

## Empower, Inform, Enrich – Consultation Questions

**General Statement from Leicester City Council:** Leicester's conclusion is that the local authority should retain control of the library service. The advantages of this are:

- Close link between delivery and strategic lead of service and local politicians.
- Local people from different communities involved as a part of community engagement, works better with service link to local elected members
- Quick decision making.
- Savings and efficiencies best made looking at the council agenda as a whole, e.g. Libraries leading on delivery of local community services, enabling different functions, but this needs to be controlled by the local council.
- Library Strategy locally consulted and unanimously agreed by council 2008.
- Flexibility to refocus services and include new elements quickly to deliver the council agenda
- Non-standardised service to meet local needs enabled by local flat management structure. Larger cross authority services are likely to be homogenous and would not reflect local needs

**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?**

Best practice is already identified through good communications within the profession, between authorities and supported by MLA best practice information. New standards could be part of a revised Libraries Act, but each library authority needs the flexibility to use its library services in slightly different ways. Some councils may decide that Libraries should provide a customer service role supporting delivery of many other local authority and partner services at library sites or through library IT systems.

**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.**

An update of the 1964 Act is needed. It needs IT and other media included in definitions plus informal education, advice and community engagement too. Key performance indicators need to be measurable against Set Standards. The loss of previous Standards was a blow to protecting investment in services.

Broad Standards should be included in a rewrite of the Act, but they should be able to be interpreted locally to meet needs of local community.

**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?**

Libraries are an invaluable tool front line communication tool for local and national government. They provide a shop window through ICT network. Staff can be trained on a range of initiatives and information, e.g. to cross the digital and knowledge divide.

Libraries help people to cope with a digital society. Library staff facilitate finding information on daily life.

**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? E.g. Marketing and publicity, digital services?**
- **Do you see any benefit in establishing new national/local structures as set out in Margaret Hodge's essay?**

MLA has provided a useful steer and makes best practice documents available.

An agency needed to help libraries get best value, e.g. Performing Rights Society on music or the need for TV licences for every PC.

Central resource to deal with national issues needed, to avoid duplication of effort, legal fees etc. to negotiate for libraries. Carry on with MLA benchmarking tools and comparison site.

The proposed Libraries Agency should lead on some marketing and publicity. A good example of how this can work is the national Summer Scheme.

There is a need for the Agency to act as the briefer and influencer of our national politicians.

**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 – e.g. the academy model for schools, social enterprise models or Foundation Trusts for hospitals – be appropriate for library services?**

Leicester has investigated the feasibility of transferring its Cultural Services, including Libraries to a Not for Profit Distributing Organisation or Trust. Whilst there are a number of advantages these are outweighed by the disadvantages. There are no significant cost

savings overall and it would limit the potential for integrated community services at a neighbourhood level.

**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?**

Look at sponsorship and advertising through ICT as this has a wide reach.

Positioning of libraries at heart of the community promoting other services or delivering them in the building or digitally.

Highly integrated partnership working can be developed where priorities coincide, e.g. at Children's Centres in Leicester, there are family reading and story telling collections.

Best practice spread through Library Development Agency.

**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 (i.e. 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?**

Provision of access to ICT, for those who do not have it, combats digital exclusion.

Libraries need to be centres with digital infrastructure, e.g. Wi-Fi access for Home Computers for Schools scheme.

It is advantageous that procurement of electronic information subscriptions could be agreed by an agency for commonly required electronic information sources.

Staff help customers filter information overload and access digital information, to help people understand.

Staff need specialist knowledge on the subscription sites.

Digital downloads of books have their place but for the moment most people prefer hard copies.

Web 2.0 libraries must use these tools. Library agency could investigate how such work could be commissioned / developed nationally.

Self-service and return technology – many authorities have adopted this but objective research is needed to identify the benefits for customers against the cost. What are real benefits versus perceived ones?

**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?**

Leicester Libraries is already making efficiencies in back office systems through use of electronic ordering and invoicing. Local flexibility is needed to carry out funded partnership work at short notice, e.g. buying books for Children's Centres or schools. This is the benefit of a small but locally focussed unit supporting service.

**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?**

Libraries should have a national web presence.

An online catalogue of all authorities is needed. However, how would the cost of increased inter-library loans be sustained if individuals can order direct from internet?

Suggestion: Inter-library loans wherever possible should be a digital download rather than hard copy.

Local authority Central IT strategies both support and impede digital innovation in library development. The key to this is building good local relationships and local libraries providing the council with excellent value through leading on IT innovation. This is where national promotion of libraries as local authority shop windows can help to ease these local problems.

**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?**

The local offer must include books and ICT and both should be free.

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

- **On what basis should library leaders make decisions about opening hours and location?**
- **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.**
- **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?**
- **How might library users have a greater voice in decision making?**

Decisions on opening hours must take into account the “Duty to Involve” responsibility. Local consultations plus cost analysis of usage and an examination of co-location should be used to enable opening hours to be extended. This requires multi-skilled staff who can be library assistants but also housing assistants, community services assistants, etc.

Joining a library should involve no need for ID. It has worked for Leicester and many other places. A national membership ticket with one system would be massively costly. If there is that much to invest, better to improve buildings and buy online services for customers. Best practice would be simplifying joining procedures everywhere and ensure all authorities give visitors membership rights.

Delivery of books to homes should take into account the Impact on the environment (carbon footprint) re transport needs.

Young people – meeting their needs is very challenging. National research is needed. Marketing and presentation are key points to making a success.

Increased understanding through national non-user survey by Library Agency, e.g. an N-PLUS (non-user version of PLUS survey) could be created. This is another area where community engagement will help Libraries. What is required is talking, listening & responding.

**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?**

Do not do enough, do not have the funds. National promotion required, e.g. TV advertising.

One idea may be to encourage the producers of soap operas to include storylines around libraries. A similar approach is taken by BBC RaW campaign with literacy & numeracy issues which was featured on Eastenders?.

**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?**

Suggest advertising local firms through Libraries public access computers.

### **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?**

Libraries need to be better at performance management. Clear targets, better monitoring and better analysis of surveys should be put to use.

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

Key factors for closure must include poor performance, poor location, poor building condition.

There is plenty of evidence to show that many Libraries thrive as a part of a better offer elsewhere, e.g. at Joint Service Centres, or through online provision or Children's Centres.

There is no point in keeping a failing site for a handful of people. Rationalisation of local authority and other public service buildings in an area can help to improve usage and make better use of public money.

### **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?**

A good location needed, e.g. near shops on a main road.

The library must be front of house, visible through a shop window. Shared goals and co-ordinated management are required.

Early and ongoing community consultation is a key part to making this a success.

### **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?**

Desirable facilities include a community space and other services providing secondary reasons to come and use the building, mutual benefits arise from this.

There needs to be a balance between local relevance and having enough service, e.g. several small libraries vs. a well located large library with good facilities that would be

common to lots of people. However, measures are required to cope with excluded people where there is no library, e.g. disabled – the use of minibus to take to a library or a mobile library.

**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?**

Competencies for staff need to be identified as in Leicester.

Current library qualifications are not relevant. It would help to remove the qualification bar. Libraries need to invite people to demonstrate they have skills and competencies and train them locally in what is needed e.g. NVQs, also locally designed courses.

Leaders. See above. Recruit from wider workforce looking for skills and competencies needed but key to train our own leaders through development programmes, secondments, identifying competencies, etc.

Other relevant skills/qualifications may include retail, customer services, teaching/training in the lifelong sector, and working with partners & volunteers.

**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?**

Volunteering is very valuable for community engagement. It also enables services to carry out more 1-1 with customers e.g. developing reading skills, learning ICT in more depth, helping out at reading groups.

Infrastructure is required to support this nationally, e.g. what are the practical rules, roles, policies required to be developed by library agency.

**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?**

It is very important that it remain a statutory obligation to reflect the importance of the service to broader community and educational aims.

**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?**

More definition is needed in a revised Act. It would be useful to outline compulsory services, e.g. books, ICT, informal learning for adults and children, promotion of reading, community space.

**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?**

NI9. It is very difficult to be clear what the results are telling us.

Visits, books and other loans, ICT use are relevant measures. Also ICT accesses to national and local government websites by public access computers.

Other factors could be cost per visit and cost per 1000 population. In addition a measure of use or a "busyness index" – this would be a measure which shows how productive a library site is, a combination of number of visits, issues, ICT use, events and sessions, versus staff and running costs.

**Q23. What research do we need to do to best demonstrate the benefits of the library service to local and national leaders**

The key answer to this question is that a library agency is needed. Evidence is required to continue to justify the existence of publically funded public libraries e.g. how libraries contribute to the national indicators listed in the consultation and how libraries make an impact on the agenda of local councils. This would help to prove that libraries are a key local deliverer of so much public service for so many agencies.

Proof is needed of our subjective knowledge that libraries are trusted, valued and are value for money. We must find out what people are using libraries for across the country, e.g. looking for jobs, training, parenting skills, learning English, other informal learning, as a community centre or meeting place as well as conventional information source and cultural/leisure centre. The PLUS survey does give some valuable clues on this.