



department for
**culture, media
and sport**



Empower, Inform, Enrich
The modernisation review of public libraries:
A consultation document

A reply from the London Borough of Lewisham

January 2010

Draft

improving
the quality
of life for all

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Consultation Questions

Role for libraries

The Government believes that the public library service is vital to a democratic society, which offers equality of opportunity and intellectual freedom. Each local authority has a duty to provide a user responsive library service and the variety of demand across the country is currently met with a mixture of complementary services in different areas:

Providing books, learning, information and entertainment to customers: All libraries provide a range of books and written material, often in a variety of formats, e.g. hard copy, audio, online and e-books. Most libraries also offer Music and Film material and provide computers with free internet access.

The library at the centre of the Community: in many areas libraries are centres of the community, facilitating community meetings such as social groups or book clubs. Often, libraries work in partnership with other public services, providing signposts to customers or integrating health, learning, skills or education provisions.

The library as an education resource and proactive provider of information and learning – In many areas libraries have a strong role in guiding customers through a morass of information, providing opportunities for education by linking to digital inclusion initiatives, improving literacy, offering reading events and providing learning opportunities within the library.

However, new challenges require new responses by libraries and give us an opportunity to consider afresh the role of public libraries.

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?

A1

In July 2009, Sir Steve Bullock presented the report¹ on the findings and recommendations of the Mayoral Commission on Libraries and Adult Learning that he had chaired.

This document reaffirms the centrality of the library's purpose, as a civic space at the heart of its community. It expresses the vision of "modern, flexible and dynamic public services connected to the aspirations of citizens and offering opportunities for all the things that people value about libraries and learning: creativity, enjoyment, personal development and community empowerment".² This vision goes to the core of what public libraries stand for, namely to allow citizens to advance.

The focal point to interpret the purpose of library 'services' is the user. As users have different needs, so library authorities / services have different mandates to meet them. However, there should be a common standard that identifies the effectiveness and efficiency by which the more basic needs are met.

¹ See

www.lewisham.gov.uk/CouncilAndDemocracy/StrategiesPlans/StrategyDocuments/CommissionLibrariesLearning.htm

² *Ibid.* p50

These basic needs are embodied by the libraries offering “unbiased access to information, learning and works of creative imagination”.

Unbiased – relates to the status of library services as trusted, open, and independent service providers.

Access – relates to the media used, the mechanics of access, and to the equality of the provision.

But the needs of communities can be extremely complex. In such scenario, the attempts of a single agent tackling complexity may easily be unsuccessful or partial. Indeed, our lives are more and more connected and libraries should reflect this.

For these reasons, the Commission’s vision – that builds on the libraries’ tangible and intangible capital – drives to a future in which libraries are the supported gateway to knowledge and interaction.

National and local leadership

Library services are delivered by local authorities who have a large amount of flexibility around which services are delivered to the community and the allocation of funding from LA budgets. Central Government has a leadership role (the Secretary of State for Culture has a duty of oversight under the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964) and provides funding to Local Authorities (this money is distributed by the Department for Communities & Local Government). National programmes rolled out to all libraries, such as the introduction of the People’s Network, are initiated by central government.

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.

A2

The 1964 Act needs reviewing and updating, but not diluting. And it needs to define more clearly the roles of central and local government.

Central government has set the vision for libraries in the past, but with little real power to tackle poor performance.

It may be argued that local government presents an inconsistent picture of how well libraries are seen in the context of the corporate business. In some cases, libraries are at the core of the council’s provision, in others they are completely marginal. Leadership at corporate level and within libraries plays a key role in this.

Therefore, a revised Act should allocate the responsibility to set the vision for libraries, in line with overarching national drivers and allowing for local complexities. It should define and measure, through existing organisms (e.g. Audit Commission) the measures that identify a “comprehensive and efficient” provision. And it should clearly define incentives and deterrents in relation to performance. It should also introduce instruments (e.g. library tariff) that are inconsistently present

in the country.

The above legislative framework should remain flexible enough to allow continuous improvement and technological changes.

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?

A3

Public Libraries offer an incredibly valuable network of assets that any business would value in their own right. While locations and condition of the buildings may be issues, these offer opportunities for growth and development.

Therefore, central and local government, as well as many other agencies, could be attracted into using libraries as a vehicle to market products and services. There are already numerous examples of this happening across the country and abroad. But coordination is what would really make the difference.

Lewisham has developed the concept of the “Lewisham Lounge”, which is a flexible interpretation of the concept of Ἀγορά (Agora, the ancient Greeks’ open place of assembly). It reflects a public space where people interact. Examples of philosophically similar approaches are available across the country, where libraries have become the heart of their community.

A key example of this is our Downham Health & Leisure Centre³ where library, one-stop-shop, leisure centre, large PCT presence, community hall, café, crèche, and open spaces coexist to create a vibrant civic space.

The concept of the “Lewisham Lounge” is flexible enough to adapt to its container and audience. Lewisham has set up examples of this approach in Georgian buildings (Manor House Library), Carnegie Libraries (Forest Hill), and new builds (Downham).

There is scope for developing the concept further with the empowerment of local communities that would use and run these spaces independently (Bellingham Project).

Organisational structures, governance and funding

Funding for libraries is provided by the Department for Communities and Local Government and policy responsibility for public libraries rests with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. However, many other departments have an interest in ensuring that libraries continue to contribute to a number of national and local government priorities – health, literacy & learning, business support and entrepreneurship, job hunting and employability, community cohesion, citizenship and digital inclusion.

³ See www.mlalondon.org.uk/uploads/documents/Downham.pdf

Two DCMS public bodies – the Museums, Libraries & Archives Council or MLA (a strategic Non Departmental Public Body promoting best practice) and the Advisory Council on Libraries (providing strategic advice to the Secretary of State on public libraries) – support central government policy making. In addition, third sector organisations like The Reading Agency and BookTrust work with central government and libraries to deliver programmes supporting literacy and learning. During the early stages of this review we spoke to the library authorities that are testing new and emerging governance models such as Trust structures and procurement to private companies, and those that are opening up new revenue streams, fund raising opportunities or radical efficiency measures. Case studies on these authorities are included in the final section of this document.

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?

A4

The problem with the present set up is not related to the devolution of the service provision to the local authority. It is in the fact that the quality of that provision is not uniquely identifiable and has no link to the legislation.

Some library authorities perform excellently, delivering exceptional services to the communities they serve. They could be presented as examples of brilliant customer service and excellent value for money in their own right. However, this standard of service is not ubiquitous.

While some of these were controversial, the Public Library Service Standards had offered a valued benchmark. Their flaw was in their tenuous link with recourse for non compliance. A new Public Library Act could establish a link between quality of the service and reward for the authority performing well.

A Library Development Agency could be the organism that delivers the Government's vision, assures the quality of service, and is responsible for larger scale projects.

In relation to the latter, there are numerous flaws in a system that is fragmented in the way in which core elements of the library business are organised and run. For example, there is no unified catalogue or library card. Surely, a Development Agency could negotiate such provision for all library authorities in the country realising substantial savings to redirect to service provision to residents. The efforts of the London Library Change Programme⁴ highlight huge potential in cooperative work. The London Requests⁵ project is a clear example of collaborative work that a national

⁴ See <http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/networks/lcip/londonlibrarychangeprogramme.htm>

⁵ London Requests is a partnership that provides Inter Library Loan requesting services to Bexley, Bromley, and Lewisham residents.

Development Agency could take further.

Another example of fragmentation relates to library services around the country buying their own DVDs. A national Development Agency could negotiate with the British Film Institute the provision of DVDs in partnership with a private contractor (e.g. LoveFilm.com) realising both an exceptional increase in quality and universal coverage.

It is expected that digital content, particularly eBooks, will follow the same route, with individual Library Authorities negotiating little contracts with disparate providers. This results in vast inequalities, with citizens having or not having access to content depending on where they live. A Development Agency could deliver the infrastructure and the content to all.

Last year, the government in Finland established access to a broadband internet connection as a human right⁶. A Development Agency could negotiate the quality and format of the support that implementing such initiative carries. With the People's Network, library staff started to support residents using the internet. With increasing digital provision, the need for supporting citizens expands.

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?

A5

Libraries can learn from other sectors as much as other sectors can learn from libraries. Local services should strive to improve in their meeting customers' needs. And indeed, there are areas where the industry far outperforms the public sector.

However, it may be argued that generalisations often lead to questionable findings. There are plenty of examples where specific governance models succeeded, and as many where the same models failed.

This is why a solution that seems right for a location may not be transplanted elsewhere with the same success. There are many instances where the library service in the hands of local authorities continue to deliver outstanding services to residents. These are examples of good practice in service provision in their own right.

⁶ See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/8477572.stm>

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?

A6

At a time when pressure on public spending is likely to grow, library services should reject any tendency to isolation. Indeed, they should develop stronger partnerships, building on their most valuable assets.

The principle here is that of distinguishing libraries and library services. Libraries may be liabilities, where library services are assets. If the objective of library services is that of allowing and fostering personal improvement, this may be achieved in many different ways. Library services can join with others, and other can join library services.

The most valuable assets that library services have relate to their perception by the public. Any business with the credibility of public libraries would cherish the value of the brand “library”. If “library” was a product, it would be worth billions as a concept.

But there is more, libraries have a network that spans the entire country. Often more than 90% of residents live within a mile of a library. Such coverage should be the envy of any retailer. Visits to libraries are growing and in the order of millions.

If presented correctly, the case for making libraries into the government’s physical “gateway to knowledge and interaction” should carry value and result in investment rather than reduction in funding.

The above would not exclude additional funding streams, resulting from the interaction with the industry and the third sector.

Digital

For libraries to remain useful and usable they must be responsive to changing circumstances. The internet revolutionises the opportunities for how libraries make their content available to the public and there is now a growing demand for 24/7 access to libraries with people wanting to access what they want, when and where they want it. The popularity of the download shows how libraries will have to adapt and the arrival of e-book readers will no doubt stimulate a market for books in new formats which libraries will have to embrace. The case study on Essex library service shows that this is already happening, that in a digital age libraries can capitalise on the opportunities available.

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?

A7

Library services have adapted to change and will continue to do so. However, because of their disaggregation, the level and quality of service vary substantially. The way in which each authority interprets the meaning and need of 27/7 libraries is an issue in itself.

For this reason, there is a need for self-contained projects to be developed, similar to the People's Network, that will deliver a basic level of quality digital services. An example of this could be a National eLibrary, with eBooks available for download free of charge for all. Indeed, delivering such project – particularly in setting up its online infrastructure – may be a lot easier to deliver than the physical implementation of the People's Network.

The issue is to identify a leader or leaders. It may be argued that most large scale projects, such as eBooks or 24/7 enquiry service, are better developed and delivered by a national body. On the other hand, developing digital content, particularly in relation to local history for example, are better left to the local provider to deliver.

Furthermore, the ability and engagement of the public should not be underestimated. Residents do develop and manage content and environments that they built; and this trend is likely to increase.

In the digital age, the role of the library service could be that of guide and access point.

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?

A8

A national body could work at the establishing of standards that relate to RFID / self-service. This should compel authorities to adopt this technology ubiquitously and univocally. The same technology everywhere allows greater flexibility, increased

usage, and economies of scale.

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?

A9

In some cases, the local authority IT Strategy excludes public libraries completely and libraries are left to negotiate their contracts and maintenance independently. Indeed, in these instances, corporate IT approach libraries through the implementation of Code of Connection⁷ to limit services to the point that they are difficult to deliver.

In others, the libraries infrastructure has been isolated outside the Council's to facilitate the implementation of third party relationships and developments. As a result, the picture of IT strategies and infrastructures is very varied.

These are some issues that a new Act or national body for libraries may address.

Such Body could develop an identifiable web presence with associated products and services, including eBook download, national catalogue, etc.

What services should be available to users?

The Government believes that the public library service should continue to be a local service which is shaped by the characteristics of its community.

We know that the services libraries offer vary across the country from opening hours to e-books to other community services. We know that there is a striking variation in the use of libraries across authorities. This must be linked to the services on offer and the responsiveness to customer demand. If we want the library service to flourish in the future we need to reverse the established downward trend in usage and ensure that libraries are relevant, popular and used by local communities. So we need to think about what libraries offer to their communities and what is effective in growing the demand by customers for libraries.

Contributors to the library review discussed whether a clear national 'offer to consumers' of the library in the 21st century needs to be articulated or whether the service content should be entirely locally led. A national offer would have the benefit of enabling coherent national marketing.

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?

⁷ See <http://www.govconnect.gov.uk/coco.php>

A10

There is a strong argument for establishing minimum levels of provision, which should be set to reflect the best performing services in the country.

The first should reflect the centrality of reading. This should happen through both physical and digital media.

Free access to the internet, WiFi, online services (including eBooks), should be part of the core library offer.

Long opening hours should be offered through a physical presence, and a meaningful 24/7 offer should be mandatory.

There should be one, national library card.

A core set of information materials should be established as an online product available to all free of charge and 24/7.

Provision should be made in the Act to link the public library network to schools. School libraries should be run by public libraries, unless they can demonstrate that their quality of service exceeds the standards that the public library can deliver.

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

A11

Universal entitlement does not translate in universal take up. Any measure that would facilitate the latter would be welcome, particularly because this could be combined with additional services. For instance, Local Authorities could issue a card following the collection of census information to all the residents in each household. The card could entitle residents who qualify to additional services, such as free swim, school meals, etc. This would reduce administration costs and allow better coverage of the offer of services that the authority can deliver.

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?

A12

There is a dichotomy between the theoretical and practical value of the product library. This is often exemplified by the reaction that residents, who perhaps never used their local library, have when they hear of a proposal to close it.

This dichotomy is coupled with the perception that libraries are separate agents. Often, even within the local authorities, public libraries are seen as separate from the Council.

Given these realities, an effort to clarify 'libraries', a marketing campaign on libraries, may not be the most effective way to use resources.

What really counts, which is at the core of the concept of public library, is the founding idea that libraries exist to allow people to improve, by accessing information, learning, and coming into contact with culture.

Given this, a successful marketing exercise would focus, for instance, on libraries offering access and support on behalf of HMRC for the filing of VAT for small businesses. Adult Learners Week offers opportunities for partnership work and increase use of libraries. The Summer Reading Challenge has successfully attracted visits to the libraries.

So, a successful marketing exercise should focus on the outcome rather than the vehicle that delivers it.

Commercial activities & partnerships

Research shows that over 80% of library services already operate a procurement partnership; over 60% are co-located with another service and over 30% have developed shared services. While there are excellent examples across the country of partnership working – as illustrated by our case studies – sometimes library services remain risk averse and unwilling to drive change.

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?

A13

The possibilities for partnerships are too many to mention. But it may be interesting to explore larger scale commercial deals that can be brokered and delivered by a

national agency on behalf of libraries across the country. The BFI example in A4 above is an example.

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?

A14

Data mining is an area in which public services, including libraries, could perform better. Some retailers seem to know more about ourselves than we do. This information helps them target identified needs and create new ones. In the cultural context, it would be extremely useful to recognise and support existing potential and foster the development of new opportunities.

Innovation is another. Some operators are able to break the mould with their services or products. Flexibility and freedom allow them to move faster than others and create new trends. It is possible for libraries to be leaders in this area – and often this is the case, where new technologies are pioneered in libraries and then embraced by larger organisms. Originally, library services developed Councils' websites, but now, they are seldom in charge of this presence. In other instances, libraries developed information centres, which grew into One-Stop-Shops that are now managed by larger departments. There are opportunities for libraries to re-establish themselves as the leaders locally in managing customer interaction, information exchange, signposting to learning, cultural brokers, etc.

Another area in which the industry in particular has shown outstanding results is customer service. People deal more and more with the industry, expecting solid customer care as a standard. While many libraries have excellent staff, there may be examples where the level of attention expected and the one delivered do not match. As well as learning from other library authorities, libraries could look at models from the business world.

Location and buildings

In 2006 estimates prepared for MLA identified a need for £760m to make the library estate fit for purpose and Disability Discrimination Act compliant. But how many buildings and in which locations are needed to deliver a modern public library service?

Q15

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

A15

Libraries and library services are very distinct concepts. Indeed, today, it would be almost inconceivable to build a stand alone, self contained library. This is because the focus is on delivering services to residents.

Therefore, it seems reasonable to consider a closure, if the service delivery can be achieved without a library with no loss of (and possibly an increase in) quality.

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?

A16

Libraries are public service, so, their colocation with others should be consequential. The reverse is also true, that other services should be increasingly welcomed in libraries.

If the above is given, perhaps a stronger argument should be needed in the few cases that aim to maintain a regime that goes against co-location.

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?

A17

Library leaders should (and do) concentrate on residents, and target their need in stead of the needs of the 'building'. In today's urban environment, nobody would build a stand alone, large lending library. The finest examples of new large libraries deliver destinations that have elements in them that include art and culture, retail, entertainment, leisure, council services, the third sector, and often learning providers.

The analysis of the needs (present and future) of the audience determines the mix of provision.

The viability of a building in terms of its accessibility is set by national standards for public buildings.

There are different ways of allowing people to borrow books. But this is different from providing library services. Vending machines, self-service, RFID, etc. are tools that help deliver a service. The service can operate with no staff, with volunteers, with minimal staffing intervention, be provided by other agents who are not library staff, with library staff, and a mix of these that may even vary during the day.

A stand alone, large lending library is inconceivable today. However, it is important that, library services are provided using the correct equipment. If books are offered

on open shelves, these should be designed and laid out according to current criteria. This includes creating dedicated space for storage, displaying, and consumption of books and other items that are made available to library users. Dedicated spaces (rather than dedicated libraries) are essential to make the offer successful. For example, providing reading and study space is essential for some services that the libraries provide.

Training, leadership and services for staff

Library services need a flexible and user responsive workforce to offer the level of customer experience that the public expects, but while we have discovered excellent best practice while preparing this paper, we know that many services remain unable to meet this challenge.

Traditional information skills – such as good understanding of information resources – remain important to the delivery of library services, but other skills are becoming increasingly critical for their future success.

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?

A18

It may not be realistic to expect all staff to have all the skills required to deliver all services consistent with the libraries purpose. Public libraries should therefore include specialists as well as generalists.

The mix of skills needed in libraries is not different from that needed in any organisation which aspires to excellence. This may include knowledge management, customer relations skills, experience of marketing and product placement, financial acumen and entrepreneurial spirit, courage, as well as leadership at all levels in the organisation.

It is essential that library staff understand and own the tools to serve the public they see every day. These relate to academic knowledge at some level, but often relate more to simpler things. For example, this may relate to the way in which information can be made available to library visitors, allowing them to manipulate, modify, and increase it.

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?

A19

Volunteering and stronger links with the third sector are areas of potential growth for libraries. Some library authorities are particularly successful in running services with the help of volunteers.

In some instances, the provision for a specific area could be wholly devolved to the community. This is possible with the library authority supporting the volunteers in the delivery of quality services to all.

How should we monitor library performance and what should we aspire to?

Local Authorities have a statutory responsibility to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service under the 1964 Act and the Secretary of State has a power to intervene if a Local Authority is in breach of that responsibility but 'comprehensive & efficient' is not defined in statute or guidance. Contributors to the initial stages of this review questioned whether introducing such a definition would discourage excellence by incentivising library services to work to the definition and provide the 'minimum required.'

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?

A20

The demise of the statutory obligation would weaken libraries irreparably. There are no real advantages in the removal of the obligation, because there is no direct link between the obligation and the quality of the service delivered to residents.

The obligation does not really curtail opportunities to set up many different delivery models that operate successfully. And, there are ample ways for libraries to access flexibly any fundraising instrument, without an immediate link to their statutory service status.

There is no evidence that the obligation hampers the delivery of projects, that can be set up independently, and thereby access additional funding streams.

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?

A21

It is essential to define 'comprehensive and efficient' because without a target there is no success. The definition should be clear enough to allow any observer to identify mediocre, good, and excellent services. And it should be mandatory for services to aspire to excellent status, which itself should be set as a continually increasing target.

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?

A22

There should be basic indicators and complex ones. The aim of these should be to allow the observer to see the impact that services make on the communities they serve. Some of these could be included in monitoring of library authority provision that is already carried out.

Any accreditation scheme that isolates libraries should be avoided. There are standards that look at specific areas of service provision in local government. These should be extended to the libraries by the entity in charge of delivering the service. For example, if the local authority has Investor in People status, it would be expected that libraries contribute to this.

A revised Act should be a stronger, clearer, modern, and should not dilute the existing powers to intervene. These have been sparingly used to effect in particular cases.

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?

A23

In recent years, research about the impact of libraries has revealed the impact this service makes on people's lives. It may be useful to track this impact over time with qualitative studies that link the service to national priorities.

A Library Development Agency would be best placed to initiate this and other longitudinal research.