

## **Luton Borough Council and Luton Cultural Services Trust**

### **A response to the consultation document - Empower, Inform and Enrich, the modernisation review of public libraries**

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

LBC/LCST believe that public libraries whether run by local authorities or other organisations such as charitable Trusts should share a common core purpose and deliver core services – but with the ability to develop local variations to respond to the needs of the local community.

That purpose and those services should be to support the learning, literacy and information needs of the UK.

1. To support reading and provide access to books and information in a variety of formats including physical books, audio books, e-books and online facilities, particularly in regard to children so that reading is embedded at an early age, even before formal education starts.
2. To provide access to learning providing a physical safe place in which to study together with a wide range of information and learning provided in partnership with other learning providers including commercial and local authority providers.
3. To bridge the information gap for those who do not have access to fast broadband at home and to help those with a lack of IT skills that will exclude them in the future for many aspects of society and work.
4. To provide a safe community space where everyone is welcome and where no-one is challenged as to why they are there - where people can sit, study, read and learn in safety. This safe community space is at the heart of the community and can and does promote social cohesion.

We believe that over the next 5-10 years the number of physical books will decrease in libraries, particularly non-fiction (a trend which has already started although currently there is an increase in both adult fiction and children's reading) and that we will see libraries loaning e-readers (as the price comes down) as well as offering downloadable e-books.

We also believe that there may be a need for fewer library buildings in the future but with seven million people needing basic skills training and six million

excluded from digital technology that the need for a library as a physical place in the community to learn and seek information and engage with ICT will remain for many years to come. We also see libraries becoming much more about learning and in effect returning to the role for which they were originally set up - as being the universities of the people.

**Q2. Do you think the current roles 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 of the library service or is the service better managed entirely at local level?**

We believe that local authorities are best placed to deliver library services to their local communities. However libraries should be embedded within the Local Area Agreements and feature strongly in local strategic partnerships. More needs to be done to use libraries to their full potential to deliver local objectives. A national framework with a common vision and objectives and with more national initiatives such as for example the Summer Reading Challenge and the 6 Book Challenge would be more effective use of resources.

The 1964 Libraries and Museums Act should be strengthened and brought up to date. The 'efficient and comprehensive' needs to be defined to take account of the changes that have taken place in modern society and ICT. The 1964 Act does not for example take into account issues such as community cohesion or the 24/7 society we now live in. It perhaps also needs to take account of people for whom libraries are particularly important - older people; families with young children; local schools and school children; communities with significant levels of deprivation; low levels of car ownership; low levels of computer ownership and broadband access and high levels of unemployment.

We also believe that library standards should be re-introduced in some format with perhaps the re-instatement of an Annual Library Plan/Report to be submitted to DCMS. In Luton the Annual Library Plan used to be presented to full council for approval before submission to DCMS. This raised the profile of the service and the standards, therefore protecting the service from serious budget reductions.

**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?**

We believe it is a resounding yes to both central government departments and local authorities making better use of public libraries. The people that use public libraries are in many instances the same people that central and local government are trying to reach or target. Libraries should be at the heart of networks of community hubs or council access points.

With the growing number of older people libraries can form a vibrant part of the community, offering informal learning opportunities and access to technology. Libraries can be used imaginatively to bring people together especially those suffering isolation if community rooms are available for clubs, societies etc. based around informal learning.

Libraries are well positioned to offer assistance for services that are becoming increasingly on-line, such as car tax renewal. Libraries must be positioned in communities and could be part of the job centre, with access points, advice and direction to formal learning routes.

Information campaigns whether national or local also need to be IT rather than paper based or libraries drown in leaflets which then end up in recycling bins – neither cost effective nor environmentally friendly!

Other initiatives could see NHS services targeting clients through libraries, e.g. mass immunisation; the annual flu jab; health clinics; stop smoking sessions; alcohol and drug abuse clinics; healthy living sessions. Libraries hold a huge range of resources both physical and virtual that support these activities. These initiatives should be formally promoted and relationships with the NHS and GPs strengthened in a strategic joined-up way.

**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 calls 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 Hodges essay?**

LBC/LCST believes the current ways public libraries are funded and governed are confusing and do not give a clear strategic lead. There are two main government departments involved in delivering public library services - DCLG controls the funding and DCMS the responsibilities. Yet libraries also deliver major initiatives that support other government objectives and departments with little recognition from those departments e.g. DCSF with Bookstart and the Summer Reading Challenge and with no clear pathway of funding into DCMS or DCLG. Likewise with two national agencies involved in library service delivery, MLA and ACL, there is confusion, no real accountability and no overall steer. We believe therefore that both funding and overall responsibility for public libraries should come together in a single government department and that there should be one organisation that addresses the key issues of leadership, advocacy, innovation, marketing and national initiatives.

There does need to be one organisation responsible to central government for the development of libraries and we do feel that MLA has benefited libraries by its cross-sectoral viewpoint and understanding that has made us part of a larger cultural family.

We believe that this agency also needs to head a national marketing campaign to demonstrate the benefits of libraries to the public. Yes, book issues in total are declining but why aren't we celebrating the number of people using ICT in libraries or highlighting case studies of individuals who have had major life changes through using their local library?

**Q5. In 2007, the DCLG 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?**

As stated in Q1, we believe that local authorities should continue to be responsible for public libraries, but should be able to deliver the service through whatever means they best feel suits local circumstances, whether through the local authority, a charitable Trust, a commercial organisation or indeed some other organisation.

Libraries as single service Trusts are probably not as viable as those in multi service Trusts where a more commercially able service such as sports or arts have the ability to generate income for the whole Trust and offer cross-working opportunities. Libraries on their own do not have an ability to generate large sums of money for example to modernise old and ailing buildings, to upgrade ICT and even within a Trust, the rate relief is only significant for larger authorities with many library buildings or where several library authorities come together to give that critical mass.

With the impending financial constraints facing local authorities it is important that the model delivers more efficiencies, as it is unlikely that the pump priming for models such as academy schools will be available. Therefore, charitable trusts or social enterprises are more likely options.

**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 successfully 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?**

Libraries need to get smarter and start charging for things they do such as space for exhibitions, charges for talks etc. If libraries could attract more services such as health or employment into their facilities, then costs can be shared.

Opportunities to link with developments in other sectors should be considered where again there can be shared community facilities in the heart of the community.

Many library services already have cafes, sell books via Amazon, have shops, rooms for hire and take advertising revenue, but this is set against a background of declining income generation for fines and audio visual income and in the context that our aim is to provide our core service free to the unemployed, the disabled, the digitally challenged, those with basic skills needs, children and the elderly. Several authorities have turned to commercial income generation companies looking at increasing income and none that we are aware of have delivered funding streams that are significant or enduring. Moreover, libraries must be careful to keep a neutral stance in many areas where customers are some of the most vulnerable in society.

It could be argued that new services such as e-books should be chargeable, but again this is a short term funding stream until they become main stream. It is possible that libraries could also charge for online information services where they have to pay subscriptions, but as these services are replacing hard copy books for which there was funding it is hard to justify, particularly as it goes against the whole ethos of a service that is accessible for everyone in the community.

There are bidding opportunities where short term funding is available and Luton Borough Council and Luton Cultural Services Trust have been very successful in attracting such funding but again the funding is short term and usually to deliver projects additional to the core service, bringing very little additionality to that core service.

Putting libraries into multi service Trusts where a more commercially able service such as sports or arts have the ability to generate income for the whole Trust is perhaps a way forward as indicated above.

Central Government also needs to think about the services they ask libraries to deliver and whether additional funding needs to come with them e.g. Bookstart is delivered almost universally by public libraries. It makes total sense for libraries who engage with children from an early age to deliver Bookstart in partnership with health workers but to deliver it successfully and engage with children and their parents takes staff time and most authorities pay for a Bookstart Coordinator and provide a significant amount of other activities to support it, all additional costs borne by the library authority. A Bookstart leaflet goes in the pack of information given to new parents when they register their new baby, yet the library service can not even advertise its service on that leaflet.

The BBC works in partnership with libraries and again it is a partnership that in reality delivers little for public libraries in real terms. It was supposed to deliver an increased profile for libraries and market them to the BBC audience, in exchange for the BBC publicising events and programmes. Library staff have put on additional activities to support these programmes, found spaces for leaflets and literature to support these activities but have seen little in terms of marketing etc. Perhaps again funding should come with such a programme?

Best practice could be shared via a Library Development Agency and Annual Library Plans if they were to be re-introduced.

**Q7. Digital Services: What is the future of library services in a digital environment? What changes do you envisage as result of changes in technology over the next 5-10 years? You might like to consider: How we can use the digital revolution to extend access to library resources?**

**Should virtual lending be the future of the public library service either generally or in some areas? What challenges does would virtual lending present?**

**What digital content should libraries provide? 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 to web content. Is there a role for libraries in Web 2.0 and 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?**

As stated above in Q1 we believe there will be a role for libraries to bridge the information gap for those who do not have fast broadband access at home and to help those who are not IT literate. With seven million people needing basic skills training and six million people excluded from digital technology currently, we believe this role will be there for the foreseeable future, particularly as more and more facilities go online. Most library authorities have up to date ICT and trained staff who can act as honest brokers and help customers use ICT to learn, shop, and seek information and to do basic tasks like apply for jobs, book hospital appointments and buy rail and air tickets etc.

It is very disappointing therefore that public libraries were not mentioned as part of the solution in the Digital Britain report, a joint publication by Department for Culture Media and Sport (currently responsible for libraries!) and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. The report mentioned the investment in the Peoples Network but effectively this finished in 2003/04 and with local authorities having to pick up the bill for replacement, there has been a patchy response across the country to its upkeep. In Luton all the public PCs are replaced over a four year cycle and the numbers of PCs has increased with internet access being free, but this is not the picture overall and a person using several library authorities is likely to see different PCs, different operating systems, different versions of Office software and different filtering systems. There needs to be an agreed standard and a proper investment programme to bring all services to the same level.

We believe downloadable books whether audio or e-books will become a core service with the advent of cheaper e-readers and library services should be offering them within the next few years if not already doing so. However with a very real demand still there for physical books, funding is an issue with library services having to offer both real and virtual services for information and general reading. A role for a library development agency might be to start negotiations with publishers and e-book suppliers about costs. It is commonly the libraries that are in the forefront of things (such as Luton with e-books) that make the decision to invest, and so who sometimes pay more. The same applies to online information resources and again a library development agency could either negotiate better prices for local authorities or look to provide these services at a national level so that libraries could direct customers to them. As it is, 151 library authorities are all buying subscriptions and trying to negotiate individually to keep prices down.

With regards to digital content we believe libraries need to focus on providing local content and unique items that are located in every library service and in every community, such as local history and local information which have the potential to be digitised and be made available to a much wider audience. Every library service has unique local information, but there is also information held in every authority that relates back to the days of subject specialisation.

In Luton's case it was car manuals and the service holds in some instances the only remaining copy of a particular manual which with digitisation would be available to all.

With regards to Web 2.0, we believe libraries should have a Web 2.0 presence as and when appropriate. Certainly there is a need for library users to participate in e.g. virtual reading groups and to generate content and share book reviews etc.

There is a view that Web 2.0 is no more than an expansion of the original ideas of the web, so libraries need to be aware and use it as and when appropriate and to show that they are keeping up with current developments - important if we want to retain the interest of teenagers. Libraries already have a presence on Facebook, Myspace and Twitter, but it is time consuming and staff intensive to keep up to date. Again maybe a national presence is required which flags up your local library service?

**Q8. Digital technology is already helping with the back office and admin 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?**

Luton has had a successful joint working arrangement with Bedfordshire County Council since 1998 when it became a unitary authority and with Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough since 2009/10 which, supplies a joint library resources facility, a joint library computer system, catalogue with a shared stock and inter library loans across the three authorities. We believe all authorities should be encouraged to share joint working where possible and practicable and best practice could again be spread through a Library Development Agency through information given in Annual Library Plans.

Whilst we think joint working should be encouraged, we fail to see how it can be enforced or even how one national system could eventually come about however desirable, without significant investment. If it was to happen, where would this investment would come from? There are multiple suppliers of library management systems, all with slightly different systems; some up to date, others still using old technology. We believe that the best that can happen without significant central investment, is that library services be encouraged to see what options are out there and speak to neighbouring authorities when systems need replacing. Again a Library Development Agency could negotiate with current suppliers to get if not a national system, then at least a system which can talk to each other.

In the same way RFID again requires a significant investment to take forward, whilst not releasing very much in the way of savings to pay for it. Yes it should be available in all libraries. It does release staff to be closer to the customer and deal with more complex enquiries and library authorities should be encouraged to provide it, but in the current financial climate it is difficult to see where the funding will come from.

**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?**

There are at times fundamental conflicts between public libraries, national government and local authority IT policy and management. Public libraries offer IT access to the public, whereas local authorities are more concerned, quite rightly, that their systems are secure, particularly now with the Government Code of Connection. Local authorities usually have much tighter filtering systems than libraries want, causing complaints from customers who are denied access to quite innocuous sites which may have a key word in them that the authority has blocked. It means the public cannot do what they normally would on their own PC or in a way they are familiar with, making it difficult for libraries to run taster sessions and adult learning classes. Local authority IT teams also does not offer the seven day support and maintenance that libraries need if their systems are to operate at weekends.

A national library catalogue sounds a great idea and could work if it used the same inter-library loan system currently available for delivery. However it raises issues about stock being bought locally for local people being available to anyone in the country and good library services subsidising poor ones. Luton opted out of the universal membership scheme believing books bought for the local community should be used first and foremost there, though it does allow users from neighbouring authorities to join in the same way Luton users do with one proof of ID. It would also raise issues around staff time and the cost of delivery to and from the customer unless the present inter-library loans system was used. A regional catalogue might be better, but the same issues would apply regarding costs, staff time and connectivity - each system would need to talk to each other, something the Eastern region was not able to achieve after several years of work.

A national web presence would be excellent - one presence instead of 151 web presences. Library services across the country are duplicating staff time and effort reviewing, annotating and checking websites for their virtual libraries. The same content is often presented in quite different ways on each site, making it difficult for the customer to use. If not national, then regional as with the CyberLibrary in the south-west.

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

As stated in response to Q1, we believe that all library authorities should have a Common core purpose and deliver core services with the ability to have local variations to suit the needs of the local community. Those core purposes should be:-

1. To support reading and provide access to books and information in a variety of formats including physical books, audio books, e-books (see below) and online facilities, particularly with regards to children so that reading is embedded at an early age, even before formal education starts.
2. To provide access to learning including a physical safe place in which to study with a wide range of information and learning provided in partnership with other learning providers including commercial and local authority providers.
3. To bridge the information gap for those who do not have fast broadband access at home and for those that do not understand currently how not being IT literate will exclude them in the future for many aspects of society.
4. To provide a safe community space where everyone is welcome and where no-one is challenged as to why they are there - where people can sit, study, read and learn in safety.

On top of this we also believe a public library membership card and information on the importance of reading should be a vital part of the baby pack given to all new parents when they register a new baby's birth.

Books and some information should be bought and determined by local needs and the make up of the local community. Other services such as a virtual library, online services, marketing and the baby offer could be provided at a national level. Currently we have 151 separate library authorities all negotiating or sourcing these services individually. E-books are an area that could benefit from a national offer that libraries subscribe to, but the mechanics of customers logging on would need to be thought through as there are so many different library computer systems in use.

Access to hard copy books, information, the internet and some basic skills courses should remain free across the country; though online subscriptions currently offered free for more leisure related activities could be charged for, such as ancestry.com. Requests for books in stock within the authority should also be free, otherwise users who cannot travel to bigger libraries with a greater choice of books are unfairly penalised.

All the services should be backed up by national minimum standards so that customers would know what service they could expect in each authority and what services were free and what is charged for. However, local authorities are best placed to make decisions on charging after a national minimum standard is set as they know their communities.

The idea of a national library service where books can be borrowed by anyone anywhere and returned anywhere is absolutely desirable - but not practicable while those services are paid for locally and determined by local need. As said above Luton opted out of the universal membership scheme believing books bought for the people of Luton should be available to them first and foremost. Postage costs for such a scheme also have to be found from somewhere, unless the current interlibrary loan scheme delivered the book to a library close to the customer, and the book would be out of circulation for some time to the customers of the authority that had bought it.

**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 be simplified across all libraries?**

**Should library membership be national so that citizens can use any library, borrow and return material anywhere?**

**Do you think there are particular services which would encourage more library use - you might wish to consider a home delivery service and enabling people to request a book on line?**

**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?**

We believe a library authority should have at least some library opening hours each day of the week to reflect the seven day society we now live in, and decisions then should be made in consultation with the local community, but with the understanding that budget restrictions may mean not all wants are possible and hours will have to be spread across the service.

But there should be a variety of morning, afternoon and evening openings across the seven days.

We believe the 'library culture' with reading seen as a fun thing to do should be embedded at an early age with library cards and information in baby packs, Bookstart, in nursery school, children's centres and schools, with school visits etc being part of a national service/ethos which fosters a love of reading and shows everyone involved in bringing up a child how important reading is to getting on in life. If that happened library usage would be embedded in the population and people would drop in and out of public library use as they needed it. Research has shown that there are people who will never use the service no matter what. Others will drop in and out of it as their lives change - so they will use libraries while at school or for study, then return to them when they have children and again when they get older, but will have large periods of their life when they do not use libraries. But having community spaces available in libraries or library access points close to community spaces means people may visit who previously did not.

With teenagers in particular, we need to ensure that libraries contain the information they need whether physical or virtual, and offer services such as graphic novels, internet etc in a welcoming physical environment by teenage-friendly staff. More partnership working with Connexions, local youth parliaments would support this, alongside more national promotions using social networking sites saying what libraries offer. This could be facilitated by a new Library Development Agency.

We believe the present three yearly Cipfa survey for both adults and children is a good vehicle to ascertain customer views on the service provided. Alongside this there are separate local consultations about opening hours and changes to any key service or which affect any key groups. However it does need to link in better with national indicators and show how the library service delivers to key national and local priorities and agendas. In Luton we have personalised the Cipfa survey to ask users if they did not rate a service as good or very good, why not and what changes they would like to see, also asking for names and contact details for those interested in being involved in further consultation thus giving us a database for future contact. What this has shown is that many people do not understand basic things about the library service - e.g. the fact that they can reserve books, the fact that if a book is not on the shelf it does not mean that the library service does not have it, it may be on loan, the fact that it is not the role of the public library service to provide multiple copies of school and university text books. We will be using this year's survey to try and get additional information back to users as well as making improvements where we can and telling them what we intend to do.

**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?**

Many library authorities have seen user numbers rise and whilst overall book issues are declining, issues are rising for fiction and children's books. There needs to be a consolidated campaign at national level about the people whose lives have changed because of libraries and of the positive things that happen such as the Summer Reading Challenge, the Six Book Challenge and the learning that takes place, whether for citizenship, to learn a basic skill or to learn a language or to learn about family history etc.

This is an area that needs a national campaign that does not look just at books as the last one did, but looks at the whole variety of reasons people go to libraries and what they do in them. This is another instance where 151 library services with small marketing budgets make little or no impact, but a national campaign harnessing the internet, and using the partnership with the BBC could be so powerful and make such a difference.

**Q13. Commercial partnerships through libraries are not common. How might we bring more private sector funding into the public sector? What commercial activities should we encourage libraries to operate ( e.g. bookselling, partnerships with bookshops, provision of coffee shops, rental of certain material, contracts with local businesses, 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?**

Many library services already have cafes, sell books via Amazon, have joint author events with local bookshops, rooms for hire and take advertising revenue. Some library services have also used commercial income generating companies to sources new streams of income, but none have been able to tap into income streams that have been significant, long lasting or in keeping with a service that has many vulnerable clients and is seen as at trusted neutral space by users. Again these services are currently negotiated by 151 separate library authorities, and we would welcome a national library development agency negotiating with major companies looking at new sources of income for libraries as a whole.

Putting libraries into Trusts which currently generate rate relief on buildings is possibly a way forward particularly multi-service Trusts with services such as sports and arts included who are able to better generate additional income for the Trust as a whole is possibly a way forward. Single service library Trusts are less viable unless they have the critical mass of a large authority with many buildings or are a group of library authorities, which come together into a Trust.

We do believe there are services that libraries should not promote and these are ones that involve customers in contracts and loans - financial, legal and insurance services for example. Providing access to financial information is one thing, offering loans is another particularly when many library customers come from deprived and vulnerable backgrounds. Retaining the integrity of the service is important if we are to remain a trusted neutral community space with staff seen as honest brokers with no agenda to promote.

**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?**

Libraries have a lot to learn in terms of customer care, recruitment and marketing from commercial organisations like John Lewis and Marks and Spencer and should be able to work with the private sector to learn new and better ways to innovate. Their customer care is second to none and an insight into their recruitment, staff training and development schemes could benefit libraries. We would welcome a role for a new library development agency in brokering national training and development opportunities with such companies.

The consultation document refers to the commercial sector, but there is little reference to the third sector and we believe that libraries could also learn a lot from them as well as looking to the commercial sector. The objectives of the third sector are in many instances closely allied to those of the public library with their aims, roles and relationships within communities. For example, some successful work has been undertaken by public libraries with refugee community organisations, to the benefit of both, and in Luton a partnership with a local charity, Sight Concern is providing support and information to visually impaired people whilst at the same time increasing usage in both organisations.

We believe a way of disseminating best practice would be the re-introduction of Annual Library Plans with results and key findings published on the internet.

**Q15. What are the circumstances in which a local authority would be justified in closing a library?**

We believe the circumstances in which a library closure would be justified would be:

- If the building was old, failing and too expensive to repair
- If usage was dropping dramatically
- If there were changes to nearby libraries with improvements such as increased opening hours or refurbishment
- If there was the opportunity to relocate to better premises nearby or if the area could be served as effectively via a mobile library and home library service.

Any such closures should be part of a strategic library plan. We also believe that any closure should be subject to local consultation and vigorous review, which should include the following:

- A mapping exercise detailing where existing users come from
- Consideration of the wide range of needs of those who work, study and live in area particularly older people, families with young children, school children and in particular where there are communities with significant levels of deprivation, low levels of computer ownership and broadband access and high levels of unemployment
- An assessment of accessibility - car usage, public transport (not just that it exists but the frequency, cost and length of journey) and the distance for those walking
- Consideration of views of existing users and attempt to analyse the reasons of non-users
- An assessment of any differential/adverse impact on specific groups or communities through an EIA
- Consideration of things like state of building, co-location, other partnership arrangements, self service and whether a physical presence is needed

**Q16. Co-location of libraries with other 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?**

As above, we believe that a move into joint premises should be the result of, or that supports, a strategic library plan agreed by the local authority. We also believe the same process of consultation and review as given in Q15 above to a proposed library closure should apply to libraries that are to be co-located, as the local library used by the community will in effect close unless the co-located library is to be a new addition to the library network.

Other issues that need to be considered alongside those listed above are its actual location and the organisation it is co-located with. Is it easy to get to, or will e.g. the steep slope deter older users and the busy road deter unaccompanied children? Will the fact that it may be in a school or college deter users who will perhaps associate the school with rules and regulations or perhaps with a bad experience at school? Will it deter those who are not well educated? The library in any move needs to retain its neutral community space and those located in a school may lose users.

**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 the 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 accessibility and fitness of purpose?**

**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?**

We believe a library network should consist of a mixture of a flag ship central library if appropriate, with smaller branch libraries and mobile stops. It is unlikely that any Head of Service will ever have a blank canvas on which to start from scratch, so there needs to be a library strategy in place with a programme of replacement and refurbishment but with the consideration to seize opportunities as they arise to upgrade or move libraries and build new libraries if the community expands, if they are in keeping with the strategy.

Any changes to library networks need the same consideration, assessment and consultation as listed in Q15 above.

We believe mini-libraries either staffed or unstaffed have a place in a library network and could be a good alternative to mobile library stops, but they need good partnerships in place to make them work if they are to be unstaffed and should be seen as an addition to the network not as replacements for library closures or to enable budget cuts.

We also think there is no need for libraries to be housed in dedicated buildings but part of a community hub, therefore placing themselves in the heart of a community. By having a mix of unstaffed libraries and mixed economy, this should allow the community to have access wherever they live, and encouraged to visit larger libraries. Alternatively there is also no reason why other services and organisations cannot be co-located in new libraries.

**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?**

We believe a good national marketing campaign showing what modern vibrant library services deliver and the variety of work within them would go a long way to attracting bright ambitious people into the service.

We also believe that most librarianship courses on offer do not have the relevant course content for public libraries. There is often almost no mention of public libraries and there is no public library module option at at least one school of librarianship, with references to public libraries tucked in other modules. There seems to be little emphasis on the importance of public libraries or indeed the concept of public service and we know from recent graduates that have come for interview that some tutors actively dissuaded them from working in public libraries.

The questions seem to infer that librarians are at the heart of change but in most authorities actual librarians are only a small percentage of the overall staff. We believe all library staff should be qualified to level two as a minimum and should have excellent IT and customer care skills. There needs to be a revised NVQ path for library staff that reflects the work they do at different levels - current NVQs do not capture all the skills needed to do the job.

We do not believe that a degree in librarianship is necessarily the only way to become a librarian and have several new librarians who have come with a degree in another subject or have worked their way up through the service and are now being supported in obtaining their chartership. We believe all library services should support and offer the chartership route for librarians along with NVQs etc. but believe it needs modernising.

All library services should also have training and development strategy with individual training plans for all staff. Critically libraries need to work to ensure that their staff profile reflects as closely as possible the cultural make up of their area. This is vital to encourage our communities to view their library as their place where they feel comfortable and welcomed.

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

We believe that volunteers have an active role in delivering public library services, bringing an additionality to the service that is not possible with core workforce.

In Luton we have had volunteers deliver books for the home library service for several years, but in the past year have introduced volunteers as part of a Big Lottery Project to help deliver IT sessions to customers, act as reading buddies to customers, support story sessions and Bookstart. We also use volunteers to listen to children talk about the books they had read throughout the Summer Reading Challenge. They have proved a very useful addition to the core service offering a much more personal and supportive service than library staff could offer and spending more time with customers than library staff could whether children or adults. Volunteers come from all walks of life and reflect the local community and local users, making the service reflective of the local community. Volunteering opportunities also support people back into employment and give them work experience that can add to their CVs.

On the downside, the recruitment process can be longwinded, training quite intensive and time consuming and it is unclear how long volunteers will stay before they move on into courses or employment. Volunteers need supervision to reach certain standards of work, so are not an easy option for services where staff resources are often stretched. However when it works, it works well and brings to the library an individual and supportive customer service.

Advertising for our own volunteers has not proved very successful in the past so the library service now uses volunteer organisations such as Vinolved and the local volunteer bureau. We believe that all library services should be encouraged to recruit volunteers and all should have a volunteer policy in place.

**Q20. Is it important that libraries remain a statutory obligation for libraries? What might be the advantages and disadvantages?**

**For example would the removal of statute allow greater flexibility for fundraising and different modes of operation currently off limit?**

We believe most strongly that libraries should remain a statutory service and that the 1964 Libraries and Museums Act should be strengthened and brought up to date with a clear definition of the minimum level of service or core service that customers can expect. It needs to reflect a modern society and take into account issues such as community cohesion or the 24/7 society that did not exist in 1964. It is also important that a final sanction through a Secretary of State is available, a good example being the recent case on the Wirral.

We do not believe there are any disadvantages to libraries remaining a statutory service and consider different ways of delivering the service (provided it remains the responsibility of local authorities) and innovative ways of raising income are already happening within the 'confines' of the existing Act. After all some library services are now run by Trusts and one by a commercial organisation. We have also seen libraries raising income through advertising, cafes, selling books and other methods not thought about in 1964. If the Act needs greater flexibility it can be revised.

**Q21. Is the obligation to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service the correct one?**

**Does it need further definition and guidance around what that means or should interpretation be left to local authorities?**

**For instance should there be more prescription around opening hours, web presence, service provision and staff skills?**

We believe that the definition of a 'comprehensive and efficient' service needs to be defined to take account of the changes that have taken place in modern society and ICT. The 1964 Act does not for example take into account issues such as community cohesion or the 24/7 society we now live in. It perhaps also needs to take account of the people for whom libraries are particularly important - older people; families with young children; local schools and school children; communities with significant levels of deprivation; low levels of car ownership; low levels of computer ownership and broadband access and high levels of unemployment. It is the chance to define library services in a modern way which is not focused on buildings and which could provide clarity by defining a national offer.

We would like to see the comprehensive and efficient service not only clarified, but backed once again by national library standards, but standards that look at local variations so that for example authorities with a high density population are not penalised with standards that count services per 1000 of the population. Luton for example as the third most populated authority within the unitary band of authorities and one of the smallest in area was never ever going to be able meet the opening hours standard despite its libraries being open longer hours than many other authorities who met the standard but had a much less densely populated area. We believe there does need to be standards that relate to opening hours, stock, percentage of population within a certain radius of a static library or mobile stop, web presence and ICT and that picks up services such as the Summer Reading Challenge and Bookstart.

There is a risk that standards become minimum standards rather than something aspirational and it could perhaps encourage some authorities to dumb down and work to the lowest standard, but we believe this could be minimised by a marking system with different levels which could be highlighted with the re-introduction of national library plans to be submitted annually to a new library development agency. We found in Luton that national standards and the Annual Library Plan which was signed off in full council raised the profile of the library service and protected it from budget cuts to a significant extent.

**Q22. How should we measure performance? You might like to consider:  
Is there a need for less, more of different local or national monitoring?  
Are visits and book borrowing still relevant?  
What else should we 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 states power to intervene still appropriated?**

Performance should be measured by a mixture of outputs, which would be important locally, such as library visits. More importantly should be the measure of outcomes i.e. the service the service is making to peoples lives. Something more could also be developed around customer satisfaction, as well as numbers of people signposted to jobs etc.

Finally as stated above, in Q20, yes we do believe the Secretary of State should retain the power to intervene in failing library services where significant cuts are proposed. It sends out a powerful message to those authorities considering severe cutbacks and shows the Government is serious about the importance of public libraries in a modern society.

**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 do this research?**

We do not necessarily need new research to demonstrate that libraries change lives. Most local authorities can give examples of case studies that show how using libraries have changed people lives forever, whether through help to obtain a job, help to surf the net, to book a plane ticket, get information on health, took an IT course or learnt to read etc. These need to be collected and pulled together and would make a very powerful case for libraries. There would also need to be from those examples very clear guidance for the future on what information libraries should collect and in what format to continue to prove their worth and the difference they can make. A library development agency could undertake this but in the meantime MLA perhaps could do it.

They have already pulled together work in this area previously and it would make sense for this to be updated to make the national case for libraries and show what a difference they make.