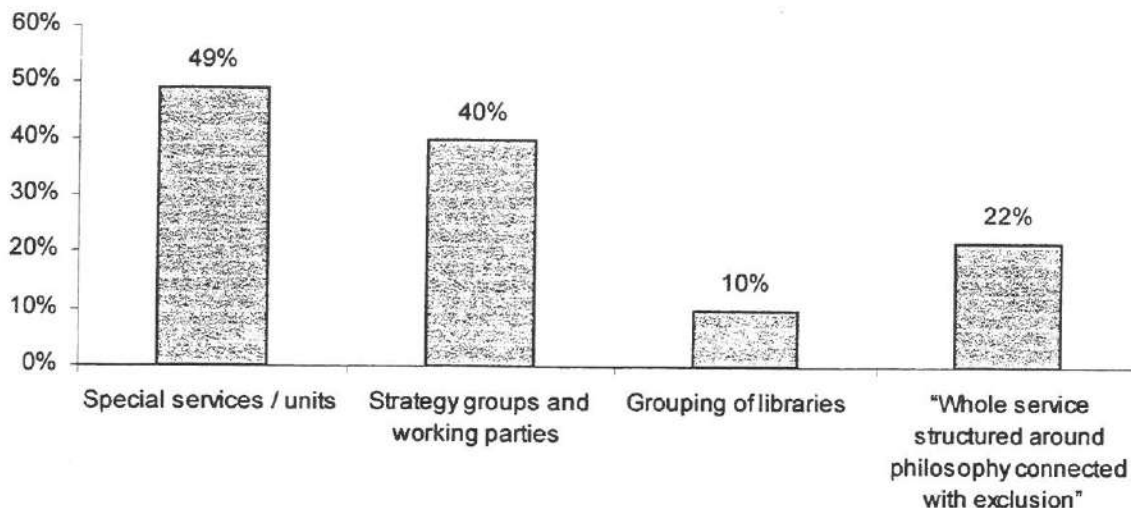
Chart 5: Public Library Strategic Activity

These limitations of strategic activity are reflected in levels of local research. Most PLAs are not organising their own research into the needs of socially excluded groups and communities, with only 27% conducting community profiles and 32% analysing issue statistics with exclusion matters in mind. A further third (32%) rely on general local authority data for information about exclusion. A final group (20%) engage in no identifiable research activity relevant to social exclusion.

A final significant strategic issue concerns the targeting of neighbourhoods and "disadvantaged" groups. As our case studies confirm, targeting is a complex and sometimes controversial issue in the public library community and there is by no means common agreement about its desirability as a mechanism for addressing exclusion. This uncertainty is reflected in our survey results: only a minority of PLAs (30%) incorporate targeting and priority consideration of excluded neighbourhoods in their overall strategic planning, although a further half of PLAs target neighbourhoods in special and ad hoc initiatives.
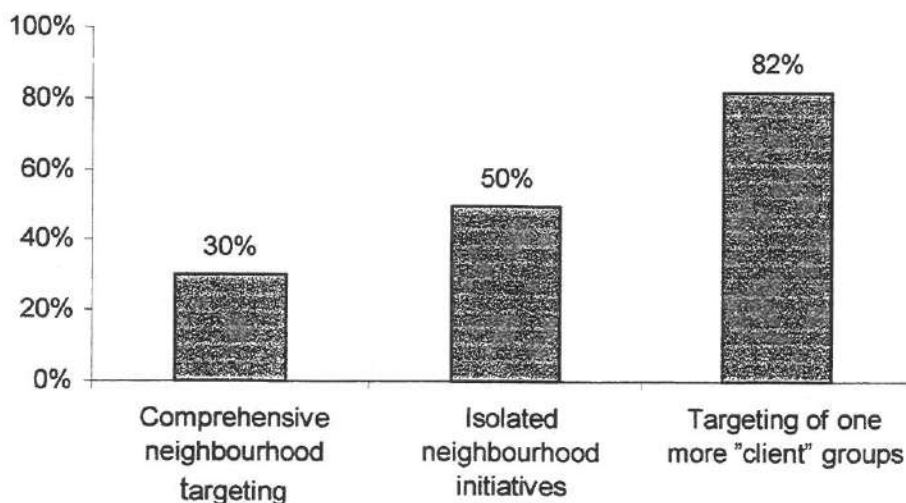
Chart 6: Public Library Targeting policies

12

A much larger majority (82%) target at least one client or disadvantaged group although, as we shall see in Section 2.4, this kind of targeting, too, creates its own anomalies and problems.

2.3   Service Developments

Irrespective of policy and strategy, operational developments in the field give perhaps a more significant indication of the seriousness with which libraries are addressing social exclusion. Our survey thus highlighted two areas of service development now commonly associated with strategies to promote inclusion: literacy and learning development and access to ICT (see, for example, DCMS, 2000, p.18-19). We wanted to see how, and to what extent, initiatives in these areas were being linked with a focus on social exclusion. In each field, we asked respondents about a range of recent initiatives, how widespread these were and whether or not they were targeted at excluded groups or communities. Results are summarised in Charts 7 and 8.
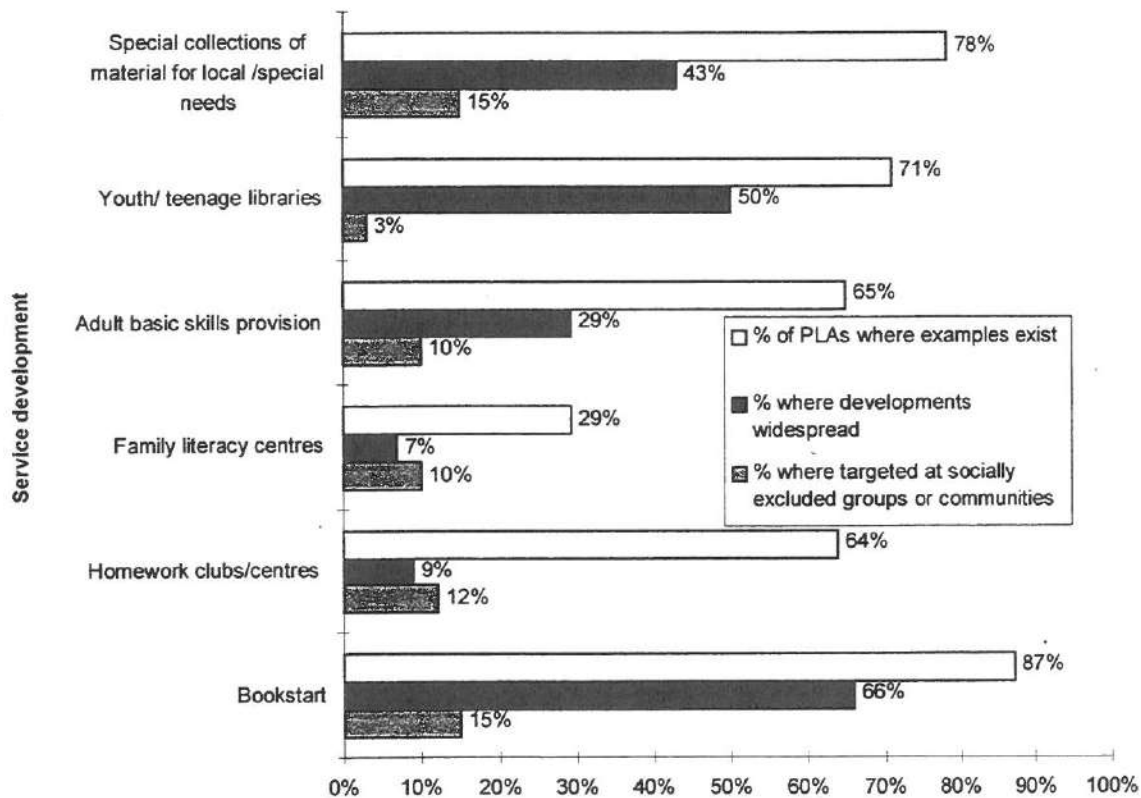
Chart 7: Public Library Learning Development Activities

In the case of literacy and learning initiatives, we can note widespread examples of initiatives such as Bookstart; Homework Clubs; Adult Basic Skills Provision and Youth and Teenage Libraries. Family literacy centres are rarer: only 29% of authorities are

13

experimenting with these. However, the development of such initiatives tends to be limited to specific and isolated examples in PLAs rather than being located widely throughout the service: for example, only 9% of authorities offer homework centres on a general basis. More significantly, however, in the majority of cases, these literacy and learning developments do not appear to be specifically targeted at excluded neighbourhoods or groups: in the case of each type of initiative, less than 15% of authorities target specific groups or neighbourhoods. PLAs, in the main, appear to be developing services like Homework Clubs, Bookstart and Basic Skills Provision on an ad hoc rather than a generalist or a strategically focussed basis.

Much the same can be said of ICT developments. Most library authorities, as Chart 8 illustrates, are now developing access to networking technologies, although in about half the cases this access consists of isolated initiatives rather than general availability (for example only 49% of authorities offer Internet access on a widespread basis). However, again, what is most significant in Chart 8 are the low number of authorities reporting examples where the development of ICT access is linked to socially excluded groups or communities. Surprisingly, this is even the case with information literacy and training initiatives, where only 13 (11% of) authorities reported targeted initiatives focussing specifically on the excluded. In contrast, 64% have developed open access training initiatives. This suggests, again, that PLAs hope to address the inclusive goals of *New Library, the People's Network* largely through generalist rather than targeted strategies.
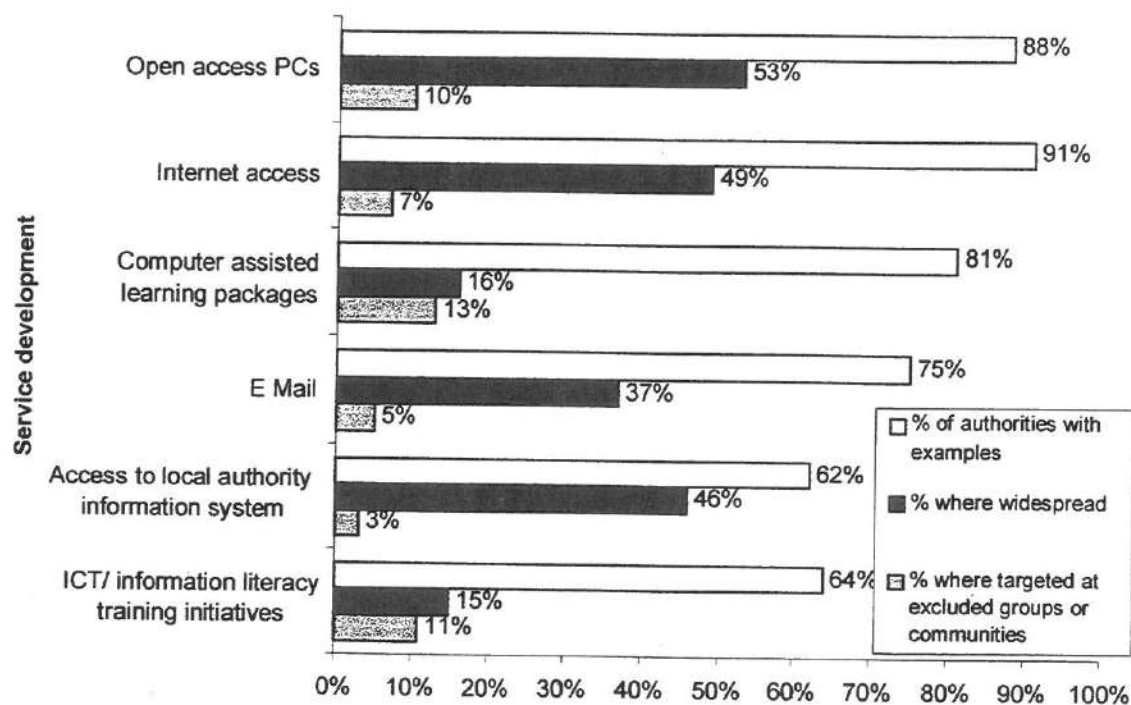
Chart 8: Public Library ICT developments

14

2.4   Services to Excluded Social Groups

In addition to general matters of service development, the survey also requested information about services to excluded social groups. These included groups excluded by disability, age, racism, discrimination, and a host of other social factors, as well as groups like the unemployed and working class people excluded by material deprivation. We asked firstly about the recognition of such groups as a service priority, and then about various service issues like the provision of permanent services; the designation of responsible staff; the development of material selection guidelines; and special initiatives/time limited projects.

Excluded Social Group	% of authorities identified as service priority	% of authorities with permanent services	% of authorities with staff specifically responsible	% of authorities with time limited projects	% with materials selection guidelines
Housebound people	82%	93%	81%	7%	33%
Children and Young people	82%	79%	78%	25%	57%
Disabled people	78%	72%	52%	11%	26%
Elderly people	61%	59%	47%	14%	20%
Racial and ethnic minorities	54%	49%	45%	12%	36%
Unemployed people	30%	23%	12%	11%	5%
Prisoners and families	29%	30%	33%	5%	16%
Lesbians, Gay Men and Bisexuals	19%	13%	12%	10%	9%
Women	17%	13%	8%	8%	3%
Refugees	16%	8%	9%	9%	2%
Travellers	12%	5%	6%	6%	2%
Working class people	6%	7%	10%	5%	1%
Homeless people	5%	4%	6%	5%	1%

Table 2: Service development and excluded social groups

As Table 2 reveals, PLA service priorities reveal a hierarchy of "legitimised" social groups, which, it might be hypothesised, reflect perceptions of "inclusion" and deviance in the contemporary United Kingdom. Excluded people, as far PLAs are concerned, appear to fall into three categories. A first group, including housebound people; children and young people; disabled people and elderly people are recognised as a priority and

served with permanent services by a majority of library authorities: effectively services to these groups have been incorporated into the mainstream of public library provision. Perhaps because of this, time limited projects and special initiatives are rare for the disabled / elderly groups and only around one-quarter of authorities have developed stock guidelines for them. In the case of children's services, such levels of activity are much higher. Children's services, predictably, have the highest levels of stock selection activity which take exclusion into account. Time-limited projects are also most common in the children's field, presumably reflecting the influence of the Government's education agenda in the funding of partnership and other special projects.

A second category of excluded social groups, including racial and ethnic minorities, unemployed people and prisoners and families, are identified as a service priority by between over 25% and just over one-half of PLAs. In the case of racial and ethnic minorities, prioritisation is supported by the establishment of permanent special services in 49% of authorities; most of these have special staffing and around a third (36%) use stock selection guidelines. Authorities prioritising racial and ethnic minorities vary significantly according to authority type, with 74% of English Metropolitan authorities but no Northern Ireland authorities and only 25% of Welsh authorities prioritising these groups.

Unemployed people and prisoners and their families are also included in this second group, with around 30% of authorities engaged in prioritisation and some service activity. Much of this, we might infer, relates to the establishment of post-war prison libraries and the development of services to unemployed people in the eighties, although the plethora of time limited projects apparent in that period targeted at unemployed people has obviously declined. Significantly, services targeted at unemployed people are more common in Scotland (38% of Scottish authorities) than elsewhere.

A third category of social groups are seen as much more marginal by most PLAs and are recognised as a priority by under 20% of respondents. These include refugees; travellers; and homeless people, groups traditionally on the margins of legitimacy in British society. Under 16% of authorities prioritise these groups and under 10% say they have developed any meaningful services or initiatives. Lesbians, gay men and bisexuals are similarly not recognised as a priority by four-fifths of respondent authorities and only around 13% have developed services catering for particular needs. Women's specific needs are also recognised by under 20% of PLAs, with as few as 3% having developed materials selection guidelines incorporating gender issues. Perhaps, however, most striking of all, the "working class" - the traditional focus of public library purpose - have seemingly become an invisible majority. Few PLAs recognise the significance of class in either policy or provision, although a small number of authorities have commented to us that "groups such as working class people are targeted as part of normal service".

Some PLAs took the opportunity in their responses to identify other excluded groups that they had prioritised or offered services to. These included: people in rural or isolated areas (4 cases); people with literacy / basic skills problems (3); "looked after children" (2); ex-offenders; parents / carers of young children; Welsh speakers; Gaelic speakers; adult returners; teenage parents.

Such awareness of the range of social groups affected by exclusion is clearly evidence of action and innovation, but, it is argued here, it seems to be the exception rather than the rule. Public library services to excluded social groups are, in the main, heavily influenced by public library traditions of generalist service provision and social legitimacy: although one tradition, that of specific provision for the working class, has all but disappeared. Other interesting patterns in the data suggest that the extent of targeted, time limited, projects has certainly declined since the 1980s (except arguably in children's and young people's services), and most PLAs now serve prioritised groups through permanent services. Also, only a minority of PLAs (again except in children's services) employ specific stock selection guidelines for excluded groups, and even where groups are targeted as a priority, provision is only sporadically supported by selection guidelines.

2.5   Community Links, Outreach and Partnership

Over the last twenty years or so, library work with excluded people has become associated with "community" based approaches. The survey thus included a series of questions which attempted to gauge the extent to which libraries worked with and in communities.

Services/activities	PLAs providing on a regular basis	"Ad hoc" provision
Mobile / Housebound services	92%	
Storytelling / reading	90%	
Events for children and young people	86%	
Provision of local information	85%	
Staff visits to community events	82%	
Representation on local umbrella groups	63%	
Deposit collections	74%	
Library accommodation for community groups	58%	
Creative writing sessions	50%	
Skills training (e.g. ICT/basic skills)	43%	
Information exchange with local groups	41%	
Local Studies events	37%	(38%)
Events for older people	35%	(33%)
Arts / literature workshops	33%	(42%)
Multicultural events	27%	(32%)
Events for parents	26%	(31%)
Events for women	14%	(17%)

Table 3: PLA approaches to working in communities

Overall, as Table 3 shows, PLAs do seem to have assimilated a wide variety of approaches to "outreach" and community work, some of them operating in all but only a small minority of authorities. Moreover, as the figures in the second column of the table

suggest, approximately one-third of respondent authorities organise or participate in various kinds of community events on an infrequent or ad hoc basis. However, levels of activity should not be overstated: 26% of authorities do not provide deposit collections in communities and 29% of authorities offer no library accommodation for community groups.

On average, too, as Table 4 shows, around two-thirds of respondent authorities are actively engaged in some forms of consultation with excluded groups or communities, usually with the aim of assessing the reading and information needs of local people. Some of these authorities (around one-third) have clearly developed more formal mechanisms of consultation, such as library users groups, focus groups or formal market research. A small number provided us with detailed information about various specific consultative initiatives they are involved in. These included:

- neighbourhood fora
- focus groups for people with disabilities
- work with social services and refugees
- work with Big Issue and homeless
- fora for older people
- teenage focus groups
- Chinese community forum
- gay and lesbian focus group
- Black forum
- visually impaired panel
- consultations on CRE standards
- early years forum
- crime prevention panel
- Healthy Cities panels.

	% of PLAs utilising	on a regular basis
Questionnaires / surveys of users	71%	20%
Feedback from outreach work	60%	31%
Suggestion schemes	62%	*
Discussion with community groups	48%	*
Surveys of non / potential users	44%	9%
Library users groups	33%	*
Focus groups	32%	9%
Formal market research	25%	*

Table 4: Mechanisms of consultation with excluded groups and communities

Other PLAs noted links between some of these consultative mechanisms and the emerging "Best Value" planning process in their local authority (see section 2.2).

However, as Table 4 also suggests, systematic and consistent activity is not always the norm: under one-third of authorities claim to have regular feedback and liaison mechanisms and programmes and, in many authorities, much of this activity is clearly occasional and time limited.

These responses, in line with the survey by McKrell (1997), point to a fairly widespread, if inconsistent, assimilation of a general " community" role by PLAs. In terms of events, liaison and community presence, a majority of PLAs are clearly active in participating in community life and addressing some exclusion issues through community ways of working. However, there are clearly limits to this approach: when asked whether or not liaison with excluded groups and communities was regular and "part of service planning" only 37% of PLAs replied in the affirmative, a further 39% stating that this happened on an "ad hoc" basis only. It is also clear that only in a small number of authorities was it normal practice to provide support, in terms of staffing or resources, for independent or community based library and information services. As Chart 9 shows, support for particular types of community initiative is usually confined to less than one-third of PLAs, and 48% of respondents provided no support of this nature whatsoever. This perhaps suggests that PLAs, whilst happy to engage in community "activities", are rather more reluctant to commit resources to independent or community run library and information services.
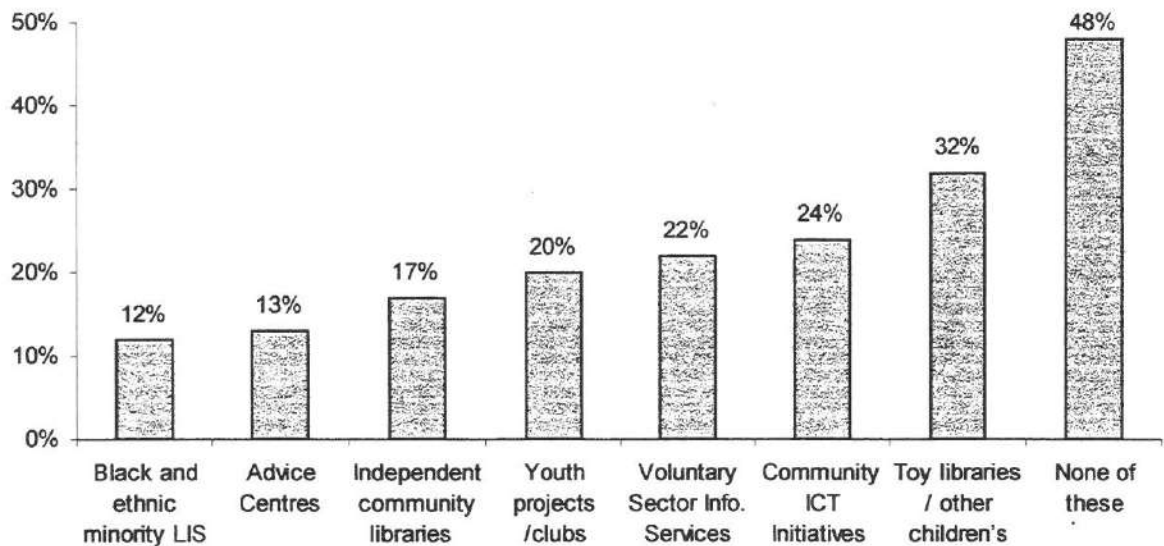
Chart 9: % of PLAs supporting independent / community projects and initiatives

Of course, one alternative to such "support" is an involvement in partnership projects with a social exclusion dimension. Clearly, this is now a popular way of working: overall, 57% of respondents tell us they have been successful in obtaining some partnership money for projects focussing on socially excluded groups or neighbourhoods over the last three years. One English metropolitan district, moreover, provided us with a detailed list of numerous partnership projects involving links with charities, schools, and community groups and work with children, young people, unemployed people and the African-Caribbean community.

19

In the main, such projects have been supported by SRB or other Central Government funding, with lesser contributions from the Lottery, European Funding and the private sector. A number of respondents remarked that partnership projects were specifically focussed on particular neighbourhoods or areas as a result of the bidding criteria of these funds.

However, as we have already seen in Section 2.4, it does not seem that externally funded / partnership projects have been a dominant factor in attempts by PLAs to tackle social exclusion. In only a minority of locations (9% or 12 numerically) have PLAs been involved successfully in more than three external partnership bids focussing on social exclusion over the last three years, although one English Metropolitan District has been successful in no fewer than 10! 47% of PLAs have been successful in between one and three cases, but 42% recorded no successful bids at all.
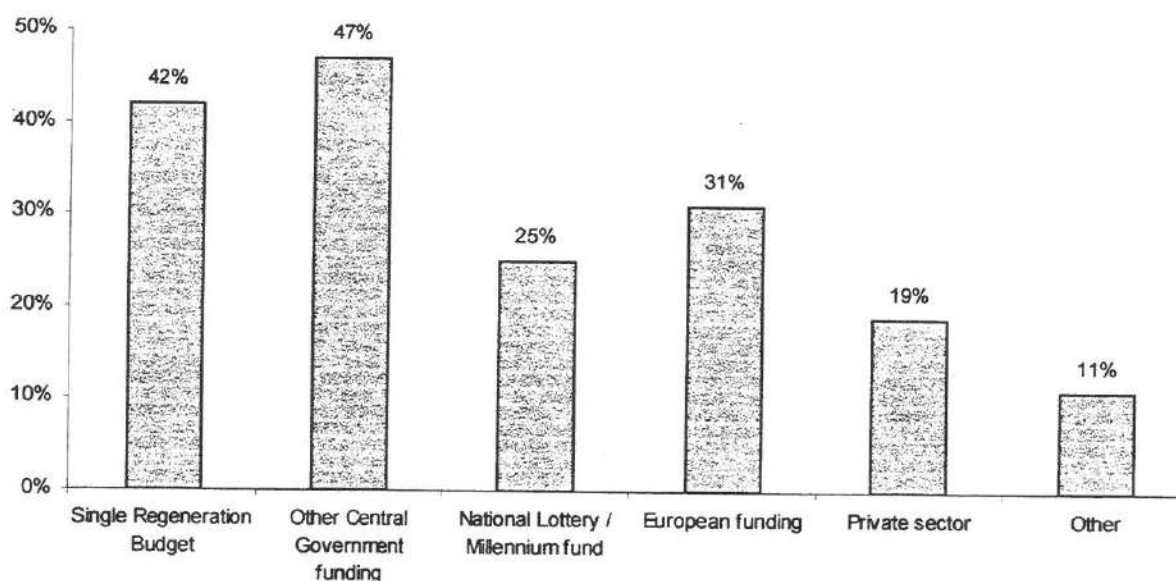
Chart 10: % of PLAs with successful bids for partnership projects since 1997 according to source of support

2.6   Staffing, Resources, Finance and Monitoring

How effectively do PLAs focus resources, and especially staffing, on socially excluded communities and groups, and what levels of resource do they commit to addressing social exclusion? In terms of staffing, we attempted, in two questions in particular (Q14 and 15), to estimate the extent to which PLAs had designated particular posts to be responsible for services to excluded areas, groups or communities. Approximately 30% of respondents resisted the assumptions of this question, typically claiming that "all staff within the library service have responsibility for services to excluded sections of the community" or, more problematically, that "our library service does not have any additional resources over and above the basic service to target any special groups".

20

Such comments were offered by services both active and inactive in service development aimed at tackling social exclusion, and are interesting in the main perhaps because they reveal the breadth of resistance to targeting across the public library community.

At Principal Officer Level	38%
At Librarian or equivalent level	52%
At Library / Information Assistant level	38%
Short term posts	13%
Community / neighbourhood librarians	38%
No designated posts	30%

Table 5: Proportion of PLAs with designated posts with responsibility for services to excluded groups or communities

Among PLAs who did designate specific responsibilities for services to excluded groups and communities, 38% have designated staff at Principal Officer level or above, 52% have done so at librarian or equivalent level and 38% have some posts at library / information assistant level which are designated in this way. Table 2, which looks at specific services to excluded groups, breaks down these posts in more detail and reveals that in general they follow the patterns of specialisation discussed in Section 2.4: i.e. the most popular target groups are the housebound, disabled, elderly and racial and ethnic minorities.

In terms of the recruitment of excluded minorities to the public library workforce, about two-thirds of respondents told us that they had policies which attempted to ensure the equitable representation of disabled people (63%) and people from racial and ethnic minorities (60%). However, only one-third (34%) said that they actively looked for special skills and requirements, such as community outreach experience or language skills, when recruiting staff to work with excluded groups and communities. The actual success with which PLAs actually recruit, employ and retain staff from excluded minorities is thus a matter of doubt, and the detailed data gathering and statistical work needed to assess this issue was beyond the scope of this survey. There is, however, clearly a need for further research in this area.

A small number of library authorities (11 in number) told us that they had developed staff groups in which members of staff from particular minorities could influence library service policy and work in more specific areas such as stock selection. Groups noted included Black and ethnic minority groups; gay and lesbian groups; disabled people's groups and female groups. One metropolitan district explained that "racial and ethnic minority staff develop library policies for black communities, for approval by senior management. Similarly with lesbians, gays and bisexuals".

Staff training practices relevant to social exclusion issues (Chart 11) revealed a now familiar three-way split between PLAs, although, encouragingly, nearly 40% of respondents here told us they had an agreed programme of training for all staff which incorporated exclusion issues. An ad hoc approach is still, however, rather more common.
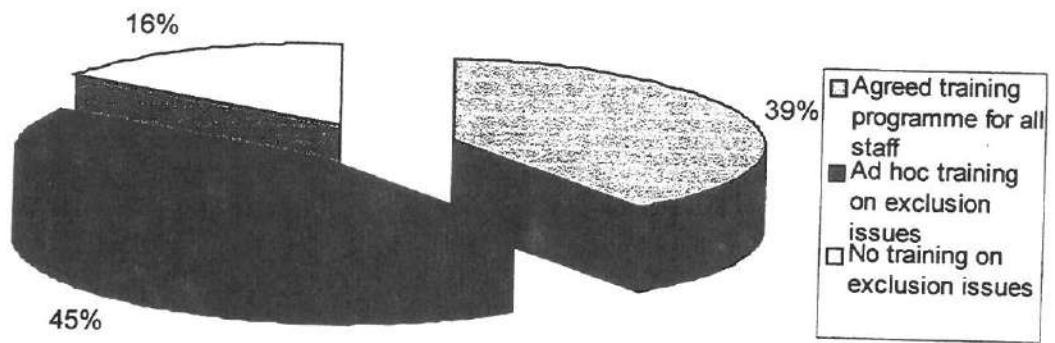
Chart 11: Training for Social Inclusion (n=112)

General resource allocation, and its relationship to social exclusion, was, however, an issue which many of our respondents obviously found it difficult to address. In total, only 16% of them had any budgetary mechanisms which enabled them to calculate how resources were directed at socially excluded groups or communities. In particular, no PLAs in Wales or Northern Ireland reported any such mechanisms, and (surprisingly) only 5% of English Metropolitan authorities, who experience generally high levels of social exclusion.
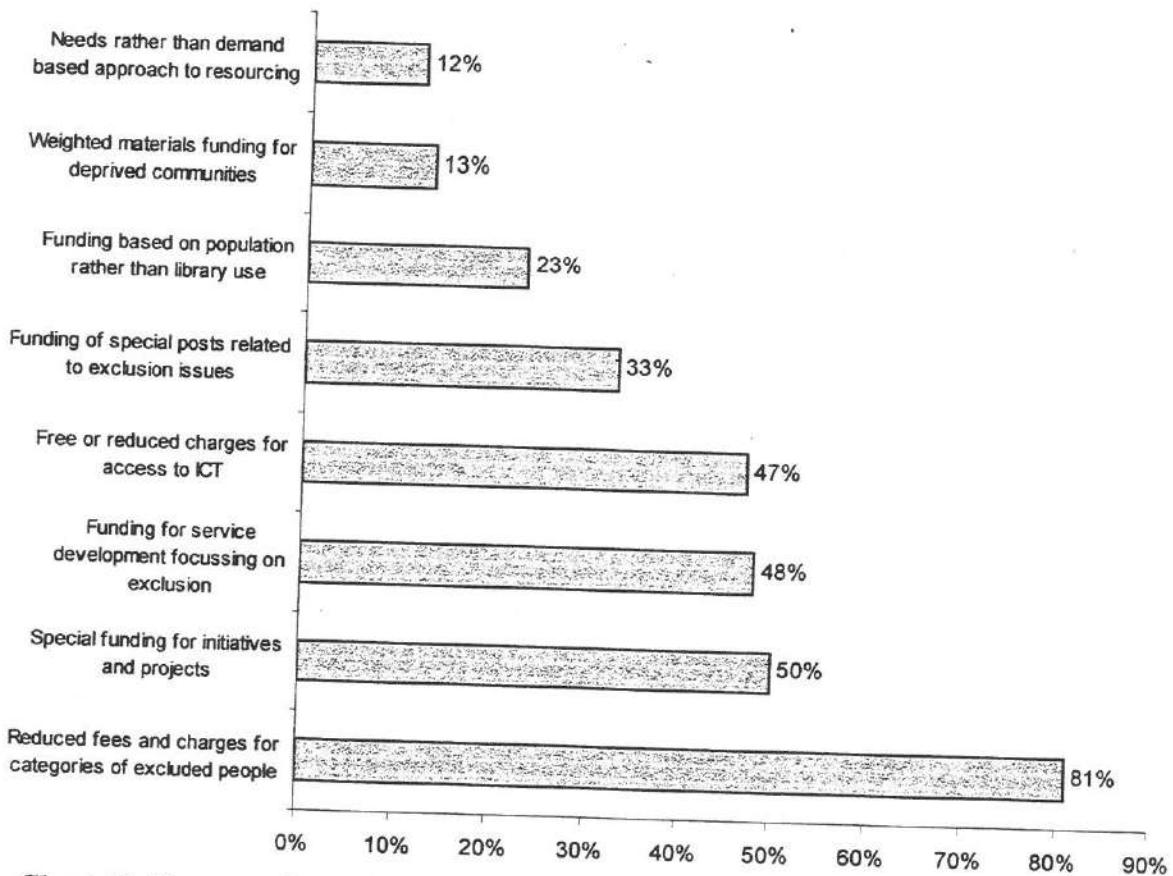
Chart 12: Resource Strategies and Social Exclusion

More specifically, Chart 12 indicates that social exclusion impinges on the resourcing strategies of PLAs only marginally and in only a minority of cases. Only a small number

of authorities (between one-eighth and one-quarter) appear to have adopted the position that excluded communities and groups need extra library resources, even though this will probably not pay off in indicators of demand. Thus, under 25% of PLAs base funding on population rather than demand, or adopt a needs based approach to resourcing, or weight materials funding towards deprived communities. A further one-quarter of PLAs, however, do earmark special funding for staff and service development related to exclusion issues. For the remainder, the main (and only) financial strategy relating to disadvantaged users remains that of concessionary use of charged services.

Perhaps one reason for this lack of clarity about resourcing is a lack of knowledge about the effectiveness of services to disadvantaged groups and communities. In 38% of PLAs, library management told us that they did not have direct responsibility for monitoring social inclusion strategies. Moreover, in spite of "Best Value" regimes, specific techniques of monitoring the effectiveness of services appear to be applied to socially excluded groups and neighbourhoods only sporadically. As Chart 13 suggests, although conventional measures such as issue statistics are relatively widely applied in evaluating services, techniques which focus on non-use and non-users are much rarer and are used only on special occasions / cases. Nevertheless, in total approximately 40% of PLAs do indicate that they are now attempting to assess the quality of their services from the perspective of non-use.
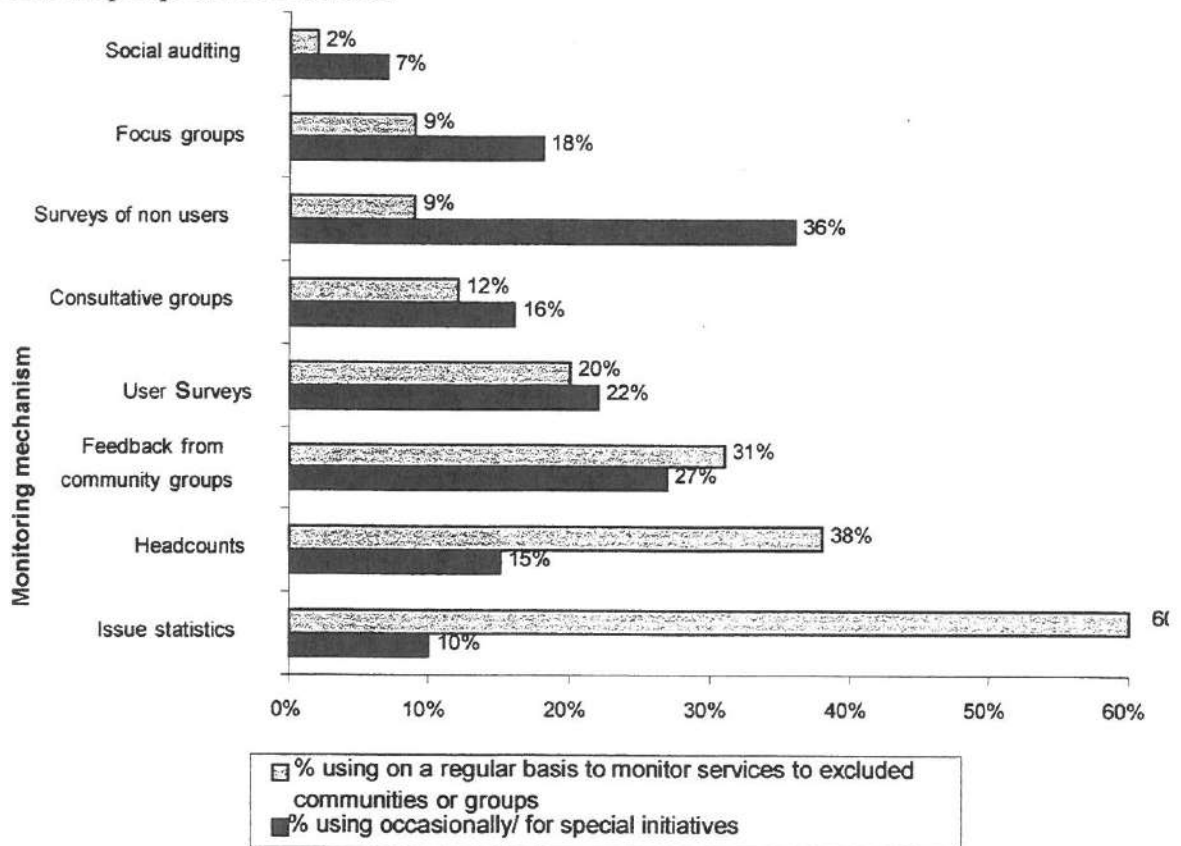
Chart 13: Monitoring services to excluded communities and groups

23

2.7   Overall Patterns and Levels of Activity

The analysis so far has focussed upon specific aspects of PLA social exclusion policy and practice, and has not, except in passing, discussed or estimated overall levels and patterns of activity. In order to assess this, it was decided to construct an index of PLA social inclusion activity. Here a range of 12 indicators of social inclusion policy and practice were derived from the survey and applied to each respondent PLA. These indicators are detailed in Appendix 2 and are derived from analyses of answers to questions about:

- policy
- service structure
- services to disadvantaged groups
- community activity
- partnerships
- staffing
- resourcing
- materials selection
- recent service developments.

For each indicator, a particular PLA in the data set was allocated a score of 2, 1 or 0. Broadly, scores of two were allocated where responses gave evidence of consistent, mainstreamed and service wide activity; scores of one were allocated where responses indicated partial, intermittent or uneven activity; and scores of nought where there was little evidence of activity or initiatives. Appendix 2 sets out the detailed criteria for scores in each category. At the end of this process, scores were totalled and each case in the data set was allocated a score out of 24.
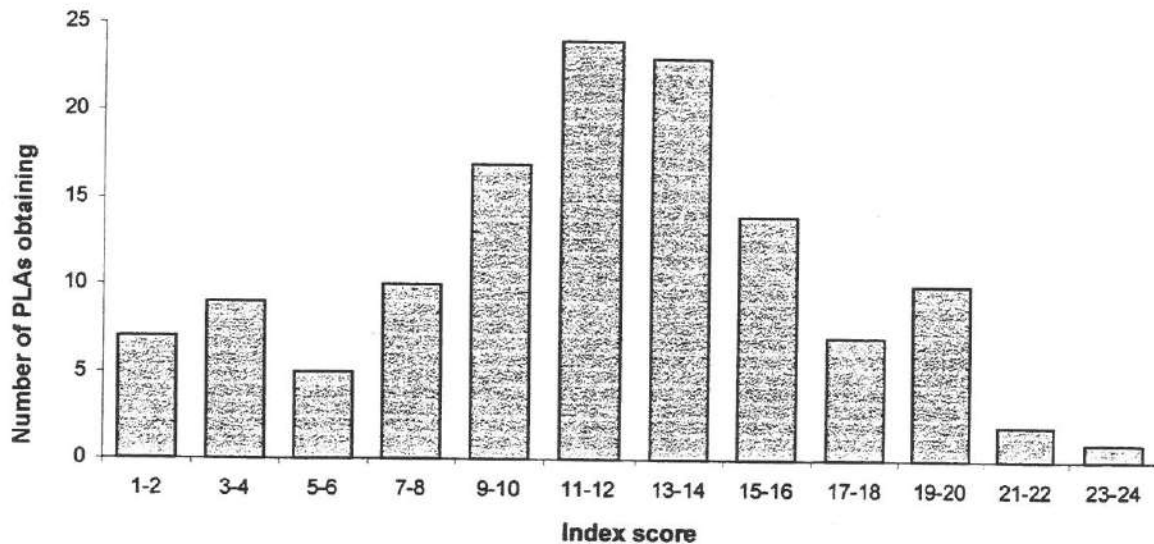
Chart 14: PLA levels of activity relating to social exclusion: index scores (maximum 24) achieved by PLAs (1)

As Chart 14 shows, the resulting total scores are statistically predictable, with the large majority of respondent authorities (95 or 74%) registering scores within the second and third quartiles (i.e. between 6 and 18 out of 24). However, an analysis which redistributes these PLA scores into three groups corresponding to our tripartite scoring structure reveals, in Chart 15, a slightly different pattern. 31 PLAs (24%) registered low scores of 8 or less; 78 (60%) registered middling scores of between 9 and 16; and 20 (16%) registered high scores of between 17 and 24. Applying our scoring criteria to this pattern we might tentatively conclude that:

(i) approximately one-sixth of PLAs, on the basis of what they tell us, are those with developed policy, "best practice" and service wide operational initiatives;
(ii) a much larger group of around 60% have developed a concern with inclusion but have less than comprehensive strategies and uneven / intermittent activity;

(iii) a final group of approximately one-quarter of PLAs are those with little apparent strategy and service developments which are rare or opportunistic.
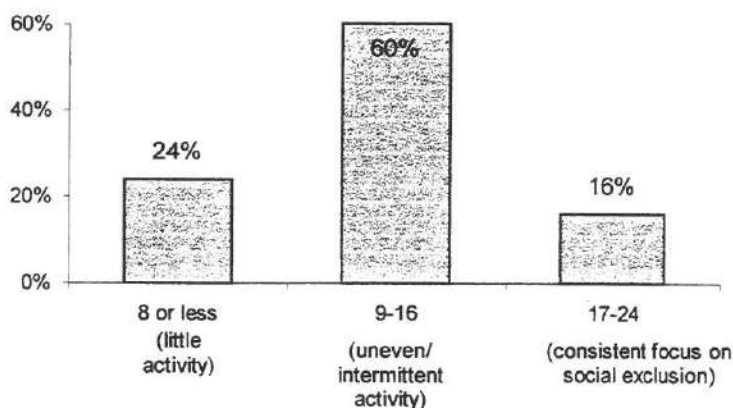
Chart 15: PLA levels of activity relating to social exclusion: PLAs categorised into three groups according to scores out of 24 (2)

In passing, it is perhaps interesting to compare these figures with the results of the DCMS *Appraisal of Annual Library Plans 1999* (Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2000, p.19), although the DCMS exercise applied only to *plans* and to all 149 English authorities. The DCMS group rated 54 (36%) of English authorities "good" on social inclusion; 73 (49%) "satisfactory"; 19 (13%) "poor" and 3 (2%) "inadequate". These figures are obviously more optimistic than ours, a fact that is possibly explained by DCMS focus on policy only. In contrast, our analysis does seem to point to a much smaller group of authorities that have fully prioritised exclusion as a service priority than DCMS suggests. Conversely, we suggest as many as 24% of UK PLAs do not really seem to be seriously attempting to grapple with inclusion issues at all.

PLA type	Group 1 (Index score 0-8)	Group 2 (Index Score 9-16)	Group 3 (Index Score 17-24)
English Counties	4%	81%	15%
English Unitaries	32%	54%	14%
English Metropolitan Districts	11%	63%	26%
London	25%	54%	21%
Scotland	44%	44%	13%
Wales	42%	59%	0%
N. Ireland	25%	75%	0%
All	24%	60%	16%

Table 6: PLA Index scores by authority type

As one would expect, there are regional and authority type variations to these groupings of PLAs although the extent to which these actually *explain variations* in policy and practice is open to doubt. As Table 6 suggests, English Metropolitan Districts and London Boroughs have the highest percentages of high scoring authorities, whereas Wales and Northern Ireland have no authorities in this group. English Counties predominantly fall into group 2, reflecting perhaps now long-standing patterns of service provision and development in these areas. Scotland, Wales, and the new English Unitary authorities have a larger than average number of PLAs with low index scores, indicating perhaps the continuance of traditional modes of service in some of these areas, or perhaps the problems encountered by smaller and newly created library services in developing policy and strategy.

A similar analysis by region largely reflects these patterns of distribution, with two exceptions. First, it suggests that the English Midlands has the highest percentage of PLAs (35%) in the high scoring group and, conversely, that the South West of England has higher than average numbers of PLAs with low scores of 0-8 (33%).

A number of variables were correlated with the final index scores obtained by PLAs in order to look for other links between the basic situation of PLAs and their levels of activity in the social inclusion field. Levels of activity in inclusion, it was established, did not vary strongly with the nature of their political control, analysis producing a Pearson correlation coefficient of only 0.120. Indeed a breakdown suggested that only slightly more Conservative controlled local authorities (23%) achieved low scores than did Labour ones (20%) and 15% of Conservative controlled PLAs were grouped in the highest group. Liberal Democrat and "No Overall Control/other" PLAs largely reflected average sample figures.

Two other variables, however, did link more noticeably with levels of activity in the inclusion field. In England, our ranking of local authorities according to the DETR deprivation index produced a positive Pearson correlation of 0.245 when compared with

PLA index scores. Although this is relatively weak, the breakdown in Table 7 does confirm that PLAs in areas with high degrees of deprivation in England *are* more likely to be active in the inclusion field. This, at least at a broad level, suggests that PLAs are taking account of the nature of the communities they serve.

DETR Index	PLA index score 0-8 (Group 1)	PLA index score 9-16 (Group 2)	PLA index score 17-24 (Group 3)
Most deprived Quartile	8%	58%	33%
2nd quartile	17%	63%	21%
3rd quartile	20%	70%	10%
Least deprived quartile	25%	65%	11%
All English authorities (n=96)	18%	64%	19%

Table 7: PLA index scores compared with DETR index of deprivation (England only)

The most powerful link between the scores achieved in the PLA index exercise and an independent variable was, however, highlighted when the scores achieved were correlated to authority size as measured by number of staff employed. This exercise produced a moderate positive Pearson correlation of 0.378 suggesting that activity in the social inclusion field is likely to increase in those larger authorities employing higher numbers of staff. However, closer scrutiny of the scattergram analysis (Chart 16) suggests that, in the main, this relationship operates negatively: PLAs employing over 300 staff do not achieve especially high scores but all achieve a minimum of 13. Conversely, although it is clearly not impossible for small authorities employing 100 or under staff to achieve high scores, it is more likely to be the case that authorities in this group will operate traditional, generalist, services and focus on operational routines. Or, as a respondent from one such authority perceived it: " the library service does not have any additional resources - over and above the basic service - to target any special groups. I believe this to be typical of many library authorities [like ours] at this time".
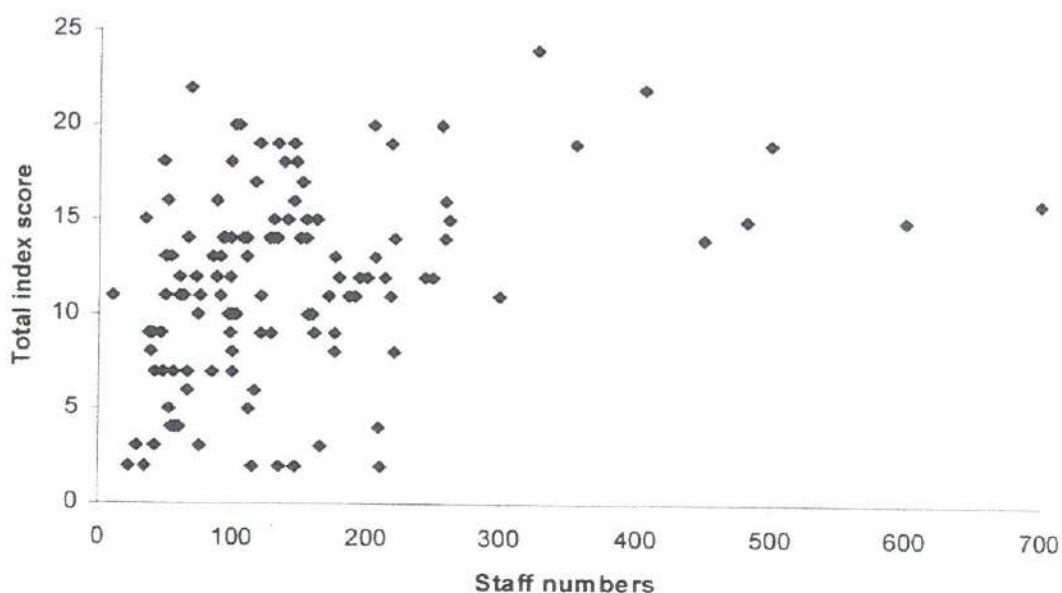
Chart 16: PLA index score compared with number of staff employed

2.8   Conclusions

2.8.1. *Local authority policies and public libraries.* In policy terms, a majority of UK local authorities (69%) are now developing social exclusion strategies although only 40% have completed this process. 35% of Public Library Authorities have adopted inclusion or exclusion policies or guidelines, in the majority of cases where the local authority has already done so. In related policy areas, 29% of PLAs utilise community development or regeneration strategies, 44% utilise racial equality strategies and a higher figure (61%) utilise equal opportunities policies. There are some regional / authority type variations to these latter figures, but not, significantly, in the adoption of social inclusion / exclusion policy.

2.8.2. *Targeting.* Targeting of disadvantaged neighbourhoods is used comprehensively by only a minority (30%) of PLAs, a group who make heavy use of community profiling and similar mechanisms as a basis for service planning as a strategy. Around half of local authorities target on an ad hoc basis, 20% not at all. It is more common for library authorities to target client groups - around 80% target children, housebound people and disabled people predominantly through mainstreamed services such as children's services; domiciliary services and deposit collections. Other client groups are less well considered [see Section (k) below].

2.8.3 . *Responses to central Government.* There is some evidence that local authorities are responding to central policy initiatives and mechanisms at the policy level at least. Only 59% of eligible authorities included social inclusion in last year's Annual DCMS Library Plans and these were generally heavily criticised. 97% propose to do so this year. Moreover, 61% of respondent authorities now say they are utilising the Best Value

framework to address social exclusion as part of service planning.

2.8.4. *Planning and resource allocation.* Despite these policy developments, the link between social exclusion issues and detailed service planning and resource allocation is, for many PLAs, a tenuous one. Only 16% say they have any mechanism for estimating the proportion of their budget committed to socially excluded groups and communities, and less than a quarter use devices such as weighted materials funding for deprived communities or a needs, rather than demand led, approach to resourcing. About half take account of social inclusion through "special" measures such as applications for grant aid, and developing special services. In real terms it is thus clear that overall the public library resource focus on social exclusion is often patchy and, at worst, very marginal indeed.

2.8.5. *Staffing.* In terms of staffing, although around 70% of PLAs designate one or more posts to address exclusion issues, some 30% of authorities designate no posts at all. However, many local authorities claim that exclusion issues are the responsibility of all, or a majority of, their staff - although in the survey we have no way of demonstrating the extent to which such rhetoric reflects reality. Encouragingly, however, 39% of authorities have a general training programme that incorporates training for social inclusion but 16% of authorities still offer no training in this area at all. Around two-thirds of PLAs also utilise equal opportunities policies which encourage recruitment of members of disadvantaged communities or groups onto their staff, although only 34% report that they actively seek to recruit people with specific skills and qualities which assist work with excluded groups or communities.

2.8.6. *ICT and literacy initiatives.* Recent service developments in libraries have focussed on the development of services to children and the integration of ICT / Internet access into public libraries. Large numbers of local authorities are have evidence of widespread service development in these areas (for example Internet access 49%; Bookstart 66%), but our survey suggests that only small numbers of authorities (15% at best for Bookstart) are targeting these initiatives at socially excluded groups and communities. Other initiatives, such as homework clubs, family literacy centres and ICT skills training appear to be predominantly available only as special initiatives and these are not always targeted at socially excluded neighbourhoods or groups.

2.8.7. *Book stock and materials.* Only a minority of PLAs have developed materials selection policies which focus on excluded groups or communities. 36% had no guidelines for any excluded social groups at all, and only 13% had developed guidelines for particular areas or neighbourhoods. Guidelines were more common for racial and ethnic minorities (in 36% of authorities) and Children and Young People (in 57%). However, quite a large majority of authorities said they assessed local reading and information needs through devices such as discussion with community groups (48%); feedback from outreach work (60%) and surveys (44%).

2.8.8. *Community activity.* In general this latter aspect of activity was reflected in fairly high levels of community activity reported by library authorities. This included programmed visits to non library user groups; contact with community groups; representation on voluntary sector and community groups; provision of local

information services and library accommodation made available for community groups: all of these activities were common in over 50% of respondent authorities. However, although this activity suggests that "community" librarianship is still widely practised at an operational level, there are question marks about its focus on social exclusion and its resource base. Only 29% of authorities participate in community development or regeneration strategies and 48% of all authorities offer no support of any kind to libraries or information services run by local groups or voluntary agencies.

2.8.9. *Consultation.* Although a majority of PLAs are engaged in relatively high levels of community activity, only in around one-third had this been transformed into the establishment of, or involvement in, more formal mechanisms of consultation. Examples include involvement in neighbourhood and community groups, library support groups; and community planning exercises and other initiatives linked to Best Value. A small number of PLAs (approximately 10%) also regularly consult disadvantaged and excluded social groups through local authority, voluntary sector and special PLA established panels and fora. A similar number have also developed opportunities for staff from excluded minorities (for example Black, gay and lesbian and disabled staff) to plan or influence service development to these groups.

2.8.10. *Partnerships.* Partnership working is promoted heavily by the Government as a preferred way of working to tackle social exclusion. Some PLAs are clearly very active in partnership working at local level, reporting, informally, large numbers of joint initiatives with other local authority departments and the local not-for-profit sector. However, the extent to which this has been developed into projects which provide additional funding for services directed at excluded neighbourhoods or social groups is more limited. 33% of PLAs report no partnership bidding activity at all, and only in a small minority of cases (9%) have PLAs been involved in more than three successful partnership bids over the last three years. Moreover, the majority of successful bids have been linked to SRB; Lottery or other national sources of funding. Overall, it thus does not seem that externally funded partnership projects have been a dominant factor in the attempts of most PLAs to tackle social exclusion since 1997.

2.8.11. *Excluded and marginal social groups.* There is also evidence that many of the UK's most marginal / excluded people are not widely considered in library strategy, service delivery or staffing. Thus, whilst a majority of PLAs have developed some policies, initiatives and services which reflect a prioritisation of children and young people; the elderly and housebound; and people with disabilities, the same cannot be said of marginal groups such as travellers; refugees and homeless people who have been considered by under 20% of authorities. Under 20% have also developed initiatives for social groups facing discrimination such as women and lesbigays, and despite many years of service development services targeted at racial and ethnic minorities are still only provided by 43% of PLAs. In the field of economic exclusion initiatives addressing unemployment exist in 30% of authorities, but only 9 PLAs even recognise the wider concept of the "working class" in service planning, despite its long pedigree in library history. There is thus evidence that most PLAs tend to exclude some of the most excluded groups and sectors of British society from their active service planning and delivery.

2.8.12. *Overall levels of activity.* Of course, this is not true of all librarians or all public library services, because the survey results do provide evidence of pioneering and consistent practice. Even though we cannot claim that our index of PLA social exclusion policy and practice (see Section 2.7) is a systematic exercise in measurement, we believe it does provide enough evidence to suggest:

(i) that there are wide variations in the levels of consideration, activity and resources which PLAs devote to inclusion / exclusion issues

(ii) that there are three "typical" categories of public library authority in terms of responses to social exclusion, and level and intensity of activity.

Thus, it is hypothesised here that the first category, comprising approximately one-sixth of PLAs, are those with developed policy, "best practice" and service wide operational initiatives. The second category comprises a much larger group of around 60% of PLAs who have developed a concern with inclusion but have less than comprehensive strategies and uneven / intermittent activity. A final category, of approximately one-quarter of PLAs, are those with little apparent strategy and with relevant service developments which are rare or opportunistic.

Such categorisation is, of course, an oversimplification. As case studies and the survey itself reveal, a particular PLA is often characterised by wide differentials of practice *within* its organisation in terms of, for example, services to differing neighbourhoods or differing social groupings. Nevertheless, we believe that these categories and estimates are useful in indicating overall levels of policy development and, crucially, extent of *activity* in the field. As such, they serve as a useful corrective to the DCMS assessment of library plans exercise, which necessarily focussed on policy development only (DCMS, 2000).

2.8.13 *Explaining variations in practice.* As Section 2.7 has demonstrated, there are both regional and authority-type variations in these groupings of PLAs. However, these variations are not dramatic, and the extent to which they can be said to actually *explain* variations in policy and practice is open to doubt. PLA activity on social inclusion as measured by our index is, it is true, marginally highest in English Metropolitan Districts and in London and lowest in Wales and Northern Ireland. Moreover, in England only, inclusion activity does increase generally in line with the local authority position on the DETR deprivation index - as one would hope and expect. However, all of these factors correlate to inclusion activity only weakly, and this suggests that whilst a PLA is affected in its approach to exclusion by its governance and environment, these relationships are relatively weak ones and cannot be said to fundamentally cause or explain outcomes.

In contrast, the strongest independent predictor of levels of activity in the inclusion field was a variable related not to politics or environment but to the nature of the PLA as an institution: that of size, and specifically numbers of people in the PLA workforce. Although not necessarily "beacon" authorities, PLAs employing over 200 people or so

were much less likely to be inactive in the inclusion field. Conversely, very small PLAs employing under 100 people, whilst not necessarily inactive, were much more likely to be so. Thus although size, in itself, does not necessarily *explain* how active a PLA is in social inclusion, it is perhaps an indicator that explanations are linked to the *level and flexibility of resources* (both human and material) that a PLA can apply to tackling exclusion. It also indicates, perhaps, that we should focus fundamentally on the PLA *as an institution* when considering how social inclusion policy and practice can be improved. For, as the case studies suggest, issues like traditions of service; the skills and perspectives of library staff; their flexibility and commitments - all in all, the *internal culture of the PLA* - are crucially important in determining the quality of library service provided for excluded neighbourhoods and social groups. How PLA "human capital", in the jargon of the information society, can be best developed to serve the interests of the excluded and the disadvantaged is thus, it appears, the big issue.

2.9   Notes

1. The size of our full sample is 129. Subsequent tables refer to sample size only where this differs from the full figure.

2. The DETR Index of Local Deprivation gives all 354 UK local authority districts an overall score, based on 12 indicators (DETR, 1999). In order to produce a ranking for the 149 PLAs, the scores for the 238 District Councils were averaged to produce a score for each County authority. This list of scores for all 208 PLAs was then divided into quartiles.

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3.   Southshire Case Study

3.1   Introduction

Southshire is a large English county in the South of England with a population of approximately 550,000 people. Geographically, the county is divided between two urban centres which together account for one third of this population, and two rural areas with an agricultural economy consisting of sparse settlement and market towns. There is also, in the west of the County, one pocket of declining rural industry.

Superficially, Southshire is affluent but Southborough, the county town, in particular has problems of social exclusion "as severe as many larger cities" (Southshire County Council, 1999). In addition, remoter parts of the county experience problems of rural exclusion such as transport problems, access for elderly people and high levels of "income polarity" - the gap between rich and poor. Other people in Southshire are also likely to experience cultural, educational and social disadvantage of various kinds: the County has significant black and ethnic minority populations and travellers who work as agricultural labourers.

This case study provided an opportunity to examine how a county library service was responding to such challenges. The County has a history of progressive local government, in particular a long-standing commitment to equal access to services. Considerable work is now being undertaken across the county to begin to tackle a range of social exclusion issues, and a number of important reports have been produced, particularly examining the extent of poverty in the county (Southshire County Council, nd; Southshire County Council, April 1999).

The County Library Service (CLS) has been deeply involved in such initiatives, and has experimented with a number of schemes and projects, including Bookstart; the Share-a-Book scheme (an Early Years Mobile Service for disadvantaged groups including traveller children); Family Literacy; and the establishment of a Gender Issues collection. In particular, as part of this case study we examine the development of a library service for visually impaired people and also the development of a community based ICT initiative in Northwold in the rural part of the county. These particular studies are supplemented by a general study of equal opportunities policy and practice in the library service.

Each of these elements of the case study was undertaken separately and each has generated specific analysis and conclusions (Sections 3.2.7; 3.3.6, 3.4.7) which can be read independently if required. However in Sections 3.5 and 3.6 we attempt to provide an overview of the approaches to social exclusion being taken by the library service in this case, an analysis of their strengths and weaknesses and a commentary on their typicality and relationship to the concerns of our project as a whole.

3.2   Study of Equal Opportunities Policy and Practice

3.2.1   Introduction

This part of the Southshire case study focuses on the use of equalities policies and practice as a mechanism for tackling social exclusion.

CLS has a long history of involvement in equalities work, and the former County Librarian not only pioneered services within CLS but was also the lead officer within the County Council on equalities matters. It is therefore not surprising that there is a considerable volume of CLS reports and papers covering aspects of equalities and social exclusion: for example, the CLS responded in some detail to the report on poverty in Southshire [Southshire County Council, 1999], outlining many of its initiatives (e.g. contributions to early years development; support for family learning; supporting out-of-school learning; informational support; developing rural learning centres; introducing a positive policy on travellers and others "of no fixed abode"; development of IT and the SouthNet local information service; a positive policy of holding down charges). The annual *Equal Opportunities Service Delivery Action Plan* [e.g. Southshire County Library, Arts and Museums Service, 1997, 1998] includes key tasks covering, for example, minority ethnic communities; people with disabilities, frail and elderly people; sexual orientation; rural communities. This part of the Case Study, then, is intended to assess the development and implementation of equalities policies and practice 'on the ground' and examine what impact the 'paper policies' are having.

Interviews were conducted in September 1999 with the Acting County Library, Arts and Museums Officer (ACL) ; the Assistant County Librarian, Field Services (ACLF); 3 Senior Team Librarians (ST1, ST2, ST 3) and 2 Library Managers, from Libraries in small market towns (LM1, LM2). The Leader of Southshire Council and the Council's Equalities Officer were also interviewed.

3.2.2   Senior Management Perspectives

At senior management level, Southshire appears to have an integrated set of policy and review documents which relate to and draw from each other; however, whilst Southshire County Council has identified some prime equalities and deprivation issues (e.g. disability, race, lesbian/gay, anti-poverty, rural issues), it has not yet taken on seeing this as "social exclusion". So, the CLS Employment Action Plan and Service Delivery Plan (which, from 2000, will become a composite report) feed into both the CLS Annual Library Plan and also the Southshire County planning process. In terms of its work on tackling equalities, access, rural deprivation and anti-poverty, Senior Managers claim that CLS has a well-documented structure of services with clear outcomes, and is:

> "held up as a very good example within the Council overall for the application which moves towards total social inclusion ..."

ACL sees this work as falling within his interpretation of the 1964 PLMA - an essential part of providing a "comprehensive and efficient service".

ACLF's view is that equalities work is high on the departmental and Council agenda - this, he says, is supported by the documentation which exists and the setting up of "serious" services, such as those for visually impaired people. ACL sees equalities as "embedded into the culture of how we manage our staff". Broad themes are set for the year by senior management, and then the actions required are generated by the staff themselves - they therefore "own" them. In any case, "Librarians have always looked at how best we can deliver our services to the total community." In terms of its effects on service delivery, ACLF sees equalities as "part of the mainstream", included in everyone's job description.

In terms of allocating the budget, ACL says that they provide broad support from within the mainstream budget, with separate allocations for the visually impaired and Home-Link Services, and for county-wide collections. He sees their role as:

> "selecting materials which meet the needs of the total community and on top of that we target resources to particular needs where we know that requirement is there."

CLS are starting to focus their services on the areas identified in the county poverty studies. Gaps are also recognised. For example, a report investigating the library and information needs of the Black, Asian and Chinese communities in Southshire was produced in 1995, but it raised expectations of services beyond those that CLS could actually deliver. Interestingly, it also identified that some people saw libraries as very bureaucratic, and therefore they did not want to come in to use the services. People were asking for local service delivery within community organisations, but ACL sees this as fragmenting provision, and is concerned that the result would be a lack of reasonable collections anywhere. Resources are a problem: at present, CLS has a set budget for "minority ethnic bookstock", based on the percentage of people in Southshire, and, obviously, this is a tiny amount of money; the report had shown that people wanted a whole range of stock, and expectations were raised which could not be fulfilled.

Developments include reviewing the services to housebound people; targeting the visually impaired service; bringing in Language Line to improve translation/interpretation; a Millennium exhibition on the history of Black people in Southshire; a joint event with Southborough City for ethnic minority groups; installation of hearing loops; implementing the DDA; implementing an ICT policy within their EOP.

Resources are a serious issue. The tendency has been to reduce the number of services and concentrate on "quality services"; the Members have been supportive of CLS and allocated an additional £300,000 to the stockfund (although CLS had to pay for this in part from their staffing budgets). ACL says that they need some £2.4 million now to bring the stockfund up to scratch.

Resources have also had an impact on staffing. The most recent reorganisation, in January 1999, has led to "tensions" (ALCF). In terms of recruitment, ACL says that CLS are not succeeding in recruiting Black and ethnic minority staff, nor people with

disabilities: in the latter case, this is because, in libraries, staff are "upfront at the counter where one requires a wide range of physical attributes in a way, so we can only look at the small area of where we can have our support services and so on to meet the needs of people with particular disabilities."

In terms of prioritising equalities and services, as well as following County-wide leads (such as that on anti-poverty), senior managers in CLS commission reports from staff, and this encourages the staff to think in terms of priorities. ACL feels that the real service strengths are in looking at outcomes in relation to their planning process and delegating prioritising to staff, thus empowering them to "deliver according to policy objectives". However, set against this is the feeling that the majority of services are now driven by Government initiatives, leaving "very little scope at local level to meet the needs of people in Southshire" (ACL).

On a more positive note, ACL feels that equalities work is kept fresh and alive in CLS by:

> "constantly addressing it. By ensuring through our recruitment and selection process, service delivery process, we're talking about total social inclusion, equal opportunity issues."

"Training, planning and ownership" (ACL) are crucial, and management ensures that equalities are not being dealt with cynically. ACLF thinks that visible successes are important (e.g. installing automatic doors and a toilet for people with disabilities) and inviting press coverage. Southshire County Council keep equalities high profile.

3.2.3 Senior Team Librarians' Perspectives

The Senior Team Librarians brought a combination of practical, hands-on experience and a managerial overview to the interviews.

Their view is that equalities ought to be seen as integral to everything that Southshire County Council does, but they are not convinced that this is the case, and they gave as an example the race awareness courses which are organised in a block as though they are something different, rather than having a range of courses on different topics, each with race awareness content. However, they think that Southshire treats equalities very seriously, and, although they are not as advanced as some London boroughs, they are progressive compared to other authorities in the south-west. Within CLS too, they see equalities treated as a high priority, but separate. The term, "social exclusion", is just starting to crop up in their team meetings. Terms such as "anti-poverty strategy" and "rural deprivation" sound very grand, and people at "ground-level" tend to think that it is nothing to do with them.

Equalities features highly in their day-to-day work, for example in terms of allowing free access to the Internet; developing SouthNet; outreach; developing approaches to open learning (and the recognition of the importance of Lifelong Learning in the establishment of a Learning and Literacy team); establishing homework clubs; use of the mobile

libraries to visit villages, e.g. for storytelling; services to housebound users.

However, they see it as difficult to identify what impact equalities has on their managing of staff - this may possibly be because one of their starting points is that staff should treat "everyone the same" when they come into libraries, and they expect staff to promote all materials to all customers.

Southshire is a member of "Branching Out", and they hope to tackle issues via this, especially as, whilst adult non-fiction is selected from approvals, fiction is purchased via CD-ROMs. Material for children and young people is bought from approvals, but they do not see much positive equalities material. Sometimes enquiries lead to service developments: for example, about 6 months ago, they had received a request for a booklist of "gay writers", which they had found difficult to prepare, so this led to their buying stock to fill the gap. However, they are less concerned with matching stock to community needs, and more interested in having all kinds of materials represented in all their communities.

In terms of prioritising equalities work, this is partly dictated by stock gaps (such as the gay writing one mentioned above), but they find it difficult to prioritise services - they are concerned not to make subjective decisions about stock and services, but are not sure how else to tackle this without matching stock/services with particular communities. At present, they feel that they are not having to prioritise, but are keeping "all balls in touch". They see equalities issues as to do with real people:

> "You have to be committed to the service you're providing to all the customers, and equal opportunities includes customers who are in some way disadvantaged, and their needs are as valid as anybody else's."

3.2.4   Library Managers' Perspectives

The two Library Managers interviewed both worked in small communities. Whilst they both talked fluently about the needs of their communities and their special needs, and this inevitably included strong equalities themes, they do not seem confident about talking directly about equalities, "Why equal opportunities, what do you actually mean?" (LM1).

Newley Library is used by "special needs groups", e.g. "mentally handicapped" people, people with strokes, a local special needs school; judging by the number of borrowers who are exempt, there is a number with visual impairment or who are unemployed. There is not a very big "ethnic" population (just 49 out of 7651, and these are predominantly Chinese and "Indian", plus a few Filipino women. There is a library club for frail independent elderly people, but the Library needs more resources, such as a wheelchair-accessible toilet) and more staff. The stock at Newley is shabby, and some areas (such as the large print and teenage collections) are in desperate need of overhaul and replacement. There is not a separate children's library, just an area with kinderboxes and old furniture and shelving, all of which needs to be brightened up. There is a lack of display space. It would have been good to have had the large print and spoken word

cassettes housed in a comfortable area with seating, but, instead, they have just one chair. Because more shelving has been squeezed into the Library, it is now difficult for wheelchair users to gain access. Some of the non-fiction has signs in Makaton, but LM1 thinks that this is not enough. There is an adult literacy area which is not highlighted and which, LM1 thinks, is highly unsatisfactory - libraries are not particularly set up to be friendly to people who are timid.

Smallborough Library has demand for large print materials and spoken word cassettes, and also has a few wheelchair users. They hold a club for housebound people every 3 weeks, but LM2 says that elderly people are put off from coming into the Library because they have to pass in front of the computers (which are "not for them").

Both Library Managers see one of the main issues for libraries being how to attract in new users: LM1 identified young parents as being particularly unaware of what CLS had to offer, and young people are put off by the poor teenage collections.

Staffing issues loomed large in this interview. Staffing levels are affecting the time available for dealing with users at both Libraries. There is not enough time available for staff meetings or training, so there is little in the way of receiving / sharing / discussing ideas, and, when staff are released to go on training programmes, they may not see the relevance because the training is not directly related to work and service in their library. Staff are frustrated because issue figures are dropping, yet there is no time to develop initiatives. (An interesting issue raised was the need for more male staff - both Library Managers feel that they want input from male staff). They wonder what is happening since the Review (which was completed in January 1999); time has been whittled away, and they now do not know what their jobs are. LM2 says that, if someone with special needs comes into the Library, they know the people to contact, but the response is not as immediate as users would like. CLS allows staff to do things, but the structure does not allow for progression for Library Managers, travel to other libraries to take up promotion may put staff off, and some also do not like working in single-staffed branches.

Libraries suffer from an image problem, and need to be more dynamic:

"I've got grey hair and glasses but I'm not that dead yet" (LM1).

3.2.5 The Perspective of an Elected Member

This elected member had been chosen for interview because she had personally championed equalities within Southshire County Council for some time, and is seen as the main 'driver'. In her interview, she makes it clear what her political and personal visions are, but also that she is very dependant on the officers (and other Members) for success.

She sees the Council as being well-intentioned: they have had an Equal Opportunities Policy for many years, and were one of the first County Councils to do so. Policies are constantly being evaluated, and legislation and other developments are very much

tailored to meet the specific needs of Southshire (recent initiatives include work on sexual orientation; disability; the Macpherson Report). However, little will actually happen unless resources are made available.

She is also concerned about the possible effects of the new structure for the Council: "we wonder, where is the place for equal opportunities?" She would like to see a permanent Standing Panel that watches over equalities issues (or, failing that, a scrutiny committee). She is very clear that a lot of people who are very poor and disadvantaged in various ways are remaining excluded. She wonders whether the Government is wishing, rather than turning things into reality, but thinks that the climate has changed with the arrival of a Labour Government, and that some initiatives (e.g. "Quality Protects") are good. Her vision is to "break down all barriers" to services - everyone is entitled to them - and we should "measure all activities against this outcome: will it bring it about or won't it?"

She sees CLS as being "very successful" in terms of developing equalities initiatives. This is partly because, in the former County Librarian, CLS had a Chief Officer who led on equalities, and partly because CLS are enthusiastic about initiatives to do with race, housebound people, visual and hearing impairment, poverty, young people: they take a broad look at how to improve. One thing that she thinks CLS could look at is "flexible opening"; she recognises that this is "difficult and costly, but libraries are not open when people would like to drop in" (which she sees as all day everyday and at weekends - perhaps more joint use of library buildings might assist in this).

She also gave a passionate plea for the importance of equalities. She describes herself as being "passionate about people who are excluded from the mainstream", people who are affected by poverty, whose life-chances are affected, who suffer from racism. She identifies herself as part of several "under-privileged" groups - a woman, working-class, a pensioner: as she says, "what applies to those people applies to me."

Finally, she says that she does not think the Council is at all complacent - they recognise that they still have a long way to go, and it is hard work to keep equalities in the forefront of people's thinking. She thinks they need "a body of people who are constantly working at it" to try to get equalities embedded in people's thinking.

3.2.6   The Perspective of the Equalities Officer

The equalities officer (EQ) and a co-worker deal with employment equalities initiatives and issues for the Council as a whole. To date, they have looked at gender, minority linguistic groups, disability, lesbian and gay issues. However, interestingly, EQ says that she has never been party to any discussions within the County about using the term social exclusion (and she wonders whether this is because she is not at the right level within the Council: this theme ran through the interview, as EQ attends the Council's senior management team meetings, but does not see herself as an equal member). The Members on the Equal Opportunities Performance Review Committee are keen on equalities work, but EQ now wonders whether equalities has a high enough profile - Best Value and Modernising Local Government are all the rage.

"We used to say we're an equal opportunities organisation - we're definitely not. We say we're working towards equal opportunities ... and I think when we truly reflect the make-up that's out there, at all levels in the organisation, then we'll be achieving something ... We do become an employer of choice, people want to work for us ... Where are the women at senior management level? Where are the ethnic minorities? Where are people with obvious disabilities?"

She considers that there are pockets of good work across the Council, especially some good positive action initiatives. The European Year Against Racism had been given a high profile, and she had worked collaboratively with other local authorities and the private sector. Currently, she is working on a Stephen Lawrence Report initiative, together with the police, the probation service, Housing, the local MP. Within the Council as a whole, there have been some exciting and valuable initiatives, such as the Springboard and Women's Leadership programmes, but in terms of specific equalities areas, EQ feels that little has been achieved. She says the Council is "failing miserably" on disability and had never met its 3% employment target; and fewer than 2% of the Council's workforce is from an ethnic minority.

She is also proud of co-organising a major public conference on lesbian and gay issues in 1998; the Council had produced an employment action plan which included the requirement to tackle some sexual orientation issues. EQ worked with Southshire Friend to set up a training programme which then fed into their corporate training programme, from where it was agreed to set up a Gay and Lesbian Network, and it was the Network which worked with EQ to set up the conference. "Keeping momentum going is difficult."

Despite that, EQ does feel that equalities is very much alive as an issue in Southshire. This is thanks in part to having a sympathetic Council Leader, having a dedicated Equalities Officer, keeping up discussions with Black staff, developing training (recent courses included "Confronting Equality" and "Diversity Strategies for Managers", an "Asian Awareness" course is just starting, and EQ sees it as important to develop training for staff who are scared to talk to Black people or people with disabilities in case they use the wrong words).

In terms of CLS, EQ says she has "real concerns" about the make-up of their workforce (which she sees as mostly women, many of whom are part-time workers). CLS has tried to recruit Black and ethnic minority staff, but EQ thinks that they could have taken this further: for example, if Black people are applying for jobs but are not succeeding in getting posts, then they need to look into why this is, and perhaps carry out some positive action training. EQ says that CLS "still seems archaic"; libraries need to modernise and become the centre of the community.

It was noticeable that EQ has had to develop initiatives outside as well as within the Council: for example, she is working with Southborough City Council and other groups to establish best practice as local employers.

3.2.7 Commentary: Key Issues

(i) Equalities

Southshire has a clear equalities policy framework (which will become even sharper next year with the streamlining of their reporting procedures). However, there are concerns amongst elected members that, with the reorganisation of local government, equalities work will not be so focused at Committee level, and monitoring will not be as easy.

Senior officers seem confident in talking about and dealing with equalities matters, and are setting a strong "tone" for the Library Service. However, at the same time, the former County Librarian was the lead officer across the Council for equalities, and there is some element of a "halo effect" from her work - there are also potential problems in identifying one particular person so closely with a corporate policy (after she has left, does the work continue?)

Staff at all levels appear to be committed to an equalities focus within their work and particularly to serving the needs of their local communities. However, it is also clear that the strong policy drive encountered at top officer / Member levels has been considerably diluted by the time front-line staff engaged with these areas of work. For example, staff appeared to be unclear about - or even in opposition to - the reasons for having equalities training treated as separate blocks, and did not reflect the prioritising which senior management indicated - rather, they talked about keeping all the balls "in touch".

At Library Manager level, there seems to be such an overwhelming involvement with just keeping libraries open that there is little time for looking outside this (there was also the issue of confusion about new roles and responsibilities since the Review, which may indicate poor communication of this or poor implementation of the Review). Some of the language used in reports and by the Council centrally seems to front-line staff not to be relevant to them.

(ii) Resources

Whilst Southshire appears to have made considerable developments in some areas, nevertheless it is within a framework of severe under-funding (for example, requiring some £2.4m to bring the stockfund up to a proper level), a point which was recognised at all officer levels and by the elected members. It has had a severe impact on staffing levels and on the stockfund, and appears to be hampering their attempts to tackle social exclusion.

(iii) Raising expectations

Whilst it would obviously not have been helpful for CLS to have carried out their consultation with Black, Asian and Chinese communities with an end-plan in mind, nevertheless it would have been useful for a prior assessment of the likely outcomes for the Service to have been made; without this, it threw up all sorts of difficulties for the Service, which have not yet been resolved. More than that, it seems likely that this initiative could well have worsened relations between these communities and the public library (the communities already thought that library staff were bureaucratic).

A number of as yet unresolved issues have been identified:

- how can a public library service assess the needs of a particular group in its area without falsely raising their expectations?
- the communities surveyed defined the public library service they required in terms of outreach to their community centres, yet CLS does not have the resources to provide this;
- CLS normally allocates stockfund, according to the proportion of particular people in Southshire. However, this may not always be an effective way of allocating the funds, particularly where there is a very small community in an area, who still require a certain level of service, and also in terms of dealing with historical disadvantage (if, for example, the Chinese community has never had any provision to date, then to allocate a % related to their population size will not overcome the years of not purchasing relevant materials). Overall, social exclusion implies the continuing targeting and prioritisation of expenditure and Southshire clearly need to develop more consistent mechanisms for this.

(iv) Staffing

Whilst there was strong emphasis on equalities in management from the senior managers, this was not as evident elsewhere, and there may not be a clear enough emphasis on why this is important.

There also appear to be differences of opinion as to the role of CLS in employing front-line staff with disabilities, and efforts need to be made to overcome this, especially in the light of DDA's requirement for employers to "make reasonable adjustments for employees with disabilities".

(v) Role of an equalities officer in local government

It was interesting - and disappointing - that the position of the equalities staff was very similar to that in some London authorities about 10-15 years ago, in that, whilst they had a central role within the council, they were also somewhat isolated(for example, the Equalities Officer had never been party to any discussions about social exclusion in the Council). This raises issues about the validity of this role, or at least of having a small central unit which is not part of any particular service area.

(vi) Where do local priorities fit in?

With the Government taking such a strong lead, there is now little or no scope for a local library authority to take off in a direction of its own. In some ways, this is obviously a good thing, but could it also lead to public libraries becoming even more like political footballs?

3.3 Study of the Visually Impaired People's Library and Information Service

3.3.1 Introduction

This part of the Southshire study focuses on the impact of the Visually Impaired People's Library and Information Service. The service is available to anyone in the county with a certified visual or print impairment. It is based within a suburban library, on the outskirts of the second largest town in the county.

Interviews were held with the head of the service and three of the four other permanent staff. A semi-structured interview guide was used in all these interviews. In addition to these discussions with library staff, a visit to a local non-statutory group project in Smallborough (in the southern area of the County), was undertaken. The intention here was to gain the perspectives of users and non-users of the service. The numbers attending the Smallborough Project (about 30-40 people) and the lack of space to have discussions with smaller groups meant that only a very general discussion was possible. All those attending the project were older people. Library staff also provided access to the service's file of user comments and complaints. It is recognised as a shortcoming of this very small-scale study that the main perspectives gained were those of library staff.

3.3.2 Service history

Before the launch of the service, Southshire Libraries provided large print books and spoken word cassettes for VI people. However, it was felt that it was difficult for people with visual impairments to access libraries and, moreover, they had limited choice of material because spoken word cassettes were popular with other users. Access to the Royal National Institution for the Blind (RNIB) talking book service was via a (rationed) Social Services department subscription. Information provision was largely left to Social Services and the voluntary sector.

The service began as a two year pilot project between the library service, Share the Vision and the RNIB, and became operational in January 1995. At the end of the two year period, the project was evaluated by consultants, but no formal evaluation of the service has been carried out since then.

The key elements of the service at the time of its launch were: the transfer of a collection of RNIB talking books to be held locally by the library service; the establishment of a dedicated collection of audio-cassettes; and allocation of staff, equipment and space for the service. Within a year, it was realised that local provision and delivery of RNIB talking books was not proving practical or cost-effective, and this service reverted to the RNIB headquarters. However, the project was considered to be successful in terms of attracting new users and the popularity of a local point of contact (Consultants' Report, 1998).

The link with the RNIB has been maintained, with a new service level agreement being

negotiated from April 1997. The service now acts as a single point of contact for users of both the library service and RNIB collections, with library staff contacting the RNIB on behalf of users (Consultants' Report, 1998).

3.3.3 How the service works

The service's initial membership was of RNIB service users who were transferred from Social Services. New members are referred by, amongst others, Social Services, voluntary organisations in the VI field, health professionals and branch and mobile library staff. Members do not need to be registered blind or partially sighted, but do require a certificate stating that they cannot use printed word material.

The Southshire service is based almost entirely on postal and telephone contacts with users, with material being sent out using the Royal Mail's free "articles for the blind" service. There is a large collection of standard audio cassettes (2,500 titles) and a smaller number of music tapes and CDs. There is a modem link to the RNIB in Wembley for requests for their larger-format talking book tapes. All the service staff emphasised how the work is very labour-intensive in terms of processing tapes and all the administrative work to support this, such as managing the membership database. Team librarians (who deal with "special client services" and are not part of the visually impaired people's service) carry out initial visits to new users to explain the service, complete a reader profile and demonstrate the use of RNIB tape players.

3.3.4 Staff perspectives

(i) Aims and objectives: a mainstream service
The first objective of the pilot project was to "assess the feasibility of providing a mainstream public library service for visually impaired people using local and national resources" (Consultants' Report, 1998). Library staff attached importance to users feeling that the service was "part of the Southshire library service ... it normalises it that bit more". One member of staff also thought that it was easier for users to approach a "mainstream" service which was open to everyone, rather than a charity, or, as was the case before the project, Social Services. Staff emphasised to new users that the service was free, something said to be a concern to many new users, as they are often unaware that there were no postal costs involved. The service manager also commented on the unevenness of provision across the country, with users who had moved into the area comparing Southshire's service favourably with that in other authorities.

Staff also saw the service as providing more equal access to library and information provision. There was agreement that the aim of the service was "to offer an equivalent service to what people could expect if they're sighted". The service was frequently compared to a local library in terms of being a friendly place where "you get to know your regular readers" and, equally, users also know staff, rather than having to contact the inevitably more impersonal RNIB. Staff saw the same benefits of social interaction (specifically for older people who might be living alone, or socially isolated in other ways) as were provided through visiting a local library.

(ii) Service users and their needs

The vast majority of users were people experiencing sight loss in old age. Other, much smaller, categories of users were: people who had been born with a visual impairment; young or middle-aged people experiencing sight loss because of conditions such as multiple sclerosis; and print-impaired people. Users were typically seen as falling into one of two categories: those who had always been "avid readers" for whom losing vision was a "dreadful loss in their life" (who were often very dependent on the service, borrowing several titles a week) and others who had turned to reading when their sight loss prevented them from pursuing other activities and interests. Provision of reading material was seen as especially valuable for the former group, and, also, as mentioned above in relation to "social" benefits, for those living alone or who were housebound.

Asked about information and reading needs, staff tended to reply in terms of what users wanted, or actually borrowed (largely popular fiction and, to a lesser extent, non-fiction). They emphasised that they did everything possible to obtain material for the small number of users with more specialised or academic tastes (which was difficult given the limits of what was available on spoken word), for instance by contacting the RNIB "students" service or by having material transcribed. Staff had differing perspectives on how well the selection system(s) worked. One staff member, in particular, felt that some users had limited help from carers in completing selection forms, but because of the "gratitude" for the service, they were reluctant to complain or ask for help from staff. Similarly, there was some concern that new users were clear about how the service worked, with one member of staff saying "I'm never quite satisfied that we're asking everyone and making sure that everyone has had the service explained to them." In terms of information, library staff handle any enquiries about RNIB services, and will also contact other services on users' behalf if this was appropriate (that is, respecting VI people's need for independence). The head of the service said "we're a one-stop shop - almost."

Two of the staff mentioned a user who was a disability activist "who kept us on our toes because he had very specific needs" and insisted on all communications being in the best format for him (tape). The service manager mentioned the DDA in this context, and it seems feasible that there might be other users for whom recorded communications would be of more use than print.

(iii) Promotion and under-use

The service had grown with little formal promotion activity (other than the meetings with voluntary and statutory organisations, described in the next section). Staff pointed out that the service was "struggling to keep up with the membership we've got," so there was a tension between promoting the service and maintaining existing standards (which, of course, paralleled the rest of the library service). They also said that, as with the generality of library services, there were of course people who did not use the service because they had no interest in doing so. Nonetheless, there was agreement that the service was under-used, although it was difficult to quantify the extent of this because the number of potential users was not really known (although according to Share the Vision/Library Association [1996] three-quarters of VI people are not registered blind or partially sighted). Client groups who were felt to be using the service

in especially low numbers were those under pensionable age, people with print impairments and ethnic minorities (whilst also pointing out that there is little or no spoken word material in some community languages). The service was already promoted through branch and mobile libraries, links with organisations in the statutory and voluntary sectors (described below), but staff suggested other means of promoting the service, for instance through doctors' surgeries. More fundamentally, the isolating nature of visual disability made it difficult to reach many potential users.

(iv) Partnerships and community links

The formalised link with the RNIB was seen as having major advantages and few drawbacks (other the initial problems that were resolved once the talking book collection had reverted back to Wembley). These advantages were seen in quite straightforward terms by the service manager:-

> "... the idea of having the link-up ... of having a service level agreement,
> of being able to offer anybody who has a visual impairment access to
> their service, has to be of greater benefit than not having that link-up."

Another benefit pointed out by one member of staff was that, with the current system, a user could join the service earlier in the process of losing their sight "when the need is there", rather than having to wait until the end of the long and traumatic registration process.

The service manager had spoken about the service to local organisations such as Southshire County Association for the Blind, and non-VI organisations such as a Black elders' group. She had also organised a meeting with social workers and another with representatives from different VI organisations. Both these meetings had benefits in relation to the co-ordination and streamlining of services. At the latter meeting "it was surprising how many people didn't know about each other", in itself an indication of the value of the library service's acting to further joint working.

(v) Developments and improvements

When asked about improvements to existing services, the main focus of interest was a drop-in facility (although the service manager was more neutral about this than her staff). One of the library assistants said that "a drop-in service would be wonderful, where people would have the opportunity to come in and chat ... that's perhaps [what] the service is lacking." As well as these social benefits, a drop-in service would enable users to browse the catalogue, and discuss reading needs with library staff. A comparison was drawn with the service already provided by Southshire's library clubs where, with support from a voluntary transport service, users of the housebound service meet in libraries.

Provision of a dedicated transcription service was already being actively considered in the library service and, as one member of staff suggested, this could provide improvements in people's "daily life" by putting routine documents on tape.

3.3.5 User perspectives

Most of the participants at the Smallborough Project used the visually impaired people's service. They were appreciative of the service and saw quality of life benefits in having access to audio material. These benefits were very similar to those reported by library staff and found in users' written comments sent into the service, where a typical view was that "your help wipes away many of the frustrations which accompany blindness."

At the Smallborough Project, users did not appear to have very strong views about the benefits of having a locally delivered service. The subsequent discussion suggested there were, however, probably benefits in having the initial visit from the team librarian. There were, moreover, some areas where users appeared to need more support and information. These included how the request system worked and questions about use of RNIB tapes and players. There were also some aspects of the service that existing users were unaware of, such as music CDs and reservations for RNIB tapes. All these areas would have been discussed with the team librarian, but the initial interview undoubtedly covers a large amount of information to process in a one hour slot. There was also quite a long discussion about the kind of reading material users wanted. The nature of this discussion tended to corroborate the views of those library staff who (directly or implicitly) stated that users needed more support in identifying and meeting their reading and information needs. Library staff were surprised at the amount of action (for them) generated from the short discussion, and acknowledged that it was, from their perspective, worthwhile to speak to the group. Library staff recruited two new service users.

There were also other information needs not to do with the service, for example on sound-only TV receivers and the availability of audio-described TV programmes. Library service staff (the Visually Impaired People's service manager and the area team librarian) were able to resolve these queries. It is inferred from this that, with more staff resources, there would be the potential for the library service to have a greater role in information provision, as suggested in the Consultants' Report (1998).

3.3.6 Commentary: Key issues

(i)   Mainstreaming of specialist services
Southshire's decision to staff and resource an entirely new service is, in itself, a measure of its commitment to people with disabilities. This is especially the case at a time when the authority was working within stringent national spending limits. Importantly, the service has successfully made the transition from being a short-term "project" to a service with a permanent resource commitment made to it.

This service promotes inclusion by attempting to make library services more "mainstream" or "normal" for VI people (although not providing the ability to "drop in" and browse associated with most libraries). The service can be seen in terms of helping individuals feel more included by being able to participate in something they used to be able to do and / or able-bodied people do, and the quality of life benefits of the service seem quite clear-cut.

47

(ii) Partnerships: a joined up service?

The unique characteristic of this service is, of course, its partnership with the RNIB. There appear to be clear benefits in providing a service for VI people as currently delivered in Southshire, in essence providing a local gateway to the RNIB. The initial project was supported by Share the Vision, and manifestly built on existing links between the voluntary and public libraries sectors, which, for example, resulted in national guidelines for library and information services for VI people (Share the Vision / the Library Association, 1996). There are also other partnerships that help create a more seamless service for visually impaired people, for example the service provides tape players as the local agent for the British Wireless for the Blind Fund. Although the service is being presented here as an uncomplicated success, it should be noted that the period of the initial project was a very challenging time for RNIB and library service staff and for many users (Consultants' Report, 1998). The success of the partnership is therefore a reflection of the commitment of the library service (and the RNIB) to the project.

In addition to the formalised partnership with the RNIB, the service has also promoted co-ordination at a local level, sharing information with voluntary organisations and Social Services. It appeared that the service had played a particularly important part in bringing together local agencies who represent and work with VI people. Staff emphasised their aim of providing a seamless service, and the degree of joint working could be seen as a step towards a joined up approach.

(iii) Limitations of the service

The service is entirely free, so there are no cost barriers to use (other than a possible perception on the part of some potential users that services have to be paid for). As in Welshborough's provision of ICTs, there is perhaps a distinction between providing a facility and enabling people to make the best use of it. The discussion with users of the service suggested that there were some areas where users needed more support and information. This discussion also indicated the kind of practical difficulties faced by VI people in their daily lives (and these individuals were, of course, attending a local support group and therefore less isolated than some others with visual impairments). As acknowledged in the consultants' report and by library staff themselves, there is scope for development of information provision. As already noted, it is not possible for users to visit the service, and this again affects the degree of support available to service users in meeting their reading and information needs. In addition, the dependence on print for requesting material may be problematic for some users. The service manager observed that this might be an issue in terms of compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act. Underpinning all these limitations is the question of the service's interaction with its users. Staff were agreed that there was a need for "closer contact with the membership … so we can get their feedback."

Finally, it needs to be said these comments on the limitations of the service should be seen in the context of what is undoubtedly an innovative service, which may be transferable to library services in other local authorities.

3.4 Study of ICT Partnership Initiative at Northwold Library

3.4.1 Introduction

This part of the Southshire case study focuses on the development of a community-oriented ICT facility at Northwold Library involving Southshire Libraries, Northwold and Region Enterprise Ltd and Northwold IT , an independent IT consultancy. The study provided an opportunity to explore issues around initiatives which aim to address social exclusion in rural but superficially affluent areas and also the extent to which social exclusion can be tackled through ICT projects. The research also explored in detail the benefits and problems of partnership projects involving public libraries.

Fieldwork was carried out at Northwold Library in August 1999 where interviews were conducted with the Library Manager (LM3); John Smith (JS), Northwold and Region Enterprise Ltd; 2 ICT Workers/Consultants from Northwold IT. An additional interview with the Acting County Library Arts and Museums Officer who had nurtured the Project was conducted in September 1999.

3.4.2 Project History and Outline

The origins of the project link to the refurbishment of Northwold Library in 1997/8. As part of the refurbishment, an additional community room became available in which Southshire Libraries wished to develop an IT facility to benefit the local community. Although equipment and connections could be provided, staffing constraints prevented the active exploitation of the resource, and hence a partnership arrangement was devised with a local voluntary umbrella organisation (Northwold and Region Enterprise Ltd) who would develop the resource as a training and learning centre. Northwold and Region obtained £13,000 (Dec 1998 -Dec 1999) funding from Northwold Region District Council to contract two local IT consultants (Northwold IT) to develop the centre.

The consultants offer support for the use of equipment and tutorial support for a scale of charges which undercut commercial rates but are higher than adult education course charges. Additionally the resource is used by the local FE college to offer outreach introductory courses and by local primary schools. A local users / consultative group has been established but use as a whole has been disappointing, except through schools and college taster courses where "several hundred" people have attended. The structure of the partnership arrangement is innovative, involving the voluntary organisation as a key facilitator in terms of both obtaining grant aid and employing / contracting the consultants.. A key goal of the project is to achieve financial sustainability by the end of 1999 (the end of grant period) so its development as an active resource can continue. Northwold IT are exploring various initiatives in this respect, including commercial development of the town web page which they have recently taken over.

3.4.3 Southshire Libraries: ICT Policy and Perspectives

Southshire Libraries ICT policies and practice are undoubtedly among the most

progressive in the UK. The "important role of public access to information is built into council IT strategy" (ACL) and this manifests itself in a widely distributed SOUTHNET community information service and a programme of free internet access that has now reached a majority of Southshire's branch libraries. The library service has taken a lead role in these programmes and recognises that the "smallest library should have access to the world of electronic information" (ACL). Social exclusion concerns are also beginning to be integrated with these access policies: SOUTHNET terminals designed for disability access are now available at County Hall; the Centre for the Deaf in Southborough has been provided with special equipment, and a new mobile library vehicle, convertible to an ICT training unit, is now being built for use in isolated areas.

Although the library service recognises that the active use of ICTs for learning is essential if social exclusion is to be tackled, it claims that it cannot raise funding to support the staffing of such initiatives. Partnership funding is therefore essential if such projects are to get off the ground: ACL claims that in general "we wouldn't be able from our existing resources to deliver a learning opportunity with homework clubs and so on....we could deliver if we had the funding, but I don't think that wheedles its way into the local community enough, there has to be other players involved".

The project at Northwold has brought in these players and ACL sees its biggest benefit is that "it's happened". However, he is frustrated at the lack of "bums on seats" and the way that the community and business facets of the project are still apparently in conflict: "they were looking for a business stream to provide the money, I was looking for opportunity for people to come and learn IT skills". In the end, however, he claims that there is no alternative in a place like Northwold, where grant aid is almost impossible to come by. "What I want is something delivered in Northwold in terms of providing learning opportunities for local people". He is uncertain, however, whether at the end of the day the private sector element of the partnership will deliver and would like to see much more involvement from local community volunteers. However, a complicating factor is that, according to ACL, the library service "still has an issue with the trades unions on the use of volunteers for services which are deemed to be part of our core service provision" and although ACL is hopeful, this issue is yet to be resolved.

3.4.4 Partner Perspectives: Northwold and Region Enterprise

Northwold and Region Enterprise is a local umbrella voluntary organisation constituted as a not-for-profit company. It aims to stimulate the local economy and employment opportunities in the North Southshire area, especially in those areas where there is little or no development - i.e. almost any activity except tourism or agriculture. JS, its chairperson, sees this heavily distorted economy as the main cause of social exclusion in the area, especially for young people who are entering employment and are driven away (excluded) to larger industrial towns and further afield to find work and accommodation - house prices are sky high in the area and many local people sell up to professionals, commuters, retirees. Training and skills, especially in ICTs, JS argues, are essential if a more holistic local economic and social base is to be developed. However, money to initiate such developments is hard to come by: an SRB 4 project bid failed because of the relative affluence of the area, although Northwold and Region District Council

(according to ICT1 "awash with money") has been a more promising source.

For these reasons, Northwold and Region Enterprise were happy to enter into partnership with the library when the opportunity arose from the library refurbishment to set up an IT room. JS is happy with the partnership arrangements and thinks they work well, but identifies the key problem as one of sustainability. In an area like Northwold, he argues, the community has to "help itself" and this necessitates developing a business structure whereby a sustainable business can subsidise "work for the community". In the end, he thinks he sees a light at the end of the tunnel, and thinks sustainability will be achieved by the end of the grant period (Dec 99).

Problems, he thinks, have focused around the fact that "people and businesses are very slow to recognise the need for IT training" and therefore haven't patronised Northwold IT in the numbers hoped for. However, FE college courses have, he suggests, been successful and he sees in the web page the seeds of a viable income stream for Northwold IT. He also argues that the library service have been "first class" partners to work with and sees no contradiction between the library function and that of IT training, arguing that the idea of lifelong learning provides a common thread.

3.4.5   Partner Perspectives: Northwold IT

ICT1 and ICT2, who together operate as the IT consultancy firm, Northwold IT, are in general much more pessimistic about the potential and success of the project. They come from, respectively, an IT/local government and an accountancy background, but both argue that, whilst needing to make a living, they are attracted by the community remit of the project. In general terms, however, they experience some confusion over their role, and different stakeholders' expectations of them. On the one hand, they feel that the library service expects them to "promote IT to the community" and "do IT literacy straight away" whereas in order to succeed as a business they need to convey a commercial message: "you're talking about suits and that kind of environment which is different to the kind of environment libraries fall into" (ICT2). They are also unsure about the image of the library as an appropriate vehicle for the popularisation of ICTs. They point to the physical difficulties of library buildings (rules/silence etc.) and the need of IT businesses for a "shop window" and "whizziness, excitement".

More materialistically, they face the problem of creating a sustainable business by the time their District Council grant ceases, in Dec 99. They have tried several ways of generating sustainability: a (relatively successful) commercial launch; marketing Sage business solutions software and support; providing personal tuition and IT support, and most latterly taking over the town web page. It is unclear whether these initiatives will succeed, although ICT2 argues that "there must be some mixture which might work, otherwise we'll have to go back to the library service for another model". An additional problem is that they feel pressured to limit their entrepreneurial activities and spend time offering drop-in sessions; promoting Web-Wise to kids and developing a community orientation - a field where they obviously lack experience. They are highly conscious of these pressures and laugh and talk of "trying to generate something out of this fusion, this Tony Blair symbiosis."

An additional problem, Northwold IT claim, lies in the social structure of Northwold and in the lack of interest (relative to other areas) in ICTs as a vehicle for education and advancement. ICT2 explains "if you saw this as a feudal environment, IT is probably inappropriate - IT is a sort of entrepreneurial phenomenon, the driving element is middle class bourgeoisie.........they're the driving, change agents and they're not really here". As for the socially excluded "they don't see it as a way forward for them........ they don't see IT as a way of improving their jobs .... they'd move geographically first."

In the end, Northwold IT argue, the project will only really succeed on the basis of a higher level of state support. "If we were paid a reasonable salary for the community remit, but given space for further 'value added' developments, then there might be a way forward" (ICT1).

3.4.6 Library Staff Perspectives

LM3, the Library Manager responsible for Northwold Library, is also on the whole disappointed with the project and its impact on the local community. She feels that access to new ICTs is vital for "people who, for whatever reason are not wired up at home", and she is keen to underline that many such "excluded" people live around Northwold, in spite of its apparent affluence. Her 12 years experience working in the town have revealed, she says, "many hidden pockets of disadvantage... and the difference between the haves and the have nots is more accentuated". She points in particular to areas of council housing in the town; isolated villages and farms; and an annual influx of migrant farm workers who bring children with special needs to the primary school. Like JS, she also points to the high cost of property as an excluding mechanism for local people. Other specific excluded groups include a growing number of elderly and isolated people, and a local centre for people suffering from mental health problems of various kinds.

Library services to these groups are fairly traditional - housebound reader services; school visits - and they are, according to LM3, constrained by staffing levels and the difficulty of "para-professional staff" getting off the library counter. However, new initiatives include weekly visits from the mental health centre; homework facilities including networked PCs; and the county-wide visually impaired service - the first two of these offered by the local staff.
LM3 is disappointed that similar staffing constraints have prevented her and her staff having direct input into the project. She had envisaged, she says, many of the facilities of the IT room being made more widely available for library users and excluded groups noted above - for example the mental health group who come in with their carers every week and make excellent use of the PC and Internet terminal in the library but not the IT room, and the homework club. She feels that the library and the IT room, because of the structure and management of the project, have developed "two separate identities".

Nevertheless, there have been, she thinks, positive benefits for the library service. There has been an increase in children's use of the library due to primary school visits to the IT room, and businessmen, people on the FE college courses and others have all seen the range of library services offered. She also feels that the embryonic users group, once

functioning properly, will be a useful way of bring stakeholders together. However, in the end, she sees partnership as expediency and argues:

> "it would be wonderful if public libraries had the money to invest. That would be ideal because we could work it the way library staff wanted it to work. However, having said that, library staff might not have the expertise, you might want income generation because I suppose its important to get things up and running - in a marketplace, if we don't provide, someone else will."

3.4.7 Commentary: Key Issues

(i) Addressing social exclusion in rural / relatively affluent communities
In spite of the relatively positive position of the Northwold locality in county indices of social deprivation, it is clear that local people had no problem in identifying social groups, areas and individuals who experienced exclusion. It seems reasonable to infer that if this is true in Northwold, it must be true almost everywhere in the UK.

It is clear that public services in areas like this, however, experience major difficulties in formulating responses to exclusion. Grant aid such as SRB funding is often not available, and this project is unusual in that through the energy and commitment of local people some seed corn funding has been found.

Library services in such areas are often traditional, passive and focused on a core of satisfied middle class users. However, the staff and various agencies at Northwold have attempted to go beyond this model, but have been hampered by constraints of staffing, resources and lack of expertise especially in the fields of outreach and working with community groups.

(ii) Addressing social exclusion through ICT provision and skills development
One major aspect of government policy regarding social exclusion has focused on the training of an information-literate and skilled workforce in order to boost employment prospects among disadvantaged people. The somewhat disappointing take up of training opportunities for this project suggests that excluded groups will not easily or voluntarily come forward for such training and facilities, especially when up-front costs are involved. In spite of the rhetoric of "lifelong learning", questions must also be asked about the appropriateness of libraries (as opposed to schools/colleges/workplaces) for this training role - it is significant, for example, that the heaviest use of the library IT room comes from FE college courses.

(iii) Public Library provision of access to ICTs : what; how; where?
There are currently major debates about the extent to which public library services should invest in new electronic infrastructures. Observation as part of this study suggested that Southshire's policy of free provision of PC provision and internet access was extremely popular, and unproblematically assimilated by many existing users into their expectations of library services. Additionally, for excluded groups it is clear that an education/support facility is also essential if problems of information capability are to be

addressed. However, it is clear from this research that there is no way that this can be provided effectively on the basis of charges or cost recovery. Public services and politicians need to recognise that, if lifelong learning goals are to be achieved, then mainstream funding for support and community IT workers is essential.

(iv) Partnership: benefits and problems
Participants in this project are generally positive about the potential of partnership, and recognise that it brings many benefits. It is clearly a way of involving local people and (in this case) a local voluntary organisation in decision making and management of projects, and additionally it offers a way of the library service offering levels of support and expertise which might only be achieved with difficulty through training or employment of specialist staff. Moreover, the innovative financial and structural arrangements for this partnership are clearly relatively successful in integrating the public, voluntary and private sectors around a common enterprise.

However, largely because of the financial pressure for sustainability, this partnership suffers from conflicts of aims and objectives, predominantly between the "community" and the entrepreneurial goals of the various participants. These conflicts are reflected, and to some extent embodied in, the separation of the "library" and "IT" environments in the building; in the perception of both library and ICT staff of a clash of institutional cultures; and in the perception of library staff in particular of a lack of "ownership" of the project.

Efforts clearly need to be made to overcome these problems-
- at the organisational level perhaps by establishing a local management group with clearer aims and objectives including consideration of key target groups of users
- at the material level perhaps by moving towards a more integrated physical distribution of ICT equipment both in community room and library
- at a human resources level by providing higher levels of training than hitherto for library staff.

(v) Tackling social exclusion - a third way?
Overall, as most of its participants recognise, Northwold IT can be regarded as an experiment in providing a "value added" community resource through the integration of voluntary sector and quasi-market service models with a public service infrastructure. The experiment is having some success: it provides expertise and support for community IT needs which, pragmatically, the library service could not hope itself to exclusively offer without a major restructuring of funding priorities. Moreover, with goodwill on all sides, funding arrangements and partnership mechanisms do not seem to pose major problems.

However, this "third way" has yet to prove itself capable of financial sustainability independent of grant aid from Northwold Region Council. It might additionally be argued that the imperative of sustainability (and the entrepreneurial activities necessary to bring it about) ultimately deflect from the community remit of the public library service. In particular, such imperatives prevent a considered and sustained focus on tackling "information" poverty and social exclusion, which persists, as this research

reveals, in apparently affluent and prosperous parts of rural England. If local authorities are serious about tackling poverty and truly providing IT for all, then innovations like those described here, and the people who commit their time to them, deserve recognition in terms of stable and less precarious forms of financial support.

3.5 Analysis of County Library Policy and Social Exclusion as a whole

3.5.1 The Southshire case study provided an opportunity to examine the nature of social exclusion in a relatively affluent English county. Both the quantitative indicators in the documents cited and the anecdotal evidence of informants confirmed that apparent affluence masks significant problems of both material and cultural exclusion in such "shire" counties. In particular, significant areas of the county and market towns of Southshire experience in microcosm many of the facets of urban deprivation typical of larger cities. In more rural parts of the county, large numbers of individuals still live in poverty and experience exclusion aggravated by isolation and poor transport. Southshire also has among its population significant numbers of people in social groups who experience discrimination and exclusion. These include Black, Asian and Chinese communities, travellers, people with disabilities, gay men, lesbians and others.

3.5.2 Both Southshire County Council as a whole and CLS specifically have responded to such exclusion predominantly through the mechanism of equal opportunities policies - many of which were developed well before social inclusion/exclusion became fashionable concepts. In the library service in particular these policies have been underpinned by a strategy of equal and free access to services for all segments of the community in Southshire. This strategy has undoubtedly had positive benefits - it has, for example, allowed the library service to proceed with the modernisation of the library network through internet access etc. on the basis of free and open access to all with the support of the county council. It has also avoided the proliferation of a large number of short term, time-limited projects driven by temporary funding. Where possible, services initiated by projects, such as the visually impaired people's project we studied, have been integrated into *mainstream* funding and services.

3.5.3 Within this strategy, the more specific targeting of services towards excluded people has tended to be organised on a client group basis often, but not always, involving the development of county wide initiatives focusing on a particular social group. The visually impaired people's project we examined in detail is perhaps the best and most successful example of this approach, but other initiatives in children's services such as mobile services for disadvantaged early years children were also in operation. The aim, and generally successful outcome, of these initiatives is to overcome barriers to access to library services for obviously disadvantaged groups. However, some other services operating on this basis - such as those to black and ethnic minority groups and gay men and lesbians - were obviously not operating with the same degree of success.

3.5.4 At the strategic level, this client group approach has been paralleled by an apparent absence of geographical targeting of resources or services, except in a very

informal and non-systematic way. Thus, in spite of the evidence from statistical sources of pockets of extreme deprivation in parts of Southborough, the County town, we were not made aware of any particular channelling of resources in this direction by CLS. In general, staffing and materials resources appeared to be distributed equitably by population across the county rather than according to need, and this could lead, in the end, to anomalies of access. For example the very small Chinese community discussed in Section 3.2 apparently received no significant service at all, whereas affluent parts of the county (such as Northwold) are prioritised for special projects through opportunity.

3.5.5 Such absence of planned targeting, in our view, limits the possibilities of turning a general commitment to equal opportunities principles into specific forms of positive action. In Southshire, this problem seemed to be compounded, in adult services at least (we did not look in detail at children's initiatives), by a relatively passive and institutional approach to service provision and absence of community outreach. In Northwold, for example, the IT room was separate from the library and library staff were unable to become involved in the more active forms of user interaction, training and support. The visually impaired people's project, too, adopted a largely "hands off" approach to users in spite of the desire of some staff and users for a drop-in facility.

3.5.6 Such specific examples are underpinned by a general confusion expressed by local staff about who has a community liaison responsibility. In Northwold in particular this has resulted in slow progress in setting up a ICT room/Library users group. More generally, the lack of feedback from users and local communities has led CLS to undertake general consultation exercises (such as that with the Black, Asian and Chinese communities noted in Section 3.2.7) which have yielded uncertain and potentially counterproductive results.

3.5.7 In some instances, CLS has begun to overcome these difficulties through the development of partnerships with local organisations such as Northwold Enterprise and Northwold IT; specialist organisations like the RNIB and other departments of the County Council. CLS has been very successful in setting up the structures of such partnerships and the partner organisations we spoke to are generally happy to work with the library service. In general, the expectation, expressed by ACL in Section 3.4.3, seems to be that local partners will provide the "active" impetus which will transform libraries into learning centres for communities, but there are obviously practical difficulties with this strategy. The evidence from Northwold and the visually impaired people's service suggests that it will only work on a stable basis if funding is secured. Moreover, partners such as Northwold IT perceive a perhaps more fundamental problem with the "image" of the library, which will make it difficult for it to widen its appeal unless its basic services are more fundamentally transformed.

3.5.8 As for most UK library authorities, especially English counties, our evidence suggests that in Southshire such a transformation will be difficult. It is clear that an "equalities culture" has developed at Councillor and Senior Management level, particularly in CLS as a result of the efforts of the former County Librarian. Elected members and senior managers we spoke to were able to speak knowledgeably and eloquently about social inclusion, and policy documents reveal a well integrated and

coherent set of policy goals both in CLS and the County Council as a whole. However, this culture was only patchily reflected in the knowledge and discourse of front line staff, and perhaps more importantly in their day to day activities (cf. Welshborough where the most junior front-line staff are set targets relating to community/exclusion issues). In particular, our discussions with Library Managers (a key group in terms of their real role in running local libraries) revealed sympathy with excluded groups, but a tendency to see them as having "special needs" and an understandable preoccupation with keeping traditional and basic services going at the expense of innovation.

3.5.9 Staffing structures and policies thus emerged in Southshire as a real barrier towards implementing policies for social inclusion. As noted above, there appear to be no staff at *local*, as opposed to area, level with clear responsibilities for assessing community needs and developing outreach/community services. Library managers and clerical staff, as the discussions in Section 3.2.4 make clear, inevitably focus upon housekeeping and day to day service issues, although many express an interest in work with the community. The staffing review completed in January 1999 does not, in the perception of some staff, seem to have been fully implemented, and there is some confusion at local level over what will be new roles and responsibilities.

Moreover, despite a commitment to equalities issues, it is clear that, especially at local level, the service has not succeeded overall in appointing staff representative of excluded social classes or groups. The "equalities culture", as far as we could see, had thus not succeeded in permeating the basic services provided by libraries at front line level. In staffing terms this thus suggests that CLS still has significant recruitment, training and day-to-day operational matters to address from an equalities perspective.

3.6 Summary

3.6.1 In summary it is perhaps possible to view Southshire as an example of a library authority attempting to address social exclusion seriously, but without envisaging a radical restructuring of the library service. The main mechanism through which this is being attempted is though a long-standing commitment to equal access and equal opportunity in service delivery. This commitment has resulted in some successes which include:

- a commitment to the principle that services to disadvantaged groups should be part of mainstream library services
- a programme of modernising the library service for the electronic age which incorporates principles of free access
- development and mainstreaming of some innovative services to disadvantaged client groups
- the successful development of partnerships with national and local service providers to enhance service provision and develop innovative services
- the development of a serious and relatively co-ordinated "equalities culture" among senior managers which is atypical of shire counties.

3.6.2 However, notwithstanding these successes our overall conclusions point to a significant gap in CLS between policy goals and success in implementation. To some extent, we believe that this gap is due to a failure to replicate the "equalities culture" of CLS at local service point level and that it is thus associated with

- lack of appropriate staffing responsibilities and (sometimes) staff at local level
- lack of available time and resources for local staff to assess and meet community needs.

Thus, in the short and medium term a focus on new staffing functions at local level and equalities practice in recruitment and training (all possible within an equalities framework such as Southshire's) might have some effect on provision to excluded groups and communities.

3.6.3 More fundamentally, however, Southshire CLS seems to us to be still hampered, despite its focus on equalities, by its emphasis on resourcing a relatively uniform, passive and institutionalised service. If it is to move towards equity of outcome, rather than input, it needs to consider in the longer term:

- moves towards more extensive targeting of resources according to need
- moves towards more flexible models and patterns of service provision
- changes in the work patterns and roles of staff, especially at local level, towards more active forms of engagement with local communities and disadvantaged people

In the end, we conclude that perhaps only though such changes of organisational strategy can Southshire CLS move significantly closer to its policy goals of equality of opportunity and access to services.

Documents Utilised in the Study

Consultants' Report (1998), *The Southshire project: library services for visually impaired people*

Share the Vision / the Library Association (1996), *Library and information services for visually impaired people: National guidelines.* London: Library Association Publishing.

Southshire County Council (nd), *A profile of poverty in Southshire.*

Southshire Library, Arts and Museums Service (1997), *Equal opportunities service delivery action plan 1997-8.*

Southshire Library, Arts and Museums Service (1998), *Equal opportunities service delivery action plan 1998-9.*

Southshire County Council (1999), *Poverty in Southshire - working together to make a difference: Summary of Service audits and future actions.*

Southshire County Council (April 1999), *Rural issues: an audit of County Council services*.

4. Innerborough Case Study

4.1 Background

Innerborough is an inner London authority with a population of approximately 173,500[1]. Ethnic minorities currently make up 20% of London's population; for Innerborough, the percentage of people from Black and ethnic minorities is projected to rise from 19% in 1991 to 26% in 2011[2].

According to a recent survey, Innerborough scores badly on effectiveness of small enterprises (fourth worst in London); well on industrial structure (fourth best in London); badly in terms of wealth (fourth worst in London); and badly on "social cohesion" (third worst in London, based on crime levels, stability of the local population, level of local employment for residents, population density, presence of over-60s, women not in paid work)[3].

4.2 Library and Information Services

In terms of expenditure across inner-London, the Library and Information Service has a high level of expenditure on stock and staffing. It has 10 libraries open a total of 355 hours per week. In 1998/1999, the Service issued 950,000 books and 270,000 audio-visual items, and 1.4m visits were made to the Service. 31% of the population are registered users. 3.6% of the stock is in languages other than English. 90 outreach activities take place each year.

There are 150 fte staff, and the net expenditure on the service for 1998/1999 is £5.3m - of this, 11% is stockfund.

There are innovative services, particularly to the Black and other ethnic minority communities, lesbians and gay men, and people with disabilities. The Services to Racial Groups Section [SRG] has dedicated staffing and resources to meet the needs of Black communities, including refugees.

However, the Service now faces cuts of £1.5m. This has been articulated via a fundamental review of provision, the aim of which is "to develop proposals for a new strategy and framework for service delivery to meet the current and future library and information needs of people in Innerborough." Key issues which the review will address include "the range and diversity of community needs" and "the role and effectiveness on non building based services."

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[1] mid-year estimate for 1991

[2] Innerborough Library and Information Service 1998 Annual Plan

[3] Innerborough Library and Information Service 1998 Annual Plan

60

The Council's vision for libraries is that "a series of beacon libraries, each with their focus area, situated down the spine of the borough will increase readership and membership, specifically among groups targeted by the literacy strategy. These will be fewer than are currently provided, with some library closures, but this will be accompanied by the refurbishment of others to provide centres of excellence."

The potential impact of this on services to the Black communities and refugees is indicated by the following extracts from the Annual Library Plan:

- Innerborough has "the fourth highest number of staff per library in inner London ... the extent to which the higher staffing levels are the product of service differences, such as services to Black communities, or whether these could be reduced by improving productivity, will be the subject of further investigation."

- a service strength is "high quality services to black communities"; a service weakness is "the number of staff per head of population"; "it is likely that the level of service in libraries will be radically changed and that support for services to Black communities will be substantially altered."

4.3   Case Study: Refugees in Innerborough

The Case Study looked at the needs of refugee communities, especially more recent arrivals such as Somalis and Albanians. Specifically, the Case Study examined:

- the response by Innerborough Council to refugees

- how the Library & Information Services contribute to the Council's refugee strategy

- services to refugees as part of the Library Service to economically disadvantaged and/or Black and other ethnic minority community groups

- the availability of resources and staffing structures to provide a "rapid response" to the needs of recently-arrived refugees.

Interviews were held in October 1999 with the Head of Library Services; staff from the Services to Racial Groups Section; a representative of the Innerborough Somali Community Group; a Librarian based at Innerborough Central Library; the Head of External Funding and Partnership for Innerborough Council; and a senior Elected Member.

4.4   Services to Racial Groups and to refugees: service background

Innerborough has a long-established service to Black and other ethnic minority communities. The SRG was set up some 15 years ago via Section 11 funding. In 1992, the original Section 11 funding ceased, and Innerborough reapplied: they were successful, and funding for a further three years was secured, on the basis of SRG becoming project-based. In 1995, the service was taken into mainstream funding by the Council.

There are 4 members of staff: a Principal Librarian and three Librarians, plus 10 hours a week admin support.

Since they became more project-based, SRG works to an annual plan with objectives and targets; however, these targets vary from year to year, depending on which communities they are working with. At present, they work with about 50 community groups, and provide materials in some 35 languages.

Their work involves visiting community groups with community information leaflets in different languages; putting on displays of library materials in these groups; encouraging group members to join libraries (including having visits to the libraries from groups); attending community group meetings to discuss and promote the Service; providing training for groups (e.g. in organising their own materials, what community information materials are available in their languages); and the three Librarians also spend one day a week in libraries, making practical links with local people, assessing the use of stock, and monitoring the library's expenditure on community language material (where identifiable communities exist around particular libraries, then these will have the main collections, but, where communities are more scattered, such as the Chinese community, then several libraries will stock materials). As well as monitoring expenditure, SRG provides practical help, for example by doing outreach or bookshop visits if a library has not got the staffing to do this. They also host a regular multicultural festival which acts as a platform for local communities to present their culture.

A minimum of 5% of the stockfund has to be spent on community language materials, although some libraries do spend more than this: of course, many community language speakers also speak English, so materials purchased from other budgets are also relevant to them. In addition, the Principal Librarian holds a small fund to which libraries can apply via bids for particular projects - SRG has a service development theme for the year (e.g. services to women or to under-fives), and libraries bid for additional money within this framework.

4.5 Interviewees' perceptions of the SRG and services to refugees

4.5.1 Head of Library Services

The Head of Library Services spoke very positively about the work that the SRG undertook, especially the multicultural events which bring community groups together and attract huge audiences, their development of the bookstock, and their policy work (e.g. in leading on developing the response to the Roach and Morrison report). However, at the same time, she identified one of the weaknesses being that other staff do not take responsibility for services to Black and ethnic minority communities.

The budget cuts posed a threat to the SRG, in terms of the Council's ability to continue to provide the same level of continuing support. However, the review offered the opportunity to unfreeze the organisation, so that a new approach can be taken by an area of the Service, which has not changed for years; it allowed questions to be asked, such as "Are we meeting needs?" "Are we setting the right targets?" It could improve the input from local community groups by involving them earlier and more in target-setting and assisting in establishing priorities for resources. It also gave an opportunity to get community groups to question the services they are receiving: "but do they know what they could really have?" The needs of refugee groups are different – "are we taking these on board and responding appropriately?" Finally, she said, they needed to ask "could we meet a wider range of needs or be more effective if we take a different approach?"

The Head of Library Services said that, within the Council, there were doubts about mainstreaming services, and some support for creating/maintaining separate units. Whilst the work of the SRG could be devolved, some elected members had strong views in opposition to this. The dilemma they faced was that, whilst the work of the SRG was very highly regarded, nevertheless, given the size of the cuts which needed to be made, it may no longer be possible to justify maintaining a team of that size carrying out this specialised role. However, whilst Innerborough's Black community was not as large as that in other areas, it does have diverse needs and priorities, and the needs of refugees are higher than those of established communities which have more capacity and make more demands.

She concluded by saying that the Best Value challenge for the borough was "is Innerborough doing the right things in the right ways, and can we do it better? Are there models for doing more for less? Or do we say, yes, we have been doing good work, but we have to stop?" The Council says that there is a high level of expenditure per head of the population on libraries, and that this reflects the needs of the borough's communities, but "we still have to cut it."

4.5.2 SRG staff

The SRG staff saw the service as being very much part of the mainstream library and information service: library staff do now "own" services to Black and other ethnic minority communities, and librarians actively search out needs and pass these on to

SRG: at the same time, many library users are satisfied with the services in libraries and may find out about SRG only at a later stage.

They felt that publicity and the "marketing [of] our products" were good, and they described some of the ways in which they make the community aware of their services, including: leaflets (and the leaflet, "Welcome to Innerborough Libraries" has been translated into 15 languages in written form, and 8 on cassette); visits to groups; exhibitions of materials and about their services; consultation meetings; organising visits for group members to the libraries; producing lists of library materials in different languages. However, it is likely that bigger, longer-established communities are generally better organised and make more demands on the Service, as they have someone willing to make demands (filling in comment cards or attending meetings, for example), and may possibly get more of the services; Albanian refugees, for example, are not yet organised into a group, so they do not have a voice, cannot make demands. Indeed, a major issue was the lack of materials in some languages: examples given were the lack of books in Somali and Albanian; the lack of CD-ROMs in some languages; copyright problems over videos (especially in Vietnamese and Turkish)

Their work involves not only providing information and leisure materials, but also strongly supporting education by, for example, working closely with Saturday Schools, providing lists of English as a Second Language materials. The SRG workers were concerned that the spread of ICT does not actually increase social exclusion, and hope to provide some software in, first, Bengali and Turkish.

In terms of being able to provide a "rapid response" to the needs of refugees, the SRG staff thought they could respond, for example by some libraries spending some of their other budget allocations on materials for refugees.

It is often difficult to measure the real successes of such a service. SRG kept statistics of the numbers of people brought into libraries, the numbers of people that joined, the numbers at events. At a very personal level, one of the SRG staff said that:

> "If I can manage to bring even one single person to the library ... for me that's my best success."

He then went on to say that they use measures such as: numbers of visits SRG staff make to individuals; referrals to the housebound service; the usage of community language materials in libraries. SRG had tried to set targets, but these had not been very successful as a process; for example, a target had been to work with Youth Workers, then the Youth Service deleted their posts, and the new Library and Information Services computer system could not collect certain statistics. One specific initiative, the promotion of business and employment information for Black and ethnic minority businesses, had not worked - this was because the business people had wanted money or free services which would enhance their business, and had not seen libraries as providing these.

With regard to their policy role, SRG has worked through the Roach and Morrison

Report and has identified areas where the Library and Information Services have not met the targets; from this they have produced a report to the management team, with the action which needs to be taken. In terms of the Stephen Lawrence Report, SRG has been involved in drawing up an action plan for the whole of Information and Customer Services, not just Library and Information Services.

A weakness in the development and implementation of policy was identified, in that there appeared to be little direct involvement by the SRG with Black and ethnic minority staff, nor great involvement of all staff in the drawing up of policy/plan documents.

4.5.3 Users

The SRG was highly regarded by its users. The representative of the Innerborough Somali Community Group (which had been formed in 1990, as a result of the Civil War, and now represented between 3,000-4,000 Somalis) spoke about the service in glowing terms, and, having had contacts with other Council departments, such as the Race Unit, Education and leisure services, he was in a good position to compare SRG with other provision. He said that relations had been established with the Library Service in 1990, partly because Somali children were arriving in the UK without being able to speak any English, and partly because there was a need to promote and maintain Somali culture, language and heritage. Despite the dearth of material available, the SRG tries hard to obtain books, and provides a deposit collection in the Somali Centre for elderly people and people with disabilities. The regular SRG-organised events reflect the cultures of the Black communities in the borough through song, dance and multicultural festivals - these are very important.

The Library and Information Services consult the Somali community, they listen, discuss problems and let the group express opinions. He considered that the SRG provided a better service than other parts of the Council: staff were more understanding of the needs of refugee communities, and the SRG gave good leadership to the service provision - they are doing all they can in a borough which is not rich and which is facing cuts.

These cuts are threatening this strong relationship: the SRG is vital, the Somali Community Group relies on them - many of their members live on benefits, and cannot afford to buy books.

4.5.4 Library staff

Inevitably, perhaps, staff perceptions were rather different. Whilst the Librarian interviewed concurred about the lack of resources to develop services to the Black communities and refugees as fully as they could be (and highlighted the developments which had taken place some ten years ago and which had suffered badly though budget cuts) and also the lack of materials in some of the most needed languages, she also felt that there was a lack of knowledge in the libraries about exactly what services were available, and that to resort to using the services of the SRG team was somehow only if "worse comes to worse".

She also identified barriers to the free use of libraries by refugees (and, by implication, other groups), especially the requirement for two proofs of address to join the library, which would deter use by refugees, many of whom were in B&Bs and were transient. Previous attempts to simplify library procedures had been linked to greater levels of stock loss, and the Service had had to tighten up. The Librarian also identified outreach as a particularly valuable method of reaching groups such as refugees, but thought that little outreach work was now feasible on the current staffing levels, and that there is a real danger that refugees will be "pushed from pillar to post by the Council" because of the current lack of joined-up, one-stop-type provision.

At the same time, the Library and Information Services are making some impact on ethnic minority communities in the borough; for example, the SRG team has developed very successful provision for the Turkish community (with people queuing to see the Turkish SRG worker when he is working on the front-line in a library), and there are successful services for the Chinese and Vietnamese communities.

4.5.5 The Head of External Funding and Partnership

The Head of External Funding and Partnership felt that, in the past, the Library and Information Service had been peripheral to some of Innerborough's regeneration projects, as most SRB funding tends to go to projects dealing with the environment, housing, community and economic development. He thought that libraries had not engaged with SRB projects (not even those relating to Lifelong Learning), with the exception of the Cyberskills Project: this is a project, based in Parkside Library (one of Innerborough's libraries), which is intended to raise awareness of new ICT facilities (such as e-mail, Internet, video-conferencing). However, the impetus for linking libraries with this Project came from him, not from the Library and Information Service. He also mentioned a regeneration project in the Parkside area, which had the possibility of new library as part of the scheme, but he thought that, unless libraries became more involved, they would end up marginalised.

He considered that this marginalisation came from "perceptions of what the library service is, who it's for, and who speaks up for it whenever it is threatened." Libraries are seen as an old, long-standing service, and not being particularly relevant to the people the Members see themselves as serving.

His overall view was that libraries need to become more involved in partnerships with other services and agencies, and that librarians need more support in obtaining and spending resources: some of the problems in Innerborough are so huge, that these will inevitably take precedence over libraries - but they need to become more involved on the Council-wide stage.

4.5.6 The Elected Member

The Elected Member thought that Innerborough Council as a whole had been successful in identifying particular services which needed to be delivered to specific groups within

the community, although, at the same time, he did think that the Council had not gone deep enough in terms of its service provision (and he had some concerns that there was duplication of provision across Innerborough). In meeting the needs of the Black communities, the approach that Innerborough Council had adopted was one of service delivery: they identify what particular services are needed within the communities, then identify a group to deliver these services - as an example, the Somali community is relatively new to Innerborough, and initially there were no specific services available, but, as numbers increased, so did demand, and now there is a number of groups to provide services throughout Innerborough. (However, he warned, there are some groups which do not receive Council funding, and there are tensions within these communities that stop groups from joining together and going for joint funding).

The support provided by the Library and Information Services was "first rate" in terms of the number of publications available in different languages, videos, and so on.

However, the Elected Member did think that there were questions around access: for example, cutbacks in opening hours over the year had affected this. He was concerned that the Library and Information Services should reach all parts of the community, but was not sure that it actually does so; he thought that the Best Value review of the Service would examine access as one of its key questions (Best Value involves using stakeholder groups, including officers, users, Union officials, and Councillors, so there will be an opportunity for all voices can be heard).

As well as the access problem, the Elected Member saw the lack of resources for purchasing stock for the libraries as a major barrier to their use by socially excluded people, and identified the possible lack of access to the new ICTs for "working classes" and the Black and ethnic minority communities as another major issue.

The Elected Member was pessimistic about the historical imbalances in service provision being altered unless there was some clear intervention, and would like to look at ways of doing this in terms of the Library and Information Services. He also stressed the need to explore ways of making public libraries relevant to everyone, not just the small group of people who lobby the Council whenever cuts are threatened. Underlying all this was a resources issue: there was a political argument within the Labour Group in Innerborough about the issue of ring-fencing resources for particular targeted needs.

One of the strongest points made by the Elected Member was that, in terms of equalities work, there is a real danger in mainstreaming, in that such work may be downgraded or disappear altogether (cf. the Southshire Elected Member's parallel concerns). Innerborough had been one of the first local authorities with a Race Equality Unit, yet now the Council was pushing for an "all-singing-all-dancing" unit within the Council: how can you make sure that everyone is really taking responsibility for racial equality? A Unit is required to take the lead, dedicate its time, collect feedback - his view was that everyone should be responsible for racial equality, but the separate body is also needed. It was clear that he applied the same model to any proposals by the Library and Information Service to mainstream the services currently provided by the SRG.

4.6　Interviewees' perceptions of social exclusion

According to the Head of the Library and Information Services, at the time of the interview, there was no Council-wide definition of social exclusion - the term is being used without being defined (this was borne out by the comments of other interviewees). However, the government's holistic view of social exclusion, plus Innerborough's financial situation, has forced the Council to take a more integrated approach which will be reflected in the new structure.

At the same time, the Head of Library and Information Services felt that the concept of social exclusion has "been part of our work and [has] informed what we do", for example in terms of services to Black communities, provision of ICT for visually and hearing impaired people, and services to lesbians and gay men, and women generally.

The staff's view was much more direct! They felt that library services were not being used by socially excluded people because they were seen as "stuffy institutions for white middle class people." Libraries still have a frightening image, with lots of strict rules, and many people are surprised that services are free. They were also critical of the way that surveys of non-users were conducted: they felt that they just asked people on the street, rather than targeting socially excluded people.

The staff also contrasted the relative success of the SRG services with those provided to visually impaired people, which had lots of publicity and well-attended launches, but which were poorly used.

The Head of External Funding and Partnership thought that a lot of work was going on within Innerborough Council, which could be described as "social exclusion", but there was no one focus within the Council.

The Elected Member preferred not to use the term, "social exclusion", as he felt it obscured the real equality issues, particularly race and class, the latter being, in any case, frequently neglected in discussions about equalities.

4.7　Themes

4.7.1　Separate versus mainstream provision - is this an anachronism?

Innerborough has managed to retain - until 1999, at least - a separate unit to develop and maintain services to racial groups: this is a leftover from the days of the former Section 11 funding, and currently has generous levels of funding. However, faced with having to make a severe round of cuts, Innerborough is grappling with whether this service can continue in something like its present form, or, if not, what exactly can replace it. Arguments are being made strongly for and against keeping the service separate: on the one hand, it is popular and well-used; on the other it may be dealing with the elite of the community's groups, may not fully involve local libraries in its work, and does not give the same Service priority to other socially excluded groups

within the community.

4.7.2   The need to protect a popular service at a time of cuts

This exposes the unfairness of the situation where a public library is providing a long-standing, highly-regarded and well-used service to a particularly vulnerable and high priority section of the community, and, in doing so, appears to be making a major impact on tackling social exclusion, yet is being criticised for spending more than its 'family' and having a higher staff ratio.

At the same time, whilst swingeing cuts are being made to front-line services, ways need to be found to protect and continue to develop such an important service area.

4.7.3   What role can the public library take across the local authority?

There was some evidence that, whilst the Library Service had strong links with some parts of the Council, elsewhere its role was seen as marginal, and/or the staff were not seen as putting themselves into the forefront of activities (e.g. in terms of gaining additional funding to support various area-based initiatives). In some fields (such as those around providing a much-valued service to the Black and other ethnic minority communities in the area) the Library Service was highly valued and seen as a team player, whereas in others it was being disregarded.

4.7.4   The role of information/libraries in services to people in crisis

From the evidence, it is clear that public libraries have a very important role to play in providing support to people in crisis, such as recently-arrived refugees. In Innerborough, it is the Elected Member's view that the Council is slow to make provision, and there was evidence to support this from the Librarian interviewed. Certainly, public library services can make provision (for example by providing the centre for 'joined-up' information provision on a one-stop basis), but there seem also to be some in-built barriers to this, particularly the bureaucracy involved in the joining rules (a number of proofs of address is often requested) and all the paraphernalia of issuing materials, overdue charges, return of materials and so on. There is also a danger that services are offered only to those people who are readily formed into groups and/or who are articulate (it was clear, for example, that the Innerborough Somali Community Group leaders were very articulate and had quickly gained access to seats of power within the borough), whereas the people who most need public library - and other - support are those who are alone, who have very little if any spoken or written English, who are not articulate (in the sense of making themselves heard in the Town Hall).

4.8   Conclusions

Innerborough Library and Information Service was, in common with most London library authorities, in the throes of major changes, many of these budget-driven. Over the years, it had created a highly-regarded service in the SRG, and one of the critical

issues at the time that the Case Study was carried out was how changes in and reductions to the Library and Information Service could be made without damaging this valuable resource (and diminishing the services to Black and ethnic communities).

One of the main reasons that the SRG was so successful was that the service was well resourced. Services to refugees are expensive and cannot be compared on a like-for-like basis with services to other communities, and therefore any reorganisation of the service must start with the needs of the communities in Innerborough.

At the same time, whilst it was clear that Innerborough could no longer afford a service at this level, there were also concerns that other service priorities were not receiving a similar level of support, and that there were dangers that front-line staff were not all taking on serving Black and ethnic minority users because the SRG was seen as 'their' service. This exemplified some of the key arguments against separate provision.

Undertaking this Case Study was an interesting and rewarding experience: there was a lot of enthusiasm and keenness to develop new roles for the Library and Information Service. One role which could be developed was in relation to a Council-wide approach - there did appear to be something of a social exclusion 'policy vacuum' across Innerborough Council, and we felt that the Library and Information Service should take the lead, drawing on the work of the former SRG and other Library Service provision, in developing initiatives to tackle social exclusion, and to create a more 'joined-up' approach to providing services for refugees and other severely disadvantaged groups.

Appendix: Documentary Sources

In advance of the case study, Innerborough provided a number of policy statements, publicity materials, reports and other documents. These included:

Equal opportunities and you - Innerborough Council's policy statement on equal opportunities. It covers: Black and other ethnic minorities; women; people with disabilities; lesbians and gay men (no mention of social class or Clause 28).

Equal opportunities in employment - Innerborough Council's policy statement on recruitment, working conditions, development and training (does not mention social class or Clause 28).

Annual Library Plan

- emphasis on consultation; budget cuts of £1.5m; radical changes to the Service
- mission statement includes "equality of opportunity and the promotion of social inclusion"
- large Black population; scores badly on wealth (4th worst in London) and social cohesion (3rd worst in London)
- target groups are "black communities, women, people with disabilities, older people and lesbians and gay men"

- "Innerborough spend more per head of population on its library service than many other authorities"
- a consultation forum meets every six months to look at services to Black communities
- market research has been carried out to investigate the views of Black communities.

See it ... hear it ... - library services for visually impaired people. This includes public computer catalogues with magnified screen and sound at some libraries.

Improving Innerborough library and information services to visually impaired people - 13.8% of Innerborough's population has a Limiting Long Term Illness (the third highest figure in Inner London).

Services for visually impaired people - in October 1997, Innerborough library and information service became the first public library service in the country to provide an integrated package of access technology, suitable for varying degrees of visual impairment, on its library catalogue terminals.

Improving internet access for visually impaired people project - introduced in January 1999, Innerborough became the first public library authority to provide this particular targeted and supported Internet service for visually impaired people.

Innerborough Libraries Strength and Pride guide - a Library Service guide which promotes library material and provides relevant information to lesbians, gay men and bisexuals. No mention of Clause 28.

Library and Information Service action plan for lesbians and gay men - an information report to Members on service provision to this section of the community. No mention of Clause 28.

Library and Information Services to Racial Groups - 35% of the Innerborough population is Black[4]; 108 languages are spoken in schools; "the library service to Black communities in Innerborough is at the leading edge nationally" and "the envy of many other boroughs ... if this unique service is to be continued, appropriate consideration has to be give to the level of reduction below which the service will be damaged."

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[4] the method for calculating this must be different from that used for the Annual Plan

5. Outerborough Case Study

5.1 Background

Outerborough is a London authority which serves a population of 216,000 and covers 11.5 square miles. The borough has large and diverse Black and ethnic minority communities, including substantial numbers of people of African, Caribbean, Asian and Irish ethnic origin: estimates from the 1991 Census show that 43.2% of the population are from Black and ethnic minority groups.

The eastern part of the borough was traditionally one of London's major light industrial belts, but it has suffered from a substantial economic decline in recent years. These problems have been recognised both nationally and by Brussels, and the Government has awarded Assisted Area status to the north-east part of the borough, and the European Union has included the eastern part of the borough as being eligible for assistance under "Objective Two" of the European Regional Development Fund. The borough has also received £60m from the Government's Single Regeneration Budget.

5.2 Library and Information Services

There are 9 libraries in the borough, as well as a mobile and housebound service and a School Library Service. There are Open Learning Centres based in two libraries.

The Service has been undergoing a Best Value review since 1998. The borough's libraries compared very poorly with other boroughs, both in London and nationally, on a number of indicators.[5]

The Library Service structure has been under review for some time, and it has now been decided to merge the Library Service with the Museum and Archives Service; a new post of Head of Libraries, Museum and Archives has been created and advertised in March 2000.

5.3 Case Study: The Centre Park Library and its impact on the local community

The Case Study looked at the relationships between the Centre Park Library, Outerborough Council, and the local community, and focused on the impact of the Library on a deprived neighbourhood.

In looking at this, the Study also included an investigation of the effects of low levels of

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[5] as this report is being written, Outerborough Council has decided not to go for the option of closing libraries. Instead, proposals for ways in which a "decentralised model can be provided, making best use of resources available" are being prepared. This will involve looking at the "potential for locating libraries and Council customer service centres together where possible."

resources and investment on service delivery, and examined ways of addressing this; and looked at the need to develop effective strategies for working with other services (such as leisure services).

Interviews were held in October 1999 with the Neighbourhood Librarian; a Senior Librarian; the Librarian, Open Learning Centre; the Librarian, Services to Children; and representatives of the Friends of Centre Park Library; and, in November 1999, with the Libraries' Trade Union (Unison) representative.

5.4   The Centre Park Library: service background

The Centre Park Library is well used by children and young people, and, particularly in term time, by students. The majority of the users is Black.

The Open Learning Centre [OLC] provides PCs, learning packages and staff support. Possibly as many as 90% of the users of the Centre do not use the Library as a whole. The Centre contributes to economic regeneration, and also works with other organisations, such as the employment advice service, a neighbourhood opportunity centre, family literacy projects, housing associations, and lone parents groups - however, the Centre does not have a crèche, and, although the Leisure Centre does, it also charges for its use.

5.5   Interviewees' perceptions of the Centre Park Library and its impact on the community

5.5.1   The Neighbourhood Librarian .

The Neighbourhood Librarian [NL] described the Centre Park Library as having been set up as a replacement of an existing District Library for the whole community, and it was hoped that it would attract people from the local ethnic minority communities, but it had not lived up to expectations: "money is clearly our big problem", he said.

However, the NL thought that the greatest strength of the Library was the OLC which compares favourably with provision anywhere in the country.

When the Centre Park Library had first opened, the Black and ethnic minority stock was very good, but since then it has become very run down because of financial problems.

The other plus for the Library was that it was a pleasant space which the NL said was welcoming and encouraged use, especially by students and by people reading newspapers in the ground-floor reading area.

Being located within the Leisure Centre complex had also meant that there was some take-up by Leisure Centre users, although it had proved difficult to pin down exactly how many; the NL felt that the activities of the Leisure Centre and the Library were not co-ordinated enough. (Similarly, the NL thought that the most had not been made of

73

having the OLC within Centre Park Library: originally, it had been a condition of use of the OLC that users had to be library members, and so there had been cross-over between the two, but this was no longer a requirement.) Whilst the Centre Park Library may gain some users via the Leisure Centre, some people are put off – some older people perhaps, or people from certain cultural backgrounds.

He also thought that some traditional users may be put off by the name of Centre Park Library, as, from the entrance in the Leisure Centre, it says nothing about its being a public library "with all the usual public library things".

The major weakness was lack of money. The stock was poor, buildings were poorly maintained (and the NL said that the Centre Park Library was beginning to look tatty), staffing levels were low, and staff morale was very low. Whilst the prime reason for this was the lack of money, this in turn related to the way the Outerborough Libraries had been managed over the last 15 years or so: there had been cuts every year, and senior Outerborough managers and the Elected Members had decided to manage the cuts by protecting front-line services at all costs - this had led to a situation where there were no non-front-line staff, no admin, nobody left even to photocopy things.

Outerborough had no Book Recovery Officer and their security system was, according to the NL, full of "loop-holes". They spent very little on stock, and losses were "huge": the accumulative effect of this over 15 years was that the stock levels and quality were very poor.

The NL felt that, given that cuts had to be made, they should have been managed differently. He said that, some years ago, there had been an Elected Member who had advocated cutting whole services rather than cutting a little everywhere, but he had been "laughed out" - there was "uproar" whenever library closures were proposed. With hindsight, there was something to be said for this approach, and perhaps Outerborough should have closed a branch or two several years ago. Sadly, much of the "uproar" was from existing users, people who lived near to libraries; a lot of socially excluded people do not come into libraries, do not use libraries, and do not care if a small branch is closed or a larger library is downgraded.

In terms of the impact of the Centre Park Library on the local community, the NL felt that it was difficult to find out what was going on for those who never come into libraries. However, from the results of a survey and a Best Value exercise, they had found that people did not come into Centre Park Library because they saw it as "stuffy", there was "the shush factor", and they think that "we are still in the 1950s". The NL thought that there was a certain section of the population on whom they had had no impact at all - they think the Library Service is boring and has nothing for them. In turn, the Library Service has not done much to overcome this: they rely on word-of-mouth publicity mainly. In addition, there were not any methods in place for testing/measuring whether the Centre Park Library was having an impact.

The NL saw there being a dilemma over the OLC. He felt it could have a real impact on the local community, but he was reluctant to promote it more because they were already

full to capacity. Ideally, it needed to be twice or even three times the size (and the bookstock reduced accordingly), but, if they went too far, there would be nothing of the library remaining. There was also a problem regarding staff attitudes to ICT: some of the staff were very traditional (a library equals books) and they felt that it was not a good use of library space to give it over to the OLC.

There also seemed to be a dilemma over the allocation of the stockfund. The NL identified that, whilst possibly 50% of people in the Centre Park Library catchment area were from a "minority ethnic" background, the Library was still spending about 80% of its stockfund on mainstream stock. This may have been partly because there was not a written stock policy in Outerborough ("we make our own"); partly because there had been little attempt to get to grips with who was using the existing collections (they had, for example, women's, gay and Black collections, but "who knows who uses them"); partly because books by Catherine Cookson and Dick Francis get the statistics for CIPFA (the gay and Black collections are not going to "earn as many statistics"); and partly because the NL, in managing the stock selection, had not "persuaded staff" about the purchases that needed to be made.

5.5.2 The Senior Librarian

As well as assisting in the setting up and stocking of the Centre Park Library, the Senior Librarian [SL] also has responsibility, as the African Caribbean Librarian, for the stock in other Outerborough libraries.

She thought that the Centre Park Library was "the best Library in Outerborough". There is a good collection of Black materials in English (although the service to Black and ethnic minority communities is not as good as it could be because of lack of funding), and, whilst South Park Library provided a good level of audio-visual stock to meet local demands, users went to Centre Park Library for reggae.

As background, the SL felt that the percentage of the budget allocated to the African Caribbean Librarian was an "ongoing battle", and the size of the African Caribbean population in Outerborough was not taken into account properly. In addition to not receiving a specific percentage of the budget, the spending allocations are left to local managers, and some spent as little as £100 per year on Black materials. In 1999/2000, for example, £6,000 had been allocated centrally to materials for the Greek community, £6,000 for the Turkish community, but only £5,000 for the Asian communities (despite there being five major language groups to cater for). £2,500 was allocated centrally for the African Caribbean stock, and individual libraries would also add to this amount from their own budgets, according to their perception of need. These allocations had not been changed in 25 years, according to the SL, and had been based originally on the influx of Greek and Turkish people from Cyprus: the allocations had not kept pace with changes in Outerborough, such as the recent arrivals from Kosovo and Ethiopia. The SL felt that she had been fobbed off in the past, having been asked to prepare reports on the level of resources required, which had gone nowhere.

The strengths of the Centre Park Library were its audio-visual services to refugees

(which assisted them to learn English, and also provided them with information); the OLC (which was especially well used by people in the community, who do not have their own resources); the African Caribbean library service events (which did encourage people to come into the Library); the positive staff attitudes, especially in providing services to people who are socially excluded. Most of the users were Black, and the Library benefited from not being an "old establishment" - there was "no shushing!" There was a good mix of Black and white users.

The major weaknesses all related to the lack of resources, coupled with some management issues: the lack of sufficient quantities of materials in languages other than English (and the fact that much of the stock is quite old and academic, and that there is very little material from Africa); the low level of - and constant cuts to - the budget; the lack of ICT, especially public-access computers, CD-ROM provision, and the Internet at Centre Park Library; the lack of video provision (only stocked at two libraries in Outerborough); and management weaknesses (especially in terms of fighting for resources for the Service).

The result of all the above was that the impact of the Centre Park Library on the community could have been far greater. No real outreach had been carried out for 10 years, and many community groups could have used the Library but do not - the SL felt that outreach helped to break down barriers between potential users and libraries.

The African Caribbean Librarian traditionally organised events (such as Black History Month), but the amount of money available for this was extremely limited (in 1999, £1,000 was spent on Black History Month, with publicity alone costing £350; to produce a really effective event, some £5,000 needed to be spent). Nevertheless, there had been some successful events (such as a creative writing event, and a celebration of Black scientists and inventors), although the SL felt that she had to "jump through hoops" to get any additional funding, and that she had to "beg, steal and borrow, give the talk myself, buy my friend a meal."

Not enough was provided for the different cultural groups in Outerborough. For example, whilst the borough still had its own Translation Unit, it was obviously difficult to obtain the services of an interpreter immediately they were required, and so staff were unable to give the information that people wanted on how to join the Library or how to use the OLC (this was a particular issue for newly-arrived communities, such as Kurdish refugees). The Library Service should "think about their needs". Packs of materials in different languages were urgently needed, and more staff training - to help them deal with cross-cultural communication, for example - was required. The existing 'Customer Care' courses did not deal with cultural differences, and the SL had noticed staff being abrupt with users.

5.5.3 The Librarian, Open Learning Centre

The Librarian, Open Learning Centre [LOLC] thought that the major strengths of Centre Park Library were the OLC itself (for the reasons outlined above); the service to young people (although cuts in the stockfund had led to a fall in the number of users);

and the audio-visual service (although, again, numbers of users are falling, this time caused by charges). The major weaknesses of the Library again all related to the under-investment of resources: the lack of a good ICT network; the lack of Internet access at Centre Park Library; the lack of public-access terminals and printers; an out-of-date information service; the lack of a crèche within Centre Park Library; and the overall lack of resources.

This has had a major effect on the impact of the Centre Park Library on the local community; as the LOLC described it, the community knows the Library is there, but Library staff are unable to carry out outreach to the community to promote the Library's services because of lack of staff and other resources. There was a particular need for outreach to specific communities, such as Eritrean and Somali women; many potential users of the Library Service lacked confidence because of literacy and language barriers. Services which are offered (such as the playbus and the mobile library service) were provided mainly to existing users, and many groups were not touched in any way by these services.

In addition, there were problems in relation to ICT generally and the OLC in particular. According to the LOLC, the Trade Union has withdrawn support for the Centre because of staff shortages (and the reason for these may be linked to a view that, because the Centre was externally-funded, it was therefore not seen as being a real part of the Library Service), and this, in turn, has frustrated staff who do not have up-to-date ICT skills and want to develop them via the Centre. The LOLC said that a training needs analysis had revealed that 99% of the staff did not have ICT skills, and the staff "feel like dinosaurs" (although, in reality, all staff, except Caretakers, use some form of ICT regularly, and most staff are familiar with the database system, TALIS, and a variety of word-processing packages and other facilities).

There was an urgent need for staff to be motivated to develop their ICT skills and for relevant training to be provided.

The LOLC thought that the major problem was lack of resources for the Service, combined with staff attitudes. For example, money from Government initiatives was now beginning to come into Outerborough, but the Library Service did not have the staff to take advantage of these resources and the developing social exclusion agenda; a new Assistant Director had put in a lot of bids for developmental work to combat social exclusion, and was keen on networking and developing partnerships, but the Councillors did not want to support this, they just wanted to close libraries, and library staff, although enthusiastic, were in something of a rut and unable to see a way out of this situation.

The LOLC also thought that some of the problems were as a result of poor communication within the Library Service: senior management had good ideas for developing the Service, but failed to communicate these adequately to the staff - there was a feeling amongst the staff that they had to do much of the work for themselves, that management did not care about them, and that there was no recognition or reward, encouragement or additional resources, and that some of the key processes (such as

continuous professional development, staff appraisal) were not in place.

5.5.4 The Librarian, Services to Children

The Librarian, Services to Children [LSC] thought that the strengths of the Centre Park Library were its large collection of Black literature, and the Children's Library which had a Black literature collection too, and focused on activities to attract children and young people (displays to tie in to festivals; storytelling; school visits; materials for homework). The Library is particularly well used by students of all ages.

The major weakness was the quality of the stock, and, leading on from this, the downward spiral of loan figures: it was salutary to think that, with a monthly loan period, even the most popular stock goes out on average only 12 times per year.

In terms of impact on the local community, the LSC thought that Centre Park Library had a dedicated staff, and, certainly in terms of events for children, they do publicise these and get a good turn out - lots of children came to the summer holiday events such as arts and crafts.

The LSC saw children as being an avenue for attracting adults into the Library; for example, dual language texts encourage adults and children to read together even when parents may not know much English. The Library Service has been targeting literacy as one of its priorities, and a family literacy group has been started, through which adults are shown how to join the library. They have also been doing some work with mothers and toddlers, although the LSC felt that it was difficult to get them to understand what the Library wanted.

The LSC has developed some work with groups who cannot get into the Library, and felt that more outreach work was needed.

5.5.6 The Trade Union's views

Unison's general view of the libraries in the borough was that they were in a dire state, and perhaps the worst-funded in London. Their fear was that they may get worse still - there is a danger that the needs of Best Value will be met by elected Members by reducing the number of libraries and involving the private sector.

In Unison's view, the greatest strength of the Service was its staff whose commitment to the Service was considered to be "amazing".

The Union saw a major barrier to the Library's increasing its reach in the community as the lack of resources, both financial and staff. Much could be done (for example, talking to children more, changing people's perceptions of libraries), but all this needs more staff. Links already existed with some community groups, and these could be strengthened, but all that happens is that the Library waits for people to come in, and staff give a tour and explain what the Library does - the Service needs to do more (such as setting up collections, looking at the languages covered), but this needs more capital.

Obviously, some things can be improved without further money, but there is a limit to what can be done without more resources.

The Best Value Review had made some attempts to contact community groups, but there was no clear idea of what Best Value was about: "nobody was sure of where we go from here, what is its purpose in libraries, it was half-hearted."

Unison saw the local area served by Centre Park Library as being a working class area where poor people rely more on libraries than in other parts of the borough, which are relatively rich. The Union also noted a disadvantage for local residents in terms of education: school libraries were run down because of the devolved funding to schools, and local schools were not performing well on those terms; this created a higher demand on the Library, as parents could not afford to buy books. At the same time, funding for the Library did not allow for the purchase of necessary materials, such as GCSE texts.

The Union saw the Library as having an important impact in the local area. The old library was run down and "nobody used it". The new Library was in a Leisure Centre, and it was a place for local people to go. However, the rest of the local area was run down - two libraries were closed in the last 10 years in the neighbourhood - so Centre Park Library stood out as a shining example of regeneration.

However, whilst it had a big impact, this could be even greater if the service was properly funded so that it could reach out more, "not just sitting in the confines of our building, but going out more to community groups, asking people on the streets what they want, going to schools."

Unison thought that the Library had an equal impact on all communities, well used by Black communities and white also. Library campaigners in general are the most vocal people, and they tend to be white middle class, so libraries are perceived to be white and middle class too. However, working class and Black communities use libraries more across Outerborough - and this was especially true of Centre Park Library which is in such a deprived area.

Specific issues discussed with the Trade Union included:
• Role of support groups - the TU thought that it was important that support groups should be independent from management and staff. In practice, conflicts have arisen, for example where one group has been in favour of the Private Finance Initiative while others opposed it. There were also differences in perception between groups which focused on one library and those which supported public libraries per se. There had been much petitioning by library support groups in richer parts of the borough, and this had included the production of a questionnaire. However, the Black support group at Centre Park Library felt unhappy with the questionnaire which had been drawn up by the other (mostly white) support groups, and thought that it did not reflect the cultural diversity of the area; they decided not to use it, but did not draw up an alternative, so a large part of the borough was not surveyed at all.

- Had the TU an anti-ICT position? - Unison were adamant that they did not have an anti-ICT stance, but identified that problems arose when money was found for ICT without the funding for sufficient staffing or training. The Union position is "yes" to ICT, but "no" to ICT misuse (for example, Outerborough had just spent some £33m on IT partly in order to introduce e-mail, whilst staff were being made redundant). The TU representative also thought that, in reality, ICT would benefit a minority of staff, and it would be better to spend the money on more books.

- How to increase funding for libraries in poorer areas? - by increasing the size of the cake, not taking crumbs from one library to give to another.

5.5.7   The Friends of Centre Park Library

The Friends was one of several library support groups operating in Outerborough, each with their own local vision for the particular library they are supporting. From the discussions with staff, it was clear that the general impression of support groups was that they have not supported the Service nor taken advantage of their position to influence policies in a positive way in order to further the interests of the borough's communities as a whole. Instead, most seem to have their own agenda, for example, to use the groups to further political positions, to support a narrow local perspective, or to preserve local libraries without looking at the needs of the community. We did not get an impression that any of them were concerned with tackling social exclusion, or that their activities addressed the needs of those so excluded - nor did it appear that socially excluded communities were actively involved in the activities of the groups.

The group we examined in some detail supported Centre Park Library which, as noted above, was located in a community which had a large number of Black and other minorities, and also a larger working class population and more people living in poverty than other parts of the borough. The Library Service was keen for us to study this Friends group to see how it could be used positively to support the Service's agenda of reaching out to those facing social exclusion in the area served by Centre Park Library.

We found that the group was dominated by the personality and interest of its leader who is not a local resident or worker (nor a regular user of the Library). Her (and the group's) main interest was in Centre Park Library's name which pays tribute to a prominent Black leader widely respected in the Caribbean and African communities. During the interview with the Friends, other group members were mostly quiet, or repeated the leader's words and ideas (and seemed rather 'programmed'). However, they responded enthusiastically when other needs were mentioned later in the interview.

In general, the Friends did not seem to be rooted in local communities. They also did not seem to have a good working relationship with the Library Service, despite the latter's provision of open facilities and support for the Friends.

The main focus of the Friends was a very narrow 'political' agenda, and they seem not to have taken various opportunities to reach out into the community or to influence Library Service policies, despite ample opportunities to do so. In fact, the Friends

appeared to have created a rather intimidating presence, and were often unaware or unconcerned about the real needs of ethnic minorities. They were hostile to the concept of class and thus did not seem to recognise the needs of working class and poor members of the local community.

In addition, the needs of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered communities and disabled people seemed to be totally ignored. In emphasising the needs of one community (Caribbean and, to some extent, African), the Friends seemed unaware and unconcerned about the potential conflict that this could create, not only with the white communities, but also with other ethnic minority communities.

The general conclusion from the interview with the Friends group was that, in making its scope too narrow and focused on only a small section of the very diverse population, they had lost an opportunity to be a dynamic force for change. Instead, its activities have created another set of problems which have diverted the attention of staff and managers from addressing real problems of exclusion. It has lost the opportunity to counter other users groups in the borough, which are predominantly white and middle class. As a result, serious concerns about the role of support groups have been raised[6].

5.6   Interviewees' perceptions of social exclusion

The Neighbourhood Librarian thought that lots of socially excluded people do not use libraries, but that the fault for this lay with libraries rather than the socially excluded people themselves. Outerborough Library Service has always had a focus on ethnic minorities and disabled people, and they do try to target people, but he thought that social exclusion meant a lot more than that. In the end, of all the services provided by Centre Park Library, the NL thought that only the OLC was really successful in providing what socially excluded people wanted.

The Senior Librarian identified a very real shortcoming in the provision of resources for Black and other ethnic minority communities in Outerborough, but also felt that there was little corporate support for this area of work: there was no Council Race Unit, and the Outerborough Equalities Unit had no power and did very little. Black Councillors and the Race Committee of the Council were too involved in their own problems, and the Friends Groups were not taking on this area as one to fight for. Whereas in the 1980s and early 1990s the African Caribbean Librarian specifically targeted socially excluded groups, this was no longer happening, and more needed to be done via outreach. The Senior Librarian was encouraged to bring more people into the Library, but, with the lack of resources, there was little that she felt she could offer them. Resources ought to be redirected from libraries to outreach, but the Senior Librarian felt that, in the end, the Council would not deliver on this (when the number of libraries was reduced from 11 to 9, redirection was supposed to happen, but it did not - instead, libraries were closed as a cut, and vacant posts were frozen).

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[6] one of the issues we noted during the Case Study was the way in which the leader of the Friends Group treated the Library as though it was her personal domain. As this report was being written, we learned that the Library Service has taken steps to curtail this.

However, the Senior Librarian also thought that lack of money was not the only problem. Some librarians thought that they were spending enough on Black materials when they had committed £100: she felt that some staff were very set in their ways, and did not listen to her when she asked them to spend more on this area of service.

The Librarian, Open Learning Centre identified that the term "social exclusion" was being used, but that, in reality, there was little real link with the community in terms of outreach, because of lack of resources.

5.7   Themes and Issues

5.7.1   Siting/location

Centre Park Library had been relocated from a stand-alone building to being within a Leisure Centre. There was evidence from staff and the Friends group that this had led to an increase in usage, although, as elsewhere, at the same time some older regular library users were deterred by the move (in terms of distance from the new location and not wishing to use the Leisure Centre). There was also a lack of co-ordinated planning of service provision by the Library and the Leisure Centre.

At the time of our study, the college next door to the Library was planning to develop ICT provision which might well cut across that being discussed as possible developments for the Library. In the end, this could well prove fatal for the Library.

It is vital that public libraries seize opportunities to work with all relevant local organisations, and need to become active partners, seeking out such opportunities, rather than tending to await their fate.

5.7.2   Friends Groups

Friends Groups are springing up all over the country, primarily as part of a move to defend Library Services against cuts and closures of service points. In the US, much of their work has been in fund-raising and heightening libraries' political profile.

However, here, the Friends have tended to take an entirely different role: whilst it is obviously vital that the community does come to the defence of well-used local facilities, there have certainly been occasions when supporters groups have taken an entirely reactionary stance over public libraries, for example by defending little-used buildings in middle-class areas (as an asset when looking at the value of property) or by attacking public library policies (stock selection, for example). There is a very real danger that what begins as an attempt to keep open a local library ends up being hijacked for personal political motives.

What is clear is that any Friends Groups need to be carefully and strongly managed, with a clearly defined role in relation to the local authority, management and library

employees, the library itself, and the wider community.

In Outerborough, Friends Groups for the libraries have emerged as powerful bodies, and, whilst this is obviously good in terms of keeping the facilities on the local authority agenda and to the forefront in the media, they have also proved something of a burden. Indeed, one Library in the authority has two rival Friends Groups who are, apparently, at war with each other! Centre Park Library's Friends Group saw itself as a one-issue body, and has made very little attempt to broaden its base to include, for example, representatives from the local Chinese and Turkish communities, or local lesbians and gay men.

5.7.3 Funding

Lack of funding is very clearly a major factor in Outerborough. Years of poor funding, combined with regular rounds of cuts, have led to poor stock and weak services, plus a demoralised staff - people can remember when there were enough resources to allow for outreach and more in-depth community-based working. Despite this, efforts are still being made to provide services to meet specific needs of the local community: whilst we were there, for example, a display to celebrate Black History Month was being mounted.

However, perhaps as a result of the demoralisation, it was also the case that staff did not make the most of what they had. For example, a manager complained to us that not enough of the stockfund was being spent on materials aimed at the Black community, when, in fact, the responsibility for allocating the stockfund rested with him! The lack of a written stock policy (and therefore the development of what appeared to be ad hoc arrangements) showed in the issues which have arisen about stock priorities and in the quality of the stock on the shelves.

5.7.4 ICT versus books

As one of the Project Team described it, this is a sterile debate. Nevertheless, there was some evidence that managers are locked into thinking that it is an either/or situation, whereas it was clear that, whilst the ICT suite is extremely well used and could undoubtedly be much larger, nevertheless a crucial aspect of the Library was its stock of materials. Whilst 'traditional' staff continue to argue strongly that space given over to the Open Learning Centre is "wasted space" (and whilst managers agree with this to a lesser or greater extent), then this debate too is going to continue to remain locked.

5.7.5 Stock management

Although there had been stock policies in place in the past, these had mostly fallen into disuse. As a result, the stocks in the Library were now uneven: for example, some of the community languages had benefited from the historical appointment of specific language specialists, but this had led to some language stocks being extensive and looking like a university collection, whilst others were much smaller and lower level (this skew in levels of provision has led to accusations that the Library does not cater for all its communities, and the fact that they are sited just inside the entrance has led at least one

user to think that there were no books in English there!) Some adult stock areas had collections of very old and outdated material, kept, presumably, to maintain certain stock levels, but of little practical use today.

5.7.6 Staffing issues

Staff at the Library are making a great deal of effort to develop their services within the very limited funding available. Despite claims of low morale, they appear friendly and approachable to their users (and this contrasted with another Outerborough Library, where staff at the enquiry desk were observed being terse and monosyllabic with the public.)

5.8. Conclusion: the 'locked-up' Library Service

Studying Outerborough was, in many ways, a depressing experience. Because of a number of factors, most particularly as the result of budget cuts and freezes, the continuous 'making do', and the consequent demoralisation of staff, there was a patent sense of frustration in the air. For example, some staff clearly want to embrace ICT, video lending and other initiatives, but see there being no commitment by management and the Council to implement any of these with the staffing and other resources required, yet, at the same time, management clearly were keen to introduce a range of new services.

At the same time, the Trade Union, in representing employee concerns about staffing levels and workloads, is taking the stance that such services should be introduced only when management can show that the requisite staffing/resources are also available (this being partly based on TU members' concerns, and partly on the TU's response to the Council's having made a large - in their terms, over-large - commitment to a new Council-wide ICT system). Without wishing to over-simplify this, it is our view that the system has 'locked': the Council will not (or cannot) do anything about its Council-wide ICT commitment; management cannot always make available all the resources needed to introduce a new service or service development (some of the resources may actually be gained by demonstrating that there is a demand for these services); staff are not developing the skills they need to embrace ICT developments; and, most importantly, the local community is not getting services it wants. (Similarly, the community is apparently very supportive of Sunday opening, but the TU is vehemently opposed to this.)

At the same time, management seems unable to manage. There is a lot of interference at a political level, with the Library Service having become something of a 'political football', most moves seem to be being blocked by the TU, the Friends Groups across the Borough had assumed far too much authority, and we gained an impression of staff who were demotivated and desperately in need of management.

It was as a result of all this that we came to think of Outerborough as being 'locked-up', and in urgent need of unlocking.

6.   Welshborough Case Study

6.1   Introduction

Welshborough is an urban local authority in South Wales with a population of approximately 140,000. Like much of South Wales, the borough has been affected heavily by deindustrialisation and unemployment, although levels of unemployment have tended to recede in the nineties with an influx of service-based industries. Nevertheless, the borough contains wards and enumeration districts with some of the highest levels of deprivation in Wales and material prosperity is still fragile for what is a largely working class borough. The borough is also atypical of South Wales in that it has played host to significant numbers of migrant settlers over the years: currently 3.5% of the borough's population is of minority ethnic origin. Of these the most significant are a longstanding African-Caribbean community and more recently settled Bengali and Somali communities.

Politically, the borough is dominated by a Labour party that has pursued longstanding policies designed to tackle disadvantage and deprivation. These have always focused on the provision of good quality public services of a traditional kind. However, since 1994 the Labour Group has been heavily influenced by New Labour thinking on social exclusion and has developed a response based upon a major community project . This focuses upon the six most deprived geographical areas of the borough and aims to facilitate a "structured approach" to community development in each area by identifying needs, setting up local multi-agency boards, and encouraging "joined up" responses by council services and other agencies to local problems. To some extent the community project has begun to change the culture of local government in Welshborough, leading to an expansion of inter-agency projects and the breakdown of traditional public service barriers.

The Library Service in many ways reflects this transitional position between the old and the new. Although the borough has a modern central library, the library service is in many ways traditional in policies, structures and operation. Until 1989 the service was part of a larger county service, and the borough librarian noted that the "community librarianship of the 70s and 80s passed Welshborough by". There was little innovation in this period, everyone agreed, except in maybe children's services. It was also arguable that in the county period the core book lending service was very poor. Since 1992, the priority for the borough has been the modernisation of this traditional service and in this it claims some success. Bookfund spending is among the highest per capita in Wales and is "protected" in that both senior managers and politicians view it as sacrosanct. Book issues have, as a consequence risen until very recently, an impressive achievement against Welsh and UK trends. The service has also adopted a bold approach to ICT provision, providing a minimum of two multimedia/networked PCs in all branch libraries. This is effectively seen as a continuance of the strategy of generous and effective materials provision into the electronic age (Welshborough Library and Information Service, *ICT Strategy,* 1999).

85

However, the price that has been paid for such strategies has effectively been one of poor staffing levels. Overall, staffing levels in the service are 0.38 per 1000 population compared with an average of 0.39 in Wales and 0.42 in England. Single staffing of branch libraries is commonly accepted and such constraints have inevitably limited the scope for innovation and active engagement with users and communities. Nevertheless, since 1992 a vigorous and committed borough library management team has driven a number of innovations based on community librarianship and a concern with social exclusion. These include detailed service planning at local level incorporating strategies targeting reading and literacy, lifelong learning, information provision and social inclusion (*Marketing Plan, 1999-2000*, 1998); a major survey of library users' needs in 1997 and a number of initiatives in literacy, children's services and services to disabled people. Library managers have also made efforts to engage in interagency working both at local and at borough level, in particular developing joint working with the education department and the borough community project.

The effectiveness of these strategies will be examined in the subsequent sections of the case study. Section 6.2 examines in detail approaches to social exclusion in a small branch library at Dock, a deprived inner city area of Welshborough and Section 6.3 develops some of these local issues through an analysis of the perspectives of a wider range of local library staff. Sections 6.4 and 6.5 focus thematically on children's services, literacy work and ICT development and their links to social exclusion. Sections 6.6 and 6.7 then widen the focus to general policy matters through an analysis of the views of Senior Library Managers, Community Workers and a local councillor who is the borough policy group elected member for libraries. In 6. 8 we draw together what we believe to be the key strengths and weaknesses of Welshborough Library Service's approach to social exclusion and we conclude with a brief discussion of the significance of the case study for the project as a whole.

6.2   Area perspectives: addressing social exclusion in local libraries, with special reference to Dock

6.2.1   Dock

Dock Library is in the old docklands area of the borough. It is open Monday, Wednesday and Friday. It is not open Saturdays. It is in a 19th century purpose-built building and is reached via community rooms downstairs and upstairs. It is single staffed and, recognising the security issues this raises, it has a panic alarm, a warning bell to indicate someone has entered and a quick locking mechanism for the door. The building was refurbished in 1993 but upstairs access is still poor. There is no lift. The library is in one large room. ICT provision and free Internet access has recently been installed.

According to the Department of Environment Index of Relative Deprivation, Dock is the most deprived area in Welshborough and the seventh most deprived area in Wales (Welshborough Borough Council, *Dock Community Profile*, 1997). The profile also points to an unemployment rate of 21.3% compared with 6.5% for the borough as a

whole and key social problems of crime, drugs and anti-social behaviour typical of inner city areas. The area is very run down with a large number of derelict and boarded up shops on the main shopping street. The library is on a side street in a row of terrace houses. This street is believed to be the main drug-dealing street in the area. The whole area shows evidence of previous "grant" schemes e.g. modern seating, bollards, streetlights and traffic calming. However, the housing often looks poorly maintained. 19th century terraced housing is interspersed with newer housing in areas cleared of older properties.

The area has a long tradition of being the starting point for immigrant communities. There is a long established Irish Catholic community with church and school. There is an older Somali community from the time when docks were active, and a newer Somali community of refugees. There are also Pakistani and African-Caribbean communities. The area is very self-contained, bound by industry, the river and the city centre.

The branch librarian (BLD) very much enjoyed working at Dock but acknowledged that it was not particularly popular with some other staff because of the responsibility and the area. She found that at first people stared at her when she walked down the road because she was a newcomer. However, she had made attempts to get to know the area with visits to community centres, pubs and cafes and she now was greeted in the area. She enjoys this. She felt it had a real community feel that she had never experienced elsewhere.

She identified the very multicultural feel to the area and believed that there was more cross-community interaction than in the past. This was partly due to agencies such as the neighbourhood team and adult education helping communities work together. She felt there was less racism than she experienced when she was here eight years ago (to the Irish community at that time). The police are more sceptical about communities interacting but she feels that it is happening. She cites the various classes that take place at the library community rooms (see below).

6.2.2 Library Use

BLD drew a distinction between the use of the library and the use of the building. The building was heavily used with over 80 classes a month in the community rooms. The library was underused. Library users were identified as either longstanding and mostly elderly or children. From teens to sixties were "missing". Especially she felt that it was difficult to attract people from the adult education classes into the library. This had resulted in a previous librarian placing deposit collections in the crèche and the Adult Education classes. She questioned the usefulness of this but felt that issues were seen as important. Many of the Adult Education classes were to help ethnic minorities with English language learning. Over 300 women were registered but few came in to use the language material in the library. There was also doubt over the future funding of the crèche and BLD was not sure whether it would continue. This would have an impact on attendance.

Community language material was provided in the library and promotional posters in

community languages were evident. Books and magazines were available for loan. The magazines were most popular. The collection was provided by another library service on subscription and circulated between Dock, Midtown and the Central library before being returned. It was felt that the stock was in poor condition compared to their other stock. Welshborough did not have any community language speakers on the staff and translated advertising of the material had not been considered. BLD said that she is able to get help from the AE tutors if she needs translations. While she was aware and agreed with the need to prioritise support for ethnic minority users she was also concerned that the needs of the 77% of residents who were white were not overlooked.

Other groups also used the community rooms and one room had been given over to Drugspace. Home tuition services were also operated from upstairs. However, there was a clear concern over the disparity between the front and back of the building. Lots goes on at the front of the building but people do not come through to the back. Later BLD linked people's perceptions of the activities with some people being discouraged from using the library. In some ways she felt this was a race issue, with older white people put off by the ethnic minority classes. She said some people had made (racist) comments but she had been polite and ignored them - "librarians are not expected to comment". However, she also thought the library was poorly located and not signposted. If she could change one thing it would be to move the library to the main road.

6.2.3   Outreach

BLD seemed to have a good awareness of the impact of outreach work - "if you sit in and wait it just won't happen"; "you've got to be in people's faces". Her time was limited (two mornings a week if she was not required for relief elsewhere) but she worked with the neighbourhood team leader to identify people and places to meet. She had visited all the local primary schools (there are no comprehensive schools in the area), youth clubs and various community groups. She mainly talked to them and handed out leaflets rather than provided activities. She had visited some 600 children since she started. She also noted that over 100 had joined the National Reading Safari Summer Scheme. She felt that the introduction of videos would help. There is no alternative provision in the area and she felt it might bring parents in with their children. She was surprised by the number of people who were unaware of the location of the library.

She felt that the Community Project Team was good for the area. It was led by a worker from Bristol who really loved the area. The CPT was instrumental in people starting to work for themselves. She felt they were asking more from the council and not just accepting things. She cited as an example the fight against drug dealing that was starting to have an effect. She always gave consideration to what would attract the people she was visiting to join the library. She felt that the recent introduction of the Internet was very good for teenagers, and she wondered what appeal the library would have if this was not available. Classes, such as the home tuition, welcomed and immediately booked sessions on it.

Consideration of deposit collections was continuing. A collection of books was going to be provided to the local resource centre. These would be community language and dual

language material, but not information type material – this had not been considered. The library was also going to purchase material to compliment the work of the Drugspace.

In terms of barriers she felt that the whole concept of the library needs to change to bring people in. She saw the library functions as primarily to educate and inform and felt that there was a "whole new world to these people" if they used the service. The image of the service needed changing. ICT helped. Videos would help. But she also identified the importance of staff attitude and approach. This was a key factor. If staff don't greet people and give a good service people will not come back. The library needs to sell itself.

Because of single staffing BLD identified that at times it was difficult to do all the various jobs. Some of them, she claimed, might not be deemed by some staff as "library work" (e.g. room booking; outreach) and this might put some people off working at Dock. Sometimes she might be trying to help with the Internet, working with a child and trying to issue a book. Also the lack of Saturday provision was because of lack of staff. She worked elsewhere on Saturdays. She was in no doubt that it would be popular.

6.2.4   Library Provision in Dock: an assessment

The library service provided in Dock represents in microcosm the dilemmas of Welshborough's approach to providing for excluded communities. Its commitment to all communities is evident by maintaining building based provision in an area of the town where many other facilities and amenities have been withdrawn or been closed. Its aim of providing an equitable service across the town results in a good, book-based service, augmented by new, free ICT provision. The librarian's enthusiasm for working in the area is within a supportive management environment where community librarianship and outreach activities are recognised and encouraged. This approach and the actual work carried out, is acknowledged and praised by both the neighbourhood project and adult education workers.

However, there are identifiable limitations. Specific targeting of resources is absent, beyond the obvious commitment of being there. The library is single-staffed, restricting the opportunities for outreach. It is only open limited hours and the ability to connect with other users of the building is consequently lessened. Specialist support in working with ethnic minorities would certainly help the existing work by the librarian.

6.3   Libraries and Social Exclusion: Local Staff Perceptions

In addition to the detailed work at Dock, staff at one other branch library (Midtown) and staff from a mobile library which served an isolated, out- of- town housing estate were interviewed about their work with socially excluded communities and individuals. This section draws together their responses.

6.3.1 The role of the public library

All of the staff interviewed had very positive views about the work that they did and the role of libraries. They believed in the functions of educating and informing and realised the potential of the Internet to widen this role. At Midtown there was a distinction drawn between the traditional lending function and the new ICT. The concern was that the Internet could reduce borrowing. This was perceived as a worry because of the great deal of focus placed on issues statistics as quantifiers of use. This was also reflected in Dock and on the mobiles in that all staff were conscious of the importance of issues in the Welshborough context. However, at Dock the Internet and ICT were seen as ways of boosting use of the library as a concept rather than a way of bringing people into borrow more books. Also, on the mobiles, computers were considered to be a potentially popular provision.

The increasing introduction of ICT in libraries was seen positively by all. There was clarity about its information potential especially in a small library such as Dock. It was not questioned in terms of its function, but at Midtown there was a worry that its use would not be reflected in the statistics that were collected. The staff seemed proud that the service was free. They also could see its potential in bringing in a wider range of users, especially young people.

6.3.2 Users and the community

All interviewees saw the main users of their services as older people and children. There was concern expressed that the ages in between were missing. Again, ICT was seen as a potential attraction for these missing people. At Dock it was felt that libraries would have little to offer teenagers if the Internet had not been provided.

The view on use by ethnic minorities varied between the two libraries and was not really mentioned on the mobiles. At Dock there was an awareness of the needs of communities for material in other languages. At Midtown there was a perception that the communities were long established and mostly spoke English. The Dock view was both more articulate in expressing the dynamism of the multiracial community and showed greater awareness of the tensions in the community with issues such as racism mentioned. The Midtown view placed more emphasis racial harmony. Both interviewees were concerned at the lack of take-up of material in other languages. Both identified the poor stock quality. Both identified the failure of deposit collections. At Dock there was a concern that they stopped people coming into the library. At Midtown there was more of a concern regarding lost issues.

Community rooms were only available at Dock, and the librarian was particularly concerned that the rooms use had little positive impact in increasing use of the library. Conversely she worried that it had an adverse effect by projecting the wrong image. At Midtown some groups used the library in the evening but this use was linked to potential issues that have not materialised. Children's services were referred to by all the interviewees and were seen as a particularly important function for the service.

Image was perceived as very important at Dock and at Midtown. Both interviewees drew attention to the need to promote the service. At Midtown it was more a question of a good product that needed selling. At Dock there was more concern that the product needed to change and this was not restricted to providing services but how that service was delivered (importance of staff attitude and approach). These varying attitudes were reflected in how outreach was perceived. At Dock the importance of knowing and relating to the community was seen as an important factor in itself and one that might influence the nature of the service. At Midtown the emphasis was more on going out and selling the service. At both service points outreach and work with neighbourhood workers etc. were seen as a standard part of the job.

6.3.3   Staffing, training and management

Staff were aware of the limitations placed on them by low staffing levels but seemed to accept these limitations. There was concern expressed at both libraries about the inability to give the level of help, especially with ICT, that was needed. However, this was not articulated more strongly than an identification of a problem that people would work around as best as they could.

There was a high degree of satisfaction expressed with the support provided for training by management. Training needs around ICT and knowledge of the needs of ethnic minorities were identified and the expectation was that this would be forthcoming. On the whole, staff seemed to be very appreciative and supportive of the management in Welshborough.

6.4   Information and Communication Technology: Policies and Practice

6.4.1   Services and Rationale

As noted briefly in the introduction, Welshborough has adopted a radical, comprehensive and progressive approach to the networking of libraries. By June 1999 all service points in the borough had public access to a minimum of two multimedia PCs (more in larger service points) which offered free public access to world wide web and a series of networked CD ROM services. In addition use of applications software such as word processing, spreadsheet, DTP and databases was also available free of charge. In infrastructure terms, this amounted to 26 Multimedia PCs using Windows NT4 and linked to the council's wide area network. Renewal and updating of hardware is supported by a phased replacement of equipment incorporated in the Library Service's ICT strategy (1999).

In part these developments have been driven by favourable circumstances: the small size of the borough and the council's overall IT roll-out has enabled change whereas in many

other local authorities both technical and organisational difficulties have yet to be overcome. However, it would be misleading to imply that these achievements have been opportunistic: the free public provision of access to ICT networks has high level political support (see Section 6.6) and library managers see these developments as a natural extension of the core mission of the service and point to their links to *New Library : the People's Network* and the Wales Information Society Project. The ICT strategy document itself claims that "these technologies will provide the service with greater opportunities to fulfil its mission of providing access to information, ideas and imagination to everyone in Welshborough and to increase its relevance to residents". The borough librarian further commented that "it's about ensuring equality of access to electronic information and the skills needed in being able to use that" and the Principal Librarian responsible for ICT strategy commented that free Internet access was grounded in the traditional library ethos of providing free information.

6.4.2 Use, Staff Perceptions and Limitations

In general, library senior managers are enthusiastic about electronic services and resources, seeing their development as an "opportunity to reconfigure the service and to provide a much greater breadth and depth of service to branch libraries" (*Marketing Plan*, 1999). The branch libraries manager sees ICT as having "amazing potential to change how people viewed libraries and how libraries served people". Over-enthusiasm is, however, tempered by a sense that "it is very important to have a balance between the traditional library role and the ICT role......there are an awful lot of people out there who require a traditional library service". This view was supported by the findings of user focus groups conducted by staff before the ICT roll-out where participants were "conscious of a role for IT, but didn't want the main service to deteriorate in any way" (Principal Librarian, Support Services).

Use of the new services is so far mainly on an individual "on demand" basis although it was anticipated that group-related activities would increase from autumn 1999 onwards. Basic skills training was being offered at the Central Library, and co-operation with community education services would increase. At Midtown Library a community writing project utilised the PCs, as well as a homework club on two evenings of the week. The introduction of PCs in libraries had thus been welcomed by outside agencies, especially in education, where it was seen as providing improved skills training for the public.

At Midtown, the Branch Librarian felt that the Internet was used "across the board.....from children to older people, retired people" (for example for family history). Many of the users were new to the Internet ("I think a lot of people want to test the water"). Word processing facilities were also widely used, often by school children; a few college leavers used the library for typing CVs. ICT services had not yet been formally promoted, but the librarian thought this would change at the end of the roll-out period. She did, however, mention Internet availability when she spoke to local groups, for instance the literacy group which meets in the library (see Section 6.5.1).

The main problem with providing ICT services, which was recognised by staff at all levels, was one of providing user support. At branch level, staff recognise that the

confidence and knowledge levels of ICT users varies widely and includes many first time users. Staff often help inexperienced users for long periods of time, and this results in them being "tied up" for long periods of the day (Branch Librarian, Midtown Library). This problem is aggravated, especially in Welshborough, by the low levels of staffing in branch libraries and the lack of confidence and ICT skills on the part of front line staff themselves. The result is that by and large, according to the Principal Librarian, Support Services, "at this moment in time we provide a facility, I don't think we provide a service. What we don't say to you if you're using the Internet is 'everything all right there? If you require any help come and ask us'. We don't do that because generally as staff we are not confident".

Welshborough has, of course, plans to address this problem, mainly revolving around the training of staff up to European Driving Licence ICT skills standards. However, there is some suspicion that this training will be so basic as to only confirm basic existing skills and in any event the extra training will not resolve the problems of numbers of staff required and their view of their role and orientation. Without staffing and organisational changes, the Principal Librarian believes that "something has to give.....whether it's the quality of book service or the quality of IT service". She adds that "people who need quality of service" will lose out most because " the independent user requires less staff interaction than the clients who, for whatever reason, require more help, or more focussing, whether it's children, whether it's the elderly, whether it's people who are less educationally proficient".

6.4.3   ICT, the Public Library and Social Exclusion

Such specific observations inevitably lead to broader questions regarding the relationship of ICT strategy to concerns about social exclusion. As we have seen, in general terms the rationale underpinning ICT development in the borough is a universalist one, based on equality of access to an "information society" and "lifelong learning" for all. The ICT strategy document of 1999 underpins this with a commitment "to ensure that everyone [source document underlining] in the borough has access to ICT facilities the opportunity to develop ICT skills and to electronic information, free at the point of delivery".

However, it has quickly become apparent in Welshborough (and we suspect that this will be the case elsewhere) that such simple equality of access does not automatically guarantee inclusion. Users, as we have seen, begin from many different skills levels and starting points and users who are excluded or disadvantaged tend to need much more assistance than those who are not, assuming they come into a library building at all. To their credit, the management team in Welshborough recognise this: according to the Principal Librarian, Reader Services, "all we are really doing at the moment is offering a resource to people who haven't got the technology ...... it doesn't tackle social exclusion, but it provides people who are socially excluded with an opportunity to use equipment they couldn't otherwise afford".

In order, therefore, for ICT services to be made more inclusive in the sense of promoting equality of outcomes rather than simply access, it is clear that the focus in

Welshborough will now need to move from the basic provision of hardware and software to its utilisation. Issues which need to be addressed include:

- Skill and confidence levels of (especially) front line staff.
- Roles and responsibilities of staff in providing support to individual users: it is clear that to be really effective with disadvantaged users staff will need to adopt a more proactive approach than at present.
- Levels of staffing which incorporate the recognition of proactive/learning/advisor roles
- The possibility of partnerships with or employment of staff with specialist ICT skills/training expertise.
- Work with community / client groups to enable excluded users to improve their information capabilities. This may eventually include some kind of library presence in ICT "outreach" projects in community resource centres or other places outside library buildings.

Welshborough is, as we have seen, beginning to consider initiatives such as these but has so far been mainly concerned with technology/infrastructure. As the Principal Librarian (Reader Services) suggests, the key concern now is to move beyond a mainly passive approach based on technology to a more active approach focussed on "information literacy". It is perhaps, this case study suggests, only through such people-centred strategies that "informational" exclusion will be addressed.

6.5 Reading, Literacy and Children: Policy and Projects

This section examines the development of literacy policy and practice in Welshborough Libraries, and links this to a discussion of recent developments and initiatives in children's work. It is based on interviews with the lead officer for the Welshborough Literacy Project (who was based in the Council's adult education department), a worker with a local voluntary literacy group and two library staff (the children's librarian and the principal librarian with overall responsibility for this area of work) and visits to a number of projects and locations.

6.5.1 Welshborough Literacy Project and the Library Service

Literacy development is clearly a high priority for Welshborough Library Service, and the development of literacy skills is identified as a key priority in its mission statement (*Marketing Plan*, 1999). Literacy work is, however, not uniquely the remit of libraries and most development has been linked to the overall framework provided by the Welshborough literacy project. An example of the local authority's project-driven approach, the literacy project is scheduled to run for five years, having begun in 1996. It was a response to the high proportion of local people, of all ages, with basic skills needs. The project is a "multi-agency partnership … driven by education but owned by everyone." Libraries are amongst a large number of local agencies represented on the project's steering group. The project takes a "cradle to the grave approach", working with adults, schools and families. Libraries play a part in all this work:-

"Right across the age ranges, from Bookstart right through to the adult education programme, all of our groups at some stage or other visit either their local library or [the central library]. We've even brought some of our youth access youngsters - and they really are the disadvantaged youngsters - in to use the Internet."

The project officer highlights the supportive nature of library staff in providing an atmosphere where children and adults with literacy difficulties "feel comfortable." This point was endorsed by the voluntary literacy worker who comments that :-

"The library seemed the most wonderful place to be, because it wasn't an educational setting. The children and adults were surrounded by books, but because of the pedagogy / philosophy they didn't actually have to pick any of the books up. So it would take away that fear of having to read in front of each other."

A central plank of the literacy project is the family learning programme which works with 450 families. Here "without exception the schools have stated that the children have improved their literacy levels, not just during the time of the family learning course, but have continued to make progress." The project worker identified a clear supporting role played by the library service, through the children's librarian speaking to family learning groups and providing book boxes. She added that the librarian had asked a colleague from adult education to "audit" the collections provided for family literacy groups (which "was very brave"). Similarly, the voluntary worker felt that the library service was "very good" in changing the collection available to the literacy group.

Individual family literacy projects tend to be located in more deprived areas of Welshborough. Bookstart, led by libraries, is identified by the project officer as an important strand of the literacy project. Another area of co-operation (with libraries and other departments) mentioned by the literacy worker is in co-ordinating the summer literacy scheme with other out-of-school work. She felt the multi-agency approach of the literacy project provided "a clear structure" for both sharing information and identifying opportunities for joint working. Generally, she felt that the various library initiatives (summer reading schemes, the Reading is Fundamental scheme and homework clubs) were successful in reaching children who would otherwise not have access to books: "the library service here is very, very effective in making reading fun. It's crucial. The children have a different approach to a school library from a local librarian."

Like the community project workers (see Section 6.7), the literacy project worker emphasises the responsive nature of the library service, for example: "in areas without a branch library, in the early days the library diverted the mobile library to the schools where were working, so that they could have access to libraries and children who'd never set foot inside a library actually came on in."

Midtown literacy group, which meets at Midtown Library, predates the Welshborough literacy project. The group is a charity which uses teacher training students as volunteer

tutors. The group pays a nominal charge for use of the library, but this was now being met by the literacy project, something which the group worker attributed to the borough librarian's support of the project. She felt that it was to the credit of the library service that they had supported work in the non-statutory sector. This was especially the case as this support predated the literacy project and because the group could be regarded as unorthodox in that it used different approaches / methods to the local authority basic skills workers.

6.5.2   Children's Services

In many ways, children's services mirrored the overall picture found in Welshborough. Examples of this included using branch service plans to ensure particular activities were carried out (for example making links with local nurseries and playgroups). The emphasis on library stock referred to in the introduction was also found with children's services. A problem relating to children with particular reading and information needs was that "because we've been so well-resourced in the past, we've put in some quite high stock performance measures, and if books aren't issuing we take them out of that library". The children's librarian therefore has to intervene to ensure that certain kinds of material, which do not issue very often, are not lost (for example books aimed at Asian girls do not issue as well as "white girl stories"). Some branch staff "are [not] that interested in stock so they'd just chuck it out because it wasn't issuing."

The library service's children's work is characterised by an absence of targeting. Bookstart is a major example of this, where, according to the Borough Librarian, pressure to focus Bookstart on the more deprived areas of the borough linked to the community project had "been resisted" because of an awareness that children with poor reading levels existed throughout the borough. Other examples of this included Reading is Fundamental and the national summer reading game. The Reading is Fundamental scheme had a dedicated member of staff and was seen by the literacy project worker as especially successful in attracting non-traditional users. Some events had, however, been targeted at schools with high take-up of free school meals. There had also been some successful targeting of boys as a response to boys' overall lower reading skills. There were no charges for children's events, so there were no cost barriers to their take-up.

Libraries were seen as relevant for curriculum support, with library staff saying that there were close links with local teachers. There were drop-in facilities for homework support at all Welshborough's branch libraries. Homework support also linked closely with libraries' ICT provision. The extent of ICT use was also said to depend on local library staff:- "we don't have that many staff in Welshborough and they're pulled in lots of different directions and often it depends who shouts loudest, who gets what. Our homework support these days is very much based on the ICT in places. I think the value of homework support in branch libraries is being coloured in some respects by the fact that our staff aren't as confident with ICT as they need to be."

Library staff highlighted the "Launchpad" programme at Midtown Library, a demonstration project funded as part of a TEC childcare project. This was aimed at children with low esteem, poor literacy and the biggest gap between potential and actual

attainment. Teachers closely monitored these children's progress, and "that was very successful because we can prove that the children who came, who were supposed to get this level in their SATs ...got a higher level." Children in council care were also mentioned as a particularly excluded group. Here, the library service had developed links with the Social Services department to improve services to this group (for example provision of information packs to children being fostered and also to those "at risk").

Whereas the two literacy workers had given relatively little emphasis to barriers to library use, the two library staff identified a number of difficulties. These included lack of library buildings in some areas, limited evening opening and parents'/ carers' concerns about paying for damaged stock. Here, Welshborough had a policy of not making charges for damaged materials, but the two staff had doubts about how this was implemented on the ground, again because of the local preoccupation with book stock. As with other library provision in Welshborough, staffing was identified as a major issue. The effects of this were seen in the support branch staff were able to give to children (especially in single-staffed branches) and the lack of specialist staff, which meant that "[although] we're quite good at getting grants, ... what we haven't got is that continuity of staff. So we've got a day-and-a-half of somebody doing something, a day of somebody else doing something else and it's hard to link people."

Whereas one of the library staff "would like to think [libraries] were relevant to the vast majority of children," the other thought it was unrealistic to think that all children (and in particular teenagers) could be "reached". She referred to local focus groups which found that children and young people saw the library as useful for homework, and for word-processing facilities and the Internet (if not they did not have access to these at home), but: "we're wasting our time trying to make the library a cool place for them to go, because the library will never be a cool place, because it's a library basically. ... They didn't want [music and magazines], they wanted a place where they could get the information [with] people that were nice to them and wouldn't treat them like dirt."

6.5.3 Conclusion

In spite of this sense of realism, literacy and children's work in Welshborough has clearly been developed vigorously and proactively, especially considering the limitations of staffing the service operates under. This brief study is notable because it shows:
(i) the important supportive role played by libraries. The library service was seen, above all, as *responsive*, and a positive and co-operative element within a multi-agency partnership which aimed to tackle a particular aspect of exclusion.
(ii) the high regard within which other workers / agencies can often hold libraries
(iii) The suitability of libraries as a venue for certain kinds of activity, especially in the literacy field, which is popularly associated with libraries. Conversely, and perhaps just as important, the importance of a sense of perspective about what libraries can achieve, and especially an awareness of the barriers and problematics of the library image.

6.6   Policy and Priorities: the Perspectives of Senior Managers

This section reports on interviews with the borough librarian, the two principal librarians (for support and reader services) and the co-ordinator of branch and mobile services. Overall, there was a large degree of agreement amongst these staff and for this reason comments are not, in most cases, attributed to particular individuals.

6.6.1   Local authority approaches to social exclusion

Welshborough was described as a "project driven" local authority, in which the emphasis was on specific initiatives, rather than formal policies or strategies. This was characterised by an approach in which:-

> "We needed to tackle poverty, so we have the community project. Give it three years to sort out poverty. The problem with illiteracy - the literacy project, give it five years to sort out illiteracy."

The library service was represented on the management committee of the literacy project and the advisory committee (which has a more detached role) for the community project. The community project was seen as an example of Welshborough Council's emphasis on particular wards and neighbourhoods. The approach of the library service itself largely counters this kind of targeting, as demonstrated by its running of Bookstart in all areas and, arguably, in its ICT strategy.

Apart from this emphasis on neighbourhoods, library staff also felt that priority had been given to social groups who were perceived as "deserving". So, "it's easier get things done in Welshborough if you say old people or children, rather than homeless people, substance-abusers or whatever - it's difficult to get political support to do anything there." Historically, this has been mirrored within the library service.

6.6.2   Public library policy and initiatives

It was agreed that, before its split from a County Library Service, Welshborough had a "very bad" and predominantly buildings-based library service, with the only possible exception to this being work with children. Since then various changes had been made, for instance setting up housebound services and improving stock so it was "more relevant to the community", but the borough librarian accepted that this was more of a neutral modernisation of the service, rather than a specific change of direction.

Having said this, there have been attempts to broaden the focus of the library's efforts beyond "traditional" target groups such as children and elderly people, and, in some cases, to embed this in service planning. The main focus of Welshborough Libraries' efforts to address social exclusion was on children (Bookstart and Books for Babies projects); literacy (as partners in the Welshborough literacy project); housebound services (as described above); and ICT.

Bookstart is an example of the library service's commitment to universalism. So, there

had been pressure within the local authority to target Bookstart on neighbourhood project wards, but Libraries offered it in all areas "because we could get to socially excluded parents not living in deprived areas, even though this meant that the quality / quantity of what was offered was less."

Issues surrounding the implementation of the ICT strategy, specifically in relation to staffing and training issues are discussed in more detail below, but its aims were seen as relevant to social exclusion through offering "a resource to people who haven't got access to technology." Another member of staff saw the ICT roll-out as "extending access" through resources being available in branches that had previously only been provided in the central library.

One member of staff also saw social exclusion issues as being addressed through training focussing on disadvantage and equalities issues. However, services to ethnic minorities, in particular, were identified as a weakness, for example in terms of the quality and relevance of Asian language material. Library management had also attempted to build community links into service planning, so, for example, branches' operational plans specify numbers of events and visits to carry out.

6.6.3   Themes and Issues

(i) There was little or no weighting of funding to take account of social exclusion, and additional resources were not put into deprived areas or to create more specialist posts. Generally, the borough librarian did not want to set the precedent of diverting from the book fund as she felt this would then lead to it being seen as a "cash cow" for the authority as a whole; related to this, issue figures were seen as crucial in justifying Libraries' spending to elected members. One member of staff added to this point, saying "materials probably provide better value for money, in reality, than average library staff."

(ii) Staff attitudes, skills and confidence emerged as important issues in all these interviews. One interviewee felt that some staff were "frightening people away" and implicitly related this to social exclusion, by saying if this happened to those "who liked libraries, what are we doing to people who are reluctant to use us?" The effect of staff attitudes was also seen in the context of ICT. Many staff were described as having "an aversion to using IT", which meant that users were given inadequate support. Again, this was seen as having a disproportionate effect on less skilled and confident users as "the independent user requires less staff interaction than ... people who are less educationally proficient."

(iii) There were some slightly differing views on staff's need for training in the use of ICT. The member of staff with direct responsibility for training issues saw this as a question of their lacking confidence (or perhaps just willingness to carry out unfamiliar work) rather than skills, for example staff were not used to providing user education. The speed of ICT implementation was also relevant, according to the Principal Librarian with responsibility for ICT. She (arguably) saw this partially in terms of the service being driven by the wrong imperatives:-

"It's a case of 'we can get money for 10 PCs, so we better get them now because we won't have that money again.' So the staff are being stretched thinner and thinner to provide a larger number of services to a lower quality."

She referred to the need for a "balance" between "traditional" and "new" services. Within the interviews there were perhaps differences of emphasis here. Another member of staff referred to the "potential" of ICT in changing people's image of the libraries and how they were used; this could be seen in terms of ICT's appeal to potential users who had not previously seen libraries as relevant to their needs.

(iv) The member of staff with direct responsibility for training issues had identified a need for race awareness training, and another interviewee criticised the availability and frequency of equal opportunities training. These points parallel the comparative weakness of services to ethnic minorities.

(v) Staffing levels were also a concern. It was difficult, for instance, to find staff time for activities and events. Low staff numbers also resulted in a lack of specialisation. For example, in the additional interviews carried out on children's and literacy work, it was felt that a lack of specialist posts affected how much was done. However, another member of staff argued that extra staffing was only effective if it developed on the base of an accessible and popular service. Usage levels were high in all parts of Welshborough, when set against comparable service points elsewhere. Thus, it may be that one basic approach to social exclusion might just be to provide an excellent service with a new and relevant stock.

6.7   Libraries and Social Exclusion: Perceptions of Councillors, Local Authority Managers and Community Workers

This section reports on interviews with one local councillor (executive member for leisure and libraries); the director of leisure services and a small group of managers and community workers involved with the borough's community development project. Overall, it detects major differences in perceptions of both social exclusion itself and the role libraries can play in addressing it. The elected member and senior manager adopt a very traditional view of libraries, whereas the (much younger) group of community-oriented staff perceive more innovative and positive possibilities.

6.7.1   Social exclusion

Both the director of leisure services and the elected member emphasise the longevity of social exclusion as a problem and point to its links with previous terms such as "disadvantage" and "poverty". In general, they emphasis its location within traditional working class constituencies, although both recognise the additional problems of ethnic minorities in the borough and specific problems such as drugs and homelessness. Both use the term "underclass" to describe groups below, or excluded from traditional working class culture. The elected member in particular points to "education", in a fairly

100

traditional sense, as the main way of breaking a cycle of deprivation and claims that expenditure on education is the main way in which the borough has always attacked disadvantage "to break the attitude of the kids.... we've always tried to address exclusion at school... I think what the new government has done is really just to focus more attention on it".

Both accept, however, that newer integrated approaches based on community development have something to offer and support the "systematic approach to community development" enshrined in the borough's community development project. This is sketched out by the project manager as a "structured approach" which aims to "set up accountable local structures so that there's a community association in each area and around that build a multi-agency partnership that develops and implements a strategy for the community." The hope is that this will lead to lasting local structures and partnerships if the project is forced to discontinue.

In practice, project workers emphasise the diversity of exclusion and the multidimensional nature of necessary responses to it even in such a traditional place as Welshborough. They hope that using the EC definition of exclusion will get this message across at policy level. As well as working class poverty on council estates there are "cosmopolitan" areas with Somali, African-Caribbean and Bangladeshi communities who experience racial and cultural exclusion. In some areas of the borough there are many transient single people and young unemployed. Such manifestations of exclusion, according to community workers, demand flexible, multidimensional responses which cut across the institutional boundaries of the council. According to the community workers, libraries are one of the few council departments who are actually beginning to break these boundaries.

6.7.2 Public Libraries

In general terms this bipolar view of exclusion is reflected in perceptions of what libraries can do. Both the elected member and the director have a relatively traditional view of the role and function of the library. For the elected member libraries are "unique institutions" that provided an avenue of social mobility for "politicians like Nye Bevan, who got their education at the local library and the miner's welfare institute". Tackling exclusion would for him involve improving "access" to knowledge and information, a "continuation and expansion of the things we're doing at the moment." This includes, of course, in Welshborough, the free provision of access to ICT, for which he sees public libraries as "beautifully placed". It includes also protecting the high level of spending on books which both see as sacrosanct and the secret of much the library service's popularity and success - according to the director, this serves working class users in the end "more effectively than £25,000 worth of staffing". It includes also, for both respondents, a limited range of community contact and activity, such as homework clubs, literacy projects and children's activities, all of which they speak of with pride. However, their detailed knowledge of such initiatives, and their aims and benefits, is vague.

The community development team also speak very highly of the library service, but

focus on different qualities and especially those which they consider engage and deliver services to excluded communities. In particular they point to the library building in Dock which really does function as a community resource. "People are comfortable with using the library, it's one of the few buildings that there aren't some politics around, that would exclude some group or other". The library building was seen as an "obvious venue" for some activities, such as ESOL classes, and a comfortable one for many more including tutors with groups of children excluded from school.

Outreach is also seen as indispensable if the library is to reach excluded people. Welshborough Libraries in general are seen as "incredibly responsive... very proactive". The team speak very highly of children's initiatives, visits to community groups, offers to place materials in community bookshops, support for cultural events and the like. Such links, together with a general "can do" attitude, according to the team, have an unquantifiable but significant effect on library/community relations. The manager comments "they're actually quite unique in the authority in that we've never actually had to go and say 'this is what we think your role on social exclusion could be'. They're actually much more likely to say 'we're doing this which we think impacts on social exclusion, are you happy with it?' They're really very proactive"

Sympathetic staff attitudes are seen as essential if libraries are to connect with excluded groups and communities. Welshborough Libraries are praised because such concern with exclusion runs, according to the workers, right though the service and does not simply reside at management level. Such attitudes comprise a willingness to work on joint projects and having a respect for excluded people and communities. It also involves anything from "being on first name terms with local users" to "having a view of libraries as being not about lending books [but] about a whole role of providing a social function, a regeneration function".

However, both the community team, and the Director of Leisure accept that low staffing levels limit the capacity of an otherwise excellent service to tackle exclusion from a community base. Single staffing of libraries, all agree, is not conducive to community involvement and prevents staff from working actively with disadvantaged users on activities ranging from help with ICT to storytelling. Some specialist staffing, especially relating to ethnic minority communities, is seen as desirable by all the council employees in these interviews.

Staffing is thus the key strength, but it is also a key weakness, of Welshborough. As the community project manager suggests, the library service clearly needs to "create the argument" for more resources within the authority if its potential for tackling social exclusion is to be fully realised.

6.8 Analysis of Key Issues

6.8.1 The Welshborough case study provided an opportunity to examine the nature of social exclusion and the public service response to it in a traditional Welsh working class bastion of Labourism. The borough has suffered from deindustrialisation and unemployment in the eighties and is struggling to adapt to the claimed "informational"

economy and social formations of the new millennium. In general, the response of local services to such contemporary forms of exclusion has been an uneasy mix of the old and the new. On the one hand, the local authority remains traditionally structured and organised concentrating on providing a uniform diet of basic services for all in a relatively institutionalised and bureaucratic way. Overlaying this, however, as the councillor makes clear, the authority has been heavily influenced by New Labour thinking about partnership, community participation and joined up government and this has resulted in a number of multi-agency projects and targeted initiatives relating to a range of areas and functions. Most notable, from the point of view of this project, are the borough Community Project and the Literacy Project.

6.8.2   As far as the Library and Information Service is concerned, what is perhaps surprising is the success with which what is still a traditionally structured and managed service has come to occupy (relatively) centre stage in some of these multi-agency developments. As our studies of both literacy developments and the detailed work at Dock reveal, this involvement has taken place both at strategic / managerial level and at local / community level. It is based on a proactive approach to involvement and interaction with users, a broad and active conceptualisation of the library worker's role and a flexibility about both the use of library buildings and the use of outreach locations. Revealingly, community workers and literacy workers are as a result very positive indeed about the potential of libraries to work with communities and to tackle particular facets of exclusion like literacy and lack of access to ICT.

6.8.3   In terms of its own institutional culture, the success with which the library has "mainstreamed" exclusion issues also seems to us extremely impressive (and possibly the key reason why other professionals are so impressed). We were impressed with the knowledge, commitment and seriousness with which a large majority of the staff we spoke to discussed equalities issues and their own professional role in addressing them. Significantly, such staff included (in contrast to some other case studies) library assistants and front-line staff and it was clear that a serious attempt was being made to build an equalities culture among the whole workforce. Such efforts were underpinned by a training programme which was praised by many staff and cited as an example of excellence in the authority by the Director of Leisure Services.

6.8.4   We were also impressed by the way the service had integrated exclusion issues into planning, operational management and performance review at both strategic and, especially, local level. Service plans negotiated with local staff translate exclusion policies into concrete objectives such as community visits, library events, outreach initiatives and stock developments. These were taken seriously by staff and seemed to us to have the effect of legitimising and mainstreaming work with community and excluded groups. They thus had the effect of underpinning the "equalities culture" referred to above and succeeded in minimising the common perception, found in some other case studies, that such work was extra or superfluous to the "basic" library service.

6.8.5   One interesting facet of Welshborough is that such successes have largely been achieved through a focus on front-line activity rather than through major structural or policy innovation. The Library Service is still very traditionally managed, with power

and decision-making focussed around the management team, although managers clearly adopt open and responsive interpersonal styles of management. Resource allocation is also relatively centralised with, until very recently, a common consensus among staff, managers and politicians that the maintenance of a generous spend on bookfund was the key to a successful and popular service (and in the end, according to the borough librarian, maybe the most effective way of addressing social exclusion!). Significantly, perhaps, recent decline in book issues has led to some questioning of this strategy and there is now some uncertainty as to whether a change of direction might be needed.

6.8.6 ICT policy and implementation is perhaps the obvious exception to such traditionalism and clearly the library service is experiencing a wholesale modernisation through the provision of networked PCs in each service point. The fact that access to the Internet and other services is now provided universally free of charge in Welshborough represents an important acceptance by the local authority of the principle of free and open access to knowledge and information, and this, in our view, is an essential precondition of creating an inclusive library service. However, even here, as staff acknowledge, practice remains traditional in the sense that "access" is predominantly passive in nature. So far, little support has been provided for users and proactive work with or targeting of excluded groups or communities is limited. Although managers and staff would like to develop the huge potential for this kind of work they are hampered by resource and predominantly staffing constraints.

6.8.7 Indeed, staffing constraints loomed large throughout the Welshborough case study as a major barrier which hampered the development of work with excluded individuals, groups and communities. In particular, the single or low level of staffing in front-line libraries was constantly raised as an impediment not only to outreach work in communities, but to simply assisting individuals who need help with books, ICT or other equipment. We realise, of course, that these levels of staffing are explained by managers as a consequence of "protecting" the materials fund, but we would argue very strongly that for excluded individuals in particular "access" to such material almost always necessitates a high degree of interaction with staff . In the end, we would concur with the community development manager who argued that it was crucially important for libraries to "make the argument" for better staffing.

6.8.8 Staffing constraints, linked with the small size of the authority, also resulted, in some cases in a scarcity of staff with specialised knowledge. In the case of the borough's Black, South Asian and Somali communities, we noted, this was linked to obvious weaknesses of service provision to excluded groups. Most staff we spoke to were concerned about services to these communities but lacked knowledge, expertise and direction. Ad hoc service provision in the form of collections of material, deposit collections and various attempts at community contact had been tried (see Section 6.5.2) but with limited success. Overall, the service has not, as far as we know, developed a consistent or coherent policy to improve services to non-Welsh racial / cultural groups.

6.8.9 This lack of clarity about services to minority racial and cultural groups is reflected more generally in an uncertainty about targeting and prioritisation of services and resources. By and large, Welshborough Libraries have resisted pressures to target

extra resources or staffing towards deprived groups or neighbourhoods, citing universalist arguments about equal services for all (for example when implementing Bookstart- see Section 6.5) and continuing to use book issues as the core measure of achievement and success. Managers, however, do recognise that working with excluded groups and communities demands extra time, materials and staffing if *equalities of outcome* are to be achieved. However, by and large they are unclear about how such resources can be generated. There is some hope that additional funds will be forthcoming from partnerships, special projects and the like, but equally a recognition that such sources of income are unstable, time-limited and often unsustainable. This problem of generating "extra" resources for deprived groups and communities thus represents a major obstacle to the long-term addressing of exclusion by the library service.

6.9   Summary and Conclusion

6.9.1   Welshborough Library and Information Service clearly represents a model of good practice in addressing social exclusion in many respects. Starting from a very low base in 1992 it is:

- developing a model of local library services where the principles of community librarianship are normal and mainstream practice.
- developing an institutional culture where equalities and social inclusion/exclusion issues are addressed seriously and consistently by the majority of staff
- developing a modernised, popular library service with free access to an excellent range of print materials and networked electronic information services
- working consistently and creatively to support borough initiatives in literacy and community development and attracting widespread respect and support for libraries from both the public and fellow professionals.

6.9.2   The only serious specific weakness (from a social inclusion perspective) lies in the relatively limited service provided to the Borough's Black, South Asian and Somali minority communities (Section 6.6). More generally, however, it is clear that that the service faces serious challenges if it is to develop its effectiveness in tackling social exclusion. In spite of the successes noted above, the fundamental structure and policies of the library service are still traditional, prioritising a predominantly passive and uniform service, on the basis of equality of access to all.

Whilst such a service goes some way towards underpinning inclusion, in Welshborough it is nevertheless leading to inflexibility in terms of development of specialised services and in the targeting of resources. Specifically, this has resulted in inflexibility in resource allocation and low levels of front line staffing which have made community librarianship, and especially work with excluded users, difficult to undertake.

In the end, therefore, we believe that if the service is to fully recognise social inclusion as a priority it will need to adopt more flexible and dynamic strategies of resource allocation, which allow a higher degree of focussing and targeting of resources based on social need. As a long-term project, such flexibility might be linked with a less rigid and

more community- based staffing structure, which provides staff with increased opportunities to work proactively in neighbourhoods in the way that many clearly aspire to do. Such work with both individuals and groups - as some current work in Welshborough demonstrates - is perhaps the most effective mechanism through which the public library can promote social inclusion.

Documents Referred to in this Case Study

Welshborough Library and Information Service (1999?), *ICT Strategy*.

Welshborough Library and Information Service (1999), *Marketing Plan, 1999-2000*.

Welshborough Library and Information Service (1999), *Service Plan 1999-2000 Dock Library*.

Welshborough Neighbourhood Project (1997), Dock Community Profile.

7.   City Case Study

7.1   Introduction

City is an urban authority in the North of England, with a population of about 400,000. It is one of the most deprived districts in England according to the DETR's latest Index of Local Conditions (DETR, 1999). This deprivation can be seen on a wide range of indicators including educational attainment, unemployment and health (DETR, 1999; City Key Facts 1999).

There is major urban regeneration activity in many parts of City, and regeneration is central to the Council's aim of improving residents' health, security, access to employment and quality of life. Amongst the objectives of City Council, in support of these aims, are to increase economic activity; increase population and stabilise population in unpopular neighbourhoods; reduce crime and increase educational attainment (*Corporate aims and objectives*, 2000). Many of these issues are reflected in the case study.

In terms of the Library Service, City is characterised by a large Central Library serving as regional resource. City has a network of 22 district libraries, managed in three groups. These libraries mainly serve working class communities, reflecting the social make-up of the authority, and City has a long history of developing community librarianship (section 7.2 of this report provides a staff perspective on this period). More recently, the local authority has developed an innovative ICT strategy in partnership with the non-statutory sector. Although not directly covered in this case study, there are many centralised services which can be seen as being relevant to social exclusion, including, for example, major community language collections and a dedicated service for visually impaired people. The case study, however, focuses on services in a particular locality.

Following initial discussion with senior library managers, and a subsequent meeting with district library staff, the case study focused on the following areas:-

- Declining use of libraries in one part of City (Northside, focusing on Northbridge Library), with reference to the perceptions of community activists;
- Staff perspectives on the changing nature of community librarianship;
- A study of a recently opened study support centre at Northbridge Library, which has been funded through SRB5.

Northbridge is one of the New Deal for Communities seventeen Pathfinder areas; these are neighbourhoods experiencing severe levels of social exclusion (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998). The case study therefore provided an opportunity to consider library services in the kind of "poor neighbourhood" described in *Bringing Britain together* (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998). Before this, an overview of current and past library services is given, including a discussion of City's history of community librarianship.

7.2 City Library Service and Social Exclusion: History, Policy, Practice

The focus of this case study is on needs and provision in an Inner City community, but this section sketches the institutional and policy background to developments there. It briefly describes the historical development of community librarianship in the service, gives an overview of contemporary efforts to address social exclusion, and concludes with a brief analysis of some of the key strategic issues emerging in the future. It is based on interviews with the City Librarian (CL), who was relatively new to the service and at the time of interview had been in post for approximately a year, and also with the District Libraries Manager (DLM) who was responsible for delivery of most field services outside City central library. DLM has worked for City for approximately 20 years, and so most of the historical sketch is based on her account.

7.2.1 Community Library Provision in City 1975-1995

Like other metropolitan library services established in the nineteenth century, City has a very long tradition of provision for disadvantaged and working class communities, holding the education of the working classes as fundamental to the purpose of the public library service. In the late 1970s and 1980s, City updated this tradition by being at the forefront of a number of library services who experimented with community librarianship as a model of service delivery. During this period, City appointed a number of "community" librarians who work mainly in deprived, inner City areas and developed outreach, deposit collections, community links and a wide range of special services targeted at disadvantaged groups and communities. City also pioneered, in some locations, the use of library buildings for community information and advice services and community resource centres.

DLM came to work for City at that time, and recalls it as a period of innovation and creativity by individual members of staff. "It was recognised", she recalls, "that you weren't going to have an impact if you relied on people to come... you had a very open brief: - go work it out for yourself'. It was also, she suggests, a time of relative abundance of resources: projects were supported heavily by the Urban Programme, and new libraries were still being opened up in the inner City. "There was so much money... people going out and buying vast amounts of book stock with no real investigation of needs".

However, DLM does not in the end idealise this period and points to a number of limitations and difficulties in the way that community librarianship was implemented in City. In spite of its successes in generating use of libraries and resource in particular areas it was never, she claims, a dominant or universal way of working for City library service. Community Librarians were, for example, only appointed in some locations and not in others and in many places "traditional" services continued as before. There were tensions also between staff, with many "old breed" staff preferring to continue with

passive book-based services. Few attempts were made to involve non-professional staff in community initiatives, and this could lead to tensions between "normal" staff and users and new initiatives involving, for example "disaffected kids". In the end, she concludes that although "there were lots of interesting one-offs going on.... as a service we never really got our act together in working out a structure that was appropriate and which would let us learn from experience".

By 1987, however, the relatively favourable budget situation in City began to reverse and as a result, according to DLM, community librarianship began to fall into decline. In part she puts this down to personalities - good people moved on but the "old breed stayed", but also, as a result of the pressure of cuts, whole service areas fell into decline. Community information, she claims, "stopped to all intents and purposes in the late 1980s", and services to ethnic minority communities, partly as a result of the ending of Section 11 support, have been scaled back. City has mainstreamed specialist posts serving the local Chinese and Pakistani communities, but no specialist post exists to serve the city's substantial African/Caribbean community, nor is there any real co-ordinated response to the needs of a number of newer migrant groups.

CL, who although new to City has substantial experience of community based approaches in other authorities, concurs with this view. He argues that "City has retreated from a lot of the attitudes it would have taken in the eighties, which is ironic because most other libraries sank very heavily then and City didn't". When CL arrived a year ago he was "quite disappointed at the level of community involvement" and he thinks that this is now sporadic and dependent on the work of a few individuals who spend a lot of time in communities rather than widespread. The service has retreated now, he thinks, to a fairly traditional one with the layer of initiatives and projects on top of it. The reasons for this retreat are many, but include
- internal politics and decline of influence of the service within the Council
- continuing budget cuts (£200,000 last year)
- a staffing structure imposed 3 years ago, which left little time for staff training and community roles
- reluctance of some staff to utilise time in community-based work.

Overall he believes that his new management team has a personal commitment to tackling social exclusion and that many staff on the ground provide excellent services to excluded people. However, the current professional team structure, he thinks, mitigates against developing community-based services: "I like the idea of identifying librarians with communities - I think that's a very strong message and a very strong link". Discussions are currently underway with the aim of refocusing the library in this direction.

7.2.2 Social Inclusion and the Contemporary Library Service

In addition to these attempts to revitalise community librarianship, it is clear that since the election of Labour in 1997 the new focus on social inclusion has significantly begun to shift the focus of City Library services. In part, according to DLM, this is nothing to do with policy, but more fundamentally a reaction to the changed social circumstances

of the city, which have seen accelerating disadvantage in a majority of neighbourhoods, not simply core inner City areas. According to DLM, "what has characterised the last decade is that the deprived areas of the city have become almost everywhere except Uptown" (a relatively affluent academia linked suburb). CL underpins this point by noting that around 60% of wards in City qualify for SRB funding of one sort or another.

Various consequences have stemmed from this, but chief among them has been the realisation that libraries can do little on their own to tackle this scale of social exclusion and that they would need to link with other City Council departments and agencies in the city to develop co-ordinated responses. Early examples of such co-operation involved the City Council's community care plan in the early nineties, which has been linked with a restructuring of mobile and housebound services serving mainly the elderly disadvantaged, and the link between libraries and City Community Information Partnership which is developing an integrated electronic information network for the city.

However, the most important partnerships in City, both in terms of scale and in terms of significance, are those linked to education. Partly driven by the availability of external funding such as SRB, City has established a network of 5 "homework" centres across the city which employ specialist workers funded under SRB budgets. In addition, libraries are involved in a variety of joint initiatives with schools and colleges; the youth service; lifelong learning (adult education) and organisations such as the University for Industry. The City Council is developing integrated learning resources plans for individual districts of the city, and in one area (South) City Libraries are co-ordinating this with the support of local heads and principals. According to DLM "we didn't specifically plan to focus on social inclusion through education, but we've come to realise that that's what we're doing...we're going to be primarily adult education providers, and that feels right".

Much of this activity has become linked to the development of various ICT initiatives linked to social exclusion. According to CL, this is based on a philosophy of providing access to IT for people who don't have access to resources at home or work - especially the unemployed. City Libraries have around 120 workstations with Internet access around the city with a minimum of two in the smallest branches. Access to these is now provided free of charge. Many of these were funded by a successful external bid for homework centres, and the City Council provided matching funding for these. Crucially all homework centres are staffed by workers able to offer people support with ICT, and some locations offer courses jointly with colleges and adult education services at adult education rates. The issues around the operation of these centres are investigated in much more detail in Section 7.5.

Overall, CL thinks that most of the experiences of partnership have been positive ones, although these have not involved the private sector, but, instead, other arms of government or the voluntary sector. He believes that pooling expertise and developing local contacts can deliver services more relevant to local needs, especially of the disadvantaged. He admits, however, that sustainability is a big problem and points to the current SRB workers on short-term contracts. Although the City Council would like to

mainstream, he thinks that people are still driven by current funding regimes into short-termism. CL would like to develop a service where it was possible to make jobs like those of SRB workers mainstream, and DLM concurs with this. "We mustn't let it happen that when the money dries up for the homework centres, we run them down...if necessary, we'll have to take something else out, otherwise we've learnt nothing".

7.2.3   Issues and Future Scenarios

Current strategy and initiatives linked to social exclusion are clearly driving City Libraries in a very specific direction, where the notion of a public library as a multifaceted agency is being replaced by an emphasis (or return to?) educational purpose. DLM in particular feels that this is the correct way to go, and is unconcerned that this will probably transform the nature of the library as an institution. She is aware, however, of the tensions that will ensue, partly because of some fairly traditional proposals currently on the table to integrate City libraries into a culture/leisure directorate. "This feels wrong to many of us, because the evidence of what we're delivering on is education".

Both DLM and CL agree that the community librarianship of the seventies and eighties provides a modus operandi, but not a strategy, for addressing social exclusion. CL notes that "the areas of librarianship I've worked in that delivered most to disadvantaged communities were very influenced by community librarianship". However, both he and DLM now take a more managerial perspective and CL argues that community librarianship "needs a lot more direction...there was too much of people doing their own thing...it's not good enough to have what we used to have which was patches of excellence and patches where nothing happened". Staffing structures and professional roles, according to CL, need to be developed where a community role is built in to the fundamental basis of a librarian's work. Only then will a consistent and high quality community library service emerge.

One distorting aspect of City is the presence of a very large central library with a regional information and academic function. CL does not want to downgrade this ("it provides a ladder for the working class"), but feels that more of its funding should be provided regionally and that "it takes too high a proportion of resources" compared with the district libraries. He feels that such regional funding should be available for Central Libraries in a number of other large cities with similar functions.

Both CL and DLM are sceptical about the significance of technology alone to transform libraries, DLM in particular underlines throughout that it is only through the link to education that ICT can be utilised to address social exclusion. CL is more sceptical about the long-term viability of IT as a "saviour of the public library service". He notes that "people will have these things on their TV screen, possibly in 5 years" and thinks that probably the role for libraries will be about helping people finds things as a "mediator", and perhaps about providing a social or communal context.

However, he feels there is no way that ICT will take over from the core purpose of the library service:

"I think people have to remember that though we are gently declining we're still the service that more people use voluntarily than any other bit of the City Council. We make too much of decline, too little of our core size".

In the end, he too is, perhaps, a traditionalist: "people will always want to read a book...it's very user friendly compared with electronics...it has got a lot going for it for a long, long time".

7.3. Community needs in Northbridge

This part of the case study represents an initial stage in a possible future needs assessment of the area served by Northbridge Library, which serves a neighbourhood about a mile from the city centre. It is mainly based on discussions with the Chair of the Education Action Zone (CEA), a local elected member (EM) and a community worker (CW), who had worked in the local voluntary sector for several years. The catchment area of Northbridge Library includes parts of two local authority wards, but the baseline statistical data used here derives from the New Deal for Communities Delivery Plan (1999). Northbridge Library lies at the centre of the New Deal area, which has a population of about 11,000. Some of the material used here refers generically to "Northside", a larger area grouped together for the purposes of regeneration activity. The localities immediately surrounding the New Deal area receive SRB funding, reflecting comparable, though less severe, neighbourhood decline.

The first section provides an overview of the changes in the Northbridge area, from the time of large-scale housing clearance in the 1960s up to recent regeneration initiatives. This is followed by a discussion of the current strengths, weaknesses and needs of the area. This discussion starts by consideration of a wide range of needs and then focuses on areas traditionally associated with library and information services. This phase of the case study draws on methodologies of needs assessment described by Percy-Smith and Sanderson (1992).

7.3.1 Historical sketch of the area

This section is largely based on CEA's account of the recent history of the area. He describes how, in the 1950s and 60s Northbridge was a "strong, rooted community", included a large well-established Irish/Catholic community. Most residents worked locally in heavy engineering. However, in the late 1960s, the City Council designated the area as a light industrial zone; 31,000 houses were cleared in just over a year, with only nominal consultation with local residents. This "decimated very strong communities" and, since that time, until very recently, Northbridge has been "an area to which things would be done", rather than local people making decisions for themselves. The anticipated light industrial revolution failed to materialise and, in the 1970s, the local authority re-filled the area with hastily constructed housing, some of which was subsequently demolished in the 1980s. Much of the original population of the area had

been permanently moved elsewhere; amongst those moved into the area were travellers, some of whom were permanently settled against their wishes.

The economic situation became worse in the mid to late 1980s when many of the larger employers withdrew from the area. Following this, many people left Northside and the area lost much of its infrastructure (e.g. local shops). For several years the area has a suffered a "downward spiral" of depopulation, with little or nothing being done to arrest the decline. During this period of decline many services and facilities were withdrawn from Northbridge and not replaced (e.g. banks; the swimming pool; play areas; a long period with no local health centre). CW said the area had been a "desert" for about twenty years.

For about the last ten years, the Council has sought to regenerate the area through bids for major sport / leisure development; setbacks in this activity increased low morale in the short and medium-term, but there is now considerable optimism about this plank of City's regeneration programme.

Respondents said that there had been intermittent non-sustainable attempts at regeneration, but these failed, often because they focused on single issues, such as local authority housing. More recent initiatives (New Deal for Communities, the Health and Education Action Zones, Sure Start) have taken a more holistic approach. CW said that there had been an upturn in grassroots community activity which pre-dated these initiatives; this began with some local people setting up tenants' groups about eight years ago.

7.3.2 Needs assessment

CEA said that a SWOT analysis of Northside carried out by the New Deal Office in 1998 found that the main strengths of the area were:-
- the resilience of local people (CW pointed out that local people were not apathetic but, instead, lacked "faith in the system" following the broken promises of past attempts at improving the area);
- local churches, who had never withdrawn from the area and were active within many positive aspects of community life (for example the Credit Union);
- primary schools, with half the EAZ's schools performing above the City average and a quarter of them above the national average.

Against this, Northbridge suffers a range of interrelated problems summed up by a member of library staff in the following terms:-

> "...there's a general sort of sink feeling amongst the people that live there. I don't think they see many options in life, especially the young people".

Some of the specific indicators of quality of life in the area are now discussed.

In education, the EAZ's primary task is seen as "levelling". Some primary schools perform well and others very badly in league tables. The "almost corrosive" effect of

local opinion means that schools labelled as under-performing are affected by a high degree of transience. As well as mobility between schools, "it's the wish and hope of many families to leave the area", something which has an effect on all Northside's schools to a greater or lesser extent. According to CEA, the DfEE regards "normal mobility" as about 2-3% a year; in Northside, it is about 28%, the highest in City. Most parents are happy for their children to be educated at local primary schools, but more "motivated" parents move to enable their children to attend secondary schools outside the area. This "haemorrhaging" of pupils means that secondary schools then take on children rejected by other areas' selection and appeal processes. A major problem is "condoned non-attendance" for reasons such as family responsibilities. CEA says "truancy is a misnomer - it's authorised absence for a range of reasons that are educationally inappropriate". The EAZ's overall level of secondary attendance is 77-81%, which translates to 455 children not at school on any one day. Although permanent exclusions from school are low compared to similar areas, fixed-term exclusions are high and are "clearly linked to established patterns of anti-social and criminal behaviour" (New Deal, 1999).

Unemployment is high at 29.8%, and is particularly concentrated in men over 25, partly reflecting the decline in employment in manufacturing (New Deal, 1999). CW adds that for many lone parents (who form a high proportion of the local population) there are financial disincentives to taking low-paid work. Low income is exacerbated by poor access to financial services (although the local credit union is expanding). CEA refers to the "horrifying" results of a local employment and training survey. The area's largest employee has about 400 workers, but only six of them live in Northside; many of these employees had originally come from the area, but had moved when they found stable employment. Low skills[7] and confidence mean that recruitment exercises attract few local applicants. Problems of this kind were now being addressed by a "preparation for work" programme run by the New Deal Office; similarly, CEA said that the EAZ offered support to local job applicants.

30% of the local population are disabled or long-term sick, compared to 17.3% of City's population, and 13.1% UK-wide (New Deal, 1999). CEA adds that there is a "very, very strong underlying depression", which although not recognised by the community has been identified by the Health Action Zone, which has found that the level of mental health problems in Northside is the third worst in the country. High levels of alcohol and substance misuse are also mentioned, by the respondents, as having an impact on health (as well as criminal behaviour). There is very poor access to health care in Northbridge, as the local health centre was burnt down in 1994, and will not be properly replaced until summer 2000. CEA refers to other health inequalities between Northside and other neighbourhoods: for example, local children had much to wait much longer for speech therapy assessment and treatment, than those in other parts of City. Social services are described by CEA as having a "reactive, emergency only" policy, meaning that the focus was on the immediate problem rather than longer-term solutions.

Tackling depopulation is a major concern for the City Council, as mentioned in its

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[7] 61% of local people hold no qualifications at all (New Deal, 1999).

Corporate Aims and Objectives (1999). This reflects the scale of the problem in areas like Northbridge, where, in 1999, the total number of void properties stood at 17.3% (New Deal, 1999). The physical condition of the housing (in all sectors) was a major factor, but CEA feels that some neighbourhoods had been poorly managed. "Inappropriate families" had brought crime to certain areas; other residents then had moves turned down and were left with "no other choice but to torch the property", so they could be re-housed. The owner-occupied sector has collapsed in Northside (with EM citing drops in house value from £35,000 to less than £5,000). Many people are abandoning their homes and leaving the area. The large number of empty houses itself attracts crime and acts as a drain on emergency services. EM says that City Council is now pursuing a policy of selective demolition as a means of sustaining the remaining population.

Reported crime is higher than in other areas; for example, it has just 2.7% of City's population, but 8% of burglaries and 14.6% of arson (New Deal, 1999). There is, moreover, massive fear of crime, especially amongst isolated and vulnerable elderly people; EM says that City Council was considering more supported types of housing for this group (something which would encourage them to stay in the area). Fear of crime does not just affect older people; 57% of residents will not go out after dark. There is also a perception that the legal system does not work. For example, 58% of residents rated the amount of police support as bad or fairly bad (New Deal, 1999). The neighbourhood (and specifically the businesses on the shopping precinct) had been "terrorised" by a small core of individuals for several years; this group was also associated with a range of criminal activity. At the time of the fieldwork, legal action was being taken against certain individuals (and is further discussed below). CW gives examples of "harrowing" neighbour nuisance problems which were, again, being addressed through new legislation and also a dedicated team set up as part of the New Deal. According to respondents, levels of crime and anti-social behaviour varied in different residential areas, being lowest in areas where tenants had acted collectively to run homewatch schemes and lobby the Council for security improvements. There have been particular problems of crime and anti-social behaviour in one neighbourhood where travellers had settled. Partly because of other local people's perception of former travellers, there was prejudice against the Irish community as a whole. Racial harassment of the "very persecuted" Chinese community is mentioned; CW says that the Somali community had been largely driven from the area. At the same time EM wants to emphasise that the area was becoming more culturally diverse and this was a "positive and healthy sign for Northside".

In terms of local influence on decisions affecting the community, it has already been described Northside had been a "done to" area for about thirty years. Respondents agree this had acted to reduce people's independence and create a feeling of powerlessness. This was said to be changing (if only because it was a condition of central government funding that local people took a lead on decisions affecting them). There are several examples given of residents' groups who had brought about positive changes. Raising expectations is seen as especially important. CEA feels that local schools were already managing to raise educational aspirations, but:-

"...the day when we have a doctor from [Northside], and still living in the community, it will be remarkable and [show] that we're on the right road" [EM].

The worker at the homework club also comments on the lack of positive role models for young people.

There was general agreement that the cultural life of the area was very weak and that this has an effect on social cohesion, because of the lack of collective activity. Similarly, the area was agreed to be lacking in safe sport and play areas for children. Here, recent residents' surveys show very low levels of satisfaction with facilities (e.g. 8% for children's play facilities) (New Deal, 1999). This was one area where the study support centre's worker had attempted to improve the situation for the users of the homework club (as discussed below).

Turning to areas traditionally associated with library and information services, the EAZ has found that adult functional illiteracy stands at 19.5%. Respondents express doubt about whether libraries (or any other agency) can reach many of these individuals. There was, however, universal praise for the work done by the homework club, especially in that children use it by choice. It was seen as a model for elsewhere in the city. There was also agreement that it was "totally under-resourced", and that the centre's worker needed more support.

In terms of information and access to ICT, respondents emphasise the need to co-ordinate with other agencies to avoid duplication Libraries are relevant as a notice board and as a back-up when other agencies are closed. Libraries are seen as comparatively open and accessible services; disabled access was mentioned, as was the "helpful" attitude of staff. Respondents also refer to community groups which had met at the library and also to Councillors' surgeries held there.

Like the City Librarian, this group of respondents think that the library service has a continued relevance in terms of traditional roles around reading, education and "self development". It was felt that "whether it diversifies is another issue... but it's got a place in years to come" (EM).

Finally, CW, who had worked with the local community for several years and could recall the impact of the opening of the new library, said:-

"...It was quite major at the time... It gave a good impression - that there was some quality there, and that people in the area were valued and they were going to get a good service. That feeling had gone [from the area] and that was the first thing that brought it back again".

7.3.3 Conclusion

The discussion above has focused on individual indicators. In reality all these interrelate with each other to create a cycle of neighbourhood decline and, in particular,

depopulation and property abandonment. There are now initiatives to arrest this decline (e.g. around the EAZ and New Deal for Communities), but, in an area facing such profound difficulties, what difference can the public library service make? This is considered in the next two sections.

7.4. Northbridge Library: perceptions of staff

This and the following section (on the homework centre based at the library) are largely based on the accounts of the following individuals: the Children's Librarian (CHL); Lending Librarian (LL); Library Supervisor (LS); Counter Assistant (CA); Study Support Worker (SW).

7.4.1 Library services and activity

The library is based in the centre of Northbridge, adjacent to the shopping precinct. It was opened in the mid-1990s, with European and Urban Programme funding being used to convert what was formerly a public house. The library replaced a service that had been based on a temporary site. It is a modern, single-storey building and is fully accessible for people with mobility impairments. The library offers a wide range of services including books on tape, a local history collection, children's videos, music CDs and cassettes, graphic novels and newspapers and magazines. The homework centre is based in what was formerly the community room, at one side of the library.

There had been a large drop in issues over recent years, which LS attributed to the closure of the nearby market for several years and to some users' fear of crime. Nonetheless, on a number of visits to the library, it always appeared well-used.

Although identified by library staff as the "probably the most deprived area in City", there are similar selection policies for Northbridge as for other libraries in the group (reflecting DLM's point that almost all areas, except Uptown, are comparatively deprived). For example, CHL has to take account of many local children's limited reading ability and a culture "where the book won't feature greatly in most people's homes". She often buys stock relating to television and film "because they will hone in on that, that much more, because it's familiar". LL makes similar points about the "popular" nature of adult lending material, saying that the library service has retreated from a policy of buying a wide range of non-fiction stock in areas like Northbridge. CHL does, however, attempt to have a good range of non-fiction to support the homework club. Children's non-fiction issues are low but "don't tell you the whole story, because they come in and do their homework ... they take a book ... and put it back on the shelf and you don't know it's been used". (Similar points were made by staff working in the homework club).

There is no particular targeting of services, or special interest collections, other than large print. Issues are generally the main means of market research ("look at the issues and see what's going well"). There are a large number of class visits, so CHL receives feedback from children and teachers. LL says "I can't think of any outreach that we've

done", other than with schools. Library staff say that work with schools also constitutes the main means of promoting the service to the local community. For example, CHL had agreed to a request to reorganise a school library, saying "it's very much what outside what we should do, but ... their Ofsted inspector was coming in and I thought it was a good way to build up that relationship, which has been really good for us". She also provides school sessions on information skills.

CHL works with parents, stressing the importance of sharing books with babies and "reassuring them about all the things that parents worry about, using library books with very young children"; these kind of attitudes are emphasised to counter staff. This is an example of "very definite policies" about encouraging babies to join the library, which also include and never charging for stock damaged by children aged under two. There are no fines on children's books. Frontline staff are asked to make it clear that:

> "... it will never ever cost you any money, even if your baby totally annihilated a book... In an area like Northbridge, it's really critical to do that" [CHL].

The library service takes part in Bookstart, having also participated in an equivalent scheme before the national one. There are good links with health visitors and health centres. CHL thinks Bookstart has been successful in that picture books and board books are "more popular than you'd expect", given the difficulties faced in many parents' daily lives ("joining the library must be a fairly low priority for most of them"). She also takes books to nurseries, again mentioning strong local partnerships. Local staff also mention children's activities, such as making Christmas cards. Children are given activity sheets "to occupy them basically" - the alternative is bored children "fighting amongst themselves" (LS). Young users include a small group who are not attending school. LS says that the library service cannot be seen to encourage truancy, and children in school uniform are "challenged" in the day. However, she allocates small housekeeping tasks for those children known not to be attending school, explaining that they like to "feel useful" and that this degree of involvement gives "a sense of ownership" to children who are "good kids [but] have been labelled, in the past, as no-hopers". LS adds that, when she started work at Northbridge, she had a clean slate policy to give a fresh start to children who had previously been excluded (including one girl who had been banned for starting fires in the library!).

Although there had been a deliberate policy of addressing parents' and children's concerns about using libraries, CHL thinks there is still a perception that libraries are "institutional", mentioning associations with rules and silence. Staff attitudes are vital - "all it is, is just being friendly ...it's everything, because it makes people feel welcome". This did not just relate to children, although some staff can be "quite hostile" to them. CHL and LS's experience was that these kinds of "life skills" could not always be learned from a training course. This is important because:-

> "90% of our staff are brilliant with kids, but ...if you're a kid that doesn't
> have much confidence anyway... it just needs one person to come across
> ... unfriendly and critical, and they'll not come in again".

At the same time, most staff echo the points made by the community activists about the

strengths of libraries as a free, open and accessible service. If nothing else, Northbridge Library was "still standing", a sign of some degree of local ownership. Although use of the library for information did not emerge strongly, local staff mention that it acts as a fairly informal community link, for instance providing directions and public transport information. It is seen as a focal point and meeting place:-

> "In some respects, we've taken the place of the market place ... They'll come in, they'll congregate, they'll have a little gossip..." [LS].

The library's central location does however mean that there is an "element who you don't want hanging round", which causes some difficulties, especially in the evenings. Issues around behaviour are discussed below in relation to the Study Support Centre.

7.4.2   General issues and future developments

CHL was "very angry that the training budget has actually run out this year". This meant that she and SW were unable to attend a modestly priced course on setting up a reading group. Although the group is still being established, she now feels this is less likely to be successful; what she saw as mismanagement of the training budget is "directly impacting on the service that we're offering to people like kids in Northbridge". Unlike CL (see section 7.2 above), the group librarians supported the team system, although LL comments "you do lose that contact".

Some library staff suggested having a fines amnesty. LL thinks that providing proof of address is a problem in an area with a high transient population, but this was necessary as the system had been abused in the past.

LL feels that there should be less emphasis on issue figures. Despite years of discussion about "weighting", the Bookfund was only based on issues ("we still follow demand, rather than need"). Further, the City Library was, he considered, well staffed, but users there did not require the support needed in areas like Northbridge, for example in using ICT. He agrees with DLM (see 7.2.1 above) that, "up to a few years ago you'd be able to spend a lot of your time on work that has no direct bearing on issue figures". In previous posts in City, he had had time to, say, attend meetings just to gain "an awareness of what's going on in the community".

7.5.   Study Support Centre

The centre is open from 3.30 onwards on weekdays and all day on Saturday, and is located in a separate room from the main library area. The centre is equipped with new PCs, scanners, photocopiers, and CD-ROMs, as well as traditional reference books. All the resources of the centre are free, including Internet access.

SW has been working at the centre since it opened in March 1999, with CA working some hours there from June onwards. This section is largely based on SW's account of the work of the centre.

7.5.1 Aims and impact

The study support centre, also known as the homework club, is funded by SRB. The centre is based on the model of a centre in another part of City. It is justified on the basis of studies that have shown that homework centres are an effective way of increasing educational attainment and improving social relationships. The centre also builds on the identification of libraries as neutral and openly accessible spaces, but adding the "extra help" of a support worker. SW's role is to "support the children in using the IT to find information, helping them to access information through books in here and in the library, encouraging them to seek information from librarians or other agencies [and] work together on projects". The centre is also used by a "variety of young people coming in, in the daytime; for a variety of different reasons they don't go to schools". These children are offered general educational support, do IT skills training and perform some specific tasks around running the club so "they get a sense of ownership".

Apart from the homework club, there is a wider study support element to SW's role. She supports adults in finding information, for example about training. This is an extension of what library staff already do, but SW had the advantage of having dedicated time for study support. It is also useful to have access to the library's reference resources and,

> "...if you can't find it there, then you can come in here, do a Webwise training session with me, do some informal Internet training, have a cup of coffee, talk about how scared they are of using a computer... Then, over a period of weeks, in a very informal way, they come in until they're more confident and they can then go out into the public access area of the library and use the computers in there".

The centre is, therefore, directly addressing some of the needs identified around low attainment, skills and confidence in Northbridge (see 7.3.2). The "non-threatening" nature of the centre is also relevant here. SW says "it's not like going to one of the educational establishments in the area, which I've found, just from chatting to people, they find very offputting". Many local people "haven't got the confidence to access those courses straightaway". Even before the opening of the homework club, SW said there did not seem to be comparable institutional barriers to using the library. When she started work in March 1999, the library was already a popular meeting place for children because it represented a "warm, safe environment". The difference is that before the opening of the club children were "apart from reading the odd book ...mostly just messing about". There was now more purposive activity and figures show that library usage has increased. CA sees the centre as promoting "self-worth":-

> "It's given the children something to focus on. They're probably not always doing their homework, but they've got access to computers, someone to talk to - people who they trust".

It is unusual to permanently exclude users and no one is turned away. However, open

access is an issue. SW wants to:-

> "... reach people who need [the centre] most ...kids who aren't going to school, who aren't interested in reading, [whose] educational attainment is low. They're facing a lot of social problems, they may be having problems with the police and they're what I would call seriously socially excluded, who don't feel part of society ... and [whose] only role models are the underworld".

The problem is balancing these individuals' needs with those of better motivated children "who do want to work". This tension is resolved through simple ground rules developed by users of the centre. These rules aim to promote "a calm, safe environment, no bullying, no aggression", but,

> "... sometimes I don't feel I'm equipped to be able to deal with some of the most challenging cases ... because they need so much attention, and I have to protect the other children that are in here. It's a very fine line".

SW is attempting to get support, for the children not attending school, from an Educational Welfare Officer, but currently the pressures of trying to meet the needs of the "seriously socially excluded" tells on her personally and on other users. Another problem is the need for more volunteer support. The club has only one regular volunteer. She has contacted the nearby university, but students have not heard of Northbridge ("it's a long way in people's minds", despite being close to the city centre) and prefer to work in another deprived part of City "because they've heard of it and it is multi-cultural". In the longer term, she hopes more parents will volunteer, but, at present, many "are not confident about their literacy". This is especially the case with the one night a week designated for under-sevens, where SW is aiming to increase parental involvement.

Having worked at the library before the opening of the homework club, CA was able to describe the change in children and young people's attitudes and behaviour:-

> "They're not angels, but there's hell of a lot more respect... I can't get over to [SW] enough how much good she's done, because she didn't know the children from a library point of view... I wish we'd recorded what they used to be like".

Here, one interviewee wanted to acknowledge "the difficulties staff there have been working under, especially over the last couple of months". SW had been "a very conscientious member of the community", in providing a statement which was instrumental in bringing a case under new anti-social behaviour legislation. This has made library staff vulnerable, although some police protection has now been provided. CHL said:-

> "That's a great tribute to [SW] ...that she said to local shopkeepers and taxi drivers, who were all being terrorised ... that unless people all stood

up together and made a statement nothing would ever happen. And the police have now got a good case".

Here, CHL refers to the change in direction implied by this kind of proactive support for the local community ("This is so interesting … what happened to reading *Peter Rabbit* and doing nice little book talks?"). Although this is a very specific example, it can be concluded that the library service is having an impact on some issues that go wider than traditional information and reading needs. These impacts (for example, around tackling anti-social behaviour, and promoting confidence and self-esteem, even providing positive role models) are especially pertinent to some of the themes mentioned in the above consideration of community needs. A further example relates to the paucity of sport and play facilities in the area, as identified in the discussion of local needs. This is also being addressed by SW, who collects information about nearby resources and had arranged a visit to a local water resource centre, which the children now used independently.

7.5.2 Relationship with library service and staff

SW sees the local library staff as supportive, especially since there has been more continuity of local staff. SW says that staff work in Northbridge because they want to; all the staff "take time out" with users and "that's such an important part of the library being a community resource". Like other staff, SW emphasises that staff attitudes are crucial:-

> "It's very much to do with the individual person who's got to be committed to the idea of community values … and to care about communities, and luckily most of the people who work here are fairly local".

If, say, someone from the Central Library is working at Northbridge, "it changes the whole dynamic of the day". She agrees with other staff that recruitment and selection policies need to reflect attitudes and values.

CA comments that, as well as there being fewer behavioural issues with library users, the existence of the centre has had a beneficial effect on staff attitudes. She has personally more developed "a lot more understanding" of the children and young people with whom she had previously had confrontational exchanges.

When SW started in the post she was unfamiliar with library processes and CA has provided an important link between the centre and the rest of the staff. She works closely with group and local staff, especially the library supervisor who manages the building. She introduces children to concepts like subject categories, so they are then ready to use the library independently. CA adds that, by providing children with something to focus on, the homework club takes pressure off other library staff. The centre is part of the library, so "we're able to say 'go to look for a book in the library' [and] I know the library stock". At the same time, the centre is "still a little bit separate";

122

many homework club users are not members of the library or have difficulty reading and so do not use library facilities. SW encourages new users of the homework club to join the library, and

> "...quite often what we find is they've defaulted in the past, they're too scared to come back and admit they've lost the book and then they don't come back. So I go with them to the library staff and sort it out".

This then acts to change the child's image of the library, something which SW says then has a knock-on effect for the rest of the family.

SW feels there is a need for specialist support staff at the Central Library to "have some induction as to what we're doing". For example, there had been problems around the homework club having access to Hotmail and chat rooms, because there was no access to these from the public areas, whereas SW felt that users should learn about them in the "controlled environment" provided by the centre.

7.5.3 Local partnerships

For SW, local partnerships provide "my job...I wouldn't be here without the SRB funding". She was optimistic about the regeneration activity going on in the area. At the same time, the number of meetings involved with initiatives like the EAZ created a time demand that she could not always meet (this was something which could be resolved if a second full-time worker was employed).

Contacts with the education and social services departments were problematic because Northbridge fell within different areas for different services and, more generally there was a lack of integration between different Council departments (e.g. "I'm in Youth Services, I don't work with Libraries or the Sports Council"). SW also thought that the title study support worker was a negative factor in her relationship with schools, because of judgements teaching staff made about her status. However, senior library staff were always prepared to lend support in contacting head teachers.

7.5.4 Future developments and sustainability

SW suggests various developments around the use of ICT. These included creating links with other homework clubs in the city and further afield. She also suggested that ICT could be used to improve links between local workers, for example creating a database with details of children not attending school.

CHL raises the question of the sustainability of the centre, referring to "this horrendous cycle that we're now in about how is it going to continue, how we are going to sustain it when the SRB funding runs out". CA expressed this concern in terms of its effect on the homework club's users:-

> "It would destroy the trust as well, in us, in the system. ... I'd hate to think what would happen to the children, because a lot of them that use it

don't go to school and rely purely on [SW], especially for access to computers".

7.5.5 User perspectives

The homework club has a users' group which provides a forum for users to voice their views about the running of the centre. Based on observation of the group, and a small number of individual discussions with the children, their main concerns were:-

- access to PCs, with some disputes between those attending, and not attending, school;
- tensions between younger and older children, centring on whether there should be separate sessions for different age groups;
- behaviour standards (with regular users demanding more strict enforcement of rules, for example around bringing food into the centre).

This forum is used to allow users to users to have a genuine stake in decisions about the working of the centre. For example, it was agreed to have more sessions for different age groups, because of the group's support for this.

Part of the attraction of the centre, for users, was undoubtedly the availability of up-to-date, high-quality computer equipment and software. However, the overriding message, from these users, was the importance of the homework club in a locality so lacking other resources and facilities for children and young people.

7.5.6 Conclusion

This message received after the fieldwork period had ended can serve as a summary of the kind of difference that a library can make in an area like Northbridge:-

> "As a postscript, things are going very well here. One of our users has gained a Grammar School place, several of our non-attenders are enrolled on a variety of courses, the Family Literacy groups on Wednesdays have become very popular, and the court case I was involved in has had a positive effect on some of the security problems we were experiencing. The multi-agency approach is working well with Libraries at the forefront!" [SW]

7.6   Summary and conclusions

7.6.1   *Policy approaches to social exclusion - are partnerships the way forward?* At a policy and managerial level, this case study has shown a realisation that libraries can do little, on their own, to tackle the scale of social exclusion seen in many neighbourhoods. Unlike some of the other case study authorities, City does not just have "pockets of deprivation"; most of its neighbourhoods are affected by social exclusion. Although Northbridge was identified as perhaps the most deprived area in the city, many other

neighbourhoods experienced comparable problems. In these circumstances, there has been a recognition that partnerships are needed to tackle social exclusion on the scale faced by most wards in the city. It was seen that libraries needed to link with other City Council departments and external agencies to develop co-ordinated responses.

7.6.2 *Educational purpose.* The most important partnerships, involving City Libraries, are those linked to education, partly driven by the availability of funding such as SRB. The network of homework clubs is an example of these kind of educational partnerships. We therefore concluded that current strategy and initiatives linked to social exclusion are clearly driving City Libraries in a very specific direction, where the notion of a public library as a multi-faceted agency is being replaced by an emphasis on educational purpose. This does, however, have implications for the nature of the public library as an institution, for example, if the library service then acquired some of the negative "institutional" associations of formal education establishments.

7.6.3 *ICT - the saviour of the public library?* City Library Service has developed several ICT initiatives linked to social exclusion, based on a philosophy of providing free access, with one example being the homework clubs. There was, however, some scepticism about the significance of technology alone to transform libraries (this also linked to the issue of educational purpose, as discussed at 7.2.3). The study of the homework club supported this view, suggesting, as it did, that the supportive environment provided by library staff was every bit as important as the ICT facilities provided.

7.6.4 *The impact of the study support centre.* The study support centre built upon the "non-threatening" nature of the library, in comparison with local school and college provision. For all the children - but especially those who were excluded from school and were given designated tasks in the homework club - the centre was seen as promoting self-esteem as well as learning. The centre's staff appeared to have, within less than a year, have engaged with young people who were, by almost any standard, profoundly excluded (and, in some cases, literally excluded from the education system). For the young users of the centre, there appeared to be as much emphasis on the centre as somewhere safe and warm (in a neighbourhood with few safe areas for children), with adults they can trust, as on learning and ICT. Importantly, the young users of the homework club were given a genuine stake in decisions affecting the running of the centre. Staff also reported that the homework club had also brought about positive changes in young library users' attitudes and behaviour, and had improved relationships between users and front-line staff. There was, however, also a sense of the centre being a victim of its own success, with the resources of the sole full-time worker becoming more and more stretched, as well as wider questions around sustainability.

7.6.5 *Local partnerships and sustainability.* The range of local partnerships around the various regeneration initiatives in Northside (e.g. EAZ, New Deal) were at an early stage, but the library service appeared to be playing its full part in these. It is self-evident, but nonetheless important, to note that the study support centre's achievements are an outcome of SRB funding. Local staff expressed their concerns about how to sustain the work of the centre, because of its time-limited funding. Senior library

managers, however, indicated that the service aimed to sustain City's network of homework clubs in the longer-term, and, from what we saw at Northbridge, we would support this.

7.6.6 *Library services in excluded neighbourhoods.* At the neighbourhood level, Northbridge was seen to be an area of profound social exclusion, something reflected in its designation as a New Deal Pathfinder authority. In these circumstances, the library service has, unlike most other local agencies, kept up a presence in an area that has suffered severe social problems over a number of years. It was seen, by the community activists interviewed, as a positive presence, or focal point, in the community. Staff are working in difficult circumstances (for example, threats to personal safety), but have maintained an open and accessible service. Northbridge Library appeared friendly and welcoming, with front-line staff who were able to connect to local people. There were also deliberate policies around being welcoming to parents and young children. Despite these efforts, there were still, from what we were told, potential users who perceived a "social distance" between them and the library. It should be emphasised that we did not identify any particular barriers deterring people from library use (other than perhaps for past-users who had "defaulted", which is the reason some staff suggested a fines amnesty). Low usage is hardly surprising, given the long-term decline of the neighbourhood and cynicism about statutory services. These local circumstances do suggest that further outreach work would have benefits. It can also be speculated that as local morale improves - with recent reductions in anti-social behaviour also being a factor here - so the library will appear more relevant to users.

7.6.7 *Library staff: attitudes, training, recruitment and selection.* We were impressed with the knowledge and commitment of staff at all levels. This was particularly impressive in the case of staff at Northbridge, given the difficult local circumstances already mentioned. Staff appeared, moreover, to take a proactive approach, making or advancing decisions that made a difference. One example here was the library supervisor's decision to give a "fresh start" to young users previously excluded from the library building. In common with other case studies, staff attitudes emerged as hugely important and, in City, were seen in a largely positive light. Attitudes were especially important in Northbridge given the understandable mistrust and cynicism felt by many local people. Staff training was mentioned here, but respondents also stressed the importance of recruitment and selection - that is, they emphasised qualities that cannot always be taught. It may also be significant that staff at Northbridge lived fairly nearby and knew the area well, so reducing "social distance" from their users.

7.6.8 *History and relevance of community librarianship.* Long-serving staff described a retreat from the community librarianship of the 1980s. This was seen in the decline of outreach, other than what appeared to be an impressive level of work with children, parents and schools. The team librarians described library services as mainly demand-led (for example in terms of stock selection), although the study support centre was a major example of a service based on need rather than expressed demand. Senior managers referred to the successes of the community librarianship, whilst also emphasising that these were sporadic in nature. This unevenness was attributed to the freedom given to individual postholders. There was, then, some suggestion of the continued relevance of

126

community librarianship approaches, but senior managers argued that, to provide consistency, a community role needed to be built in to the fundamental basis of a librarian's work. This is, of course, an issue for local determination, but does, arguably, parallel national debates around the need to set and maintain standards.

7.6.9 *Overall conclusion.* Although the direction taken by City Libraries can be seen as being driven by opportunism (that is, as noted above, by the availability of funding regimes like SRB), we were impressed by what we saw at the study support centre and Northbridge Library in general. The library and, especially, the study support centre were taking a proactive approach to tackling some of the most deep-seated problems of the area. This approach was most obvious in the area of skills/educational attainment, but can also be seen as promoting social cohesion through the positive relationships built up with (previously) disaffected young people. In summary, the *potential* of public libraries to address social exclusion is often referred to. In City, or at least in the area we studied, the library service appeared to be taking positive steps towards realising this potential.

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8. Millborough Case Study

8.1 Introduction

Millborough is one of England's smaller Metropolitan Districts with a population of approximately 192,000. It is a mixture of urban and rural areas with one town (Milltown) accounting for almost half the population. Many of its socio-demographic indices are in line with national averages. It has an ethnic minority population of under 5%, mainly Pakistani and mainly concentrated in one area of Milltown.

Poverty is concentrated within Millborough. Four of its 18 wards are in the top 10% of most deprived wards in England. Many of the other wards are either average or scored zero on deprivation indices. In terms of all English districts, Millborough is only just ranked in the top third in terms of deprivation indicators.

The average nature of the borough in terms of poverty indices has led to it experiencing some difficulties in accessing UK and European funding for its areas of greatest poverty. However, it has had a number of successful SRB applications and has one Education Action Zone.

The perceived "averageness" of the borough is also reflected in its political makeup with long periods of "hung" Councils since its inception in 1974.

It will be seen that, locally, it is felt that these factors help to explain the general lack of policies and direction that has hampered the authority. This awareness has seen an early embracing of New Labour's modernising local government agenda with Best Value pilots, the introduction of the "cabinet" form of local government in 1999, the restructure of Council departments and the creation of five new executive director posts.

Millborough's Library and Information Service has 27 service points ranging in opening hours from under 10 hours (7) to over 45 hours (5). It has one of the lowest ratios of people to service points and one of the highest materials issues per thousand population of any of the Metropolitan District authorities. In 1998/99 it issued nearly 1,900,000 materials. CIPFA figures imply that almost 62% of the population are active borrowers. It spends less than the Metropolitan District average per capita, but more than any of its neighbouring Councils.

There is approximately 90 staff. Its total net expenditure in 1998/99 was almost £2.7 million. The library service's material expenditure as a percentage of gross service spend was high at over 18% (one of the highest of the Metropolitan Districts). Conversely, its expenditure on staff was average and its salary levels below average.

The service is at present undergoing major alterations to its library management system with branches being converted to computerisation for the first time. This has also had a beneficial spin-off in terms of providing public ICT access for information in all libraries

free of charge. Negatively, much of the funding for this scheme has had to be provided from the materials fund. This will clearly have an impact on the 1999/2000 statistics in terms of per capita spending.

The service was a pilot for the local authority in Best Value and the report was presented to the Cabinet in December. Best Value forms part of this case study.

Like a number of our case studies, staffing levels and unfilled vacant posts have left a clear mark on the capabilities of the service. Officers interviewed clearly believed that their ability to develop the service was affected by this.

The Case Study looked at three issues:

• Corporate and departmental policy and decision making in Millborough and the impact on the management of the library service including the outcome of a Best Value review pilot;

• The provision of a library service in one of the areas of greatest deprivation in the Green Hill ward of Milltown;

• The development of ICT services including responsibility for the Council web site.

8.2   Policy Development, with special reference to Best Value

This part of the study focuses on policy development in Millborough Metropolitan District Council. It specifically examines:

• The effect on policy making of having long periods of political "no overall control;"

• Tradition as the driving force;

• The piloting of Best Value and the introduction of the "modernised" Council.

Interviews were held in October and November 1999 with the Assistant Director of Leisure Services (Libraries); the three principal Librarians in post at the time; the Web Site Manager; and the former Chair of Leisure (now Chair of the Scrutiny Committee of Community Services, which includes Leisure). A planned interview with the Director of Leisure (also senior officer on the Best Value pilot) was unable to take place because she resigned to take up another post before the review process began.

8.2.1   The Perceptions of Interviewees

All interviewees acknowledged that Millborough has suffered from a policy vacuum. Typical comments were that:-

"By and large Millborough Council has never functioned by having policies, strategies and plans" [A].
"Not a great place for setting strategies" [A].
"Yeah, we never seem to be able to make decisions" [D].
"A sleepy backwater, stuck in custom and practice" [B].
"I know there are policies that we must abide by but (I) can't find anyone who knows about them or admits to knowing about them" [E].

This was identified as a problem linked with the lack of political control and leadership. The authority has been "hung" for most of its existence. This problem was further evidenced by some very high profile problems in its education and social services departments in recent years. Overall planning and strategic development has been lacking and the Leisure Service is reflective of this. Within such a framework it is hardly surprising that issues of poverty and social exclusion have no policy strategy:

"We still don't have a policy on social exclusion or poverty" [D].
"[We did have an anti-poverty strategy under Labour which] tried to make things more equal but was not structured enough to make an impact" [D].

In the absence of strong central policy development in the past, it was felt that departmentalism has been paramount. Thus, developments in one department have not been joined up or involved other potential partners. This has left smaller services, like Libraries, unaware of initiatives and funding opportunities or finding it difficult to be part of them (SRB5 and Education Action Zone).

"[We have] tried to elbow libraries onto it [the EAZ] but don't seem to be getting far with this" [B].

The current organisation and perceived role of the Library and Information Service does not help this situation. During the case study the service was half way through a very protracted reorganisation that has resulted, in effect, in two structures, operating simultaneously. In discussions with officers this clearly led to uncertainty over ability to implement ideas, give direction or know who should take the lead in pursuing partnerships. Equally, interviewees felt that the library service's potential community role is not recognised by many Councillors or amongst officers in other departments (see also Area Study of Green Hill library below).

In many respects the traditions of the library service were the power drivers in Millborough. The service is led by the indices of traditional output mechanisms. It is clear that this is something the politicians "understand" and therefore support for the bookfund has been more important than any client group or policy led approach. Consequently, library service levels have been dictated by performance rather than any concept of need. This has left some service provision operating on as little as eight hours a week. Community librarianship has never been a service strategy in Millborough:

"The tradition of the service by and large, with some honourable exceptions, is to sit back in those libraries and wait for people to come

130

in" [A].

"No real understanding...of whole ethos of community librarianship...it has largely passed Millborough by." [A].

Neither have such tools as community profiling and outreach work provided any structured way of developing service provision:

"No one has ever done any community profiling...No one has ever looked at a single piece of census data and said 'Oh this is the community outside those doors' and, until this year, no-one had even made any attempt to plot where people live in relation to their branches..." [A].

Lacking policy support, community links and developments are left to those who are "keen" and/or who can find the time (this is even reflected in the housebound provision where the volunteer basis of the service results in no provision in the Green Hill area). Not uncommonly in library services without strong strategic approaches, the quality of the service becomes reliant on individual initiatives. In Millborough there was evidence of such initiatives across the service areas from work with children to reading groups for adults.

Most of the officers interviewed were relatively new to their posts and they were members of a partially restructured management team. There was a clear desire, almost longing, for the post-restructure period to arrive and for various vacant senior posts to be filled. This "limbo" was undoubtedly hindering progress towards a strategic approach that principal officers seemed enthusiastic to embrace. They all recognised the significance of such a development.

From the information gathered there was also a lack of corporate guidelines with regard to service planning. The library service had completed the two Library Annual Plans but such plans did not seem to fit into any wider planning process:

"There was no real understanding of the Library Plan [by the Council]... and having produced it no real planning that you don't just put it in the filing cabinet and get on with what you do" [A].

Equally, at the departmental level, there was not a tradition of service planning. Some officers had developed their own sectional plans and all expressed a hope that, with the completed restructuring, service planning and action planning would become a core part of delivery method:

"I hope things settle down and things get better and more organised and more co-ordinated" [F].
"Every section needs to have a report of what it should do over the next 12 months or it just reacts" [B].

8.2.2 Best Value

Given the description of the service presented to us, it would be expected that the Best Value (BV) pilot would be an ideal vehicle to impose more structure, recognise the need to address communities and consider how the service could work in partnership to further the goals of the authority.

The review was commenced in November 1998 and the reasons for the Library Service being a pilot are somewhat vague. While one interviewee felt it was because the service was an example of a good Council service (in reflecting BV's concept of reviewing a mix of variable performing services) another interviewee felt it was for the opposite reason.

BV is one of the Government's flagship concepts in introducing "continuous improvement" into local government. Even in its pilot period (it becomes compulsory in April 2000) guidance was available regarding the four "Cs" (challenge, consult, compare, compete) and the significance of Government issues, not just such as efficiency, but also social exclusion.

Those officers from the library service were enthusiastic that BV would deliver a new framework and clear structure to propel the service forward. Three of those interviewed were actually part of the BV panel, which also included other library staff from all levels within the hierarchy. It is therefore doubly disappointing that, in its pilot stage at least, BV reviewing has so singularly failed to deliver in the view of those involved from the library service. Staff said of this experience:-

I hoped it would "get to grips with issues and fundamentally look at why we do things. Prioritise etc. really have it sorted out...It left a nasty taste in the mouth" [B].

"I came out jaundiced. Opportunity...mishandled" [C].

In particular, there was a feeling, borne out in the end report, that BV was overwhelmingly a cost cutting exercise and no real attempt was made to consider the fundamentals of service development. It was a case of how we can deliver the same (or remain in the upper quartile) for less.

"BV process was only about saving money. That's what it felt like" [B].
"No, doesn't address the issue of social exclusion. It dealt with how to save money" [F].
"Yes [it was a reduction exercise]...but it had to be in Millborough when you look at the bookfund and the amount of libraries" [D].

Consultation was poor and focused on a very limited range of people and the consequences resulted in public and/or member outcry at the most contentious cuts. No consideration was given to issues of communities other than distance from libraries, age of users and transport.

The Scrutiny Committee acknowledged this when it called in the proposal of BV, supported by cabinet, to close Eastly library. It was recommended to the Cabinet Committee that:

a) "No decision be taken to close Eastly Library until -
- alternative means of maintaining a Library Service in Eastly are explored
- and the earliest consultation has taken place with users of the Eastly library and the Eastly community.

b) Officers develop a methodology that assesses the value of all libraries taking into account a range of factors including costs, efficiency, usage, visits and potential usage, the type and range of service levels of user satisfaction, physical access, relocation and partnership opportunities and the characteristics of the local areas rather than just the availability of alternative libraries."
(Millborough Council Cabinet Committee minutes 15th November 1999)

D also acknowledged the failings of not consulting:

"We didn't consult as we should have and that's the lesson we learnt".·

The Scrutiny Committee also overturned cuts, proposed by BV to Cabinet, that among opening hours savings should be a 10 hour cut (40%) in the library (Green Hill) serving one of the most deprived areas in Millborough. Again, the BV assessment had been made purely on demand-led performance, rather than on wider community criteria. This was despite the fact that the Library Association performance targets that have been adopted by Millborough clearly state that "opening hours should take account of the needs of the local community."

Social exclusion was not considered as a challenge ("it never crossed the lips of anyone" [A]) and was not reflected in the recommendations.

Ironically, the Government's modernising local authorities agenda and BV in particular are being introduced to counter situations such as in Millborough where there is a policy and directional vacuum (see Public Library Policy and Social Exclusion Working Paper Number 10: Central and local government policies and social exclusion). In that context it is especially interesting to try and analyse how it has worked in Millborough in relation to libraries in this pilot stage.

(i) The review was capable of being dominated by a minority and fundamental challenges and comparisons were ignored. This was partly due to a rushed conclusion, the result of the lead officer leaving the authority. It was also considered, by most of those involved, that one individual had a specific agenda and this unduly affected the conclusions.

(ii) However, the cabinet and scrutiny committee system allowed for a correction to the shortfalls of the pilot review, albeit partly in private as the BV review was not published.

(iii) Once BV becomes compulsory some of the weaknesses of Millborough's review

should not happen. Consultation, especially, will be required to be more wide ranging. The social exclusion agenda will be more explicit. However, the test will be in the inspection and monitoring from outside of all reviews as well as strong internal structures.

(iv) In relation to the use of comparisons and benchmarking, one particular concern is the danger that it can be used, within a cost cutting agenda, to "drive to mediocrity" [A]. In this review it was apparent that Councillors felt able to reduce the bookfund as long as it stayed in the upper quartile. They also introduced charges to a service previously free (Archives/local history enquiries because the authority was out of step with neighbouring authorities who did charge). In using the Library Association standards (1995) as another yardstick they also felt able to reduce the opening hours at some of the busiest service points ("equalising" of hours at District libraries) but, as this was a cutting review, not increase hours or service in areas of need. Instead they confirmed a policy of equating opening hours in community libraries with use. Hence the proposals to reduce hours at Green Hill.

8.3   Area study of Green Hill Library

This section is based on interviews with the librarian responsible for the library, a part-time library assistant based at Green Hill and the district housing manager. The librarian is also responsible for one other larger service point, where she is based. This part of the case study also utilises some information taken from documentation, provided by the branch librarian, which was used in support of the successful SRB5 bid. It was hoped to speak to some key local stakeholders, but planned interviews were cancelled at short notice.

8.3.1   Green Hill

The main part of the Green Hill ward is a sprawling post-war estate in a semi-rural area about three miles outside Milltown, although there is also an older village. Part of the estate was built about forty years ago, but it also includes a distinct area of high rise development, which has been the main focus of the housing department's efforts to improve the area. This work has concentrated on community safety, with provision of 24-hour security services and vetting of new tenants for criminal records. Nonetheless, properties remain difficult to let. All the interviewees (one of whom lived in the area) agreed that the biggest problem here was the area's image. Problems of crime and anti-social behaviour, dating from a few years previously, had been sensationalised in the local press and this negative image had persisted.

The basic aim of this part of the case study was to look at services to neighbourhoods characterised by high levels of deprivation. The "average" nature of Millborough has already been noted, but, within the authority as a whole, Green Hill is the third most deprived ward. This translates into profound levels of deprivation, as demonstrated by these figures used in the SRB bid:-

134

- it is within the 8% of most deprived wards nationally;
- two of the census districts in the area are within the 3% most deprived nationally;
- two-thirds of households receive Council Tax Benefit;
- half of the children live in households with no earner.

(SRB5 Bid, 1999?)

The community consultation carried out prior to the SRB bid suggested that residents' main concerns were the lack of local shopping (notably for affordable food) and leisure facilities, especially for children.

8.3.2 Green Hill Library

Green Hill Library is based in the centre of the estate, along with the housing office, pharmacy and post office. The external appearance of the library is very neglected. The inside of the library is also less bright and "modern" than many of the libraries visited in other case studies. There is no sign outside the building indicating that it is a library, due to ongoing vandalism. A long-term drop in issues means that Green Hill is now a part-time library. It is open for 20.5 hours a week, including Saturday mornings and two evenings until 7.30pm. The library offers a basic range of services, including a well-used large print collection and audiobooks, which are less popular. There are steps outside the library, making disabled access difficult.

Library staff saw local people's reading and information needs as being expressed through demand for popular fiction. Other than for children, and materials in alternative formats, services are not tailored to the needs of different groups; services are "pretty general" [F]. The library was seldom used for information. It does have quite a wide range of stock, reflecting the fact that Green Hill was a number of years ago, a busy full-time library. It is now "quiet" and issue figures mean that the library workers are constantly aware of threats to opening hours. Cuts were proposed last year, but did not happen. Cuts were also proposed under the Best Value review but were withdrawn (as discussed above).

Commenting on the library's low usage, one member of staff said that:-

> "The total population of the target area for this SRB is 4,100 - why aren't they using the library? It's sad really, whether those people don't like reading, I don't know" [F].

The other member of staff interviewed had worked at the library for nearly 40 years and was able to give a picture of the decline in usage, over the years, from a time when "you could spend all evening helping children do homework", to, now, "strange days, where it's just deserted" [G]. This decline was most striking amongst children and young people; some younger children, but virtually no teenagers, used the library. She attributed this to cultural change and improved provision by school libraries and homework clubs. The library continues to open on Tuesday and Friday evenings. The original rationale for this, "being the area it is", was to encourage children to use the library for homework. There is very limited use by children for homework, but evenings

are "very quiet" apart from children coming in just to keep warm in the winter.

At the same time, however, staff emphasised the continued significance of the library for regular users, in particular older people who are its most loyal users. Some of these users do not borrow books, but still needed the "contact" provided by library staff and to feel "somebody does care about us" [G]. Staff would telephone certain users if they did not come in and, in their own time, drop off books to people who cannot visit the library (the volunteer-based housebound service does not operate in the Green Hill area). The brief observation of the library would support the view that the service is appreciated by older users, and is used in a "social" way by them.

More generally, the library was seen as "friendly", especially compared to the Central Library. Both library staff felt that there were no particular barriers preventing people from using the library, other than the specific example of the effect of library fines. Individual cases of accumulated fines were mentioned as excluding users ("it's sad that they won't come here again because they owe that much money" - [F]). Another example related to a family reading group organised, a few years ago, through the local college. The tutor wanted the librarian to show the group books which parents could share with their children. Unfortunately, several of the parents were on the "defaulters list." The decision was taken to allow these users re-join the library. Two defaulted again "but you feel that, for that time they were coming, they got something out of it" [F]. This interviewee went on:-

> "Fines are so expensive, that discourages people. I'm very, very lenient. Children don't pay fines, but we do charge for postage. But if children come to Green Hill, and bring the books back and they're overdue, and they don't have the postage, then I just don't bother about it. But with this new computer system it will go on that child's record that they owe 19p, and if you want to waive it, you have to initial that you've waived it on this new system. So, I think staff will be more reluctant to do that, because audit can check and see who's been waiving this money" [F].

She would be prepared to argue that, as Green Hill is an "excluded" area, then she would support local staff's decision to waive fines. She also thought that the overdue letter is offensively worded, saying:-

> "I was thinking of people in the Green Hill area that, particularly the second overdue letter ... would frighten them off and think 'this is just what I think libraries are, they're all officious.' It wasn't an encouraging letter, it was like you've been a naughty person" [F].

She re-wrote the letter "but nothing was ever done," although new letters are now being introduced.

Although not mentioned as a barrier to library use, there had been significant concerns about safety at the library:-

"Green Hill used to be single-staffed ... in the day, but because of an incident where someone was shooting an air rifle at the windows during the day, it was then double-staffed all the time" [F].

There had been no further major incidents of this kind, but there are ongoing behavioural issues with children and young people in the following terms:-

"Sometimes we have had to send them out, and sometimes we've even had to lock the door because they won't stop coming in and running round" [F]

One member of staff has also faced racist comments:-

"One gang in particular were horrible to her over a period of a couple of weeks, when I worked with her. But ... she didn't catch what they were saying. I heard them quite distinctly, so I didn't say what they were saying" [F]

As in Welshborough, library staff do not see it as their job to challenge racist attitudes.

In terms of promotion of the library, school classes are encouraged as this is seen as a way of encouraging children to join the library. Library issues had, in fact, risen somewhat over the last six months, possibly due to a resumption of visits from a local school. The school had been going through a difficult period and had failed to return a number of books. The librarian had accepted that the school was unable to locate the books, and class visits have successfully resumed. More attempts were being made to promote the library, "but a lot of the things are aimed at people who come in the library, aren't they? like readers' groups" [F]. The library service has an advert in the local church magazine, but this is the only external promotion (apart from an entry in a community booklet, produced by the local parents' centre, which library staff were not consulted about). Coffee mornings have had a low take-up, and are not run regularly. Library staff leafleted nearby homes for the first coffee morning, but only had two people attending it - "it's difficult to know what to do to get more people to come" [F].

Comment cards are quite a new innovation, but are the main means of getting formal feedback. Friends groups have only been mentioned at a management level.

8.3.3   Community activity and outreach

It was emphasised that the head of service encourages the local librarian "to go out into the community." She went on to say, however that:-

"...A lot of places you go to, they wonder why you're showing your face, anyway. ... I went to the clinic at Green Hill, I took loads of books to try and get the mums to come and that, and they weren't that interested in the books. And I tried to take things that were about things that mums might be interested in ... I suggested having an open day and

137

perhaps a coffee morning for them, to the health visitors, and they wouldn't come unless it was the day that they normally go to the clinic, which is the day that we close. It was quite awkward really" [F].

More positively, two of these parents had started using the library on a regular basis. Bookstart is in operation through the clinic, "but I've had no feedback from any of the mums that have come with babies that they've come because of the Bookstart scheme" [F].

Various community links were described. Of these, the local nursery "seems the key one" [F]. At one time, there had been contact with the parents' centre, which had had a deposit collection form the library. However, these links have ceased, perhaps because books had gone missing. The librarian was "prepared to accept that's what happens" and had visited the centre to resume links, but this was problematic because of lack of continuity of staff at the centre ("it's hit and miss, I shall try again when they have a new manager" [F]). The parents' centre also runs courses, and she would like to offer a library card for users.

Deposit collections are provided to sheltered accommodation and an old people's home. The special services mobile visits group accommodation in Millborough, but not in Green Hill.

The librarian interviewed had enough flexibility to use her time for things like visits and display work (which was mainly done to promote stock); she emphasised that the head of service supported her in this. Generally though, the balance between buildings and outreach was not right within the authority:-

> "A lot of librarians are timetabled within their library, so they're not free to go out. But [the head of service] has got something planned for reorganisation... Rumour has it there might be more librarians who are off-timetable" [F].

8.3.4 Green Hill for the future

The discussion with the housing manager focused on the SRB5 Bid. The housing department led initially because it obtained a grant to employ a consultant to carry out "the Planning for Real" day in December 1997. This was a consultation with local residents to identify changes to the area that they wanted. Since then other parties have gradually come on board e.g. the local Church, community centre, parents' centre, school governors and teachers, ward Councillors, residents' representatives, the food co-op and Council departments like environmental services. Since the initial day, the housing department has run meetings and "kept everybody on board" [G]. This existing community group was then used as a forum to ask, along with other consultation, about the basis of an SRB5 Bid.

The bid was successful, resulting in £286,000 to spend on community capacity building in Green Hill. The first meeting was due to be held of what is now called the "Green Hill

for the Future" group.

The library service's perspective on the bid was described in the following terms:-

> "I wasn't sure why libraries were going to be involved in the Single Regeneration Bid. ... I don't really know what's gone on with the regeneration bid, but they do seem to have some money because they said we're having these meetings, and [the housing manager] said that about 30 or 40 people went. So I offered to have posters and leaflets to get to other parts of the public that they might be missing. But she seemed a bit confused as to why I'd rung, but really I was ringing because I'd been instructed to. We couldn't offer much except a facility for their publicity, if they wanted to do a display or anything" [F].

The librarian feels she had insufficient time for any greater degree of involvement with the group taking forward further work.

From the viewpoint of the housing department, it had, at an early stage, written to all local agencies and produced posters and leaflets. There are some representatives from leisure services on the group, mainly working in children's sports. However:

> "Even if I was to go to [libraries] now and say 'do you feel as though you've a role to play?' I would struggle to understand what role they do have to play, because I don't know what other libraries do in other areas. ... They're obviously trying to get their heads round this, because about 5, 6 weeks ago [the librarian] rang me and said she'd been given my name as an SRB5 contact, because she'd been told that they should try and develop their role ... in SRB5 and be more visible" [H].

This conversation had finished (as described above) with libraries' limiting their involvement to displaying posters. It was concluded that they were both struggling with what the library could or should do, but "you never know how things will and can develop until you get involved" [H].

On the general potential of libraries to contribute to regeneration, the housing manager had never visited the library and so doesn't know if it has, say, ICT provision. More generally, she commented on the authority's vertical working, something that the SRB group is, of course, trying to break down, to deal with crosscutting problems. She thinks these barriers are starting to break down, but this has only being achieved by groups like Green Hill for the Future. Her involvement with the group means that she has more regular contact and better working relationships with people from other agencies and:

> "That only happens when there's a structure in which to develop it in. It doesn't happen because somebody suddenly says to you 'right, we've got to do things differently'" [H].

8.3.5 Conclusion

There are some positive things to say about this strand of the case study. From the visit to the library, there was no doubt that library staff have a very caring attitude to regular users and that this group (especially older people) valued the service. Also positively, the branch librarian was working to engage with local groups, such as the parents' centre and nursery. At the same time, however, this case study showed an absence of "joined up thinking" at a local level. The only local role that could be envisaged for the library, in the regeneration of the estate, was to display posters. This reflects the priorities and approach of the library service as a whole, that is, a service which continues to work within vertical structures and is struggling to find a wider role within "joined up" approaches. In fairness to libraries, it should be added that the effects of these vertical structures appeared to be felt throughout the local authority.

8.4   ICT and the Corporate Web Site

This part of the case study briefly examines:

• The introduction and shape of ICT provision and the responsibility for the corporate web site.

Interviews took place with the Web Site Manager, based in the Libraries Department and the Assistant Director of Leisure (Libraries) in October and November 1999.

8.4.1   Millborough Council Web Site.

Millborough Council has a nationally recognised quality web site. The site is organised and produced from the Library Services Department. The library involvement came about because the department had previously taken the lead in a community information experiment funded by the EU. The service being based in the Libraries Service sometimes 'surprises' people in Millborough but the Web Site manager believes it is the right place to be and managed by a person with 'information management skills'. It also means that the website 'packages information for human beings' rather than 'techies'.

The site was planned to take account of the access needs of socially excluded people. It is a "model of accessibility" [A], with plain English, easy downloading and a lack of superfluous graphics. Issues such as best colour combinations for people with learning difficulties or sight problems, type face legibility and avoidance of 'official' Council look were included in layout considerations. The result has been that the site is acknowledged as one of the best local authority sites in England and has won a 'Bobby' award for its clarity.

In terms of this case study the web site development is interesting not only because it is an example of the library establishing a key role for itself corporately but also because it illustrates the confidence, perseverance and planning needed to gain that status.

The support of senior Council officers and Councillors has been won by lobbying and by presenting strategic reports of future direction and the need for future funding. When it was implied that the web site was not important responses were developed to get the support of other departments and to win "the hearts and minds of people" [E]. This support has been won by showing a clear strategy including financial planning. Future direction includes the exploration of information provision in languages for ethnic minorities and the development of government dealings on-line.

8.4.2 ICT in libraries

Until this year the only major investment in ICT was in Milltown central library. Here there was an automated issuing system and Internet and word processing facilities.

Now the library service is introducing an integrated library automation system to all its libraries. As part of this process it will provide free access to the Internet in all service points. The smallest, least busy will have single terminals the larger, busier libraries will have more. The provision is viewed as a clear upgrading and extension of the public libraries information function:

> "We are trying to make sure that the community in Millborough continues to have access to up-to-date information. It is the electronic extension of the reference library" [A].

With this emphasis the other potential uses of ICT are seen as secondary roles for the library service or not a role at all:

> "Not as a replacement for the post office. So we are blocking out things like Hot Mail..." [A].

And word processing access in the branches is seen as part of a lifelong learning agenda with joint funding applications with the local college. A learning centre model had not been formed. The service that is provided will be without charge. Again reflecting the clear vision of a replacement medium.

However, in contrast to the web site development where the needs of socially excluded groups were central, the approach to ICT in libraries reflects the traditional demand led strategy. The model does not challenge the present service profile but instead only extends it.

Considerations of the promotion of the "electronic library" and the training of staff to support use were less well developed. All staff would be trained in the use of the Internet as it is piggybacked on the automation system but publicity and more developed ways of using outreach to attract excluded people in had not yet been planned.

8.5 Analysis of key issues

8.5.1 Millborough is an interesting example of a largely traditional library service. It

performs well against demand led performance indicators and at this level is supported by local Councillors. In infrastructure terms it has attributes that would be the envy of many authorities (high number of service points per thousand of the population; high relative materials fund; support for free Internet access within an income raising culture). But success at this level comes with a cost. As with some other case studies (c.f. Welshborough) the book issues led culture has resulted in reductions in staffing levels and opening hours at those places that perform least well against this criteria. This results in large disparities between service points in terms of staffing levels, opening hours and stock purchasing. It also, inevitably, results in those libraries most likely to support the needs of excluded people being continually targeted for cuts. This was evident at Green Hill.

8.5.2 This traditional approach is reflected in the lack of any structured introduction of the new approaches to librarianship that developed in the 1970s and 1980s. In particular, even the basic concepts of community profiling and outreach work have not been introduced to the work across the borough. While some workers are called community librarians and have attempted to develop outreach strategies (e.g. at Green Hill) the systematic embracing of community working and partnership principles has not happened. At present there is no structure in place to support those who wish to work with communities. Low staffing levels contribute to this situation with staff across the grades tied to service point timetables. Equally, service planning and target setting was patchy at a departmental level. Some officers did develop sectional plans but there was differing views regarding the function of the management team in approving targets.

8.5.3 One area where planning at a strategic level was evident was in ICT developments. The success of the web site illustrates the importance of strategic thinking as well as perseverance. It also illustrates how consideration of need can result in quality services to all. The introduction of the new automated library system has also required a strategic approach but here the development continues to reflect a demand led approach. The focus was primarily on updating and extending information tools rather than on the New Library, the People's Network learning centre model.

8.5.4 Partnership working was piecemeal and depended on occasional seizing of opportunities rather than through a clear, corporately accepted, role for libraries in joint working initiatives. The confusion over the library's role in SRB5 in Green Hill and the difficulty in being recognised as a partner in the Education Action Zone reflected this.

8.5.5 The weaknesses of the library service were reflective of Millborough Metropolitan District as a whole. In the past there had been only sporadic attempts by the leadership, corporately or politically, to change a culture absent of policy. Most people blamed the lack of direction inherent in a "no overall control" Council system. However, awareness of the need to change (Millborough has been under the spotlight nationally for some of the consequences of it's perceived structural weaknesses) has led to an early embracing of New Labour's modernising government agenda. Already the mixed results of this have been seen in this case study. The Best Value pilot merely confirming and tightening the efficiencies of the traditional service. The Scrutiny system reversing the rubber stamping of Best Value by Cabinet and halting further opening

hours cuts at Green Hill.

8.5.6   At present Millborough Library Service has officers with the ideas and the enthusiasm to respond to the needs of socially excluded people. It does not have the structures. Its traditional measures of success drive it in the opposite direction. Government support for a socially inclusive agenda is an opportunity to reverse this. The challenge for Millborough will be its ability to do this while remaining in the upper quartiles of the Government's other measures. This is a test for the Government as well. How it will support developments for the socially excluded while still extolling the importance of traditional performance indicators?

8.6   Summary and conclusions

Millborough reflects a library service strong in traditional service values. Its priorities, supported by the politicians, are geared to high demand led outputs.

Such a traditional service is understandable in an authority that has provided little in the way of policy or service planning guidance and where senior officers have not felt able to fill the vacuum left by political instability.

The national exposure of the lack of direction has awoken politicians to the need for structural improvements. New political and Council structures are expected to improve policy setting and decision making throughout the Council.

This gives the library service the opportunity to complete its own restructuring in a climate more open to organised approaches than previously. A new structure linked to government priorities would also enable a greater focus on needs.

From this case study a number of conclusions can be drawn in relation to the future direction of Millborough Library and Information Service in supporting the needs of the socially excluded:

- The implementation of service planning would clarify the links between sectional work and the Library Annual Plan.

- The development of a social exclusion strategy linked to the prioritisation of needs rather than demand would give support to the work already being undertaken. It would also clarify for other Council officers and the voluntary sector the role that the library service has in supporting work aimed at tackling social deprivation (SRBs etc.).

- The need to consider training support for staff in undertaking this work and aiding their understanding of the nature and culture of communities and especially issues such as racism.

- The development of a wider "learning centre" concept for ICT in areas of social

deprivation than is presently being proposed would reflect the social inclusion strategies advocated in the Government's National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000).

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9. Caledonia Case Study

9.1 Introduction

Caledonia is a large, mainly rural, regional local authority and library service in Scotland. In area terms it is one of the largest local authorities in the UK covering over 25000 sq. km., although it has a population of only 210,000 (approx.). Nearly two thirds of this population is situated within 30 miles of Burgh, the main urban centre for the region, which itself has a population of around 65,000 people. In the rest of the region, population is mainly clustered around eight (relatively) large regional centres with populations of between 5,000 and 10,000 people. Beyond this, rural pockets of population are often characterised by situations of extreme rural isolation, and the issue of geographical exclusion and access to services is obviously one which dominates policy and debate in Caledonia. In real terms, it can take over three hours to drive from Burgh to the extremities of the region and local people often face journeys of over an hour to reach their nearest provider of a library, or indeed any other council service.

Other aspects of social exclusion, however, also affect Caledonia and these interact with the geographic factors above to generate particular and sometimes unique problems. In the relatively urbanised areas in and around Burgh, there are pockets of deprivation which reflect situations, common in urban Scotland, of unemployment, crime and low levels of educational attainment: the area has 5 enumeration districts among the worst 10% in the 1991 Scottish Office analysis of deprivation, and these areas have traditionally been in receipt of urban programme and other forms of government aid (Social Inclusion Partnership Project, 1999). Rural areas are particularly characterised by poor wages: overall in Caledonia wages are below 80% of the EU average and lower than this in rural parts. Levels of unemployment in rural zones are also double the average in Caledonia and these areas suffer from poor housing and high maintenance costs, and poor services and community facilities. Some communities, according to Caledonia council, are literally "on the edge" and "the confidence of individuals within these communities has become severely depressed" (Social Inclusion Partnership Project, 1999, p.6). Of particular concern has been the phenomenon of rural depopulation, largely driven by the migration of young people to urban Scotland looking for wider opportunity and work.

This concern in particular has come to comprise the focus of Caledonia Council's overall Social Inclusion Strategy which is now based upon the region's designation as a Social Inclusion Partnership by the Scottish Executive. The strategy comprises a wide-ranging set of linked initiatives, community projects and service developments directed mainly, but not exclusively, at young adults, and is supported by a range of partners including other neighbouring local authorities and a local "third sector", the Well-being Alliance. The Council has also developed other strategies which affect services more generally and which are designed to address inclusion issues: these include moves towards decentralised and community focussed provision; a structured programme of community consultation and planning; "joined up" provision of local services which cross traditional

departmental boundaries and a wide ranging ICT strategy. These initiatives are discussed more fully in Sections 9.2, 9.4, and 9.5.

For the library service this new environment has to some degree inaugurated a period of transition, at least in terms of overall strategy and organisational approach. Historically, Caledonia Libraries has operated as a centrally managed service with a large number of small/part time service points (40 at present) except in the Burgh area where the town itself is served by a medium sized central library. This branch network was supplemented by a fleet of 12 mobile libraries which serve remote areas, usually on a two weekly rota. Until 1998, many of the functions associated with this network were controlled centrally - stock and materials were purchased and exchanged (rigorously) and a number of specialists in, for example, Children's work and Information Work operated predominantly as a central support and advice team. However, in 1998, many of these operations and professional staff were devolved, in line with council policy and the Cosla Standards for the Public Library Service in Scotland (1995), to eight areas in order to enhance responsiveness to local needs and to address, among other matters, local issues of social inclusion and access.

The impact of these changes and, in particular, their relevance to addressing social exclusion in Caledonia are discussed in the Sections that follow. The accounts are based on interviews and observation undertaken in Caledonia in November 1999 with a wide range of Libraries staff and with Caledonia Council policy staff who were especially concerned with social exclusion. In addition, a wide range of working documents were made available by the library service and council, and these are cited at the end of the report. Where specific interviews have contributed especially to the discussion of particular themes, these are noted in the text of that section.

9.2   General Policy and Strategy: Caledonia Council Social Inclusion Policy; Caledonia Libraries; ICT Policy and Strategy

9.2.1   Caledonia Council and Social Inclusion

Caledonia Council only came into being in its current organisational form in 1996, integrating a range of regional, burgh and smaller local authorities. Politically it is a council with an "independent" majority over Labour, Liberal Democrat and SNP, a phenomenon which reflects a continuing tradition of independence, localism and decentralisation in the local government of the region. This does not, however, translate into inaction in inclusion issues: for example the council has always generously funded youth and community education initiatives and has developed a network of one stop shops which give advice on benefits, services and rights. One of the key "goals and values" of the Council is to "tackle disadvantage wherever and however it arises" (Caledonia Council, 1998)

Indeed, the Council's Head of Policy (PO) argues that, to some degree, there is a "consensus" about exclusion issues in the region, although this does not necessarily reflect the concerns and policies of the Labour party in Edinburgh. Specifically, in 1996,

this has resulted in the formation of a regional "Well-being Alliance", a partnership involving the council, the Enterprise Board, Scottish Homes and the Constabulary. This grouping aims "to promote, sustain and develop the Well-being of communities in Caledonia" and it is "also the mechanism by which the mechanism of community planning is being advanced" (Social Inclusion Partnership Project, 1999).

Thus, local concern and partnership initiatives regarding social inclusion in Caledonia substantially predate central government action. However, the role of the partnership has been given weight and impetus by the development of a *Scottish Social Inclusion Strategy* launched on 1st March 1999 by Donald Dewar. In outline, this strategy incorporates a much more comprehensive definition of inclusion and a framework of action than has been adopted in England, and it is supported and co-ordinated by a *Scottish Social Inclusion Network*, a consultative forum for local authorities, third sector organisations and other significant parties in Scotland. It incorporates various specific initiatives including community planning and consultation programmes, community development initiatives and action on poverty and young people. However, most significantly for Caledonia, it incorporates a general *Social Inclusion Partnership* scheme worth £200m over 3 years (Scottish Office, 1999) which allows local partnerships to put forward proposals for matched funding. The Caledonia Well-being Alliance has successfully bid for such funding incorporating a project worth £4.5m over six years. According to PO, the success of this bid is directly related to new ideas about social exclusion, which, in contrast to previous urban programme initiatives "are much more accommodating from a rural perspective".

In outline the resulting Social Inclusion Partnership Project focuses on disadvantage and young people, and envisages a range of community development and service initiatives aimed at improving opportunities and facilities. These include transport facilities, meeting places, educational, employment and training opportunities including those involving ICT. Significantly, in specific terms it often involves improving or refocusing existing services or facilities, rather than the more expensive option of entirely new premises, staff or facilities.

Geographically, the project targets two types of community: firstly, urban estates in medium sized settlements demonstrating conventional multiple deprivation criteria, and secondly fragile rural areas which combine these conventional measures of disadvantage with often extreme situations of isolation. According to the Social Inclusion Partnership Officer (SIP), the latter of these, in a sense, represent the greatest challenge. Whereas the "urban" communities, such as the one in inner Burgh, replicate in many ways well documented problems common in Central Scotland, the rural deprivation of "communities on the edge" presents new and unique problems. For example, consultation demands new methodologies, local partnerships are difficult to build and sustain because of time and distance, and co-ordination is a real problem. ICT links, SIP thinks, are only partially a solution to this - in many cases he feels they are leading to an increased need for travel and contact rather than substituting for it. However, he does believe the world wide web is an excellent source of information for the isolated.

It is impossible to comment on the effectiveness of the Partnership Project at this stage,

as it is still in the its first year of operation. However, some general observations are possible about social exclusion strategy in Caledonia. Intentionally or not, new initiatives are highly targeted in terms of community development and service delivery. They are heavily characterised by partnership working both at regional and, prospectively, at local level and are committed to links with community planning and community consultation exercises. In these respects they contrast with the council's network of institutionally based approaches to exclusion through access to services such as leisure centres, one stop shops, and of course, libraries, which are, of course, largely universal in their approach. It is thus to an examination of the impact of social inclusion issues on general library strategy and policy that we now turn.

9.2.2   Library Service Policy and Strategy

Traditionally, the issue of access to services has dominated policy concerns in Caledonia libraries, with "exclusion" being conceptualised predominantly in terms of physical accessibility and more specifically geographical access to services. This has resulted in statements of purpose which claim that libraries exist to "enable individuals and groups of individuals.....to gain free and unbiased access to books, information, knowledge and works of creative imagination" and which prioritise "the extension of services beyond static library buildings to individuals and groups who are unable to use these facilities due to disability, infirmity, age, geographic location or remoteness (Caledonia Council, 1996). In practice, as we have already noted, this has led to a huge resource commitment to mechanisms for providing good standards of service to remote communities, either through small static service points or through mobiles and through an extensively developed system of stock rotation, with all the effort and staff time that this implies.

The result, in the main, has been a fairly uniform, traditional service provided with great commitment to a very large geographical area. The service, in many locations, has tended to have a stronger educational bias than usual, in part because of the scarcity of alternative educational libraries (see for example Island Library detailed in Section 9.3). However, the limitations of this approach have become clear in recent years. Responsiveness to local needs has, in the main, been assumed to take place through informal channels and, although this is undoubtedly the case in many situations, a more professional approach to community responsiveness has been identified as necessary. Average regular use of libraries is estimated by senior managers as 36-37%, figure which the Library and Information Services Co-ordinator (LIC) thinks is "about the National average but too low". In particular, he notes that class is still a barrier in some places: "in a village hall setting we have a membership of 350 out of a possible 400, but in middle-sized communities we run into difficulties with working class communities".

Over the last three years, library policies have focussed on a number of structural changes which are designed to improve the use of the service by excluded individuals and communities. These include a restructuring process which has decentralised the service: implemented in March 1999 this devolves matters like materials selection to 8 areas and offers increased professional staffing support to community libraries. A Library Service task group has also explored ways in which "library/community linking

can be further developed" and has developed proposals for outreach, networking, targeted marketing and promotion, and joint projects with local agencies (Caledonia Libraries Service Task Group, 1999). A number of community planning and consultation exercises have also been undertaken to improve responsiveness to local needs. These are heavily supported by management: LIC thinks that "the only way you can tackle social exclusion is by turning things round to be totally customer focussed.........you've got to know who people are and then look to support them from whatever source". These initiatives are explored more fully in Section 9.4.

In terms of links to other council policies, the progress of the library service has been more mixed. Under pressure to rationalise provision to remote communities, libraries have begun to develop joint provision with both Caledonia Education Service (in the joint provision of learning centres) and with the One Stop Shop network of service points (see Section 9.3). However, these developments have been the exception rather than the rule, and some council officers think this process could go much further. The Leisure Services Research Officer (RO) argues for "integration regardless of geography" and she sees:-

> "libraries as being a similar resource to [one stop shops]. They may never collect the rent and council tax, but all the information that a one stop shop delivers, a library could deliver... benefits advice, council tax forms, ICT resources. We shouldn't have separate libraries and one stop shops in many places and I believe that joining them up would significantly strengthen the way the council supports its communities."

Libraries have been slow, too, to develop specific targeted initiatives linked to geographical communities or social groups affected by social exclusion. Although the Culture and Leisure Directorate (of which libraries are a part) has, according to RO, widespread experience of proactive, targeted initiatives such as Community Radio, Community Video and numerous sport and recreational schemes, these are thin on the ground in libraries and no library projects could be identified that were linked to the major Social Inclusion Partnership Proposal. Other "outreach" projects noted by LIC included "Bookstart" (although this was not targeted on socially excluded groups) and conventional housebound services in Burgh. A project involving a Gaelic writer in residence was identified and is discussed in Section 9.5.

9.2.3 ICT Policy and Strategy

One significant driver of policy change understated above is the issue of social inclusion in an "information" or networked society. Almost everyone who was interviewed in Caledonia saw this as extremely important, in the main because the obvious issues of distance and geographical exclusion had heightened perceptions of what ICT might be able to offer. In addition, the perception that ICT might bring rapid change to Caledonia is strengthened by a plethora of network related projects such as the University of the Highlands and Islands, a European funded project relating to integration of Internet information systems, and the development of a number of community networking projects supported by a range of community and educational funding arrangements.

Underpinning all of this activity, according to Caledonia Council's Director of information Systems (DIS), are basic questions about profit and technological infrastructure: in particular the issue of "wiring up Caledonia" and the extent to which telecom companies will develop ASDL links.

For Caledonia Libraries "taming the electronic world" and "making electronic information available" (LIC) are fundamental both to the future of the library service and its ability to tackle social exclusion. Library managers support almost totally the vision of *New Library: the People's Network* and see the Internet as a tremendous opportunity to offer a vastly enhanced range of resources to library users and, crucially, to modernise "access". In an effort to gauge support for the development of the electronic library, the service engaged in a consultation with 146 Community Councils in the Caledonia area between December 1998 and April 1999. 95% of community council members who responded "indicated that developing the public library's role in combatting alienation and social exclusion through appropriate technological investment provided a route to universal access and opportunity" The Library Service concluded that "the overall response from the Community Council consultation gives a positive mandate for the Public Library to prioritise future investment and development opportunities in line with proposals laid out in *New Library: the People's Network*" (Caledonia Council Cultural and Leisure Services Department, 1999).

In real terms, however, progress seems unlikely to be rapid. Although all 40 community libraries in Caledonia are now linked to the internal TALIS library management system, and potentially staff are now able to connect to the Internet, significant barriers to public access to electronic information persist. As we shall see in Section 9.3, questions of public access have yet to be settled, and issues of charging are not yet resolved. Training and reskilling of staff is also problematic, and the whole question of support and guidance to users is an issue in an authority as large as Caledonia which has many single-staffed service points.

More fundamentally, however, there is still debate among council officers about overall council policy and information strategy, in spite of the fact that an interdepartmental working group has tried to develop an information society policy. Some staff, such as the Leisure Services Research and Development Officer, see the *New Library* as potentially the gateway to a "massive range of information" and believe that the electronic library could be a catalyst for and enhanced range of services which would "significantly strengthen the way the council is supporting its communities". The Director of Information Systems, however, is more cautious. He is sceptical that a simple wiring up of libraries (or any other council service point for that matter!) will automatically address exclusion issues. He is chastened by the failure of other "service delivery" projects such as Viewdata that have been overtaken by technological developments and concerned that "if we provide Internet access in every library, in every school, in every village hall, I'm not sure in that time it won't arrive by digital TV". He is also not clear about the "community" potential of IT and dismissive of the idea of people "having social events around PCs in village halls". Instead, he advocates a twofold role for local authorities: first as enabler and co-ordinator, lobbying central government for infrastructure funding and co-ordinating partners - a function

particularly important in Caledonia. Second, he argues that, based on this infrastructure, ICT initiatives addressing social exclusion need to be much more targeted and focussed, have clear and specific aims, content and objectives and probably be time limited because of the nature of technical obsolescence. Public libraries, of course might be an appropriate venue for some of these developments. However, most would be, he thinks, "issue driven" by needs and local circumstances, and adopt flexible service delivery methods based on perennially changing and converging technologies.

9.3   Community Library Services: Moorside and Lochside; Island Region

In order to examine the impact of policy issues in the field, studies were undertaken of two contrasting aspects of community library provision in Caledonia. The first examined provision at two medium-sized service points in the environs of Burgh (Moorside and Lochside), each serving communities with significant manifestations of social exclusion. The second looked at community library and mobile services in Island, a relatively remote area almost three hours drive from Burgh. In each case fieldwork is based on observation and interviews with area library staff at all levels, and, in the case of Island, conversations with mobile library users and attendance at a community consultation meeting.

9.3.1   Moorside and Lochside

Moorside and Lochside are both communities within easy travelling distance of Burgh. Moorside is really an expanding outer suburb of around 10,000 people at a distance of about 6-10 miles from central Burgh. It contains, however, two public housing estates of around 5,000 people which in the 1980s suffered from significant problems of unemployment and poverty and attracted urban programme funding. More recently, however, an improving employment situation in Burgh has led to a lessening of material deprivation and to an expansion of relatively low cost commuter housing projects. As a result, the area has many families living locally who are new to Caledonia, together with a largely working class core population who are predominantly low paid.

Lochside, in contrast, has never really experienced an economic upturn and is one of the targeted areas in the Social Inclusion Partnership Strategy. The village, situated about 15 miles from Burgh, expanded rapidly in the sixties with the development of nearby heavy industries in oil and aluminium smelting: however these have now collapsed leaving a legacy of high unemployment (for example 43% of males aged 20-24) and poverty (for example, 60% of households have no car in this relatively isolated settlement). Not surprisingly, the Council's Social Inclusion Strategy incorporates a number of youth projects in Lochside.

In terms of library provision, each community is served by a similar level of service infrastructure in terms of buildings and book stock. Moorside has a library which is linked to the local community centre, and the librarian there has some management responsibilities for the centre. Lochside has a library physically linked to a local youth /

151

leisure centre, and although it used to be administered jointly with these, for staffing and resource reasons this has had to be discontinued. The size of stock and buildings, and range of services offered in each library is very similar.

However, beyond this, the approach to service provision and outcomes seem to be, in each case, very different. For historical reasons, Moorside is staffed much more generously than Lochside and in particular it has a librarian (ML) who is not linked to counter duties for much of the time. As a result, and because of her links with the community centre, she is able to practise what she calls " a version of community librarianship", which is mainly focussed around offering a wide range of services, visits and activities for children. These range from activities for toddler groups who use the community centre, through to help with homework for children who heavily use the community centre and library after school, and teenage events, drama workshops and the like. ML notes that these facilities are heavily used by disadvantaged youngsters, many of whom come to the centre after school whilst awaiting parents arriving home from work. She also thinks that Moorside would be an "ideal location" for a homework centre utilising the new ICT network connections. She likes, and would recommend, the community centre model as a vehicle for tackling social exclusion in communities, but thinks that now "even disadvantaged users are demanding extra services" and the library has "outgrown its size".

At Lochside, it has, however, not been possible to replicate this level of service or activity. The library is operated only by two part-time staff and the Senior Library Assistant visited was confined to largely clerical and administrative work related to book issues, together with some relatively straightforward reader support work. The original intention to have joint working with the Leisure Centre had also, it seems, been abandoned for operational and security reasons. As a result, several other staff in the service said they felt that the use of Lochside had declined through this lack of integration, although efforts are now being made to address this through enhanced support from area library officer level.

However, it seems like more significant action would need to be taken if the library was to begin to address the significant problems of social exclusion that obviously exist in Lochside. In particular, as Moorside demonstrates, excluded groups in general, and young people in particular, need an active rather than a passive approach to the delivery of library services, and this approach was not really in evidence at Lochside. It does seem that, in this case, resources need to be found to invigorate the library service and (perhaps) link it more with the work of the many other agencies and services operating in what is one of Caledonia's poorest and most "excluded" areas.

9.3.2   Island

Island is a relatively remote part of Caledonia, cut off from the Scottish mainland except by one road. It has a population of around 8,000 people distributed over an area of around 1500 sq. km, but there are only two settlements with a population of over 1000 people. Socially, it experiences a number of forms of exclusion and disadvantage and has, according to staff, one of the highest levels of long-term unemployment in Scotland,

and also one of the highest levels of pensioners who live alone. Library services are organised around a medium sized community library based in Port, the largest town, with a local population of around 3,000 people. A mobile library serves the rest of Island on a two weekly rota.

The pattern of services in Island, and the rationale behind them, is deeply traditional and illustrates very well a number of key ideas which continue to drive the UK public library service. Port library is staffed by two very able and articulate non-professional grade library staff. They offer a service characterised by an excellent, well organised and up to date lending book stock, and a well maintained and obviously heavily used reference library. This has taken on recent innovations like open learning packs related to distance learning courses with stand alone PCs running educational software. Port is notable, according to staff, because of its emphasis on education as opposed to fiction: non fiction issues account for 30% of the total (the same as fiction and children's books) and staff explain this in terms of both the lack of local access to other educational libraries and the "Scottish tradition of learning for oneself". They support the council's policies of "keeping staffing to a minimum and safeguarding the bookfund - we think that's absolutely spot on" and they suggest that "a good, solid deep core of material is essential for libraries.......not just superficial stuff, good information, resources for the Open University, that kind of thing". They view the imminent staff access to the World Wide Web and National Grid for Learning as an excellent opportunity to extend this kind of service, but worry about unrestricted use of net resources and especially access to commercial services and E Mail. On balance such access, they feel, would confuse the traditional purpose of libraries.

Library staff would like to have time to promote these resources more often, but nevertheless they claim the library is successful - it has 2500 registered borrowers out of the 8000 population in Island and they suggest that ,in the main, non users are those "disadvantaged by location - especially the elderly" or those who "don't feel we have anything to offer them". They are happy to organise group visits to the library, such as those of children from remote schools who come to Port for swimming lessons, or a local Alzheimer's group from a day centre. But, they stress:

> "we aren't really a public social club, we're primarily a place for books...
> of course we're here to help people find information and use it, but we
> are not social workers"

Island mobile Library had, inevitably, a more "social" aspect, but interestingly it also took on a much more recreational function than the static library in Port. The long geographical distances covered by mobiles in Island inevitably lead to short stops of often no more than 10 minutes in duration, and this limits the activities and interaction possible during visits. During observation of a typical day, users fell into three groups:
(i) Active but housebound home workers or early retired: the majority of these users utilised the mobile for recreational reading and often used Port library or other information sources like the Internet
(ii) Housebound elderly: reliant on the service for reading, these users were often visited in their homes by the driver, or books were chosen by neighbours

(iii) Children: remote primary schools were visited and children changed books there.

All users, of course, appreciated the service and many defended staunchly its role of providing access to people who had difficulty reaching council service points. Nevertheless, several users in conversation suggested that mobiles might well be threatened by new networking technologies and improvements in transport which would facilitate access to fixed service points:

> "I wouldn't want them to replace our mobile with all these newfangled ideas about computers, machines, electronic libraries and that"

The abandonment of mobile services on Island is, of course, an unlikely prospect, but in spite of the continuing emphasis on the traditional library philosophy of access, there was evidence of some gradual change in library provision. The most striking example of this is the opening in early 2000 of joint library/one stop shop provision at Ford, one of the most socially deprived of Island's villages which has never benefited from either of these services. This initiative is a direct response to a community consultation exercise conducted in 1998, which is part of the council's community planning process (see Section 9.4). The new facility will combine library, advice centre and council access point services and will be staffed by a former member of Library Service staff with advice work / voluntary sector experience. It is too early yet to predict whether the joint service will be anything more than a simple marriage of convenience, but some strategy staff, notably RDO, hope that it will, and that in doing so it will become a model for a type of information access point that addresses both library and informational needs of a wide range of people, including those who have never used libraries.

9.4 Library Strategy and Community Consultation

One aspect of the "new" local government environment that is thus already impinging on library services in Island in particular, and Caledonia in general, is the inauguration by Caledonia Council of formal community planning processes, and, more specifically, professionally undertaken community consultation processes. In part these are driven by "Best Value" pressures from the Scottish Executive, but they are also, according to managers, particularly popular in Caledonia because of traditions of independence and community localism. Specifically, they have been associated with the decentralisation process taking place within the council, and the specific example studied here focusses on Island Area Cultural and Leisure Services Consultation.

The objective of this consultation involved, in the end, the preparation of an Island Area Cultural and Leisure Services Plan, including a plan for Library Services. As part of this process, the council had appointed a specialist community participation consultancy (CPC), based in Edinburgh, to canvass local opinion about Arts, Libraries, Recreation and Culture in Island and to suggest and prioritise ideas for improvement. As part of the consultation process, CPC organised a series of village meetings throughout the island and also, in some cases, interviewed people in more informal settings such as shops, pubs and the street. A specific objective of CPC's methodology is, according to the team

leader, "to reach people likely to exclude themselves from formal consultation". Within consultation events, too, consultation was organised around small groups using an evaluation method called an "H Form", designed to allow people to contribute ideas on "post it" notes and avoid the possibility of groups, or the whole meeting, being dominated by the articulate or vociferous (Community Participation Consultancy, 1999). The researcher attended one of these meetings as observer, and can witness that meetings, as a result, were not dominated by any one individual/ class or group.

In terms of output, each consultation aimed to generate a series of "likes" and "dislikes" about various services provided, coupled with a series of suggestions for improvement which were, in some cases, then polled to give some idea of community priorities. For example, consultation in Ford resulted in "Ideas for improved Leisure Provision" which prioritised the establishment of a Swimming Pool (103 votes); Cinema (83); Youth Centre (74); Youth Club (73); All weather Playing Field (71); Ten Pin Bowling (66) and Library (65)!. Around 30 other ideas, many achievable on less resources, rank lower down the list (Community Participation Consultancy, 1999).

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of these consultations, from a library service perspective, are the more qualitative comments on library strengths and weaknesses and suggestions for future developments. The Library Manager for Island area suggests that "generally people are happy with library services, but just want more of them". To some degree this is true: suggestions columns in the meeting are full of predictable demands for new libraries, more convenient opening hours, and longer stops for the mobile library. However, other lines of suggestion reveal that some members of the public can envisage a changed type of library service which incorporates new forms of access and new institutional forms. Thus, shared provision and resources/collections in Island Gaelic College and in schools and in village halls are all suggested. More futuristically, other ideas assimilate the impact of ICT: the mobile is reconceptualised as a "cyber café van" or an "IT van", and calls for access to the Library Service reservations system via the Internet are made.

Caledonia Libraries have, of course, already responded to some of these suggestions in the shape of the new joint provision at Ford. However, the consultation process does perhaps indicate that some (younger?) people are not content with the existing model of library services. In the information age, at least some people in remote communities now expect access to a much wider range of resources than that provided by a traditional mobile van. Providing such access, especially to people with multiple disadvantages of distance and poverty, disability or culture, will present substantial challenges to Caledonia Libraries and it may be that some major reconceptualisations of "library" services to remoter areas will be needed.

9.5   Cultural Exclusion, Gaelic Language and Public Library Policy

According to the Gaelic Development Worker (GDW) on Island, households which still speak Gaelic on an everyday basis in Scotland amount to around 2% of the total in Scotland, or about 66,000 people. However, the region covered by Caledonia Council is

155

one of the few remaining areas of Scotland with substantial numbers of Gaelic speakers, and percentages in areas like Island are certainly significantly higher than the national average. Moreover, in Caledonia as a whole there is wide support for the preservation and cultural recovery of Gaelic culture and language and the current campaign for the establishment of "secure" status for Gaelic as an official language in Scotland (see Communn na Gaidhlig, 1997). There are several strands to this campaign, including, popularly, the restoration and a recognition of a Gaelic "heritage". For Caledonia Council's Gaelic writer in residence (WR), however, the Gaelic movement is more about demystifying the idea that Gaelic is "on the periphery" and "excluded" from mainstream life. WR argues that Gaelic language is, and should be recognised, as the "core" of identity for many people in Scotland, and that in a modern context it parallels the need for Urdu speaking families in Glasgow to seek identity through their own language and culture:

> "Scotland is more multicultural than it's ever been and its important to reflect that in art, literature and libraries. Difference needn't be divisive..... I think the opposite, I think difference can bring people together"

Not all supporters of a Gaelic renaissance argue this way, but nevertheless there is sufficient cohesion of purpose in Caledonia to have led to the development of a comprehensive Gaelic strategy supported and promoted by the Council. One of the council's strategic goals is to " promote and support the indigenous heritage and cultures of Caledonia and to recognise the importance of heritage and culture in underpinning and strengthening our place in the contemporary world" (Caledonia Council, 1999). This policy is supported by a range of initiatives in education, community education, language development, arts and cultural policy and social and economic development. Important too is the idea that the objectives of Gaelic policy are "mainstreamed" throughout all service departments of the council, through ensuring that "new policies, procedures and publications where applicable are produced bi-lingually and are consistent with and relate to Gaelic strategy". A range of strategy groups and review mechanisms have been established to ensure that these policies are implemented.

As far as libraries are concerned, the Gaelic policy document proposes a number of specific actions which impinge on library activities, including the promotion of reading and writing in Gaelic, facilitating access to Gaelic resources and materials, and "promoting the production of Gaelic books, magazines and newspapers and ensuring that they are widely read ". In more specific terms, Caledonia Council supports a specialist library of Gaelic materials attached to a Gaelic College on Island, and is host to a writer in residence whose brief is to support and foster modern writing in Gaelic, as well as to participate more generally in Gaelic cultural events and promote Gaelic literature. The writer has conducted readings and workshops at a number of venues in libraries across Caledonia, and he believes these have been very well attended by a range of people of all ages and classes. Some have resulted in people sending him manuscripts, and pending publications.

More generally, however, Caledonia Libraries are experiencing difficulties in

implementing the Gaelic strategy on a widespread basis. Most libraries have collections of Gaelic material, and an increasing number of children's books, including bilingual material, is becoming available. However, the dearth of contemporary reading material tends to lead to Gaelic language books becoming marginalised a heritage "classics" and lacking in appeal to a younger readership. Most service staff are unclear about standards of provision, and these vary on a seemingly "ad hoc" basis from library to library. Practice on bilingual signage and guiding is also variable, and the limited use made of outreach/and or deposit collections limits the potential for libraries working in partnership with Gaelic community education projects.

There are , however, new opportunities. According to WR, the Internet represents a major step forward here with large numbers of Gaelic sites now becoming available with the capacity to "unite the Gaelic Diaspora" and promote writing and communication around modern themes. It presents, according to WR, a new opportunity for development and co-ordination of content - and it is not impossible to envisage libraries becoming involved here.

All of this suggests that, although libraries have had some success in this particular project, there is a need to develop a more specific libraries strategy which addresses Gaelic exclusion within the framework of overall council policy. This could clarify such issues as targeting, outreach and standards of service and point the way to more comprehensive, and more proactive, service provision in this sphere.

9.6   Analysis of Key Issues

9.6.1   The Caledonia case study provided an opportunity to examine the nature of social exclusion and local authority responses to it in a large, superficially rural, area of Scotland. The picture of exclusion that emerged confirmed our hypotheses about both the pervasiveness and complexity of exclusion as a problem, and at least two major models of exclusion were clearly apparent. The first category relates to pockets of "urban" exclusion found in many medium sized (10,000 -100000) settlements: here neighbourhoods often experience in microcosm many of the problems of deprivation typical of larger cities. The second, much rarer, category comprised "communities on the edge" where people experience material and social deprivation coupled with situations of extreme isolation, and the very existence of some communities is threatened as a result. Policies and strategies for tackling these differing forms of exclusion, it was clear, often needed different methodologies and ways of working.

9.6.2   In terms of its overall policy responses to exclusion, Caledonia Council has been heavily influenced by recent local government trends and thinking. Perhaps in part because it is such a large (in area) council, it has focussed on decentralisation and area and community based strategies, and on the process of community planning detailed in Section 9.4. This is linked to what is a very comprehensive effort to engage communities in consultation (including groups and neighbourhoods specifically targeted as "excluded"), which does seem to be delivering results. These general strategies are, moreover, overlaid by a regional Social Inclusion Partnership Strategy. This is a

geographically and thematically targeted strategy attempting to address what has been identified as one of the region's core drivers of exclusion (youth migration). Again in line with recent trends, this strategy foregrounds partnership approaches to problems of exclusion both at a strategic and local level.

9.6.3 Led by a management team committed to change, addressing exclusion and increasing the popularity of libraries, the library service has assimilated a number of these influences, especially at the level of policy and strategy. What was only 5 years or so ago a highly traditional branches / centre structure has been decentralised, and staffing resources and some decision-making have been devolved to areas. The Culture and Leisure Services directorate has also become significantly involved in community planning and consultation exercises and, as we have seen in Section 9.3, this has led to concrete results. Some reconfiguration of services and "joined up" service provision is also emerging in terms of the development of learning centres and libraries / one stop shops.

9.6.4 However, in other respects the library service has been slow to adopt the proactive approach to social exclusion embodied in the Social Inclusion Partnership Strategy. By and large, the service has not engaged in project based working, and the Gaelic Writer in Residence Project and Bookstart were the only initiatives of this type in evidence at the time of fieldwork. There was also little evidence of the targeting/prioritisation of particular excluded or deprived social groups such as elderly or unemployed people, youth or children - although to some extent this took place on an informal basis in terms of work such as that at Moorside noted in Section 9.3. The conscious targeting of resources at deprived / excluded communities was also not evident, and in locations such as deprived areas of inner Burgh there was a real issue about the visibility of library services at all. Altogether, the absence of this focussed approach seemed to have had the effect of making involvement in local projects and initiatives quite difficult to resource and generate

9.6.5 From the perspective of the researcher, the key reason for the general absence of such targeted approaches and initiatives was not inaction but the basic commitment by most staff in the library service to promoting *inclusion through a strategy of access and equal opportunity*. In terms of both stated policy and in terms of local practice, the library service basically operated on the basis that inclusion amounts to ensuring that a service of good standard was available equally to everyone, especially those disadvantaged by distance and geography. By and large, the service has therefore resisted providing specialised services targeted at social groups, or services that vary heavily according to local needs. "Outreach" is also thus conceptualised in the service mainly as mobile services which are microcosms of the whole, or "promotion" of the core library services.

9.6.6 Interestingly, this approach is, of course, one which characterises *New Library - the People's Network* and it is no surprise that the ICT policy of the library service is heavily influenced by this. The aspirations of the library service are basically to extend the concept of equality of access into the "information age" and ensure inclusion through access to ICT irrespective of disadvantage by distance or other impairment.

158

Most library users in Caledonia, as the consultation exercise proved, obviously support this vision and it seems likely that it will be ultimately realised. However, it was interesting that some non-library central policy staff did question this "universal" vision and advocated more targeted and specific initiatives which, they argued, would address more closely the specifics of "informational" exclusion in particular communities.

9.6.7   One other explanation of absence of "proactive" approaches at local level lies in the structure and nature of local staffing. Like many largely rural library services with small branches, libraries in Caledonia are often single staffed by non-professional grade staff and in terms of time and resources this limited the potential for outreach, contact with non-users, and project based working. Moreover, although frontline staff interviewed for this project were mainly local and assumed to "know" community needs, most had a very traditional perspective of the role and purpose of libraries. Significantly, where this was not the case (Moorside) a much wider range of activities and community contact appeared to be taking place, and a more proactive approach to the needs of "non" library users was evident.

9.6.8   In the end, of course, this raises the question as to what kind of library service the public - and, more specifically, excluded sections of it - want. The Library Manager in Island, who claimed that "generally people are happy with library services, they just want more of them" is correct in the sense that this is the majority verdict of the Caledonia consultations (and many other similar exercises). However, as we have seen in Section 9.4, it is clear that some users see the need for new, more flexible institutional forms, joint provision and the like, and there is evidence that Caledonia, under pressure to rationalise resources because of geography, is edging towards the development of at least some of these. Moreover, it is also unclear that simply "more of the same" will address the difficult, and to some extent unique, problems of social exclusion facing Caledonia Council. Innovation, targeting, flexibility will, we think, at least to some degree need to be the order of the day.

9.7   Summary and Conclusion

9.7.1   In summary, it seems possible to view Caledonia Library Service as one which continues to operate on the basis of a traditional approach to social inclusion, based on the provision of a high standard of public service to all and the elimination of inequalities of access, especially those linked to distance and geographical location. This has led to:
- a high standard of core library provision and high levels of use of the service, given the geographic size of the authority
- the relatively successful creation of a system which supports users who live in very remote locations.

9.7.2   However, whilst this approach goes some way towards underpinning inclusion, it nevertheless leads to:
- a service which is relatively inflexible and uniform and involved in targeting and project based working only on the margins of its activities.

- ways of working at local level which are, in the main, reactive rather than proactive and which do not always recognise the needs of disadvantaged groups.

9.7.3 Currently, library policies designed to enhance the *inclusiveness* of the service rely heavily on its modernisation and the development of access to ICT networks. Whilst this is clearly a progressive development, we are not convinced that this alone will tackle *exclusion*. Studies in other authorities have suggested strongly that ICT provision needs to be focussed and accompanied by good levels of staff support if it is to successfully help excluded groups.

9.7.4 Other policy developments, however, especially those linked to Caledonia Council's decentralisation and community planning initiatives, seem in the long term to be promising from an exclusion perspective. Such trends include:

- the devolution of staff to area level and the resulting opportunities for them to work more proactively with communities
- the joint initiatives in service development with other council departments and local communities, which introduce new models of provision
- the development of rigorous and thorough methods of community consultation which take the issue of "exclusion" and the views of excluded people seriously.

Overall, it seems to us that the Library Service needs to underpin these developments with more flexible strategies of resource allocation which incorporate a greater degree of targeting of groups and communities based on social need. If it can do this, it will surely move nearer towards the local authority's goal of

"achieving for all the people of Caledonia, as far as is practicable, equality in service levels, in access to services and communications, and to tackle disadvantage wherever and however it arises"
(Caledonia Council 1998 p.29).

Documents Referred to in this Case Study

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10. Central Education and Library Board Case Study

10.1 Introduction

This case study, within a Northern Ireland education and library board, provided the opportunity to consider dimensions of cultural / religious exclusion that only apply within the Ulster context. Aspects that are specific to Northern Ireland include an equal opportunities context encompassing the Province's Policy and Fair Treatment Initiative (PAFT) (Northern Ireland Office 1999). Northern Ireland also has a longstanding tradition of significant community development work and a more recently developed programme *New Targeting Social Need*, or New TSN (Northern Ireland Office, 1998). It is hoped that this programme will, like the PAFT initiative, contribute:-

> "to redressing the unequal distribution of unemployment between the
> Catholic and Protestant communities. At present the unemployment rate
> for Catholic men is twice that for Protestant men."
> (Northern Ireland Office, 1998, p.12)

It should also be noted that the fieldwork was carried out in late October / early November 1999, just before the breakthrough in negotiations which led to the establishment of the Northern Ireland Executive. The interviews therefore reflected relative pessimism about the peace process.

One of the five Northern Ireland Education and Library Boards, CELB covers a predominantly rural area (other than parts of a major urban area) with a low population density and few large towns. It comprises nine local government districts, with a total estimated population of about 380,000 (CELB, 1999a). Only one of the district council areas is controlled by the nationalist political parties, reflecting the mainly Protestant / loyalist population of the Board area.[8]

In terms of the specific equal opportunities issues applying to Northern Ireland, the Board has a legal obligation to monitor recruitment and selection policies on the grounds of "perceived religious affiliation." CELB has widened this to include gender, marital status, disability and race. There is no policy covering orientation or age discrimination. Fair employment legislation is very stringent, with the Board having to carry out a three yearly review of workforce compositions, practice and policies, so that it can draw up "Affirmative Action Programmes." This system appeared to work well within the Board. Since monitoring started in 1990, the proportion of Catholics has increased every year by 2-3%, with libraries being fairly typical of the Board as a whole - that is, with a slight under-representation, but an ongoing improvement. This shift has been achieved through good practice, such as training for selection panel members, not quotas. The make-up of the workforce is not "mapped" against the community served, but this was something which might, in the future, be addressed through the Equalities Schemes. The schemes have replaced PAFT (Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment), and

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[8] According to case study interviews.

derive from the Good Friday Agreement. Public sector bodies are compelled to draw up Equalities Schemes, that is processes to appraise existing or new policies. It can be anticipated that the schemes will have a significant impact and we were told that it was likely that the five Education and Library Boards would take a collective approach to this major area of work.

Turning to the library service, the "neutral modernisation" found in the Welshborough case study can also be detected in the Central Education and Library Board. Various changes have taken place since the arrival of the Chief Librarian about four years ago. These include computerisation of almost all static libraries, broadening the range of materials and some decentralisation, for example, of stock selection work. The library service has a significant commitment to customer service and quality issues, having been awarded a Charter Mark in 1999. In recent years, the library service has been reorganised into a group structure, as compared to the previous branch structure. In addition to group librarians, this system also includes team librarians for information and children's work.

Historically, the Board has had a policy of providing library services to areas with relatively small catchment populations and has a network of 37 static libraries. More recently, the Board's library committee has developed policies on the provision of library services in rural areas, reflecting a concern with rural deprivation (CELB Library Committee, 1996).

Social exclusion is referred to in the library service's strategic plan for 1999-2004 (CELB, 1999b). In preliminary discussions with the research team, the Chief Librarian had identified two open and distance learning initiatives (the Townside Open Learning Centre and the European project) as the main existing initiatives aimed at addressing social exclusion. Following discussions with her, it was agreed to focus on these in the fieldwork, and on declining conventional library use at Newland, a deprived estate in an "outer city" area. The pilot Internet access project at Mountside Library, located in a rural area, was also briefly considered. There was also a wider policy level to the study. This included interviews with the Chief Librarian, one of the Assistant Chief Librarians and three local politicians (two of whom were interviewed as part of the area study of Newland). An interview was also held with a representative of the TSN programme.

The next section of the report provides an overview of the Board and library service context, reporting on these policy and management level interviews. After this, the report offers broadly descriptive accounts of the following four services or initiatives:-
- Library use at Newland;
- European distance learning project;
- Townside Open Learning Centre;
- Pilot public access to the Internet project at Mountside.

This is then followed by a discussion of the overall themes emerging from the case study and a summary of the main issues. Individual conclusions are also provided for each of the main elements of the case study and can be read separately if required (see 10.2.4, 10.3.5, 10.4.4, 10.5.4 and 10.6.5).

10.2 Policy and Management perspectives

Some overarching policy issues are considered in this section, which draws on interviews with the chief librarian, one of the assistant chief librarians, the lead officer for the Board's TSN programme and a Board member. The report of the interviews with library management also contains more general information about library services, to supplement the details of the specific projects and services contained in sections 10.3 to 10.6.

10.2.1 Discussion with local politician

This interviewee[9] considered that "the Board has never really targeted deprivation because ... *Targeting Social Need* has only recently become an agenda item." In the past, "people outside the Board would have had a view about its attitude to non-unionist areas, which would be very negative," but he had not encountered discrimination during the period of his involvement, over the last six years.

Although social exclusion may have moved up the agenda in England since 1997, it has been present in Northern Ireland (as Targeting Social Need) "mainly as a result of the troubles, for the last ten years or so." He questioned whether there is "more lip service paid to [social exclusion] than real economic clout" and said the Board had never identified "the areas of greatest need" in its area.

There was an Ulster dimension in that "it boils down to green and orange at the end of the day, because the majority of the disadvantaged areas are west of the Bann," which are predominantly nationalist. The authorities are "trying their best to be equal to all people," but deprivation remains higher in nationalist areas. At the same time, "the Catholic community is very strong from a community involvement point of view" (discussed further in relation to Newland, see section 10.3.5), but the Catholic feeling would be that, historically, "nobody would ever give them anything unless they fought for it."

On the relevance of libraries to social inclusion, this local politician said:-

> "I've never looked at libraries as a mechanism for involving people, but they probably should be. We have one in most towns, they are generally neutral venues... My view is they're not perhaps used enough outside the library hours... You would seldom say to a group 'we're having a meeting in the library tonight.'"

He added that the library would be "the most neutral venue to meet," saying that the chief librarian has insisted on the provision of meeting spaces in new libraries. However,

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[9] Although providing a perspective on Board policy, this interview should also be read as a counterpoint to the interview with two Board members from the Protestant area of Newland (see 3.4).

"they've not been seen as a venue for the community; they are seen as a place where you go to borrow books, and they still have the stigma attached, I suppose, that they're a place of academia, and not necessarily a place where the working class will be seen." Although the chief librarian was "very good" and had "modernised the whole thing" there was "still a perception that the library is books."

10.2.2 Discussion with TSN programme manager

Historically, the Board, apart from Government and DENI (Department of Education, Northern Ireland) initiatives, rarely targeted resources beyond its statutory responsibilities.

The proposed New Targeting Social Need framework within Northern Ireland was known and it was envisaged that this programme would have a "major effect on the Board's work." The Board was aware of this and had set up a TSN / New Opportunities Fund (NOF) committee which might be given a co-ordinating role with TSN, but would deal with initiatives emanating from the developing NOF activities. The remit developed by the TSN/NOF committee sought to ensure that those monies notionally allocated to the Board were bid for and grants allocated were spent within the Board.

Discussion took place on work within pockets of deprivation, principally local Protestant communities (like Newland) which may or may not exist within a paramilitary environment. It was noted that it was extremely difficult to penetrate some of these communities, which was in stark contrast to Catholic communities, which, invariably, had the organisation and knowledge to successfully compete for available grants. It was noted, especially in rural communities, that Catholic parents were proactive in pursuing their children's educational attainment.

The manager indicated the need to be flexible in the approach used to combat social exclusion; he was clearly concerned that TSN policies should address need when and where it existed. Current initiatives tended to identify deprivation, disadvantage, disaffection and exclusion and provide remedies through existing resources. Resource-led solutions had significant potential not to reach those they were designed to help. Government policies, including TSN, were giving a clear direction towards meeting need. This manager felt this could only go so far; it was up to those closer to local communities to empower individuals or communities to react to, and have the ability to respond to, the needs of their people. Many communities needed such support to provide them with the skills and abilities to seek funding. Existing form filling and referring reports through a line management structure had been demonstrated as having limited value in these situations.

10.2.3 Discussion with library management

The chief librarian said that there had so far been little library service involvement in corporate strategies to address social exclusion through the New TSN programme. Social exclusion had, for the first time, been included in the service's strategic planning and was described as:-

"...one more thing that ... we have to think about when we develop new services. It's not given top priority ... [but] it's now having to be considered consciously for the first time."

The library service itself did not have "any statistics and indicators of social need, and that's something that we're looking at, at the moment" (e.g. by working with a local university). Official figures were used to identify social exclusion, for example Health Board figures have been used in targeting the pilot Bookstart project. This became problematic because health visitors were "unwilling to divulge names of disadvantaged families [so] we can't actually follow up to know whether it's been of any use or not." The chief librarian therefore thought "blanket coverage of this kind of project, which is what we're aiming to do, would therefore be much more effective." It was easier to target communities than families. She also mentioned literacy and Read to Succeed programmes, with classes in libraries, which are targeted at "single mums, or mums whose children who are not doing well at school" which can identify particular families "but quite often, I'm sure, they don't actually come near us."[10]

As well as these two examples, the needs of excluded groups and communities were addressed through the library service's "health and welfare services." These included services to visually impaired people; housebound people; hospitals and institutions. There was also a children's summer story bus, going to areas of rural isolation or big housing estates lacking facilities. These were described as "probably our only formal outreach services," other than class visits (which included special schools). The chief librarian added that the "fact that we run the whole thing centrally is outdated, and I think we need to do very much more at local level through local branch libraries, and possibly even using local knowledge and some volunteers ...particularly in terms of the housebound service."

There was no targeting of resources on particular libraries. There were a range of indicators to identify "libraries which need attention" e.g. issues per staff hour, stock per capita. However, this response might be, as at Newland where issues were low, "we can't put any more money into it, let's close it for more hours because you've always got to meet your budget target." Refinement of these indicators has been discussed, e.g. using weightings for social need to justify, say, more staff. The chief librarian identified a tension "between managing your budget effectively and meeting those sorts of needs, and, of course, we're under pressure the whole time from the department to show increased usage, increased issues, and money is tending to be targeted on that."

There were no special posts targeted at excluded groups or areas, other than a long-standing vacancy for a Bookstart Co-ordinator. Other posts were needed, most notably in learning support. Social exclusion was not taken account of in budgeting processes and the usual message from the Board was that there was no additional funding. Partnerships and external funding were therefore seen as "as the main way forward."

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[10] Another interviewee commented, however, that Read to Succeed courses had a higher take-up at Townside Library than in the local school, as parents who had had a bad experience of formal education were more comfortable with visiting the library than the school.

Co-operation with other agencies was also needed to help identify and meet different areas' needs. Two new libraries had been achieved though working with community development groups. She mentioned the Townside Centre (see section 5) as an example of community involvement and a successful partnership approach. Although there was more scope for initiatives of this kind, other experiences had been less positive, for example a collaboration with a community group to develop an open learning centre and other services, which:-

> "... fell through in the end because we couldn't come up with any additional funding to match them. So they were proposing a massive project, which was going to improve every part of the building except the bit where the library was, and we couldn't actually provide any funding within their timescale to meet that, and in the end they went away and did it somewhere else."

Despite such problems, partnerships have resulted in developments that otherwise would not have happened.

Generally, the chief librarian thought libraries should have the potential to overcome exclusion and disadvantage "as having a permanent presence, being open and as a place that some people do take for granted." She (and her assistant chief) identified barriers to libraries achieving this potential, saying:-

> "There are barriers in our buildings, they tend to look institutional and they tend to be associated with the establishment. There may be barriers in our staff, who may not necessarily welcome disadvantaged people."

The library service had to change to attract "particularly younger people." However, she "wouldn't like to think we were working towards becoming a ghetto service for disadvantaged users though, because I think that's equally bad, and we've got a lot of loyal and long-term users who rely on the library service, and they've still got to be served." The CIPFA PLUS survey had revealed proportionately low use by unemployed people. She attributed this to, in the past, "never having much of an information service" and a lack of marketing of the library as a place to study. She had tried to change the previous home lending orientation, but thought this image persisted.

The Assistant Chief Librarian agreed with most or all of these points. She also mentioned the importance of Best Value in challenging existing practice and consulting with excluded communities. Best Value could "back up and inform TSN strategy." She added that existing initiatives were already being used to challenge entrenched practices and attitudes:-

> "We've made a start, not particularly in terms of TSN. In terms of all the other management things that we've done, it's starting to change staff's perceptions of how we do things. ... [The Charter Mark] is changing the way that we think about how we manage the service and how we involve the community, how we involve users. That's a start of the cascade."

167

10.2.4 Conclusion

Taken collectively, these interviews show a service that has modernised, but where libraries are still seen as having a home lending or academic image and as being distant from many within the communities they serve. Library managers were aware of many of the factors preventing people from using libraries. Further, they identified a need for more devolution of decision-making, to enable staff to be more responsive to communities; significantly, the Board's TSN manager, who worked with some of the most deprived communities in the Board's area, also emphasised the importance of "empowering" local staff.

There were already some examples of partnerships with local community groups, of which the Townside Centre was seen as the most successful. The Townside Centre was also an example of how the initiatives and services most directly addressing social exclusion were in the broad area of learning and, to a lesser extent, literacy and reading (e.g. Bookstart). Beyond this, there was little explicit targeting on areas of social need in the library service's policies, although the developments described by the TSN manager suggested that, in the future, all the Board's services would have to be more responsive to local need.

10.3 Area study of Newland Library

This section is largely based on discussions with two local politicians and three library staff, as well as supporting documentation provided by the library service.

10.3.1 Newland

The Newland estate is located on the outskirts of a major urban area. There has been a significant decline in the estate's population in recent years. The population peaked during the 1970s at 17,000 and has declined to 8,500.[11] Newland contains 3,800 dwellings constructed between 1953 and 1973. The housing stock consists of houses, flats, maisonettes and bungalows. Newland was a popular choice in the 1960s and 70s with neighbouring factory estates offering excellent employment opportunities, but now the level of housing demand in the area has fallen. It is difficult to re-let accommodation, especially in non-traditional style housing, and voids become quickly vandalised.

The facilities in Newland are generally under-developed. There is a limited variety of shops with an overall poor appearance. There are three primary schools and one secondary school in or adjacent to the Newland estate, but limited formal play areas (although there is a grassed area with football pitches). Newland is identified as an area of social need: a key priority for action for CELB and the present government. Options have been explored for improving services in Newland and ensuring that they meet the needs of the local community. In 1999, a new community centre opened, providing facilities such as a Citizens Advice Bureau, nursery and credit union.

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[11]Communication from group librarian; this figure is based on information from several agencies.

10.3.2 Newland Library

Newland library has suffered a significant decline in use over recent years, as shown by the issue figures:
1994/95: 78,413
1995/96: 77,043
1996/97: 70,339
1997/98: 59,907
1998/99: 63,614

Total issues from April - September 1999 were 29,544 compared, over the same six-month period, with 32,156 in 1998/99 and 31,337 in 1997/98. The library has 1,574 adult and 869 junior members.

An action plan (CELB, 1998a) to boost the use made of the library was drawn up and implemented in 1998-99, resulting in some increase in use. The fall-off in use appears to be linked to the declining population and to social problems within the estate, which make the library less attractive to people from surrounding areas. According to information provided by local staff, Newland is falling short on all the Board's indicators for a 'middle-scale' library (i.e. issues per non-professional staff hour; cost per issue; stock per capita; stock turnover; membership per head of population).

The opening hours were changed in November 1999 from two late nights and a half-day Saturday to one late night and open all-day Saturday. The effects of these changes on library use were being monitored. In the meantime, efforts to increase use were continuing and targets for performance were to be agreed with local staff. As a means of attracting more users, alternative uses for some of the space available in the library were also under consideration.

10.3.3 Discussion with library staff

The local situation had improved since the Peace Process began. The staff were tolerant and people were not asked to leave the library until "they hang themselves." Young people used the library for social activities such as chess, jigsaws and a PC with CD-ROMs. "Difficult" behaviour among young users was sporadic, but could be disruptive, and included offensive verbal abuse directed at library staff as well as stone throwing, graffiti (both inside and outside the building) and damage to library furniture. Staff often did not know the parents of young library users. Few people in the 16-25 age group used the library.

Staff were trying to get local groups to visit the library and use it as a community centre for information and events. Staff had also attempted to make the stock more popular and relevant to the community through reservations and circulating collections. Charges were applied to services such as videos, but income generation was low. An effort was being made to encourage parents to join. There had been a rule that parents had to come to the library with their child to sign the child's joining form. Now as part of an ongoing

169

programme with local primary schools, registration cards are sent home from school with children and completed cards are returned to the library via the school so that the borrower cards can be ready for use when children visit the library with their class. This initiative was specifically covered in the branch action plan. Other activities covered in the plan included: resuming school visits (which was possible following an increase in staffing); developing the community information section; and visiting community groups "to raise our profile as a community service." The plan is described as an "on-going set of actions, aimed at getting the community to 'take ownership' of their library" (CELB, 1998a).

10.3.4 Discussion with local politicians

For these two local politicians, social exclusion in the context of Northern Ireland was associated with exclusion from and by the establishment. Policies were top down and solutions were imposed. Ministers were more concerned with "cutting tapes for civil servants than engaging with local communities." Poverty was actually increasing on the estate. In terms of education, the 11-plus school system perpetuated inequalities. There were effectively two tiers of schooling in Northern Ireland. The grammar schools were good but these only helped a very narrow band of pupils. Working class children had low expectations and sought work in traditional places such as the docks.

Targeting Social Need, mentioned above as the strategy for tackling social exclusion, was regarded as divisive. It reflected the Government's policy to replace universal benefits with means testing. The Welfare State acted as social glue, binding communities together; without it, communities will be less cohesive.

It was strongly emphasised that the Protestant and Catholic communities had different approaches to issues, including social exclusion. Protestants tended to take an individual approach while the Catholics were more collective. Some examples were given:-
- when there was a problem with the local drains, individual Protestants got straight onto the Council demanding action; Catholics tried to resolve the problem amongst themselves before contacting the Council collectively;
- there is a lower take up of benefits by the Protestant community;
- there are more funding bids submitted by the Catholic community;
- working class Catholics have a stronger learning habit and are more willing to take up learning opportunities.

These local politicians said that there were more job vacancies than unemployed people, which indicated a serious skills gap. Information and communications technology (ICT) was regarded as a panacea for social exclusion, but there were no easy solutions. In their view, CELB had the task of implementing flawed policies which were driven forward by civil servants.

Libraries were low down on the Board's priority list, but there was cross-party consensus that libraries were "a good thing." The Board was broad-based and represented all interests and was not dominated by party politics.

They felt that there was no reading habit on the estate, which is significant when people needed to be able to read and understand issues such as the Good Friday Agreement. There were a number of initiatives to boost reading levels, as a route to skills development. These initiatives need to be more "bottom up." A strong oral history tradition existed, which could be tapped into. For example, local people could be asked to talk about their experiences over the past 30 years. Some local people had also written about their experiences and these people could be used as community role models.

Local people "are not joiners" and care must be taken as to how to encourage them into the library (for example "do not go knocking their doors at 5.30pm"). Finally, people tended to use the library for utilitarian rather than holistic purposes.

10.3.5 Conclusion

The conclusions of this specific area study can be seen in terms of the strengths and weaknesses of Newland Library.

Strengths
1. Links with schools and with community groups, such as adult learners.
2. Positive staff attitude.
3. Management support and commitment: at senior level a new popular culture is being introduced into the library service and there is also support and commitment at group and team levels.
4. The branch action plan in which specific members of staff have undertaken to take forward activities relating to junior and adult membership.
5. Outreach activities.
6. The library is valued and seen as a neutral space.
7. The library is used by children and core / long term-residents (mostly elderly).
8. The inside of the library is attractive.
9. There is a well-defined catchment area: the Newland estate.

Weaknesses
1. No qualitative performance measures have been considered: quantitative indicators such as issues are in decline, but other activities are not being measured.
2. Limited devolution of resources and local stock selection.
3. Limited community involvement (although the branch action plan addresses community ownership).
4. The library is seen as being education based.
5. Staffing resources are stretched: a team librarian was not in post at the time of the case study[12].
6. Limited external funding.
7. Under-used by parents.
8. The outside of the library is unattractive (although staff pointed out that windows

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[12] This post has, however, been filled since the case study was completed.

have had to be covered with grilles because of the frequency with which the glass was broken).

10.4 European Distance Learning Project

Interviews were carried out with one of the project investigators from the University involved in the project (with the Assistant Chief Librarian also contributing to the discussion) and the information team librarian based at Northglen Library. In addition to her information role for the North group of libraries, this postholder also had management responsibility for Northglen and three other libraries.

10.4.1 The European project

The European project is funded through the EC Framework 5 Telematics for Libraries programme. Its aim is "to look at the possibilities of distance learning via the public library," with a focus on "providing really good courses that were available over the Internet for people in public libraries." The project has five main partners in different countries, one of which is the nearby University.

CELB has a local partnership with the University, providing two test sites at the Townside Centre and Northglen Library (although the focus here is on the provision at Northglen). The university provides development of the project's list of open learning resources and the "database behind the list" (so the project is "dynamic," in that it can be interrogated, rather than just being a list of pages). From CELB's point of view, the project offered a chance "to dip our toe in the water as regards European funded projects" and to offer free Internet access.

The project is considering the role that libraries' provision of distance facilities can play both in rural areas and for people who "have been excluded from the conventional learning processes." Here,

> "...the idea is that the public library provides a fairly friendly environment in which to come in to pursue fairly worthy educational objectives. ... So we're really looking at how easy this is to do and what the opportunities are."

A further aim of the project relates to the roles played by libraries and their staff, extending from the basic function of providing a physical environment for learning (especially for those who do not have computers at home) to the librarian's role in helping the user find distance learning courses or acting as an "honest broker" when the user is taking a test online.

The project investigator felt that the local project had been successful in providing Internet access, but it was "too soon to say in terms of actual distance learning." There had been interest in the project's catalogue of resources, but most people were reluctant to pay for courses "where they don't know what they're getting," so the project was

focusing on free provision. The assistant chief librarian added that the University for Industry had expressed interest in the project's resources, and the "quality guarantee" it could offer would change this reluctance (especially as individuals would have access to Individual Learning Accounts).

The project was seen as relevant to social exclusion in that it focused on material and resources suitable for those returning to work, not degree level material, and also because Internet access was free of charge. It was admitted, however, that many users at Northglen (unlike the Townside Centre, discussed at 5 below) were "relatively peripherally" interested in learning.

Both staff were very positive about the workings of the partnership itself, although there had been some technical problems. Support for users was also an issue as the information librarian was not always on site.

10.4.2 Local delivery of the project

Northglen is a market town with a population of about 10,000, but with users from a larger rural area. The local librarian described it as a mainly farming community. The library is in a large 1960s building, some way from the main shopping area. The European project's two PCs and open learning collection are found in a corner of the library.

The information librarian was responsible for the project because she was based at Northglen which had, in turn, been selected because it was a rural area. She felt that work on the project had been "thrown at me." No additional staffing had been provided to take account of the project. She had not had any formal training at the start of the project and had had to use "trial and error" when troubleshooting Internet problems. This had caused significant delays and difficulties for users during the first months of the project, something which also had an impact for other library staff (as her other responsibilities meant that she was sometimes based elsewhere).

Although the original aspiration was for the Internet to be used as an educational tool, it was "not going that way at the moment." Her perception of the "real world" was different to that of the project partners based at the university:-

> "They have a notion that … people will come in and they're going to go
> to the [project] gateway and use this and they're going to get educated.
> … The reality is not like that at all."

There was some use by students and by those seeking work, but the main two categories of user were people seeing "what it's all about," often because they were considering buying a PC, and people using e-mail and chat facilities. The librarian gave examples of individuals starting to use e-mail (a form of "learning as well") to keep in contact with relatives overseas. More generally, she saw the benefits of the project as the "mere fact that it's here," that the library service was helping make the "information age" more accessible and familiar to local people.

The service was really only educational "in that they're learning to use the Internet." Although the librarian had tried to promote use of the Internet for distance learning, there had been no interest in this, which she attributed to people wanting to work in a more supportive environment (like the local FE College). Here, she thought that most learners would prefer the more "structured" kind of provision offered by the Townside Centre, but having tutor sessions was not feasible given that the project had only two PCs.

The fact that the service was free added to its popularity, with 243 registered users. The team librarian doubted whether this use crossed over to increased library membership or issues (although these had increased over the period of the project).

There were problems caused by low level vandalism and also people changing PC settings, but the librarian felt that she now had the technical ability to deal with this. She did, however, express some criticisms of the amount of back-up offered by the university. For example, there were ongoing problems with printer connections and she felt that more software should have been pre-loaded ("the PCs were brought in here and it was a question of 'get on with it'").

10.4.3 Community issues

Like all other library staff, the team librarian emphasised the neutrality of the library service. She added that the library was built on land belonging to the health service, next to the local hospital, which again increased the sense of being on neutral ground.

10.4.4 Conclusion

This project showed something of a gap between rhetoric and reality. The aims of the European project are clearly relevant to the objective of tackling social exclusion. However, at this stage of its development, the actual use of the project does not appear to connect too closely with the stated aim of promoting open learning in a local setting. The idea behind the facility at Northglen could be seen as an example of the library as "the local learning place" (DCMS, 1999, p.17). Instead, the Internet access provided by the project was actually being used for e-mail and chat room facilities, and for finding recreational information.

Although the discussion here has focussed on provision at Northglen, it should be noted that the free ICT access provided by the European project also supported the work of the Townside Centre, where there was much more of a demonstrable educational impact (discussed at section 10.5 below).

The partnership between the library service and the university was, as described by those with a more strategic involvement, a success. However, the information librarian clearly felt that there should have been more technical support from the University. There was also some common ground with the Welshborough case study in the sense that hardware provision and free access to ICT had not (initially at least) been matched with the

174

necessary training. Another parallel with the work in Welshborough was the pressure on staff time to support existing and new services.

10.5   The Townside Open Learning Centre

The visit to the Townside Centre comprised discussions with the group librarian and a course tutor at the Centre (who was based at the local higher and further education college), with a few contributions from one or two of her students. The interviews were supplemented by written material.

10.5.1 Townside Library and estate

Townside Library is located in a small neighbourhood centre on a deprived estate on the edge of one of the main towns in the Board area. The Townside estate, like the library, dates from the late 1970s. The group librarian said that the estate had never really developed as intended, due to people who originally wanted to live there being housed elsewhere before the estate had been completed. The library itself has performed poorly in terms of issues, cost and stock turnover, and opening hours have been cut over the years (i.e. a parallel situation to that currently existing at Newland). The neighbourhood centre contains a pub, post office and one or two other shops. Although it was rundown, the tutor and the group librarian were agreed that the centre had been "rejuvenated" over recent years, and a local developer had recently bought all the units.

Townside was described as a "good estate" by the group librarian (she mentioned the community spirit there and the overall physical environment appeared reasonable), but is characterised by high levels of unemployment and low levels of educational attainment.

10.5.2 The Townside Centre

The Townside Centre, based in the library, opened in September 1997 and is supported by a partnership between the library service, the college and the Townside Community Association. The centre was an outcome of existing links between the library service and the college. The two individuals interviewed had previously worked together to establish a basic skills collection at the nearby town's library, in response to the needs of the tutor's students. Some of these students came from Townside, and expressed the need for an informal centre on the estate to help with residents' basic skills. The centre developed from this point, with an approach then being made to the estate's community association. For the library service, the centre was also an opportunistic use of the room freed up by the children's library being relocated to the main library area. The centre was initially funded by Peace and Reconciliation money allocated through the local authority. It is now an accredited community education centre for the college, which brings in funding, dependent on the courses run. It receives additional support from the college and library service.

The community association is based next door to the library (which also means that users attending the centre can leave children at the playgroup at the community

association). The centre has separate access from the main library and they have different opening times. There is good wheelchair access and a number of disabled people attend the centre's sessions. The centre holds sessions on three mornings, four afternoons and one evening per week.

In an area of low educational attainment, the centre aims to provide an opportunity for individuals "to develop …and empower themselves." It provides a "comfortable environment," which the librarian saw as "more appealing" to many users than a college setting (something which was confirmed by the tutor and students, as described below).

Other than the course tutors, the main resources available to the centre (some provided in the library) are eight PCs, video, listening facilities, fax, photocopier and study materials. Townside is the second site for the European Project, which provides free Internet access for the Centre's users. Apart from the basic skills tutor interviewed, there were two other tutors providing regular sessions at the Townside Centre (covering numeracy and IT). An illustrative list of courses would include basic computing (Clait 1 and 2), English, maths, family literacy, personal development, job search skills, interview skills, interpersonal skills and first aid. The tutor said that she aimed to accredit as many courses as possible (e.g. through the Open College Network). The tutor also sought to guide people to a further level of provision, as appropriate. She gave examples of students who had moved on to NVQs, access courses and volunteer tutor courses in basic skills ("a lovely progression route" for former basic skills students).

The tutor was emphatic that users were "far happier accessing courses outside the college." She described how older users, lacking confidence in their educational ability, were intimidated in an environment dominated by 16-18 year olds. She also emphasised the importance of gaining accredited qualifications for those with low educational attainment. According to a questionnaire completed by basic skills students, using the centre had improved their confidence and self-esteem. The group librarian acknowledged that this was a difficult thing to measure but, again, many examples of these kind of benefits were documented in a booklet compiled by basic skills students. According to the tutor, the centre was an "important part of [students'] lives," providing structure to their lives. The tutor saw the centre as "building an environment of helping each other … building the community." The local community saw the centre as "their centre."

The librarian agreed that the partnership with the community association had added to this feeling of ownership (for example, the community association had painted the outside of the library building). The building was respected and the tutor felt the centre had rejuvenated the neighbourhood centre which had been "very rundown and depressing." The librarian agreed that the estate was slowly improving, and that, by continuing to support the Townside Centre, the local authorities were "keeping faith" with the estate. The centre, and the partnership around it, had been the catalyst for future developments, notably a planned cybercafé and IT training centre, which was to be located in the neighbourhood centre.

The tutor said that although the centre had "more than proved itself ... we could do so much more" with resources to provide more sessions. There was, in particular, a demand for IT training. Often courses were only viable with more students than the centre could accommodate. Financial restrictions, especially uncertainty over continued funding, appeared to be the only significant constraint on the success of the project. There were some issues around partnership, with the librarian comparing the more bureaucratic approaches of the library service to the more laissez faire attitude of the community association. The librarian emphasised the strengths that each partner brought to the project while recognising the cultural differences of each organisation. Finally, the group librarian saw the Townside Centre as an important contributory factor in a 39% increase in issues during 1998/9.

10.5.3 Community issues

Despite its presence in a staunchly (and very visibly) Protestant neighbourhood, the group librarian said that both religious communities used the Townside Centre. Membership information supports this to some extent.[13] She felt that the Education and Library Boards were perceived as non-sectarian. The tutor generally agreed with this, saying the centre worked "right across the divide ... there's no barriers here." She did, however, suggest that walking through the estate might, especially at certain times of year, be intimidating for people from the nationalist community.

10.5.4 Conclusion

From the description above, it seems clear that the supportive learning environment provided by the Townside Centre had significant individual benefits. It was also stated to have some broader regeneration spin-offs and, from the perspective of the library service and the college, was a strikingly successful partnership.[14] Having said this, both the tutor and the group librarian repeatedly used the words "it's very frustrating," in relation to the struggle for funding and the inability to meet demand / need because of lack of resources.

The library service was planning to use the Townside Centre as a model in other localities. The librarian, who had previously worked at Newland, felt that that this model would be successful there because of the strength of its community association and the enthusiasm of local staff.

10.6   Pilot public access to the Internet project at Mountside

This section is based on interviews with two library staff (one of whom had been the

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[13] Membership figures for August 1998-February 1999 show that 18 out of 202 members are Catholics. This compares to 101 Protestants, but the picture is not entirely clear because of the 66 people not stating their religion.
[14] It would have been useful to have had the perspective of the local community association on these two points, but unfortunately their representative had to cancel the planned interview.

information librarian leading the Internet project) and supporting documentation provided by CELB. Because the Mountside Internet project was an intrinsically smaller subject than either the Townside Centre or the European project (i.e. it was essentially a trial for a proposed new service, with no other partners involved) these interviews were wider ranging than those at Townside and Northglen. This section therefore also briefly considers some other issues, most notably Irish language.

10.6.1 Mountside Library

Mountside is situated in the predominantly nationalist part of the Board's area. It is a rural town with a population of about 3,000, although the library's catchment population is 6,000, including a sparsely populated mountain area. The librarian interviewed described Mountside as "polarised," with Protestant and Catholic estates at either end of the town.

The library building is located where the main loyalist estate meets the shopping area, meaning that the main nationalist estate is some distance from the library. The librarian interviewed commented that many of the Board's library buildings were based in loyalist areas (even in mainly nationalist towns like Mountside). This simply reflected the cultural hegemony of earlier library administrations, and was being redressed in one or two places where libraries were being relocated for other reasons. On the visit, the library gave the appearance of being a small but well-stocked and well-used library. The library is open six full days a week, with one late night.

10.6.2 The Internet project

The project began in July 1998 as a six-month pilot to test whether an Internet service was "economically viable." The information librarian emphasised that Mountside was selected as the pilot location because she had been allocated this particular task and she was based there. Issues of rural isolation did not influence the decision to pilot the Internet service at Mountside, except to the extent that, as a small rural town, it was typical of much of the Board's area. The service proved to be viable in cost terms and has been continued on a permanent basis, with an ongoing rollout of Internet access to other libraries.

The approach taken, from the outset, was to be responsive to needs, so awareness sessions were carried out for the group of users who had little or no knowledge of the Internet. An early response to demand was to provide e-mail access which had proved very popular. As at Northglen, this was seen as valid by staff as a "service for the local community."

The two main categories of user were those wanting to find out about the Internet and part-time students. A small-scale survey during the early months of the project showed that 60% of use was to find information about hobbies or interests and about 25% was for study, although the questionnaires were completed in the school holiday period (CELB, 1998b).

Internet access cost £2.50 for a 30-minute session, but there had been few complaints about this. The librarian felt that this affected the amount of use by children, but there had been support for charging children from parents and teachers (with a local head teacher comparing this cost favourably to video rental). The senior library assistant felt that charges increased the respect for library equipment, and there were none of the problems of low level vandalism, or users changing PC settings, found at Northglen.

As in Welshborough, staff identified a need for user support and this had implications for the role and training of staff. The information librarian said that "people needed a lot of help if they were looking for information and the staff didn't feel they were well-equipped for that role, and don't feel they are yet." Here, she identified a "enormous skills gap."

10.6.3 Community issues and Irish language

The two staff interviewed were emphatic that the library "is perceived as a neutral place" and equally welcoming to (and used by) all sections of the community. One indicator of this neutrality was that there were class visits by both Protestant and Catholic schools. When the librarian had started work at Mountside she had been surprised that there were no children's books in Irish and that the small Irish language school did not visit the library:-
"When I went to Mountside, I wanted to bring the Irish language school in. The staff didn't even want the picture in the paper, to say the Irish language school had been. Whereas I wanted it, because I wanted to go to the Catholic end of the town to say 'you're welcome in this library, even though it's down the other end of the town.'"

The staff mentioned here were Catholics themselves; they had also felt that the library should not stock children's books in Irish. The librarian saw local staff's concern not to offend the Protestant community as an example of how they were "open" and "fair." In fact, there had been no public objections to the decision to stock children's books in Irish. The senior library assistant attributed this to Protestant users accepting that the decision would have been made in a fair and objective way.

Consistently with other interviews (e.g. at Newland and with the TSN manager), it was reported that the Catholic community was "more organised, more aware." One instance of this was a writing competition promoted to local schools by the library service. There had been a number of entries from Catholic schools, but none from Protestant ones.

10.6.4 Other issues

The size of the library was a clear constraint. If and when more ICT facilities are introduced this will have a further impact (and, from what staff said, comparable space problems would apply in many other CELB libraries). The senior library assistant said she was unable to do much of the display work that she would like to carry out.

Opening hours were seen as "excluding a whole part of the community."[15] Opening up the library for community use, outside opening hours, was mentioned.

10.6.5 Conclusion

As with the European project at Northglen, the Internet service was popular, but its relevance to social exclusion seemed fairly marginal, with e-mail being the most popular use. More generally, however, the library service in Mountside could be seen as a positive force in a divided community. In particular, there was a sense that the library service supported people who were perhaps lacking in other support and resources in what was a small and isolated community. Both staff gave examples of information provision, on areas such as the EC Working Time Directive and the minimum wage, which had made a real difference to individual users. Similarly, there was some evidence that the library's ICT provision did have some educational impacts, most notably for school children, but also for some part-time students who, because of the isolation of Mountside, lacked other accessible provision.

The two staff had differing perspectives on whether Internet access should be charged, but were agreed that most users needed support in using it effectively. The interview with the librarian, in particular, illustrated that Internet access did not, in itself, improve information provision. She (like the information librarian at Northglen) reported that users, including those with Internet access at home, needed help and support in finding relevant information. The experience of Internet provision at Mountside, and through the European project at Northglen, had parallels with the Welshborough case study, where a distinction was made between providing an ICT facility and an ICT *service*.

10.7   Commentary: themes emerging from the case study

10.7.1 Overall library service policy on social exclusion

There was considerable scepticism about the New TSN programme and the Board's ability to advance it, but there was no doubt that social exclusion was taken seriously within the library service.

As was briefly outlined in the introduction, the library service has come a long way over the last four or five years, and has changed its orientation to take account of a number of emerging concerns including social exclusion. The library service now refers to social exclusion in its strategic planning documents and this can be taken as an indication of its concern with the issue. To date, provision relevant to tackling social exclusion has, as

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[15] At the same time, it should be noted that CELB libraries' opening hours were generally longer than those found in most of the other case study authorities.

described above, focused on distance and open learning, with some limited targeting (e.g. of Bookstart).

The Chief Librarian mentioned her concern that, although issues were rising, they came from a narrow membership base. Another senior member of staff said that "there can be a trickle- down effect of excellent services," although admittedly not reaching the most excluded individuals. It is doubtful if this is realistic at present, when library membership stands at just 33.2% (CELB, 1999c) and we would support the targets set for increasing this (CELB, 1999b).

Senior managers also mentioned their fears that staff attitudes might exclude some potential users. This did not appear to be the case with the staff we spoke to, with a particular example being the "tolerance" of staff at Newland. Newland was also an example of how individuals within the library service were attempting to break down some of the bureaucratic barriers to library use (for example making it easier for school children to join the library).

10.7.2 Community issues

The neutrality of libraries in Northern Ireland has often been claimed (e.g. by Greenhalgh et al, 1995). This assessment was supported by many interviewees, as evidenced, for example, by the discussions with staff at Mountside and confirmed by the Board member who represented a nationalist party. This, in itself, suggests that libraries are a force for social cohesion in divided communities. One interviewee, whilst also concerned to emphasise the neutrality of the service, pointed out that library buildings were predominantly based in Protestant areas. She questioned, for example, whether Catholics would feel comfortable using the Townside Centre which was based on a strongly Protestant estate. From what we were told, the location of many of the Board's libraries reflects historical bias towards the Protestant community. In fairness to the library service, its management was trying to address this issue in instances where resources allowed for the relocation of libraries. There is, nonetheless, a need to explore the question of 'whose neutrality are we talking about?', looking not just at the siting of libraries, but also the extent to which staff, services and stock reflect the profile of the community.

Equally, there were major concerns about "reaching" deprived Protestant communities like Newland. There was general agreement that the Catholic community was better organised in taking up targeted provision and some interviewees also referred to the motivation of many Catholic parents' to achieve social mobility through their children's education. All this then raises the question of whether different approaches are needed in reaching excluded people within the two main communities? This is discussed in the final section.

At the same time, it needs to be recognised that, in the words of one respondent "[the Catholic community] have had to be organised, because they have been the disadvantaged community." This historical disadvantage has been addressed by the library service in recent years, in terms of both human resources policies and procedures

and the restructuring of the library service itself. The importance of this was stated by one member of staff, who said that:-

> "[The chief librarian] set up the group structure two years ago and it's been very rewarding being part of the Mountside group ... because they were neglected, and it's only with the new group that this part [of the Board's area] has had any voice at all within the library service."

This move in itself seems a significant step for the library service to make in overcoming the historical bias against the Catholic community. It is, moreover, unlike recruitment and selection policy, not something which was has been prompted by external forces such as legislation.

10.7.3 Equal opportunities

Equal opportunities policy does not currently cover sexual orientation or age discrimination. No explanation was given for this, but it is possible that equal opportunities in the context of Northern Ireland has become so focused on the issue of religion, that other equal opportunities issues have not been developed. Another possibility is that issues of sexual orientation and age do not reflect the concerns of the dominant community.

In terms of religious discrimination, the legislation and codes of practice are in place and recruitment and selection policies have made the library service's staff more representative of the community as a whole. Broader issues of religious bias will, in the future, be addressed through the Equalities schemes introduced as part of the Good Friday Agreement.

10.7.4 Open learning and ICT

This case study offered the opportunity to contrast charged and free Internet access in different locations. Although some staff defended charged access, as it was felt that this controlled demand and increased respect for library equipment, the debate had moved on, with senior managers deciding to ask the Board to support free access. What did unite almost all respondents was that the availability of appropriately trained staff was absolutely fundamental in the delivery of ICT. Significant training needs were identified by staff with experience of providing ICT. Staff at Mountside and Northglen also emphasised that the presence of the Internet had not reduced the amount of support users needed in finding relevant information.

Similarly, in an open learning context, there was general agreement that what was described as the "four PCs in the corner" model, offered at another of CELB's libraries (not covered as part of the case study), had little impact. In contrast, we were particularly impressed by the supportive learning environment offered by the Townside Centre. The centre appeared to be both a positive response to local need and a practical use of library facilities. We would agree with the library service that it offers a suitable model for other libraries, in areas with comparable needs, to follow in partnership with

community representatives.

At the same time, we would question how realistic it is for libraries to be "the local learning place and champion of the independent learner" as envisaged in *Libraries for All* (DCMS, 1999, p.17). At Northglen we were told that local people preferred the more structured provision offered by the local FE college. The Townside Centre is an accredited location for college courses; it also has separate premises and opening hours to the main library area. The centre clearly gains many things from its location within a library - most notably not having some of the negative associations of a formal educational environment - but the actual provision appears to be comparable to that provided in a college setting. There was little evidence of libraries supporting "informal and self-directed learning," the recommended focus for future developments in *Libraries for all* (DCMS, 1999, p.17). There was, moreover, some evidence that their academic or educational image acted to distance libraries from the communities they served (see, for example, sections 10.2.1 and 10.2.3) and this needs to be taken account of in future provision. The model offered by the Townside Centre may be relevant here. Although this was not investigated with library users, it did not appear that the presence of the centre had created negative associations with formal education. It can be speculated that this was because of the involvement of the community association (and the resulting 'ownership' of the centre) and by the centre being separate from the rest of the library.

10.7.5 Library indicators

The question of what indicated success was often a significant concern. In terms of social exclusion, probably the most successful initiative we looked at was the Townside Centre, but the Chief Librarian commented that:-

> "I have to say in terms of library use, it's very hard to demonstrate benefits. Lots of people use the Townside Centre ... but in terms of library membership and book issues, that's not actually changed very much. So it's quite hard to put this forward as a major benefit to the library service, because over our shoulder is CIPFA, and there you're always looking at the bottom line."

This raises the questions of whether it is feasible to develop alternative indicators. For example, the information gathered by staff at the Townside Centre suggests that users have felt significant benefits in terms of self-esteem, but the current range of indicators cannot reflect this kind of impact. A related issue is the flexibility of indicators. In recent years, Newland Library has been seen as failing on all the library service's main performance measures. Given the stated difficulties of reaching people living on deprived Protestant estates, is it reasonable to directly compare its performance with that of other "medium-scale" libraries? The chief librarian told us that "refinement" of indicators to take account of social need was being considered, and we would support changes of this kind.

10.7.6 Partnerships

Partnerships were seen by senior managers as "the way forward" for the library service, and indeed a necessity because of its funding position. However, for all the successes such as the Townside Centre, the Chief Librarian also gave several examples of the frustrations and problems of partnership working. Sustainability of short-term projects was also a significant issue, as seen with the Townside Centre's struggle for funding (although it had continued to be supported by the Board at the end of the first year's Peace and Reconciliation funding).

10.8   Conclusions

10.8.1 Policy issues

The case study enabled the researchers to look at social exclusion from the perspective of several of the major stakeholders: politicians, Board officers, partners in the academic sector, library managers and other staff. The picture which emerged from this was that for CELB social exclusion is a new concept, although the historical context of Northern Ireland has strong elements of institutionalised exclusion. This context has led to social exclusion policies being viewed with some concern, suspicion and scepticism.

Although *Targeting Social Need* (NIO, 1998) could be regarded as a weak approach to tackling social exclusion (when compared with policy documents from other parts of the UK), in the Northern Ireland situation it is sometimes regarded as a threat, too strong and divisive. Political developments in Northern Ireland may allow this perspective to shift, so that the advantages of tackling social exclusion can be seen for the whole community, rather than as a means of benefiting just sections of it.

10.8.2 Area studies

Although the area studies were carried out in different environments they have a common theme running through them: the role or potential role of open / distance learning and information and communications technology in tackling social exclusion. These are viewed as panaceas for some of the problems facing CELB. As one of the politicians interviewed at Newland pointed out, however, ICT is not the solution, although it may form part of it. The situation is much more complex and questions have to be asked such as: who is the open/distance learning and ICT aimed at, and who actually uses it? What are the expected outcomes? Basic success criteria and performance measures around these issues have not always been developed. This needs to happen and socially excluded communities need to be involved in the target setting.

The performance indicators that do exist tend to be quantitative and crude, and, as already said, we feel there is scope to refine existing indicators and perhaps develop new ones. Having said this, we would support the target of increasing the adult membership level to 50% of the population (CELB, 1999b). This will not be achieved in places such as Newland simply by installing an open/distance learning centre into the library. Service

development has to be coupled with an outreach strategy which is focused on engaging the interest of non-users. This strategy has to take into account the different traditions of the two communities.

10.8.3 Community issues

A strong theme running through the case study is the difference in approaches of the Catholic and Protestant communities. As one of our respondents has pointed out:
"The two Northern Ireland communities are very differently constituted - they have a different dynamic. Broadly speaking the Catholic community is politically active...In the Protestant community, political culture is very weak" (*Social action in a Protestant community*, 1995).

The Catholic community has a range of community, tenants, women's, legal, single issue, arts, cultural and campaigning groups. The Protestant middle class community is extremely private and atomised. With manufacturing in decline, the only remnant of communal solidarity for the Protestant working class is within the paramilitaries.

There are a number of dynamics at work here including religion, class and the influence of armed groups. All of this was present in the Newland study, for example, as evidenced by the paramilitary murals which covered the estate. These dynamics have to be taken into account when devising an outreach strategy so that approaches are tailored to suit particular conditions and traditions. There is not a "one suit fits all" model. Lessons could be learnt from the success - and failure - of pioneering outreach work amongst Black communities in London and elsewhere.

One of our case study respondents has identified certain conditions and traditions relating to the Protestant community, for example, which could be taken into account when designing an outreach strategy for that community:
- there is an inbuilt resistance on the part of Protestants to declare themselves "in need";
- the Protestant community is fragmented in its approach;
- when Protestants do get together to tackle social issues and form groups there is an excessively bureaucratic approach;
- Protestants tend to approach problem-solving individually, not collectively;
- those involved in social action are regarded with suspicion or seen as anti-state;
- there is a high degree of social mobility within the Protestant community i.e. when people do well they tend to move away.
(*Social action in a Protestant community*, 1995)

The class issue in this last point is important. There are differences within and between the Catholic and Protestant working and middle classes. Approaches to outreach based on the class interests of the two communities should also be taken into account.

These community issues have been covered in some depth in this case study as they have not arisen in other case studies as part of the research; at the same time they provide a

link to the issue of class which is often hidden or ignored when libraries and social exclusion are being discussed or explored.

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Appendix 1: Survey of UK Public Library Authorities

«Name»
«Title»
«Address»

1 September 1999

Dear Colleague

Public Library Policy and Social Exclusion (Library and Information Commission Research Project) - Survey of Public Library Authorities.

We are currently undertaking research on the above project and we are writing to ask for your help in completing the enclosed questionnaire.

The overall aim of the project is to identify ways in which library services might effectively assist in tackling social exclusion and disadvantage. At the conclusion of the project we hope to disseminate policy briefings and guidelines that will be of practical benefit to local authorities. However, in order to do this effectively we need to assess the nature, extent and limitations of current public library activity in this area. The questionnaire, which is being sent to all UK library authorities, is the fundamental means by which we can attempt such an assessment and we hope very much that you or one of your senior colleagues can find the time to complete it.

Social exclusion is, of course, a key focus of government policy at the moment. However, we realise that the term may be problematic in some ways: it is a relatively new concept which has superseded narrower terms such as poverty and disadvantage, and it has generated related terms such as social inclusion and social cohesion. For clarity, it may be helpful for you to know that in our project proposal we suggested that social exclusion is based on "fundamental cleavages of class, gender, race, age, disability and schooling" and that such exclusion undermines the "social rights of citizens to certain basic standards of living and to participation in the social and occupational opportunities of society" (G. Room et al, *National Policies to Combat Social Exclusion*, European Commission, Brussels, 1992). However, if your own local authority defines social exclusion differently, or uses related terms, we are interested in this and would be pleased if you would tell us about it in the questionnaire. In the end, we hope that the scope of the questionnaire is broad enough to encompass related approaches, but please feel free to ring and discuss with us if this creates problems.

Our survey attempts to be relatively comprehensive and includes sections on overall strategy; structures and staffing; service development; book stock and materials; community links and outreach; partnerships; and resources and finance. We hope that most will not find it too onerous - it is designed, at a fundamental level, to offer as straightforward a coverage of a complex and wide-ranging topic as we could achieve.

Some colleagues however may feel that, like all quantitative research, it oversimplifies greatly, and if you wish to amplify answers with comments and annotations, we welcome these and will do our best to reflect them in our analysis.

In addition, many library authorities may have examples of documentation which provides details of policies and practices in this area. Such documents might comprise:

- local authority and library authority policy documents relevant to social exclusion;
- more detailed reports of initiatives, partnerships and service developments that highlight both good practice and problems;
- reports on specific areas such as staffing, materials selection or ICTs which are relevant to social exclusion;
- sections of 1998 DCMS library plans and assessors' comments relevant to social exclusion issues.

If you are able to send us examples of these kinds of documents, it would greatly assist us and provide valuable illustrative material. We obviously undertake to treat all such material anonymously in our project output.

In any event, we would appreciate it greatly if you could complete the questionnaire and return it to us by 1 October. All replies will be treated as confidential. Please phone Rebecca Linley on 0113 283 2600 x 3661 if you have any questions about completing the questionnaire, or more generally about the project as a whole.

Many thanks for your help

Dave Muddiman   Rebecca Linley
Principal Lecturer in Information Management   Project Research Assistant

PUBLIC LIBRARY POLICY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION:
SURVEY OF PUBLIC LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES

| A | YOUR LOCAL AUTHORITY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION |

1.   Has your local authority adopted a working definition of any of the following?
a) Social exclusion ☐
b) Social inclusion ☐
c) Social cohesion ☐
If yes, please would you give these definitions here.

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2.   Does your local authority have a policy or strategy covering any of the following?

	Yes	No	In preparation
a) Social inclusion / exclusion / cohesion	☐	☐	☐
b) Anti-poverty	☐	☐	☐
c) Equalities / equal opportunities / cultural diversity	☐	☐	☐
d) Community development strategy	☐	☐	☐
e) Social / community regeneration	☐	☐	☐

| B | LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICE STRATEGY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION |

3.   Have you or your local authority carried out research in order to investigate social exclusion in local communities?
(Please tick as many boxes as apply)

	Local authority as a whole / other local authority departments	Library service on its own
a) Analysis of census data	☐	☐
b) Analysis of Council data	☐	☐
c) Analysis of library membership	☐	☐
d) Community profiling	☐	☐
e) Community or social audits	☐	☐

4.   Does the library service have a strategy / policy, or use guidelines, in any of the following areas? *(Please tick as many boxes as apply)*
a) Social inclusion / exclusion / cohesion ☐
b) Anti-poverty ☐
c) Racial equality and cultural diversity ☐
d) Equalities / equal opportunities ☐
e) Community development ☐
f) Social / community regeneration ☐

g) Library standards which reflect the needs
of socially excluded groups and communities ☐

5.   Has the library authority identified particular areas or neighbourhoods for priority consideration as socially excluded areas?
a) Comprehensive targeting as part of overall policy ☐
b) Isolated initiatives ☐
c) Not at all ☐

6.   Has the library authority identified any of the following social groups for targeting or prioritisation? *(Please tick as many boxes as apply)*
a) Racial and ethnic minorities ☐
b) Working class people ☐
c) Housebound people ☐
d) People with disabilities ☐
e) Elderly people ☐
f) Refugees ☐
g) Travellers ☐
h) Homeless people ☐
i) Prisoners and their families ☐
j) Children and young people ☐
k) Unemployed people ☐
l) Lesbians, gay men and bisexuals ☐
m) Women ☐
n) Others (please give details) ☐

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7.   Please list any mechanisms for any of the groups identified above to influence the library service's policy and practice.

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8.   Please list any mechanisms for staff from any of the groups identified above to influence the library service's policy and practice.

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9.   Is the Best Value framework being used to address issues of social exclusion, as they affect the library service?
a) Yes *(Please give details below)*   ☐
b) No   ☐

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10.   Was social exclusion specifically addressed in your 1998/1999 Annual Library Plan submitted to DCMS?
a) Yes   ☐
b) No   ☐
c) Not applicable   ☐

11.   Will social exclusion issues be addressed in your 1999/2000 Annual Library Plan?
a) Yes   ☐
b) No   ☐
c) Not known   ☐
d) Not applicable   ☐

C	LIBRARY SERVICE STRUCTURE AND STAFFING

12.   In what ways, if any, is the structure of the library service influenced by considerations of social exclusion? *(Please tick as many boxes as apply)*
a) Strategy groups / working parties   ☐
b) Grouping of libraries   ☐
c) Special services / units with responsibility for social exclusion   ☐
d) Whole service structured around philosophy connected with social exclusion ☐
e) Other ways (please give details below)   ☐

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13.   Do you have a designated post or posts with responsibility for services to excluded areas, groups and communities?
(Please tick and indicate full time equivalent posts, if applicable)

	Yes	No	Estimated fte posts
a) At principal officer level	☐	☐	
b) Librarian or equivalent level	☐	☐	
c) At library / information assistant level	☐	☐	

d) Short-term specially designated staff   ☐   ☐

14.   Do you have designated posts with special responsibility for services to any of the groups and a community listed below, or posts part of whose responsibility is to these groups?
(Please give full time equivalent posts as applicable)

	Estimated number of specialist posts (fte)	Estimated number of posts with partial responsibility (fte)
a) Areas or neighbourhoods (e.g. community librarians)		
b) Racial and ethnic minorities		
c) Working class people		
d) Housebound people		
e) People with disabilities		
f) Elderly people		
g) Refugees		
h) Travellers		
i) Homeless people		
j) Prisoners and their families		
k) Unemployed people		
l) Children and young people		
m) Lesbians, gay men and bisexuals		
n) Women		
o) Other (please give details below)		

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15.   Do you have policies to ensure the equitable representation of any of the following groups amongst the library service's workforce?
a) People with disabilities   ☐
b) People from racial and ethnic minorities   ☐
c) Other groups (please give details below)   ☐

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16.   Please give details of any special requirements (e.g. language skills, community outreach experience) when you recruit or select staff to work with excluded groups or communities.

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17.   Do you provide training to staff to help them work with socially excluded individuals and groups?

a) Yes, as part of an agreed training programme ☐

b) Yes, on an intermittent basis ☐

c) No ☐

If yes, who is this training available to?

a) All staff ☐

b) Staff with specific responsibility for socially
     excluded communities ☐

D	SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

18.   Does your library service have services, initiatives or projects targeted at any of the following groups or communities?
(Please tick as appropriate from the list below)

	Permanent services	Time limited projects
a) Particular areas / neighbourhoods	☐	☐
b) Racial and ethnic minorities	☐	☐
c) Working class people	☐	☐
d) Housebound people	☐	☐
e) People with disabilities	☐	☐
f) Elderly people	☐	☐
g) Refugees	☐	☐
h) Travellers	☐	☐
i) Homeless people	☐	☐
j) Prisoners and their families	☐	☐
k) Unemployed people	☐	☐
l) Children and young people	☐	☐
m) Lesbians, gay men and bisexuals	☐	☐
n) Women	☐	☐

193

19. **Do you provide any of the following?** *(Tick as many boxes as apply)*

	Available as isolated initiatives or only in a few locations	Widespread availability	Targeted at socially excluded groups or communities
a) Book Start	☐	☐	☐
b) Homework clubs / centres	☐	☐	☐
c) Family literacy centres	☐	☐	☐
d) Adult basic skills provision	☐	☐	☐
e) Youth / teenage libraries	☐	☐	☐
f) Special language / subject collections of interest to local communities	☐	☐	☐

20. **Do you provide support (e.g. staff training or purchasing materials) for libraries or information services run by community groups or agencies?**
(Please tick from the list below)

a) Advice centres ☐
b) Voluntary sector information services ☐
c) Neighbourhood community libraries ☐
d) Community ICT initiatives ☐
e) Black and ethnic minority libraries and information centres ☐
f) Toy libraries, parents' and children's groups, or similar ☐
g) Youth clubs and projects ☐
h) Other (please give details below) ☐

21. **Does your library service offer any of the following types of ICT provision?**
(Tick as many boxes as apply)

	Available as isolated initiatives or only in a few locations	Widespread availability	Targeted at socially excluded groups or communities
a) Open access PCs	☐	☐	☐
b) Internet access	☐	☐	☐
c) E-mail access	☐	☐	☐
d) Computer assisted learning packages	☐	☐	☐
e) Access to local authority information system	☐	☐	☐
f) ICT skills / information literacy training	☐	☐	☐
g) Other (please give details below)	☐	☐	☐

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E   RESOURCES, BOOK STOCK AND MATERIALS

22.   **Does your service have policy guidelines on the selection of library materials that focus on any of the following groups or communities?**
(Tick as many boxes as apply)

a)   Particular areas / neighbourhoods ☐
b)   Racial and ethnic minorities ☐
c)   Working class people ☐
d)   Housebound people ☐
e)   People with disabilities ☐
f)   Elderly people ☐
g)   Refugees ☐
h)   Travellers ☐
i)   Homeless people ☐
j)   Prisoners and their families ☐
k)   Children and young people ☐
l)   Unemployed people ☐
m)   Lesbians, gay men and bisexuals ☐
n)   Women ☐

23.   **In what ways do you investigate the reading and information needs of excluded groups or communities?** *(Tick as many boxes as apply)*

a)   Discussion with community groups ☐
b)   Focus groups ☐
c)   Feedback from outreach work ☐
d)   Analysing library usage statistics ☐
e)   Suggestion schemes ☐
f)   Surveys of potential users ☐
g)   Other (please give details below) ☐

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F   COMMUNITY LINKS AND OUTREACH

24.   **Do your staff visit groups in the community who do not normally come into library buildings?**

a)   Yes, visits programmed as part of service planning ☐
b)   Yes, on an ad hoc basis ☐
c)   Yes, occasionally ☐
d)   No ☐

If yes, please give examples of the type of activity and the approximate number of staff involved.

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25.   Have you used any of the following types of consultation with excluded groups or communities?

a) Library user groups   ☐
b) Questionnaires / surveys   ☐
c) Contact with community groups ☐
d) Market research   ☐
e) Focus groups   ☐

26.   Is the library service represented on any local non-statutory groups or committees (e.g. residents' groups)?

a) Both local authority-wide and neighbourhood level   ☐
b) Local authority level   ☐
c) Neighbourhood level   ☐

27.   Do you offer any of the following in socially excluded areas neighbourhoods and communities? *(Please tick as many boxes as apply)*

	Special initiatives only	*On a regular basis*
a) Library accommodation for community groups	☐	☐
b) Information about local community groups	☐	☐
c) Participative arts or literature workshops	☐	☐
d) Events for older people	☐	☐
e) Events for children and young people	☐	☐
f) Multicultural events	☐	☐
g) Events for parents	☐	☐
h) Events for women	☐	☐
i) Local studies events	☐	☐

28.   What approaches do you use when working with groups in the community?

(Please tick as many boxes as apply)

a) Mobile / housebound services   ☐
b) Deposit collections   ☐
c) Storytelling / reading   ☐
d) Creative writing sessions   ☐
e) Information exchange   ☐
f) Skills training (e.g. ICTs, basic skills) ☐
g) Specialist staff visits to community events / meetings ☐
h) Other (please give details below)   ☐

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196

29. Please indicate if the library service been involved in partnership bids for funding in any of the following categories, since 1997.

	Successful bid	Unsuccessful bid	Pending
a) Single Regeneration Budget	☐	☐	☐
b) Other central government funding	☐	☐	☐
c) National Lottery / Millennium Fund	☐	☐	☐
d) European funding	☐	☐	☐
e) Private sector	☐	☐	☐
f) Other (give details below)	☐	☐	☐

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30. Please list successful bids, since 1997, which have focused on socially excluded groups or neighbourhoods.

Name of bid	Area of work	Partner(s)

31. Do you take account of issues relevant to social exclusion by the use of any of the following budget processes? *(Please tick as many boxes as apply)*

a) Weighted materials funding for deprived communities ☐
b) Applications for special funding ☐
c) Funding of special posts targeted at excluded groups or communities ☐
d) Reduced fees and charges (for general library services) for certain groups and / or neighbourhoods ☐
e) Free or reduced charges for access to ICTs for certain groups and / or neighbourhoods ☐
f) Funding based on total population (users and non-users), rather than use ☐
g) Needs based approach rather than current usage patterns ☐
h) Developing services to groups and communities that are not currently reached by, or who under-use, the library service ☐
i) Special funding made available for initiatives and projects ☐
j) Other (please give details below) ☐

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32. **Do you have any mechanisms for estimating the percentage of your budget committed to socially excluded groups and communities?**
a) Yes (please describe below) ☐
b) No ☐

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33. **Does senior library management have direct responsibility for monitoring the implementation of policy on social exclusion?**
a) Yes ☐
b) No ☐
c) Partially (e.g. shared with another local authority department) ☐

34. **In what ways do you monitor library services to those groups, areas and neighbourhoods affected by social exclusion?**

	Used for special initiatives only	Used on a regular basis
a) Issue statistics	☐	☐
b) Headcount statistics	☐	☐
c) Market research surveys	☐	☐
d) Surveys of non-users	☐	☐
e) Feedback from community groups	☐	☐
f) Social auditing techniques	☐	☐
g) Focus groups	☐	☐
h) Consultative groups	☐	☐
i) Others (please give details below)	☐	☐

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Name of local authority

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Contact name

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Phone / fax / e-mail

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Local authority department or directorate in which the library service is based
Separate libraries department ☐
Leisure services ☐
Community services ☐
Education ☐
Arts / culture / heritage ☐
Other / combinations of the above (write in below)

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Number of staff (fte) the library service has in post

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Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please return it by 1 October to Rebecca Linley, Department of Information Management, Leeds Metropolitan University, The Grange, Beckett Park Campus, Leeds LS6 3QS, using the enclosed pre-paid envelope.

Appendix 2: Index of Public Library Authority Social Inclusion Activity

Score allocated for each indicator is noted in brackets. Scores were then added to give a total out of 24 for each case.

Indicator 1: Policy and strategy
(Q.4)
Social inclusion / exclusion policy and strategy (2)
Related policies (1)
No relevant policies identified (0)

Indicator 2: Service structure
(Q.12)
Whole service structured around "inclusive" philosophy (2)
Special services / working groups / initiatives (1)
None of these (0)

Indicator 3: Number of disadvantaged groups as service priority (13 possible)
(Q.6)
7+ (2)
3-6 (1)
0-3 (0)

Indicator 4: Community activity - number of regular activities / outreach mechanisms (18 possible)
(Q.27/28)
13+ (2)
7-12 (1)
0-6 (0)

Indicator 5: Support for community projects - types of project
(Q.20)
3+ (2)
1-2 (1)
None (0)

Indicator 6: Partnerships and external funding - successful bids over last three years
(Q.30)
3+ (2)
1-2 (1)
None (0)

Indicator 7 Staff training
(Q17)
Training programme addressing exclusion issues (2)

Ad hoc training (1)
No relevant training noted (0)

Indicator 8 Staff recruitment
(Q15/16)
Socially exclusion specific consideration (2)
Equal opportunities policies (1)
Neither (0)

Indicator 9 Resourcing
(Q.31)
Strategic resourcing policy incorporating exclusion issues (2)
Special funding/initiatives only (1)
No relevant funding strategies (0)

Indicator 10: Materials selection policies relevant to excluded social groups and neighbourhoods
(Q22)
Policies affecting 4 or more excluded groups / categories (2)
Relevant to 1-3 excluded groups (1)
None (0)

Indicator 11 Homework clubs
(Q19b)
Widespread or targetted at excluded groups / communities (2)
Examples but not linked to exclusion considerations (1)
None (0)

Indicator 12 Internet access
(Q21b)
Widespread or targetted at excluded groups / communities (2)
Examples but not linked to exclusion considerations (1)
None (0)

Appendix 3: Sample Interview Guide - General Questions for Senior Library Management

1. Please give an overview of how your local authority as a whole is developing policies and strategies designed to tackle social exclusion.

2. What definitions, if any, of social exclusion/inclusion/cohesion/ are being used in your local authority? How, if at all, do these reflect your own view or definition of social exclusion?

3. How involved, if at all, has the library service been in local authority corporate strategies designed to address exclusion? (Prompts - Involved in planning strategies? Involved in partnerships? joint service delivery? etc)

4. Focusing on the library service more particularly, what kind of historical tradition, if any, has the library service had in developing services to disadvantaged and excluded communities and groups? What aspects of these traditional services are still seen as relevant, and what aspects are seen as outdated?

5. In more contemporary terms, in what ways is the issue of social exclusion taken into account in library service planning and strategy:
- Did you include references to social exclusion in your DCMS library plan, and what sort of response did these receive?
- Do you have any policy or strategy working group that focus on matters relevant to social exclusion, and how do they operate, what kind of recommendations have they made?

6. Are there any other policy developments or initiatives (for example anti poverty; equal opportunities; community development) through which you feel the library service has especially attempted to address social exclusion. Can you suggest why this / these approaches have been adopted in your authority?

7. How does your library service identify socially excluded or disadvantaged areas or communities? To what degree, if at all, have you targeted resources and services on these areas? Have you undertaken any market research / consultation / needs assessment to enable you develop services in these areas?

8. Which social groups within your whole authority have you identified as excluded or disadvantaged, and what service strategies and initiatives have been developed to reach such groups? [Checklist from questionnaire can be used as aide memoire if necessary here]
Have such services predominantly been developed as part of the core library services; through outreach, or through other special initiatives and partnerships?

9. In what ways have issues related to social exclusion and disadvantage affected your materials selection policies and processes? Do you have examples of materials selection

policies that take account of various forms of exclusion? Please provide copies if appropriate

10. Does your library (local authority?) service have an ICT strategy? If so, in what ways does it seek to address inequalities of access to, and ability to use new ICTs

11. How, if at all, do your staffing policies and practices relate to issues of social exclusion:
[Prompts] - do you make efforts beyond statutory requirements to employ people from excluded and disadvantaged groups?
- do you differentiate in staffing levels in favour of disadvantaged areas/locations?
- do you appoint special posts targeted at particular areas or groups?

12. How are policies and practices relevant to social exclusion reflected in the budgeting and financial allocation processes in the library service? Is it possible to quantify in any way the impact that a concern with disadvantage and social exclusion has on your patterns of expenditure?

13. How important do you think it is that libraries work in partnership with other agencies in tackling exclusion at a local level? What experiences has your own library service had of partnerships in this context, and what seemed to be the main benefits and problems associated with this way of working?

14. In summary, what potential do you think libraries in general have to overcome exclusion and disadvantage? How would you characterise the main strengths and successes of your library service in tackling social exclusion?

15. Conversely, what do you think are the main barriers and problems which hamper libraries in tackling social exclusion? In what ways, and how much, do you think they need to change?