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

Number 105, January 2010

(formerly published as *Public Libraries & Social Exclusion Action Planning Network Newsletter*, issue 1, May 1999 – issue 29, September 2001)

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

Contents List

Appendix: *Empower, Inform, Enrich – The modernisation review of public libraries: a consultation.* **Response from "The Network – tackling social exclusion …"** – pages 11 and 12ff

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Did you see …?

Adults Learning

The latest issue[1] includes:

- Stephen McNair "Is everybody happy?", a brief piece on the importance of wellbeing [p15]
- Ed Melia "Get up, stand up", article about Barrie Hughes who, in his 50s, finally tackled the fact that he was dyslexic – inspiring example of how someone has 'got by' for years, and is transformed by learning to read and write [pp30-31]
- Plus a reference to the *Annual survey of digital participation* – please see below.

Literacy Today

The December issue[2] includes some useful articles, including:

- Al Campbell "Dyslexia – when nature's little experiment becomes a literacy conundrum" [p11]
- Jonathan Douglas "Viewpoint" column on the Cambridge Primary Review [p16]
- George Dugdale "Maximising life chances", a report on the Demos/National Literacy Trust event that took place at the Conservative party conference [p17]
- Anne Sarrag "The Summer Reading Challenge: celebrating ten years and looking ahead", a report of the conference held in November [pp18-19]
- Christina Clark "Don't diss blogs and social networking sites: young people's writing and technology", an outline of the research looking at the impact of technology use on young people's writing [pp28-29].

Tackling social exclusion – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

Role of public libraries in supporting and promoting digital participation

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[1] *Adults Learning* 21 (4) December 2009. Further information at: http://shop.niace.org.uk/adults-learning.html.
[2] *Literacy Today* 61, December 2009. Further information from: www.educationpublishing.com.

MLA have just published this new report[3].

Following the publication of *Digital Britain*[4], a consortium chaired by Ofcom was set up to develop a national plan for digital participation, and MLA is a partner in this consortium. The draft national plan sets out a strategy for securing the UK as one of the world's leading digital knowledge economies. MLA has carried out research to:

- "Identify the extent of the existing digital offer in public libraries – the first survey to explore this since the People's Network was introduced into public libraries in 2001; and

- Identify the potential future role for the public library sector in supporting the delivery of the national plan for digital participation." [p4]

"The survey findings demonstrate that library authorities offer a wide range of digital services to the public" [p4], including:

- The network of service points
- Help for people to get online and develop digital literacy skills
- Trained staff
- Delivery partnerships eg with Age Concern and the WEA.

Finally:

"Further research is recommended to identify:

- The level of digital provision at individual library level;
- The level of customer demand for digital services and the nature of digital participation within the library setting, including more information on the extent and depth of one-to-one support to get online;
- The potential for expanding the number of volunteers working with digitally excluded groups;
- The capacity of library staff to undertake a greater number of supported access hours." [p6]

Tackling social exclusion – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government

National Equality Panel research

[3] CFE. *Role of public libraries in supporting and promoting digital participation* Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, 2010. Available to download as a pdf from: http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/public-libraries-and-digital-participation-mla.pdf.
[4] See: http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/broadcasting/6216.aspx.

The final report[5] of the NEP has had massive press coverage, coming as it does at a point when political parties are reassessing progress in the UK.

There is also a summary report[6], and the following is taken from that.

> "The National Equality Panel was set up to document the relationships between inequalities in people's economic outcomes – such as earnings, incomes and wealth – and their characteristics and circumstances – such as gender, age or ethnicity." [p1]

The report draws out some over-arching themes, including:

- "Inequalities in earnings and incomes are high in Britain, both compared with other industrialised countries, and compared with thirty years ago. Over the most recent decade according to some measures, earnings inequality has narrowed a little and income inequality has stabilised, but the large inequality growth between the late 1970s and early 1990s has not been reversed.
- Some of the widest gaps in outcomes between social groups have narrowed in the last decade, particularly between the earnings of women and men, and in the educational qualifications of different ethnic groups.
- However, there remain deep-seated and systematic differences in economic outcomes between social groups across all of the dimensions we have examined – including between men and women, between different ethnic groups, between social class groups, between those living in disadvantaged and other areas, and between London and other parts of the country.
- Despite the elimination and even reversal of the differences in educational qualifications that often explain employment rates and relative pay, significant differences remain between men and women and between ethnic groups.
- Importantly, however, differences in outcomes between the more and less advantaged *within* each social group, however the population is classified, are usually only a little narrower than those across the population as a whole. They are much greater than differences *between* groups. Even if all differences between such groups were removed, overall economic inequalities would remain wide.
- The inequality growth of the last forty years is mostly attributable to growing gaps within social groups, however those groups are defined. The pattern of the last decade has been more mixed, with the effects of

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[5] John Hills *et al. An anatomy of economic inequality in the UK: report of the National Equality Panel*. Government Equalities Office, 2010. Available to download as a pdf (4000 kb) from:
http://www.equalities.gov.uk/pdf/NEP%20Report%20bookmarked.pdf.
[6] John Hills *et al. An anatomy of economic inequality in the UK – summary*. Government Equalities Office, 2010. Available to download as a pdf (1790 kb) from:
http://www.equalities.gov.uk/pdf/NEP%20Summary.pdf.

growing inequality within some groups offset by narrowing gaps between them.

- Many of the differences we examine cumulate across the life cycle, especially those related to people's socio-economic background. We see this before children enter school, through the school years, through entry into the labour market, and on to retirement, wealth and resources for retirement, and mortality rates in later life. Economic advantage and disadvantage reinforce themselves across the life cycle, and often on to the next generation. By implication, policy interventions to counter this are needed at each life cycle stage.
- A fundamental aim of people with widely differing political perspectives is to achieve 'equality of opportunity', but doing so is very hard when there are such wide differences between the resources which people and their families have to help them fulfil their diverse potentials." [p1]

The report looks at the position of different groups, including:

- Gender
- Age
- Ethnicity and religious affiliation
- Disability status
- Sexual orientation
- Occupational social class
- The impact of social background
- Housing tenure
- Nation and region
- Area deprivation.

Finally, it outlines key policy challenges, including:

- The importance of early years policies (and the scale of the challenges they face)
- The need to reduce child poverty and to improve the educational attainment of poor children in general
- To improve staying-on rates after 16 of low-income children in particular
- The need to focus on the "deteriorating position through secondary school of low-income boys from White British and Black Caribbean backgrounds …" [p33]
- The need to focus on "the low – and apparently deteriorating – educational achievement of children from Gypsy or Traveller families …" [p33]
- "The position of those with particular forms of Special Educational/Additional Support Needs is of concern, particularly those with Behavioural and Emotional Support Needs in secondary school." [p33]
- Issues around the "Considerable differences …. even after allowing for attainment at 16, in entry into higher education, and the kind of

institution attended by social class and ethnicity, and experience of private education." [p33]
- Looking at avoiding the "longer-term 'scarring' effects from early unemployment" [p33]
- Differences in pay by gender and ethnicity – and the fact that "There still appears to be straightforward discrimination in recruitment, affecting both minority ethnic groups and disabled people, particularly in the private sector." [p33]
- Particular issues facing Bangladeshi and Pakistani working age populations
- The low level of hourly pay for part-time work
- The need for a stronger focus on policies affecting the employment of disabled people
- "… the importance of policies that support lifelong learning and training that extends beyond the already well-qualified." [p34]
- Policies to reduce health inequalities earlier throughout adulthood
- Greater focus on neighbourhood renewal.

This is highly recommended – it forms a very clear snapshot of the situation in the UK at the start of 2010, and will give us a lot of key areas where we can target our work to greatest effect.

Tackling social exclusion – Other Agencies

NIACE's annual survey of digital participation, 2009

In November, NIACE published the results[7] of their latest survey, which make interesting reading. The headlines include:

> "Over one-third of all adults (37 per cent) don't have regular access to the Internet; and just under a third (32 per cent) lack access to a computer. Digital participation is heavily dependent on class and income as 86 per cent of ABs have regular access to a computer or laptop, compared to 70 per cent of C2s and only 45 per cent of DEs ...
>
> The digital divide is further illustrated by the findings that while almost three-quarters (74 per cent) of ABs have regular access to digital television and 44 per cent have regular access to digital radio; the figures for DEs are 56 per cent and 19 per cent respectively."

Also:

- "… the most common use of the Internet is for using email (80 per cent);

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[7] Lorraine Casey, Rachel Thomson and Fiona Aldridge. *NIACE's annual survey of digital participation*. NIACE, 2009. Available to download as a pdf (238 kb) from: http://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/events/Digital%20Participation%20Survey%20%28final%20report%29.doc.

- the only digital activity done more by women (33 per cent) than men (29 per cent) is using the Internet for social networking e.g. Facebook, MySpace, Bebo. In the last year there has been a 10% (21% - 31%) increase in the total number of adult 'social networkers';
- adults are - for the first time - more likely to watch TV or TV on-demand on a computer than use one to listen to live radio or use listen-again facilities (23% compared to 18% - in 2008 the figures were 17% and 20% respectively);
- one in six adults (17%) have used the Internet to help them help their children with their homework; this is down from 19% in 2008;
- almost nine in ten adult learners (85%) have regular access to digital technologies compared to almost three in five non-learners (57%); however the number using the Internet for learning and/or for finding out information for their learning has fallen by 8 per cent in one year; and
- only one third (33 per cent) of adults play or download music digitally and only one in every 50 adults (two per-cent) use the Internet for online dating."[8]

Sinking & swimming …

This new report[9] from the Young Foundation:

"… provides an overview of where the most acute needs are in Britain today, and which needs may become more pressing in the future. It looks at why some people can cope with shocks and setbacks and others can't, and at the implications for policy, philanthropy and public action." [p7]

The report begins by investigating people's material and psychological needs (and the interaction between the two):

"Essentially, this analysis indicated that those on low incomes were more likely than average to have unmet psychological needs and over 1.3 times more likely compared to those on high incomes, but that overall income did not have a very strong relationship with psychological health." [p96]

It then goes on to look at how dynamically these needs are actually being met. It also identifies those groups that are the most vulnerable to unmet needs – including:

- People living alone
- Lone parents

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[8] Quotes taken from: http://www.niace.org.uk/news/over-one-in-three-adults-don%E2%80%99t-use-the-internet.
[9] *Sinking & swimming: understanding Britain's unmet needs.* The Young Foundation, 2009 (ISBN 978-1-905551-11-8). Available to download as a pdf (1310 kb) from: http://www.youngfoundation.org/files/images/new_needs_pdf.pdf.

- Sick and disabled people
- People on low incomes
- Older people
- Unemployed people
- Minority ethnic groups.

Importantly, the report also identifies ten "groups that are particularly vulnerable and likely to have severe or multiple unmet needs are insufficiently captured by national survey data and official statistics." [p104]. For each, they estimate numbers and highlight key needs. These groups include:

- Undocumented migrants
- Runaways
- Sex workers
- Problematic drug users
- Isolated older people
- Prisoners
- People with dementia
- School exclusions
- Looked-after children
- Travellers and Gypsies
- Adults with neurodevelopmental disorder.

The report then uses six case studies to illustrate some of the key issues. These include:

- Transitions – "investigating how people cope with transitions out of care, prison and violent relationships" [p121] in England and Scotland.
- Needs in London – which "delve[s] into the lives and experiences of some of the Londoners who fall below the official radar." [p121]
- Worklessness in Wales
- Needs at night – "By following the night workers throughout their shifts we uncovered a largely invisible workforce with distinct needs of their own, as well as insights into how the needs of the general population differ at night." [p122]
- Low income families in Teesside
- Teenagers in Bedford.

The report concludes that:

> "… Britain is a brittle society, with many fractures and many people left behind." [p9]

Finally, it recommends seven "broad directions for change" [p9]:

1. "Provide preparation, bridges and support for difficult transitions" [p9], for example from being a teenager to being an adult, or from being in care or prison to independence

2. "Isolation – help to connect the disconnected" [p10] – "There are many good initiatives trying to address these needs – from befriending schemes to mentors – but they remain very much on the margins of policy and small in scale. Being without a roof over your head or a job to go to brings you entitlements, however meagre. Having no one to talk to does not." [p10]

3. "Provide access with 'no wrong door'. People often access services that are not the right ones for meeting their underlying need. They may show up at A&E when their real problem is alcohol; they may turn up at a homeless shelter when their underlying problem is a mental illness. Access points need to be less devoted to functions and more to people." [p10]

4. "Enhance resilience and psychological fitness" [p10]

5. "Rethink welfare provision through the lens of wellbeing" [p10]

6. "Focus on new and old necessities. Over time many items move from being luxuries to become necessities. People living in rural areas are not alone in thinking of the car as a necessity. But the mobile phone is much the clearest example of this shift – invaluable and prioritised by everyone from refugees to unemployed teenagers." [p11]

7. "Invest in better social accounts. The UK publishes regular economic accounts, but not comparable social accounts. And while government shares extensive data on production, consumption and finance, it doesn't map wellbeing, and data on psychological needs is patchy. We show how regular snapshots of social needs could be developed that could become as prominent in our national consciousness as economic accounts are today." [p11]

This is an immensely important report, with lots of food for thought. More importantly, there are areas here where we can see that we could make a real difference – take recommendations numbers 2, 3 and 4, for example.

Recommended.

Fair society, healthy lives: the Marmot Review

This major report[10] and an Executive summary[11] have just been published.

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[10] *Fair society, healthy lives: the Marmot Review – strategic review of health inequalities in England post-2010.* The Marmot Review, 2010 (ISBN: 978-0-9564870-0-1). Available to download as a pdf (25000 kb) from: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/gheg/marmotreview/FairSocietyHealthyLives.
[11] The *Executive summary* is available to download as a pdf (8000 kb) from: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/gheg/marmotreview/FairSocietyHealthyLivesExecSummary.

Along with the previous item (and *The spirit level*[12], assessed in the last Newsletter[13]), this makes an extremely strong case for why social justice matters and the critical importance of this work in the UK today.

This Review has nine Key Messages:

1. "Reducing health inequalities is a matter of fairness and social justice. In England, the many people who are currently dying prematurely each year as a result of health inequalities would otherwise have enjoyed, in total, between 1.3 and 2.5 million extra years of life ...
2. There is a social gradient in health – the lower a person's social position, the worse his or her health. Action should focus on reducing the gradient in health.
3. Health inequalities result from social inequalities. Action on health inequalities requires action across all the social determinants of health.
4. Focusing solely on the most disadvantaged will not reduce health inequalities sufficiently. To reduce the steepness of the social gradient in health, actions must be universal, but with a scale and intensity that is proportionate to the level of disadvantage. We call this proportionate universalism.
5. Action taken to reduce health inequalities will benefit society in many ways. It will have economic benefits in reducing losses from illness associated with health inequalities. These currently account for productivity losses, reduced tax revenue, higher welfare payments and increased treatment costs.
6. Economic growth is not the most important measure of our country's success. The fair distribution of health, well-being and sustainability are important social goals. Tackling social inequalities in health and tackling climate change must go together.
7. Reducing health inequalities will require action on six policy objectives:
   - Give every child the best start in life
   - Enable all children young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives
   - Create fair employment and good work for all
   - Ensure healthy standard of living for all
   - Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities
   - Strengthen the role and impact of ill health prevention

8. Delivering these policy objectives will require action by central and local government, the NHS, the third and private sectors and community groups. National policies will not work without effective local delivery systems focused on health equity in all policies.

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[12] Richard Wilkinson <u>and</u> Kate Pickett. *The spirit level: why equality is better for everyone.* Penguin, 2010 (ISBN: 978-0141032368). Paperback edition now available (also available to purchase from The Network bookshop: http://www.seapn.org.uk/shop.asp?page_id=79).

[13] *The Network Newsletter* 104, December 2009, http://www.seapn.org.uk/content_files/files/newsletter_ns_104.pdf.

9. Effective local delivery requires effective participatory decision-making at local level. This can only happen by empowering individuals and local communities." [p9 – Executive summary]

The Executive summary concludes:

> "The central tenet of this Review is that avoidable health inequalities are unfair and putting them right is a matter of social justice. There will be those who say that our recommendations cannot be afforded, particularly in the current economic climate. We say that it is *inaction* that cannot be afforded, for the human and economic costs are too high. The health and well-being of today's children depend on us having the courage and imagination to rise to the challenge of doing things differently, to put sustainability and well-being before economic growth and bring about a more equal and fair society." [p29]

Broader issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

Empower, Inform, Enrich – The modernisation review of public libraries: a consultation. Response from "The Network – tackling social exclusion …"

Our response to this latest consultation document from DCMS is attached as an Appendix.

Abbreviations and acronyms

DCMS = Department for Culture, Media and Sport
MLA = Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
NIACE = National Institute for Adult Continuing Education
WEA = Workers' Educational Association

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Empower, Inform, Enrich – The modernisation review of public libraries: a consultation. Response from "The Network – tackling social exclusion …"

The Network[14] was formed in May 1999 as a legacy of the then Library and Information Commission-funded research project, "Public Library Policy and Social Exclusion", the report of which was published under the title, *Open to all?*[15] The Network's mission is "to assist the cultural sector, including libraries, museums, archives and galleries, heritage and other organisations, to work towards social justice."

We made a submission to the Review in December 2008, as a result of the original call for comment, and, whilst are pleased to have a further opportunity to comment, are also disappointed that so much time has passed with very little to show for it. We consider that, maybe, enough "considering" has taken place, and what we now need is some action!

We would add that, to be frank, this set of essays does not take us very much further. For example, there are (as instanced below) some excellent pieces written by library leaders, showing some of the range of excellent work that public libraries are undertaking, yet it almost appears as though these are being ignored in the search for something else. And why is there such a fixation on the commercial sector, when public libraries are much closer to – and could valuably learn from – the Third Sector?

As we demonstrate below, one of the major contributions of the public library service is in working towards social justice (again evidenced in some of the essays), yet this is almost wilfully ignored in the set of questions. Public libraries have a long history of playing a strong role in the community (not just as the 'heart' of the community – whatever that means exactly), and this needs nurturing and supporting, rather than this endless quest for some new grail.

Finally, the set of questions is repetitive, and, as we shall demonstrate, often seem to miss the point. For example, in Q11, there seems to be an assumption that public libraries are there to be visited if only people knew about them, rather than challenging, for example, whether providing library services via static buildings is even the best approach, and looking at how libraries can best meet local needs where they arise, rather than necessarily thinking 'library building' every time.

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[14] See: www.seapn.org.uk.

[15] *Open to all? The public library and social exclusion. Volume 1: overview and conclusions*. Resource, 2000.
http://www.mla.gov.uk/resources/assets//L/lic084_pdf_5679.pdf.

Q1. Does every library authority have to share a common purpose? Are these purposes complementary and relevant? Are some more important than others? Are there other purposes we should consider?

The introduction to this question, 'Role for Libraries', outlines three broad areas (Providing books etc; The library at the centre of the community; The library as an education resource etc).

We support these as being important contributions that public libraries make, but, at least in the wording used in the consultation paper, they come across as passive, almost reactive.

We see the public library as incorporating these three roles, but in a much more dynamic and active way, working locally and nationally for social justice and social inclusion. This is stressed in the essays by, for example, Roy Clare, Miranda McKearney, Bob McKee and Fiona Williams – as Bob McKee puts it libraries being "central to our strategies for literacy and learning, digital inclusion, regeneration, equality of opportunity, and personal well-being".

This should be the public libraries' common purpose, and, we would argue, should therefore be obligatory for every library service in the UK.

Q2. Do you think the current roles as defined for central and local government are still appropriate? Is the 1964 legislative framework still appropriate or does it need review? If so what changes would you like to see? Is there any value in central government having a more direct role in setting the vision and objectives for the library service or is the service better managed entirely at local level.

As indicated in our response to Q1, we consider that there has to be a strong national framework within which public libraries operate. Of course, they also need to be fully responsive (and responsible) to local people too, but this 'balancing act' needs to be finely managed. For example, a library service – with local community support – may propose closing some library buildings, or relocating them, only to have this thwarted by local politicians who do not want to see service closures in their Wards.

To counter this, the 1964 Act does need to be overhauled, and the relative roles of local and central government redefined, but the statutory nature of the public library service needs to remain.

Q3. Could (a) central government departments, and (b) local authorities better use the public library service to communicate initiatives and contribute to other public services? Do you have any ideas on how this might work?

As noted above, two of the core roles of the public library are to be a hub at the centre of local communities and to provide the path through "a morass of information". Yet, still, these roles are often overlooked, and it is very common for local authorities – and other agencies – to try to disseminate information

and/or carry out local consultations without recognizing the key role (in terms particularly its 'reach') that the public library can play.

As Fiona Williams notes in her essay, public libraries already do contribute heavily to other local public services, but their role is often undervalued (this is, we would argue, partly an issue with public libraries too, which we shall address more fully in Q21 & Q22.

Again, there needs to be a balance struck between assisting central government departments to disseminate information and not overwhelming the key local, community needs with national campaigns.

Q4. A recent report by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Libraries, Literacy and Information Management concluded that central Government structures complicate the delivery of library funding and policy. The Report also called into question the suitability of the MLA and ACL and recommended a Library Development Agency.
• Are there benefits in changing the structures in government?
• Are there benefits in changing the structures or roles of the public bodies?
• Is there a value in a greater central function around particular issues? Eg Marketing and publicity, digital services?
• Do you see any benefit in establishing new national/local structures as set out in Margaret Hodge's essay?

We agree with the APPG report's analysis of the issues surrounding central Government structures. It really does not make any sense to have policy-setting, funding and monitoring of public libraries carried out by different Government departments – as we frequently see, it can lead to a culture of 'passing the buck'.

In relation to MLA, in our original response, we said:

> "It remains to be seen whether MLA in its new form will be able to deliver the strategic leadership (and massive levels of support) that public libraries require, but it is already clear that there is likely to be a lessening of focus at national and regional level on social justice issues, and we would urge DCMS (and MLA) to ensure that social justice, tackling social exclusion, community cohesion and engagement are all built into MLA's core policies and work-plans."

There is a vital need for a national body to coordinate policy creation, advocate libraries at every level, ensure that social justice is at the heart of every library service, create effective marketing campaigns, and so on – possibly some kind of National Library Agency?

At the same time, given that The Network is also an example of the Third Sector organisations that you mention, there needs to be scope for the continuation of a range of organisations, not just having them all combined into one new mega-agency.

The exact role of the ACL (particularly in its current reincarnation) is very unclear; having this body, MLA and the Society of Chief Librarians all advising makes for even more confusion!

Q5. In 2007 the Department for Communities and Local Government published Developing the Local Government Services Market: New ways of working and new models of provision within the public library service but only a handful of local authorities currently deliver libraries through a trust or private company. The case studies show that alternative delivery models can be effective so how might we best encourage Local Authorities to explore the opportunities they offer? What other governance models might be suitable for library services or are there barriers to introducing these models? For instance:
• What could libraries learn from other sectors including the private sector?
• Would other models of delivery and funding – eg the academy model for schools, social enterprise models or Foundation Trusts for hospitals – be appropriate for library services?
Q6. How can we prioritise investment in libraries, especially at a time of financial constraints? You may like to consider:
• How we might ensure that all libraries are able to develop successful funding models which are based on a diversity of funding streams.
• How could we help open new and more revenue streams for libraries,
• What could libraries learn from other sectors?
• How do we effectively spread best practice?

Experiments with different governance models would seem valuable, provided that there really is applied learning once the experiments are over, and provided that the different models do not detract from what we have described above as public libraries' core roles. (For example, were a bookselling chain to become heavily involved in co-running public libraries, and insisted that, as part of this, libraries focussed more-or-less entirely on current best-sellers, then we would see this as detrimental to the core function of libraries.)

Public libraries do need to look at and learn from a wider range of successful enterprises than at present.

Q7. Digital Services: What is the future of library services in a digital environment? What changes do you envisage as a result of changes in technology over the next 5-10 years? You might like to consider –
• How can we use the digital revolution to extend access to library resources?
• Should virtual lending (ie lending downloads to the home via the internet) be the future of the public library service either generally or in some areas? What challenges would virtual lending present?
• What digital content should libraries provide? For example should all libraries make subscription online services available to users? Should this be a free service?

• Web 2.0 enables people and communities to contribute web content? Do you think that there is a role for libraries in Web 2.0? If so, what?
• Is there other content or technology which you think should be guaranteed to users?
• How can libraries support the Digital Inclusion agenda? What are some of the potential obstacles to greater digital engagement within libraries, and how might these be overcome?
• What other opportunities does new technology present for libraries? Do you have ideas for innovative ways in which new technology could be applied in local libraries?

The Network worked with CILIP last year in its response to the DCLG consultation paper, *Delivering digital inclusion: an action plan for consultation.* The response is very full, and covers much of the same ground as this – we recommend that DCMS and the Review Team use this as a starting point. It is available at:
http://www.cilip.org.uk/sitecollectiondocuments/PDFs/policyadvocacy/deliveringdigitalinclresponseFinal0109.pdf.

Q8. Digital technology is already helping with the back office and administrative functions of many libraries
• How can we spread best practice and maximise those opportunities?
• Self service and return technology is intended to free up library staff to deal with more complex customer enquiries. Should this technology be available in all libraries?

We do need to find ways of making the most of the advantages that office technology can bring. These include:

- More sharing of best practice
- Deciding on some nationwide approaches, and then implementing them across all library services (rather than allowing the service-by-service approach as now)
- Exploring urgently the benefits of unifying admin functions, eg across London, maybe on a regional basis (as in LibrariesWest)

We need to ensure, as a matter of urgency, that the introduction of self-service and return technology really is freeing staff for other work, and bringing the claimed benefits. For example, anecdotal evidence shows that staff are actually dealing with a lot more queries about the system itself, so the benefits may not be as great as proclaimed. In any event, and more seriously, there is a strong view that the use of touch-screen technology prevents use by many visually impaired people – this allegation also needs to be taken on board as a matter of urgency.

Finally, we support these initiatives – provided that the ultimate purpose of the public library is not lost in the excitement of yet more technology!

Q9. Do Local Authority IT strategies support or impede libraries' digital innovation? Should libraries have a national web presence?

Would a national online catalogue covering all public libraries be beneficial?

Clearly, some local authorities' IT strategies support libraries' digital innovation (and may even be leading on this). However, at the same time, there are local authorities with IT strategies (and practices) that do not recognise the 'out-of-hours'/24 hours role that libraries play, nor the necessity for libraries to engage fully with Web 2.0 (there are still public libraries that do not even allow all staff access to email, never mind blogs, Facebook, Twitter, etc).

Yes, a national web presence – as some form of gateway to local services – would be extremely valuable (and could be a key part of the role of the National Library Agency).

It would be very useful for DCMS to consult with users and staff of public library services in London to see if they have found benefits in having London library catalogues available to be searched from the same point.

Q10. Are there any services which you consider should be prescribed across all library services or should services be entirely determined at local level? Is there any value in having a clear national 'offer to consumers of the library in the 21st century'. If so which elements would be vital components? Besides hard copy books do you think there are other services which should be free at the point of delivery on a national basis?

We agree that the public library service must continue as a local service shaped by local needs and demands.

Within that, however, as we state in our reply to Q1, we think that the social justice role of the public library (including involvement in learning and literacy, digital inclusion, regeneration, assisting to create equality of opportunity, health and wellbeing, helping people to negotiate their way to finding information they need, etc) is absolutely critical and central, and that this should be prescribed across all library services.

After that, we need to consider the issue of the "national offers". Again, there is a balance to be struck between introducing a service across all libraries, and the need for local determination. For example, although the Summer Reading Challenge is undoubtedly a great success, nevertheless there were library authorities that were running their own, local – and different – versions; they were asked to join in the national scheme, which, whilst it may be good in branding terms, does mean that local initiatives may get pushed aside.

That said, there are services that should be universal and therefore part of a "national offer". These include (but this list is not exhaustive!):

- Reading support and activities for under-fives, their parents and carers

- Support for creative reading for children & young people of all ages, targeted particularly towards those who are socially excluded (eg looked-after children)
- Provision of services for older people (such as those outlines in The Network's recent guidance[16])
- Supporting people who otherwise would not have access to ICT
- Working with other agencies to build effective partnerships to support communities that, otherwise, may not access libraries' services (eg new arrivals, people with basic skills needs).

Q11. How can we widen usage and make libraries more accessible to the public?

This question conflates a number of issues that actually need to be looked at separately, hence our replies to each sub-question.

For instance:
• On what basis should library leaders make decisions about opening hours and location?

As noted below in our response to Q15, these decisions need to be taken following full, open consultation with local people. Opening hours of static buildings may need to change to meet changing local circumstances – too often libraries have remained with a pattern of opening hours which were relevant in a different time, but now do not meet local needs.

As we say elsewhere in this response, such decisions – particularly about location – should be taken with a pan-authority approach to avoid locating a new library close to one in the neighbouring authority.

• Should library joining and membership arrangements be simplified across all libraries? Indeed should library membership be national so that citizens can use any library and borrow and return material anywhere.

Many public libraries are already simplifying their joining arrangements, and this is a key step to making public libraries more open and accessible. At the same time, it is vital that other local authority departments with a 'custodial' role (such as Audit) understand and support these initiatives, and do not try to block them.

National library membership would also open up the service – and would create new opportunities for people to use services wherever they find themselves (eg on holiday, away on business) – but it needs to be recognised

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[16] Margaret Sloan <u>and</u> John Vincent. *Library services for older people: good practice guide*. The Network, 2009.
http://www.seapn.org.uk/content_files/files/library_services___good_practice_guide_1336795.pdf.

that there will be overhead costs in such a scheme, for example for the return of library materials to their 'home' library.

• Do you think there are particular services which would encourage more library use? You might wish to consider a universal home delivery service (in addition to the scheme for housebound people), and enabling people to request a book online.
• Only a third of 16-24 year olds now visit public libraries. How can we ensure that young people who leave full time education remain library users?
• How can we improve our understanding of the people who use libraries – and of the people who do not – in order to improve services to them?

In our opinion, these questions come at the issue from slightly the wrong angle! It is less about making libraries more 'appealing' and more about ensuring that people see their relevance. So, for example, library staff need to work not just in static buildings but also in the community, making strong, long-lasting connections with community groups and individuals, many of whom may never actually visit a library building, but who are happy to use resources where they are (eg in a playgroup, residential setting, hospital, etc). This approach has been shown to work, but is resource-intensive: there therefore needs to be a real commitment to sustainable, mainstreamed approaches to this work (and not the short-term, project-based, one-year-at-a-time approach which is so prevalent).

By meeting and working with people in their own spaces, libraries can learn at first-hand what the barriers are to take-up of services – and then do something about them!

• How might library users have a greater voice in decision making?

Using the community-based approach outlined above will involve ensure that libraries engage people who would not normally visit a public library, and these voices can then be heard as part of the decision-making process.

Q12. Do we do enough to market library services? If not, what more could/should be done to promote or explain the benefits of libraries?

It is undoubtedly true that libraries are, generally, poorly marketed. However, it is our view that, until libraries have a unified, core approach, marketing is going to be difficult. The following analysis is rough-and-ready, but it could be argued that public libraries are caught between a number of opposing views (eg that there need to be more books; that libraries should return to some form of core book-related service; that there is a lot more to libraries than books), without a real sense of direction (eg are libraries meant to be 'all things to all people'? Doesn't that run the danger of their becoming 'nothing to nobody'? If they focus on a particular target group – or marketing segment – who decides what these priorities are?). If social justice were to be the core aim of a library service, then some of these dilemmas become much easier to resolve.

Q13. Commercial partnerships through libraries are not common. How might we bring more private funding into the public library service?
• What commercial activities should we encourage libraries to operate? (Examples of commercial activities or partnerships might be book selling or partnerships with bookshops, provision of coffee shops, rental of certain materials, contracts with local business, national partnerships with private companies?)
• What benefits do you think these might bring to the library service?
• Are there any commercial activities which you think are not appropriate for libraries to undertake?
Q14. Where can libraries learn from the commercial sector and what private partnerships can you think of which have been useful for library services?
• How can we better spread good practice here?

Previous partnerships with the commercial sector have not always proven fully successful, so any new ventures would need to be very carefully assessed. Given the general public view of banking and commercial "fat cats", however, care would need to be taken to ensure that libraries do not become tarnished.

However, the commercial sector could well help public libraries to introduce some improved working practices (such as budgeting, staff management, ICT, marketing).

More importantly, in our view, is the role that the Third Sector could play, where their aims, roles and relationships with communities are often very closely allied to those of public libraries. For example, some successful work has been undertaken by public libraries with refugee community organisations, to the benefit of both, and the learning from this good practice needs to be spread more actively.

Q15. What are the circumstances in which a Local Authority would be justified in closing a library?

There are certainly circumstances in which a local authority would be justified in closing a library, for example if the building's fabric was in such poor repair that it was not cost-effective to repair it; or where a library is located close to another in a neighbouring authority, and the two authorities agree to close one and leave one (this raises again the issues around governance, as, clearly, it would make sense to have a view of service provision, which is beyond the boundaries of single local authorities).

However, any decision to close a service point has to be made after exhaustive and proper consultation, taking into account the views of the local community (and politicians using their political skills and judgment to decide, for example, whether a particular lobby group is actually speaking on behalf of the community it purports to represent).

Q16. Co-location of libraries with other public services, schools and colleges or business is becoming increasingly prevalent. When is co-location successful and what factors should LAs consider in making co-location decisions?

There is a growing number of examples of successful co-locations, for example not only with schools and colleges, but also with medical centres (eg in Salford) and a range of other Council services (as in Tower Hamlets).

Provided any risks and new barriers are carefully assessed – and mitigated – then this would seem a highly successful way forward.

Q17. There is a mixed economy of library buildings including large central libraries, smaller local libraries and mobile libraries. What should library leaders consider in making decisions about the make-up of their library service? For instance:

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

Public library services should maintain a mix of sizes of service points, co-located where possible, plus a range of other access, such as mobile libraries, community-based services, and, of course, online provision.

As colleagues in Lincolnshire have said in their response:

> "The type of library service provided in small rural communities should depend on the local circumstances. For example, where the library is the only local service, it could remain in a building which is then shared by other local groups. Where other local services exist, the library could be co-located with one of these services. Mobile provision is another possibility, ranging from large 'libraries on wheels' to more personalised delivery-van type services."

There may be benefits to be gained from unstaffed mini-libraries and library machines – provided these are not introduced as cost-cutting exercises, but are, instead, seen as ways of creating greater access and choice.

Where possible, libraries should no longer be housed in dedicated buildings, but should be located in multi-use, one-stop-shop type settings.

Q18. How could we encourage a greater skill mix beyond traditional librarianship in the library service?
• Do you think library courses have the relevant content and teach the right skills to equip the library workforce?
• How can we ensure that the library service attracts and nurtures leaders with the ability to drive improvement, engage in partnerships and innovate services?
• What other skills and/ or qualifications are required to staff a modern library?

Public libraries need to attract – and retain – staff with a wide range of skills and experience (not just what have been seen as 'traditional' library skills). For example, we need more staff with highly developed 'people', IT, marketing, and entrepreneurial skills, in addition to information-handling skills.

There are already leaders within libraries, who demonstrate the abilities outlined in the question – the issue often is whether they are allowed to use them! Unfortunately too, where library managers show a high level of leadership qualities, they are often quickly recruited to elsewhere in the local authority. This reflects, in our opinion, that the leadership issues are not actually solely libraries', but are also being faced across local government as a whole. This is obviously a much wider issue, but it is worth noting that local government is altogether risk-averse and uncreative – so it's no wonder that many library staff either follow their peers' lead or find themselves stifled by the bureaucracy.

Q19. Do you think that volunteering is a useful component of the library workforce? How can we ensure that volunteering arrangements are used to best effect?

There are huge benefits to engaging with volunteers (eg to assist libraries in building bridges into particular communities; to help libraries with, for example ICT support and mentoring) – and the work experience that the volunteers gain is valuable to them too (eg Leicester and Camden's work with refugee volunteers).

The roles of volunteers need to be clearly delineated, and we also need to make sure that they don't feel they are being exploited.

Q20. Is it important that libraries remain a statutory obligation for local authorities?
• What might be the advantages and disadvantages?
• For instance, would the removal of statute allow greater flexibility for fundraising or different modes of operation currently off limits?

Provided that this really does mean that local authorities (and the Government) take the provision of library services seriously, then 'yes'! Until the recent Wirral Inquiry, it has been unclear exactly how or when the Minister of State might intervene – this recent case should give the Government, local authorities and libraries an opportunity to refresh their thinking on this, and

ensure that, in maintaining the statutory duty, its purpose and function are strengthened.

Rather than removing the statutory duty, would it not be possible to move towards introducing different fund-raising and operational methods within the current framework?

Q21. Is the obligation to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service the correct one?
• Does it need further definition or guidance around what that means or should the interpretation be left to local authorities?
• For instance, should there be more prescription around opening hours, web presence, service provision, staff skill mix?
• Is there a need for less, more or different local or national monitoring?
• Are visits and books borrowed still relevant?
• What else should we consider and measure when determining the efficiency and effectiveness of our libraries?
• Would an accreditation scheme for libraries be beneficial or are there other systems which might incentivise libraries to deliver more effectively?
• Is the Secretary of State's power to intervene still appropriate?
Q22. How should we measure performance?
You might like to consider:
• Is there a need for less, more or different local or national monitoring?
• Are visits and books borrowed still relevant?
• What else should we consider and measure when determining the efficiency and
effectiveness of our libraries?
• Would an accreditation scheme for libraries be beneficial or are there other systems which might incentivise libraries to deliver more effectively?
• Is the Secretary of State's power to intervene still appropriate?

As noted above, the 1964 Act – and especially its "comprehensive and efficient" obligation – need complete overhauling. This obligation really is meaningless, and, taking on board points we made above on the core roles of a public library, we consider that these activities should be set and monitored at a national level – with the Secretary of State's power to intervene remaining.

Visits and "books" issued are not useful measures. We need to see the speedy introduction of impact measures that will take libraries towards the useful "Model of Impact" included in the Review document.

We would prefer not to see the introduction of anything that could be interpreted as 'library league tables', but there does need to be robust monitoring (and follow up) of performance, perhaps by the proposed National Library Agency.

Q23. What research do we need to do to best demonstrate the benefits of the library service to local and national leaders? Who would be best placed to initiate this research?

We are not convince that any fresh research is required. As the excellent work by the Society of Chief Librarians has shown, there is a mass of good practice and different models 'out there', they just need to be evaluated and disseminated. If the National Library Agency were to be set up, then this dissemination role should be its first major task.

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