

Review of the Public Library Service in England and Wales

for the Department of National Heritage

FINAL REPORT



**REVIEW OF THE
PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE
IN ENGLAND AND WALES**

**FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF
NATIONAL HERITAGE**

FINAL REPORT



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Foreword

DNH Review of Public Libraries in England and Wales: Final Report

The completion of the *Public Library Review* by the Aslib team occurs at a time of anniversaries. During the period of our research there have been many ceremonies of remembrance commemorating the military and civil sacrifices of the Second World War. Fifty years ago, the nation was in turmoil and the values and ideas of society were undergoing dramatic change. I am reminded that though still at war, the country found time and was sufficiently concerned to examine its social and educational institutions and policies. Thus fifty years on, we are able to recognize the great landmarks of the McColvin report on the public library service and the 1944 Education Act. The former, a challenging examination of the then present and the future potential of the public library; and the latter, one of the most significant pieces of educational legislation of this century.

Like McColvin, we have undertaken our research at a time of great social, technological, economic and demographic change. We face political changes relating to our relationship with Europe, technological opportunities, and debate and challenge in the fields of employment and education. It has been an interesting period in which to examine the current standing of a national institution and to suggest some of the ways in which the public library service might develop in the next century.

Also like McColvin, we discovered with the publication of our *Draft Report* that not everyone shared our view of the future. Consequently, we have consulted widely and listened to the views and comments of professional librarians, library staff, politicians, commercial, educational, academic and voluntary organizations - as well as users - to shape and add detail to our report. Over time, the importance of McColvin's work was recognized and his contribution duly valued. We trust the judgement of history will be as kind to us.

Our Review is the largest piece of research into public libraries every undertaken in the world. We have created an extensive database of evidence containing over a million words. I believe it is important to convey some of the deep feeling that exists about public libraries. The response from library users and organizations with an interest in the public library has been overwhelming. One of the great strengths of our research has been the quality and quantity of our consultation. On behalf of the research team, I should like to thank all those who submitted evidence and comments to the Review and assure them that their contribution has helped enormously in the preparation of this *Report*.

There is a natural tendency for the Aslib team to feel that, with the publication of the *Final Report*, its work is at an end. However, for the public library service in England and Wales, this report marks, in Churchill's words 'perhaps the end of the beginning'. Our *Report* should herald the beginning of debate and action to carry forward a much cherished and highly valued public service into the 21st century.

I commend our *Report* as an independent, thoroughly researched and stimulating document which will serve as a useful guide in the development of public libraries in the years to come.

Roger Bowes
Chief Executive
Aslib, The Association for Information Management

May 1995



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Summary

1 Scope

1.1 The present historic

We began this work with a perception 'not only of the pastness of the past, but its presence'.¹ In 1927, Kenyon² and later McColvin³ in 1942 set the scene for the public library service in the years and the decades that followed their reports. They showed their awareness of the then-current difficulties of public libraries, but did not allow the concerns of the day to blur their vision of the future. They offered fresh insights and far-seeing recommendations. Admittedly, the effects of their reports were not immediate; society, its elected representatives and the library profession value stability and continuity in their public libraries. As Learned Hand remarked, in his address to the Supreme Court of Massachusetts, also in 1942:

We accept the verdict of the past until the need for change cries out loudly enough to force upon us a choice between the comforts of further inertia and the irksomeness of action.

The thinking prompted by Kenyon and McColvin's reviews eventually wrought change. Organizational reform in the latter half of the century has generally meant fewer, larger library authorities than in the past, despite recent proposals for boundary changes in some counties. The post-war authorities offered the wider range of services we see today in urban and rural areas; they began to reach out to serve the needs of local people. As we near the turn of the millennium, our public libraries play a larger role than was once the case in leisure, social life, education, and the communication of information. They mainly use as scripts the ex and extant sources of knowledge and the chronicles of culture.

Half a century after McColvin, the Department of National Heritage (DNH), in consultation with the Welsh Office and the library community, decided to commission an up-to-date review of the public library service in England and Wales. They set a brief, and instructed a team of researchers and consultants brought together by Aslib to carry out the work with guidance from a steering committee.

1.2 Perspectives

Since the second world war, there have been numerous investigations, papers, conferences and books on public libraries, up to and including Comedia's report, 'Borrowed time', in 1993. There have been many *ad hoc* studies into the needs of

¹ELIOT T S **Tradition and the individual talent** 1919

²KENYON, Sir Frederic (Chairman, Public Libraries Committee) **Report on public libraries in England and Wales** London H M Stationery Office 1927 356 pp *Cmd* 2868

³MCCOLVIN L R **The public library system of Great Britain: a report on its present condition with proposals for post-war reorganization** London Library Association 1942 218 pp

users, and bodies such as LISU⁴ and Cipfa⁵ compile regular series of statistics on the demand for public library services and their supply. The databases in the field and communications networks provide access to growing volumes of texts, data and references that cover theory and practice across the world. Details of innovations in the libraries and communities of Western Europe, North America, the British Commonwealth, other OECD nations, and developing countries, are readily available at the tap of a few keys. The sources of information have become more open. So has society itself and, today, both the public and practitioners expect that they will be consulted on decisions that will affect them.

The team therefore adopted a research strategy that differed in some respects from the approaches in earlier work. In technical terms, the team used a 'triangulation' method. It requires researchers to gather, cross-check and combine data from different vantage points to contour views, in this case, of public libraries.

Our surveys of users and non-users of libraries, of librarians and other library staff, and of local officials and elected members, gave us a representative set of opinions as a starting point. Evidence from library authorities, and from professional and other bodies, added a useful perspective. A wide-ranging search of the literature and database sources enriched the team's awareness of public library services as they are, and as they could, or should, be.

. . . probably the most intensive and widely-influenced study of public libraries so far carried out anywhere in the world . . .

Meetings, presentations and discussions stimulated worthwhile exchanges on our thinking as it evolved; and the circulation of early draft conclusions prompted critical and thoughtful responses, which have swayed our recommendations. In sum, the work represents probably the most intensive and widely-influenced study of public libraries so far carried out anywhere in the world.

1.3 The DNH's brief

The brief, which prompted these endeavours, was demanding. It required the team to conduct studies of –

- The public library's environment;
- Library users and non-users' opinions, behaviour and interests;
- Library functions and services.

⁴Library and Information Statistics Unit, University of Loughborough

⁵Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy

We also explored the funding of public library services, their democratic control, and the repercussions of change. These issues provide the framework for this summary of findings and recommendations, and for the accompanying report.

1.4 Themes, recurring and new

Themes that permeated past reports recur in this review. Since early Victorian times several issues have repeatedly featured in the published appraisals.

- One concern has been to ensure that everyone in English and Welsh towns, cities, villages and hamlets can gain ready *access* to public libraries' resources.
- Another concern is to promote *excellence* in the management of public libraries and the delivery of their services.
- A third, to ensure that public library management, staff and services are *responsive* to the changing demands of people who use them now, or can be encouraged to use them in the future.
- A fourth, to win *recognition* for the importance of public libraries to democratic processes; to formal and self-education; to business, employment and trade; to relaxation and leisure for people who live in a public library's catchment, and for casual visitors and tourists.

Librarians have sought to add to the qualities of a locality that make life worth living there, and, generally, to foster the cohesion of society, and its heritage, civilization and culture.

Those purposes endure, but there are now new forces at work. Electronic and optical media and networked communications are leading to an information revolution that will be as profound in its effects as the industrial revolution. Public libraries will need dynamic leadership to expand their roles and seize the opportunities that are emerging. Changes are occurring at a pace that will scarcely allow for a mature and measured response. To meet the challenge, and to ensure equitable access to information, those who run public libraries will require fresh vigour and enthusiasm, and a willingness to innovate. They will need to work in new partnerships with other libraries, and with enterprises from the private, voluntary and public sectors. Above all, they must find ways to break the shackles of today's problems, so that they can address the critical issues of tomorrow.

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..

Public libraries will need dynamic leadership to expand their roles and seize the opportunities that are emerging . . .

In the twenty-first century, the avant-garde public library should be in the hands of efficient, pragmatic managements. The library community, and the elected members who control services, must look for managers, specialists and professionals with exceptional capabilities. Authorities will need individuals who are aware of the service ethic, and who fully recognize the social, economic and political significance of their work. They must also have the financial and commercial know-how to develop large-scale funding from new and diverse sources. This emerging library and information sector will need individuals and groups who can respond to demands from their localities and regions, and to opportunities wherever they arise.

2 The public library's environment

2.1 Brief

The brief agreed between DNH and the library community called for a study of the changing world within which libraries have to operate. Specifically, the team should examine economic and political parameters; social, demographic and technological shifts; and changes in local government. As part of this study, the team should review significant developments over the past ten years, in the UK and abroad.

2.2 Findings

We found our study of the public library's environment instructive. It revealed an established institution with a wider influence on the lives of people than they perhaps consciously realize.

Historically, public libraries have helped local people to cope with crisis and change. They still do; when a disaster strikes, a common reaction is to search for information, and many resort to their public libraries for that purpose. Libraries enable people faced with change in their lives to inform themselves about local, national, European and world affairs, to acquire knowledge, and to refurbish their skills. Trade, job-seeking, relocation of families, and home working can all benefit from the type of help that public libraries already offer or could provide.

Many other opportunities will arise, as the information revolution gains momentum and new demands appear. Businesses will seek to create novel information-based products and services, and to increase their export earnings. Managers in both public and private sectors will want to enhance their organizations' information-handling capabilities. Knowledge and cultural insights will become crucial to success in global markets, to revitalizing skills and capabilities, to course-based and independent education, to healthy living, to social survival, to the integration and development of many communities.

Among the communities we have studied in this review are people whose preferred language is Welsh. The Welsh Language Act 1993, and the increasing number of young people in Wales who speak Welsh, are creating a rising demand for public library services that can meet their needs. Other groups of people, to whom public libraries could offer help, include children with a poor home life, and members of ethnic and

cultural minorities. Libraries can also provide useful services to people with impaired sight or hearing, and to those who suffer learning difficulties, health problems, or are disabled and perhaps housebound. Generally, they will be seeking more information and social intelligence, and they will want direct or remote use of public libraries as focal points of access. On the evidence, many in these groups will also be eager to participate in new community networks.

At the hub of such networks, public libraries could offer an attractive and stimulating milieu. However, it is often not easy – especially for people who only go there occasionally – to appreciate the range of resources and services that libraries can supply. There are sometimes deficiencies in marketing and ‘merchandising’ services, and in layout and signposting. Planners, designers

. . . take advantage of research on ways to enhance the appeal and friendliness of the library environment . . .

and managers of public libraries could remedy these problems. For example, they could take advantage of research on ways to enhance the appeal and friendliness of the library environment. Recent studies of museums and galleries offer instructive findings that could benefit public libraries as users' expectations and circumstances alter.

Social changes and a new demography will add to the pressures on fissile families and their children, and to the tensions among an older and culturally varied population. As the population ages and the proportion of dependent people increases, the need for information and cultural resources to improve the quality of life and the productivity of economic activity will become acute. Public libraries can contribute to these objectives and develop services that will support, stabilize and integrate people from different backgrounds into the community.

Bodies such as Unesco, the European Union and the DNH have considered how these developments should broaden the mission of public libraries. For our part, we have examined the question of how to empower libraries to fulfil their mission through legislation, charters and standards.

All these factors could modify the range and scale of library use. And all these factors are likely to influence the apparent and latent demand for diversified services.

2.3 Observations

Public libraries can help to satisfy this multiplicity of users and potential users' requirements, and our review of developments suggests that there have already been innovations to that end, especially in forward-looking authorities. However, few of these innovations have become pervasive. To cope with the

. . . To cope with the extraordinary changes in their environment, public libraries will need new capabilities, additional resources, and new partnerships . . .

extraordinary changes in their environment, public libraries will need new capabilities, additional resources, and new partnerships. For example, we note that enterprises in the business of developing attractions are turning away from the ersatz style that has characterized some theme parks. Instead, they wish to provide visitors with different, authentic experiences that have a greater 'cerebral' appeal. Public libraries' heritage assets⁶ may be of considerable value to these entrepreneurs, who could bring innovative skills and techniques to joint ventures and, incidentally, to the improvement of the library milieu.

Many we surveyed, listened to, and communicated with, believe that public libraries warrant additional finance so that they can develop as focal points for extended services, facilities and activities to meet diverse needs. As long ago as 1849, the Select Committee remarked in support of government investment in public libraries:

This is one of those few cases in which a comparatively small aid may accomplish a large portion of public good.⁷

To fulfil that aim, the country will need to marshal the investments and resources that will enable public libraries to improve access to both knowledge and informed insights. Developments in information technology, multi-media systems, communications, databases and networking (for example, Internet and World Wide Web) are reinforcing demands on public library services, and altering the ways in which they respond. These innovations will make an impact on the location and interdependence of libraries, on service provision and management, and on the benefits that should accrue.

3 Users and their interests

3.1 Brief

In their brief, the DNH, the Welsh Office and the library community emphasized the importance of the changing and emerging needs of the public. They envisaged a process of public consultation to ensure that, as a team, we kept our thinking in close touch with these needs.

3.2 Findings

Each year, more than twenty-four million adults (aged 16 or older) use public libraries, that is, about three in five of the population. Even higher proportions of children of

⁶Local studies collections contain illustrations, documents, historical texts and other materials on well-known individuals, organizations, events and activities. They could provide the basis for new electronic products (for example, CD-Roms and online multimedia databases) with a wide appeal. Electronic publishers have a growing interest in such products. Genealogical and other records already draw enquiries and visitors from across the world; electronic media could stimulate more tourism and add to local sources of revenue.

⁷SELECT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LIBRARIES **Report from the Select Committee on Public Libraries with the proceedings of the Committee and the minutes of evidence** Education, Public Libraries 1 12 June 1849

school age also go to public libraries. Twelve million of the adults are frequent users, and visit a public library once a fortnight on average. They mainly go alone. The twenty-four million estimate also includes two or three million people who depend on friends, relatives, library staff or volunteers to deliver books on loan, and to use other public library services for them.

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Library users come from all socio-economic and age groups. However, there are higher proportions of teenagers (16-19 in our surveys), older people (60+) and people in the AB and C1 socio-economic groups who regularly go to public libraries. The frequent users generally borrow books, both fiction and non-fiction, and they mainly read for pleasure or leisure, not work purposes. Popular uses of public libraries also include reading newspapers or magazines, and searching for information, usually in reference works. Other media (cassettes, compact discs, videos) have a minority appeal.

Non-borrowers, especially in the C2 and DE socio-economic groups, use public library services less often, that is, only when they need information which a library might supply. People who say that they 'never use public libraries' feel that they have 'no interest or need', or 'no time', to use a public library; or that they 'buy all the books they want'. In contrast, teenagers and younger children are often in public libraries to find materials that will be of value for a school or college project. Young people who have just left school, or are about to leave, rely on their public library when trying to find a job, as do older people in search of employment. Individuals who work from home, or 'telework', are the most intensive users of all who visit public libraries.

People who use public libraries generally prefer main or central libraries to branch, village or mobile libraries. The larger the library the more often people will go to it, the further they will travel, and the better its image. This finding reinforces the view that increased scale will benefit public libraries and their users. The other main factor, which determines the diversity of use, is access. People are also attracted to public libraries that are conveniently located, and they are more likely to use such libraries on impulse. Both the size and the number of public library 'outlets' will therefore influence patterns of use.

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. . . People are also attracted to public libraries that are conveniently located, and they are more likely to use such libraries on impulse. . . .

On average, people travel for about half an hour when they visit a public library, and they may call at the shops, a bank or a building society on their way there or back. Most people walk to their local library, or go by car; a few take the bus.

Public Library Review

Users of public libraries feel that the service has improved in recent years, and they expect to see further improvements in the future. Library staff, other than professional librarians, share their views. The profession feels that the service is deteriorating. Librarians, library staff and frequent users have a strong commitment to the public library service; occasional users and non-users do not feel as strongly about it.

Public libraries have a generally favourable image among library users, who believe they are well-organized, a good source of information, easy to reach, and pleasant to use. They feel that the service is not well publicized, and both users and library staff suspect that public libraries do not appeal to young people. Our findings confirm that suspicion. On balance, teenagers do not feel that public libraries are up to date or that staff are approachable. Conversely, older people who often visit public libraries have a positive image of their services.

Welsh-speakers also believe public libraries are well-organized and a source of reliable data. They find it easy to locate what they need, but they have reservations about the public library's environment, staffing and stocks. For example, people fluent in Welsh would like more spent on books in their language and staff who speak it well, and less on new services. Members of the 'white' and 'non-white' population share the view that libraries are well organized; and respondents who are members of ethnic or cultural minorities would like to see more libraries and services attuned to their interests, and new shops in public libraries selling books, records, gifts, stationery, etc.

Men and women who are housebound have a significant interest in tourist and travel information (that is, information on places that could cater for their needs) and in local council information. They would like public libraries to have better computer information services, and to offer remote access to library catalogues and reference materials. Respondents as a whole favour innovations that would help people who are disabled or do not read easily or well.

3.3 Recommendations

The research has created a database of qualitative opinions as texts structured for interpretation, and a databank of responses to questions for statistical analysis. In combination, the database and databank, and the methodology developed by the team, could provide resources that later researchers can both use and augment. The team recommends editing the database and the databank to remove confidential information about individuals, and then arranging the information for electronic publication on, for example, a CD-Rom.

During its work, the team identified useful sources of information, which merit further study and analysis. We recommend that the Department should commission additional research with the limited aim of drawing relevant conclusions from these sources:

- A recent survey by the Central Office of Information covered people in England and Wales who speak Urdu, Punjabi, Gujarati, Bengali, Sylheti, Hindi and other Asian languages. The DNH was not involved in this study, and the team could not secure access to the data from this survey, which covered respondents' use of

library services. It would be advantageous to acquire and analyse these data to draw out conclusions useful for the public library service.

- Various library authorities provided the results of local surveys, prepared either to help the public library review, or for their own purposes. The latter included, for example, separate research studies into black and ethnic minority library users, by Birmingham City Council's Department of Leisure and Community Services, and by Nottinghamshire County Council's Leisure Services. The data from these and other local studies, which paralleled our own, could usefully enrich understanding of users' requirements. We recommend further research to find and analyse the relevant data from these diverse sources.
- Our research produced profiles of demand and supply for library services in nine case study authorities. The team also developed data on the economies of scale and the geography of location that could be of value to library authorities. In our view, these and other data should form the basis for further analysis and a substantial second volume. We recommend that work be commissioned to produce this additional publication.

4 Functions and services

4.1 Brief

At the heart of the brief, drawn up by DNH, the Welsh Office and the library community, is a requirement to assess the scope and value of the public library service. Guidelines and a framework for local choice should define 'a comprehensive, efficient and modern public library service'. As part of this study, the team should consider the desirability of any changes in the Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, and to identify key developments that warrant national attention.

The brief instructed the team to examine services commonly provided as part of a modern public library service, and expected by the public, although not necessarily envisaged in the 1964 Act. A further requirement was to consider partnerships and links with other library sectors, and with the voluntary and private sectors. The team should take account of the connections between library services and other local authority services.

4.2 Findings

Public libraries offer a range of benefits, fulfil diverse functions, and provide a wide range of services. We discuss the nature of these benefits, functions and services in our recommendations for *Public library policy and planning guidance notes*.⁸ We base our findings on a trade-off analysis. The detailed findings show that frequent users favour the direct benefits they receive when they use a public library. Most people want the public library to spend more on books, and on more convenient and longer opening

⁸See section 4.3 of this summary

hours. On the other hand, people who suffer disabilities would like to see more spent on new services that they could use.

Our trade-off analysis suggests that, on average, English and Welsh people would spend an extra £5-£10 per household annually to see improvements in public library services – with more books and longer opening hours ranking high on their list of priorities. Individuals who are bedfast, housebound or otherwise disabled, people in ethnic minorities and Welsh-speakers all value the public library service highly, and would like to see far more spent on its development.

This trade-off analysis shows that the majority views the public library as a valuable resource for future generations and as a ‘community asset’. We found widespread support for these purposes. It seems that many individuals, employers and communities wish to see additional monies allocated, or raised, to maintain and develop libraries, collections and resources that will benefit future generations. There is comparable support for the public library as an asset of considerable value to the community. We believe that these are important findings that offer a basis for securing new funds for the long-term development of public libraries.

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. . . these are important findings that offer a basis for securing new funds for the long-term development of public libraries. . . .

4.3 Recommendations: Public Library Policy and Planning Guidance Notes

The team’s research shows that there are significant variations between the make-up of areas, the standard and quality of public libraries, and local people’s needs. Most people want well-furnished libraries and a range of effective services that will suit local circumstances. We therefore recommend that the Department should set a new comprehensive framework for public library services that will allow considerable flexibility in local choice. Our findings show how DNH might best accomplish this objective without amending the 1964 Act. We do not recommend new legislation, except that a new statutory instrument may be required to simplify the collecting of fines and charges.⁹

Instead, we recommend that the Department should prepare *Public library policy and planning guidance notes*. Each authority would find in them valuable advice on how best to draw up a strategic plan geared to the needs of the public library service in its

⁹See section 5.2 in this summary and chapter 5, s 5.12 in the main report.

area. The *Notes* would have a persuasive, not a coercive effect. Nevertheless, we believe they will set an authoritative paradigm for public libraries services across England and Wales, and establish the tone and tenor of opinion on their development.

Each library authority (or, in the future, authorities that decide to work together as a regional group) would use the *Notes* to prepare broadly-based strategic plans for its area. These plans would draw upon past work on Library and Information Plans (LIPs), which showed the advantages of, and the mechanisms for, cooperation between library and information services in an area. In its strategic plan, the authority would state the priority and emphasis it will give to the defined and tested purposes and functions of a public library service, based on the results of the team's work.

Briefly, the research shows that four main purposes and thirteen 'core' functions supply a broad and comprehensive framework for a public library service – a framework for local choice that corresponds to the expressed preferences of participants in our research. The *four* purposes are:

- To take practical steps to ensure that the public library service can meet the demands of *future generations*;
- To create a public library service that will be a *community asset* in which local people can take pride, and which others will respect – an asset that helps local people to identify with their community;
- To develop, maintain and operate public library *facilities and services of direct benefit* to people who live, work or study in the area, and wish to make regular use of these services;
- To maintain public library facilities and services that occasional users of public libraries can take advantage of when the need arises, although these occasional users may be unfamiliar with the services that are available – that is, services that have a '*contingency value*'.

**. . . four main purposes
and thirteen 'core'
functions supply a broad
and comprehensive
framework for a public
library service – a
framework for local
choice that corresponds
to expressed preferences
. . .**

Our surveys of frequent, occasional and non-users of public libraries, and of professional librarians and other library staff, revealed a consensus. The *thirteen* core functions identified in the team's research represent a comprehensive description of public library services. Our research suggests that these functions offer three broad sets of benefits:

- *Continuing or 'perpetual' benefits* – that is, benefits held in high regard by local people, which they wish to see as everyday features of the public library's functions. These include:

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Ways to *enlighten children*, by enabling and encouraging them to discover information and the advantages of reading;

A range of *popular reading* materials (broadly defined), which library members can borrow for themselves or for others, including people who are unable to visit a library;

Development of public libraries that will be *landmarks* for their communities;¹⁰

Provision of *areas for study*, both for students on educational courses and for other local people who are engaged in lifelong learning;

Making available collections of cassettes, talking books, compact discs, videos and other new media which library members can borrow or study (*audios, videos and new media*).

- *Sporadic or occasional benefits* – that is, benefits to people who use public library services (either directly or from a distance), as and when the need arises. The services include:

Reference services, with *expert reference librarians* available to help enquirers to find information;

Access to knowledge and culture from every part of the world;

Sources of documents and information about the area's history (*local studies*);

Resources and skills that enable enquirers to obtain *information on vital issues*;

A quick way to find out what is going on in an area, and whom to contact (*local information*);

A rich mine of information and intelligence for business, trade, employment and training (*business information*).

- *Social benefits* – that is, benefits that come from people who find a public library a pleasant and worthwhile place to visit:

Developing a public library, which local people and visitors will value as a *familiar, relaxing place*, which is safe, warm and well-lit;

Providing a *pleasant place and a stimulating environment*, where people who go to the library can meet their friends, exchange news, opinions and information, and perhaps enjoy interesting exhibits, displays, events or activities.

A consensus emerged from our surveys. Library users and non-users, professional librarians, and other library staff agreed on the significance of these functions, and did not add to them. Library authorities may, of course, depend on remote resources, or even contractors, to deliver services; and they may decide that public libraries should carry out additional functions and offer further services at the margin. None the less, the team has survey evidence to show that the specified purposes and functions describe, comprehensively, the core functions of public libraries.

How best to set priorities for public libraries, and to plan for services? The team recommends that the *Guidance notes* should advise local authorities to involve users

¹⁰That is, functions which help to fulfil the purpose of creating a community asset, which local people and visitors can identify as a central attraction of an area.

and non-users, and to conduct surveys of local opinions. The *Notes* should draw attention to model practice appropriate to such surveys, including the methods employed in the present research to develop national benchmarks of opinion. Library authorities should then publicize the priorities local people allocate, and their plans for developing public libraries in the area. When completed, authorities should deposit their plans with the DNH in England and the Welsh Office in Wales. We believe such an approach will contribute significantly towards local choice, support local, democratic decision-making, and encourage the development of effective public library services.

The *Notes* should also provide information on model charters, standards and practices that library authorities can employ to measure the performance of their public library services. The Library Association's standards will be of value for this purpose, and we recognize that their recommendations reflect a considered professional viewpoint.

It will be important to take full account of users' perceptions when drawing up standards. We suggest an integrated approach to their development, hospitable to the views of elected members and professional librarians, but shaped by users and non-users' expectations and experience. Measures of users and non-users' impressions, observations and perceptions developed for our surveys could be of value in that connection. We recommend further work to explore these possibilities.

To monitor performance against plan, we propose a new independent library inspectorate, OFLIB. It should follow the models and precedents we suggest in the report.¹¹ A key feature of OFLIB should be the involvement of users and non-users in the inspections. We also suggest that school libraries and the school library service should fall within the scope of OFLIB inspections.

. . . . to monitor performance against plan, we propose a new independent library inspectorate, OFLIB. . .

4.4 *Recommendations: developments*

We recommend that there should be infrastructure investment outside existing sources of funding. The money would enable central, branch and mobile public libraries and new access points throughout England and Wales to connect to the new information superhighways, including Internet and World Wide Web, through broadband cable or the Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN). The links should provide rapid access to multimedia and online databases, and regionally-based CD-Rom collections. The investment

. . . central, branch and mobile public libraries and new access points throughout England and Wales to connect to the new information superhighways, including Internet and World Wide Web . . .

¹¹Chapter 4, s 4.6

should include the costs of the information technology, cabling, staff training and incidental costs of setting up connections and screens in each library.

The team believes that this public sector capital investment will foster important changes. In particular, it will help to create the mechanisms and the attitudes that will encourage library authorities to identify opportunities and seize them. We recommend that library authorities, which already work together in regional cooperatives, should be invited to submit joint proposals for investment in this technology for the public libraries they manage and control.

Our findings suggest that public library users would benefit from the introduction of libraries in village shops, and kiosks or micro-libraries in many new locations. These could include shopping centres; railway, bus and motorway service stations; and other places that attract sustained flows of people. The development of these new 'outlets' could offer opportunities for partnership ventures with the private sector. We note that large telecommunications and electronic media companies have a lively interest in such innovative enterprises.

. . . Our findings suggest that public library users would benefit from the introduction of libraries in village shops, and kiosks or micro-libraries in many new locations . .

Working people find the present limitations on opening hours inconvenient. There is interest in Sunday opening of public libraries, although some people oppose this on religious or social grounds. On the other hand, for members of some religions and cultures, Sunday would be a more appropriate and convenient opening day than Friday or Saturday. We recommend a review by library authorities of the days and hours when public libraries are open.

. . . a review by library authorities of the days and hours when public libraries are open . . .

It will be more difficult for any library to meet from its own resources the diverse needs of multifarious communities, which are likely to become accustomed to the instant gratification of demand in a new information age. Economies of scale will favour large, possibly very large, and well-resourced libraries that can work with local libraries to offer access to a wide range of specialized collections and services.

. . . the introduction of new Regional Library Centres, or 'hyper-libraries', largely under the control of library authorities in the region . . initially . . . on a pilot scale

It will be wise, in our view, to develop new approaches and structures, based on existing patterns of regional cooperation. We therefore recommend the introduction of new Regional Library Centres, or 'hyperlibraries', largely under the control of library authorities in the

region. Initially, we recommend the development of one or two Centres on a pilot scale, as a model for their further development. Funding for these Centres should be diverse, with the injection of additional monies from the public purse, and the early involvement of the private sector. Based on our informal enquiries, the most fruitful sources of such funds will be enterprises in the information, publishing, media, leisure and entertainment industries.

The case for such Centres is elaborated in our report.¹² Briefly, they will be complementary to public libraries in the region, and enable them to secure useful advantages for functions, activities and services that are uneconomic on a smaller scale.

4.5 Other recommendations

We recommend –

- Development of regional cooperative links, joint public library services for interlending, and other shared resource schemes to ensure the delivery of a comprehensive service. These improvements could usefully take advantage of information technology, cable and telecommunications networks, and will need both public sector funding and new, diverse sources of income.
- Further trade-off analysis research to refine our estimates of the value of public library services, individually and in combination.
- Investigation of computerized services appropriate to the needs of remote users whose disabilities or health problems prevent journeys to a library.
- Consultative meetings in each library authority with a forum or representative group of people with disabilities, who use libraries, to work out how best to meet their needs. As an illustration, we are advised that public libraries should give particular attention to labelling and lighting shelves. According to the evidence, poor and badly-lit shelf guides prevent many users, especially those with impaired vision or physical disabilities, from locating the material for which they are searching.
- Enabling library authorities to gain local electoral approval to raise additional revenue funds for library materials. We believe that public libraries will support a broad range of core functions and provide access to existing and new electronic services. In practice, these functions and services will add to the demand for books, journals and other media. Therefore, funding to pay for additional materials will be a prime requirement.
- Improvements to services for children and adults engaged in lifelong learning: the focus should be on services that build upon new information technology and regional initiatives. Public libraries also need to improve their response to the

¹²See chapter 4 of our report, section 4.8

expectations and demands of young people who use public library services or might do so in future.

- A broader-based approach to the provision of business and commercial information. Public libraries have a useful appeal to homeworkers and business people who run small enterprises. They are evidently more at ease in a public library than in chambers of commerce, business links or other formal services. Access to the information superhighways should enable public libraries to develop the range and quality of information services that first-class reference libraries should offer in the future.
- Development of 'proactive' information services¹³ that anticipate and cater for the needs of particular groups and in niche markets. Public libraries may develop these proactive services most effectively in partnership with private sector bodies, or perhaps other local government, voluntary or public sector services geared to the service of business, commerce and community groups.
- The introduction of on-demand, electronic and other publishing services, the requirement for which is likely to increase with the development of databases and broad-band communications. There will be emerging opportunities for libraries to offer services adapted to the needs of individual users, students, community groups and local enterprises. To meet local demand, public libraries could develop partnerships with publishers and bureaux, and attune services.
- The membership of the new Library and Information Commission and the new Advisory Council¹⁴ should include practitioners, users of libraries, and individuals knowledgeable about research and developments in the field. The composition of these bodies should also include private sector members, among them individuals with a sound knowledge of the information business and hi-tech services. The advice of these members should be of value to the Commission and the Advisory Council, each of which has a key role to play in developing library services in the years ahead.
- Partnerships between public libraries and community groups, businesses, and other organizations, which together can supply the technical skills, the entrepreneurial capabilities, and financial resources to fill important gaps.
- Introduction, or reintroduction, of services for 'latchkey children'¹⁵ to stimulate their interest in reading and information. Effective services could reduce the

¹³For example, bulletins, 'alerting', and 'selective dissemination of information' services.

¹⁴The successor to the Library and Information Services Council (England), which will advise the Secretary of State on public library matters.

¹⁵Children who, out of school hours, may not have a place to go out of school hours until their parents return home from work.

chances that children out of school will be at risk in the streets, or become involved in mischief or crime.

- Development by library authorities of telecentres, sometimes known as 'electronic cottages', to allow teleworkers to share networking and IT resources, and benefit fully from public library services.

5 Funding and control

5.1 Findings

In chapter two¹⁶ of our report we discuss the benefits that public libraries can potentially offer. Since the mid-nineteenth century, people generally have believed that these shared benefits justify public libraries being run largely as a public service. Our research confirms that view. The survey results, which we report in chapter five, show that people would like to see public libraries under local democratic control, not under the control of business. This finding is pertinent to the parallel study for DNH on contracting out public library services.

Prima facie, there is a spread of opinion on charging public library users, even for borrowing books. If a public library needed more money to keep up services, 37 per cent of the population would favour charging users. However, these respondents to the question in our survey are mainly occasional or non-users of public libraries, and our analysis shows that they do not feel strongly about the issue. Frequent users do, and they do not generally support charging for services.

Professional librarians and other library staff also feel strongly about charging; they believe it would damage the public library service. They favour public sector funding of local library services, and would prefer support to come from the Council tax, a central government grant, or even a special fund for public libraries paid into by all local households. When we combined their choices, we found that 45 per cent of our respondents favoured one of these public funding options. We also received many submissions from library authorities, and from members of the public who are strongly opposed to charging for mainstream public library services.

5.2 Recommendations

We recommend that access to public libraries and their services should remain free of direct charge, and that there should be no charge for borrowing books from the library's own stock. The rationale of charging for the loan of audio and video materials, and not for books, is difficult to explain, but it would be unrealistic to suggest the abolition of these charges, at least in the short term. We therefore

. . . access to public libraries and their services should remain free of direct charge, and there should be no charge for borrowing books directly from a public library . . .

¹⁶see section 2 above

recommend that no new direct charge for present library services should be introduced, and that the principle of free and equal access to library materials and services should be extended when conditions allow.

When public libraries begin to use the information superhighways, we believe there will be a case for allowing uncharged access to those network sources that are essentially 'free', that is, available at no more than the cost of local calls to telecommunications nodes. Within limits, library authorities could specify no charge for these services, although they should retain the option to levy fees for 'added value' services.¹⁷

The public library is a focal point for many services, facilities and benefits, actual and potential. The library is a well-established, familiar institution, which many people already use to their advantage. Admittedly, public libraries generally are not now geared to a high rate of innovation, whatever the situation was in the immediate post-war years. Nevertheless, it would be costly to duplicate the capital investment in buildings, facilities, resources, and skills which public libraries already have. Instead, authorities could develop them to satisfy emerging needs.

English and Welsh people on the whole favour maintaining and improving public library services. In times of great change, to develop and improve these services will call for investment, some of which must probably come from the public purse. As the 1849 Select Committee implied, public library services are 'public goods' or 'merit goods' (that is, services that can justify public sector funding or subsidy) because of the range and type of benefits they deliver. We recommend that the DNH should secure increased capital for the public library service *inter alia* from national lottery and heritage funds.

We advocate DNH support for the 'unbundling' of public library management accounts and funding sources, with the following objectives:

- A concentration of existing funding on mainstream public library services;
- The establishment in each authority of a Future Generations' Trust, to attract widely-based local support and draw additional funds for the long-term development of the public library service;
- The creation of partnerships, especially with community groups and the voluntary and private sectors, to provide 'added-value' and 'proactive' information and

. . . The establishment in each authority of a Future Generations' Trust, to attract widely-based local support and draw additional funds for the long-term development of the public library service . . .

¹⁷For example, extensive database and document delivery services conducted for local businesses.

library services, and community networks, for groups of users and in niche markets.

Diversification of funding sources on which public libraries rely, will require significant increases in collaborative initiatives. Specifically, we recommend that:

- English and Welsh library authorities collaborate regionally, and with similar bodies in other European Union member states. The authorities, jointly or severally, should approach national and EU bodies for regional, structural and social fund support, and explore possibilities with English Partnerships. There is evidence from informal discussions that innovative approaches would have reasonable prospects of success.
- Library authorities work together to develop region-wide strategies in close cooperation with the private sector, other local authority services and community development agencies. As a straightforward example, there should be, for instance, greater regional and national cooperation in the provision of mobile libraries. Such cooperation should lead to a general improvement in the building of mobile libraries and economies in their cost.
- Authorities initiate regional initiatives to win sponsorship for appropriate public library activities. These initiatives should build upon the recommendations in the LISC working party report on sponsorship, published by Aslib. That report highlighted the advantages to sponsors of single source negotiation that covers a broad geographical area.

New, forward-looking approaches could help to secure a broader, diverse basis for funding revenue expenditures in public libraries. Cooperation between library authorities, regionally and nationally, could help to develop a positive image for public libraries as a vital feature of social and economic life in England and Wales. We believe that to focus publicity mainly on the problems public libraries have in financing and keeping up services could be counter-productive. New funding sources are more likely to support activities they think are vigorous and healthy than services they are told are in decline. The advantages that a positive image would bring argue for public sector financial backing for public libraries.

. . . to develop a positive image for public libraries as a vital feature of social and economic life . .

We recommend the introduction of monetary-value vouchers that would enable individuals to purchase them as gifts for their children, relatives, friends, and employees. The vouchers could cover any extra costs a public library may charge for added value services – for example, special database searches and consequential urgent-action document deliveries required by students or other library users (an ‘Interlib’ service), and other heritage purposes. These tokens would also enable

libraries to transfer small sums that would otherwise be expensive for authorities to invoice and pay.

‘Smart cards’ could improve the speed and convenience of public library transactions. Possibly, they could assist those authorities which decide to make a charge for added value library services. Users might find it convenient to use their smart cards to pay for those extra facilities library authorities may decide to offer. We recommend a study of how libraries can best take advantage of this innovation.

When a borrower loses a book, his or her public library may charge its full price,¹⁸ plus fines at a rate of 10 pence per diem, perhaps to a maximum of £5 or £10. Borrowers often take out six, eight or even ten books at a time. Thus, a library member who fails to return eight non-fiction books may face a bill of £280. Library authorities do not pursue all defaulters, because of the time and cost of doing so; and sometimes the authority does not take action against defaulters as a matter of policy. Police Research Group figures¹⁹ indicate that consequential losses, mainly of new books and other media, amount to many millions of pounds each year, rising annually with the value of purchases.

We have discussed possibilities with several companies which supply services to public libraries and local authorities. They have advised that it would be economic and effective to recover the books and fines through a new central facility, akin to that already used by local authorities to recover unpaid parking fines. In running that service, the firms take steps, in cooperation with the authorities, to avoid hounding vulnerable members of society. The library authorities and professional librarians we consulted were generally against this centralized approach, which they feel would deter poorer families from using libraries. On the other hand, the loss of books and other media deprives library users of items they can refer to or borrow. On balance, we believe that the case for introducing it has merit, and we recommend that DNH should set up a working party²⁰ to explore it.

6 The repercussions of change

6.1 Findings

We examined in detail the attitudes of library staff to innovation and change in the nine case study authorities. Our research revealed public library services that are generally effectively managed, and run by well-motivated staff. However, we note that younger

¹⁸Hard-back fiction books may have a cover price of £15; non-fiction books, £25 or more; and CD-Roms and videos could be as costly.

¹⁹BURROWS J *and* COOPER D *for* POLICE RESEARCH GROUP, CRIME PREVENTION UNIT **Theft and loss from UK libraries: a national survey** London Home Office, Police Department 1992

²⁰The working party membership should be diverse.

members of staff are dissatisfied, sometimes alienated, because of the constraints and structures within which they work.

In practice, library authorities have often taken initiatives that clearly bring advantages. But they are mainly modest in ambition, and the authorities are not set up to apply new ideas and innovate on a larger scale. To adopt the broader and higher level strategy that we recommend in this report, library authorities will need order of magnitude shifts in attitudes and enterprise. This is a key finding which merits close attention.

. . . the broader and higher level strategy . . . will need order of magnitude shifts in attitudes and enterprise .

6.2 Recommendations

We recommend –

- That ways are found to attract high calibre recruits to the public library service. We believe this could be achieved, partly by the development of partnerships with private enterprises, community groups and voluntary bodies, and partly by the introduction of supernumerary trainee schemes in library authorities. We also propose the creation of new Department for Education (DfE) studentships for entrants to the public library service.
- The creation of a staff college. Its main purpose will be to identify, attract and develop future leaders who can work in or alongside the public library service. We would like to see secondments to the College, to DNH, and to OFLIB, with other secondments to broaden and deepen the experience of talented library professionals.
- Schemes to share funding for the development of initiatives to promote staff development and training programmes at a regional and local level.
- A study to examine the likely emergence of alternatives and substitutes to the public library service – a competitor analysis.
- A review by library authorities of their marketing approach, and their systematic use of market research.
- Authorities should develop strategies that encompass all elements of the ‘marketing mix’ – service delivery, service redesign, cost and promotion.

- An indepth study (based on the strategy we propose) and a series of ‘charrettes’,²¹ which would involve a few key participants for several days in an intensive planning exercise. The proceedings would be open to members of the public. The aim would be to complete and obtain approval of a plan at the end of the agreed time span.
- A thorough review of future requirements for staff to work in and alongside public libraries, and how best to select, educate and train recruits to the field. The review should take account of our findings and recommendations. Relevant factors include: the shift of erstwhile schools of librarianship to information science and generic information studies; the introduction of National Vocational Qualifications; and the continuing demand for expertise in specialist areas (for example, services for children, for members of ethnic and cultural minorities, and for people who are disabled).

In chapter 5, we discussed the diversification of funding sources. There is the obvious implication that public libraries will need competence, and perhaps support, to negotiate with these diverse sources. We found top level interest from the private sector in the opportunities and prospects of partnerships and joint enterprises with public libraries. However, strategies and tactics for pursuing this interest and maturing prospects need additional research. We recommend a further study to determine how best to tackle these openings, and how best to provide library authorities with the skills and resources to build worthwhile partnerships.

Outside the public library sector, some well qualified, experienced librarians and information scientists have become specialists with high level responsibilities. It would be advantageous to attract them to work in, or with, public libraries. We recommend that authorities anticipate the future role of public libraries in the information sector, and reflect this in the recruitment and remuneration of staff, and in job titles and descriptions.

7 Cooperative endeavours

Cooperation is an emerging theme of this report, and the subject of our final chapter. There we give a few examples of cooperative ventures and developments. The Team’s view is that many proposals and initiatives put forward in this report will require cooperation on a larger and more diverse scale. We also believe that our findings and recommendations can form the basis of extensive discussions and debate that should extend beyond the library community into other parts of the public, voluntary and private sectors.

²¹A special type of planning workshop

Schedule of recommendations

1 Public library policy

1.1 DNH to set comprehensive framework

The Department of National Heritage should set a new comprehensive framework for public library services that will allow considerable flexibility in local choice.

This objective can be accomplished by the DNH without amending the Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964. We do not recommend new legislation or regulation, except that a new statutory instrument may be required to simplify the collecting of fines and charges. (*see below*)

1.2 Public library policy and planning guidance notes

The Department of National Heritage should prepare *Public library policy and planning guidance notes*.

The *Guidance Notes* would –

- Have a persuasive, not a coercive effect, but nevertheless carry weight.
- Advise and guide each authority in the preparation of a broad strategic plan for the public library service in its area, which should state the priorities and emphases that the authority will give to its various public library services.
- Explain the principal purposes and core functions that should serve as a basis for decisions on the strategic plans. These purposes supply a framework for local choice that corresponds to the expressed preferences of the public, elected members, librarians and other library staff.

Note

The *four* purposes are:

(1) To take what steps are practical and necessary to ensure that the public library service can meet the demands of future generations;

(2) To create a public library service that will be a community asset in which local people can take pride, and which others will respect – an asset that helps local people to identify with their community;

(3) To develop, maintain and operate public library facilities and services that will directly benefit people who live, work or study in the area, or who visit it, and wish to make regular and frequent use of these services;

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(4) To maintain public library facilities and services that occasional users of public libraries can take advantage of when the need arises, although these occasional users may be unfamiliar with the services that are available – that is, services that have a ‘contingency value’.

The *thirteen* core functions identified in the research are:

(1) Ways to enlighten children, by enabling and encouraging them to discover information and the advantages of reading;

(2) The supply of a range of popular reading materials (broadly defined), which library members can borrow for themselves or for others, including people who cannot visit a library;

(3) The development of public libraries that will be landmarks in their communities;

(4) The provision of areas for study for students on educational courses and for other local people who are engaged in lifelong learning;

(5) Making available collections of cassettes, talking books, compact discs, videos and other new media, which library members can borrow;

(6) Developing a public library that local people will value as a familiar, relaxing place, which is safe, warm and well-lit;

(7) Providing a pleasant spot and a stimulating environment, where people who go to the library can meet their friends, exchange news, opinions and information, and perhaps enjoy interesting exhibits, displays, events or activities;

(8) Reference services, with expert reference librarians available to help enquirers to find information;

(9) A means of access to knowledge and culture from every part of the world;

(10) A source of documents and information about the area’s history (local studies);

(11) Resources and skills that enable enquirers to obtain information on vital issues;

(12) A quick and convenient way to find out what is going on in an area, and whom to contact (local information);

(13) A rich mine of information and intelligence for business, trade, employment and training (business information).

- Motivate library authorities to make effective use of Library and Information Plans (LIPs), which emphasize the advantages and the mechanisms for cooperation with other library and information services in the area.
- Encourage library authorities to make effective use of remote resources, and to deliver additional functions and offer further services.

- Advise local authorities to involve users and non-users, and to conduct surveys of local opinions that would assist the planners to develop appropriate public library facilities and services in their areas.
- Draw attention to model practice appropriate to such surveys, including the methods employed in research for the Review.
- Encourage library authorities to give publicity to the priorities local people allocate, and to the plans for maintaining and developing public libraries in the area.
- Provide information on model charters, standards and practices that library authorities can employ to measure the performance of their public library services.
- Describe procedures for placing completed plans on deposit with the Department of National Heritage or the Welsh Office.

Note

We believe that it will be important to take full account of users' perspectives when drawing up standards. The work of the Library Association on standards will be of value for this purpose, but we recognize that their standards reflect a professional perspective. We recommend an integrated approach to the development of standards hospitable to the views of elected members and professional librarians, but influenced by users' expectations and experience.

2 Performance measurement and inspection: OFLIB

A public library and school library inspectorate to be known as OFLIB should be created. The organization would be headed by a Chief Inspector responsible to the Department of National Heritage. The inspectors would be a mixture of professional and lay people. Their reports would appraise each library authority's plans and performance, and OFLIB would publish its findings

Note

The Social Services Inspectorate and OFSTED offer helpful models for the organization and operation of OFLIB, within the context of the proposed DNH Public library policy and planning guidance notes.

3 Infrastructure investment

3.1 Links to information superhighways

Infrastructure investment should be made to link central, branch and mobile public libraries and new access points throughout England and Wales to the information superhighways through broadband cable or Integrated Services Digital Network