

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE THIRD REPORT OF THE CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT SELECT COMMITTEE, SESSION 2004-05: PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Introduction by the Minister for Culture

I welcome the Committee's report and its important recognition of the value of our public libraries.

Since childhood I have had a passion for public libraries. In the area in which I grew up, and which I now represent in Parliament, there was little money to buy books, and little space to study or enjoy reading. I needed the library for these things and it was vital to my development. Public libraries remain a hugely used, valued and popular service. I was delighted to be able to welcome in my first week as Minister for Culture the greatly increased number of visits in 2003-04 – an increase of 14 million in the UK, building on the 5m increase the previous year. There are nearly 337 million visits a year to UK public libraries, which is a staggering figure. Especially given the opportunities people now have to inform themselves, to communicate, to fill their leisure time and much more wealth to buy books: all of which has changed dramatically even over the last ten years.

The core functions of libraries have perhaps remained unchanged. They provide access to reading for pleasure, to learning, knowledge, information, guided by skilled people, in spaces which are, or should be, welcoming and neutral – free for use at will, without compulsion. The media and materials by which these functions are provided, and the ways in which they are provided have changed and continue to change, of course. The People's Network has helped to achieve a transformation in the vibrancy of libraries throughout the country. We need to ensure that its full potential is achieved. Books remain at the core of libraries' work, and we must ensure that libraries continue to provide a high quality stock, and that access to special collections and back catalogues is available.

Libraries are now very active in informal learning, in helping to develop basic skills, all vital to modern life, and important areas of concern. Libraries reach out to communities in many ways. The success of Bookstart and the Summer Reading Challenge demonstrates that. Over the last ten years, book lending and the number of visits has been falling (until the recent increases in visits). The make-up of communities is changing, and libraries must make sure they keep up with those changes, with new needs and expectations. This is a challenge for all services in the public, private and voluntary sectors, but libraries are at the forefront of delivering in the community, and the challenge is all the greater. I believe libraries play, or have the potential to play, an enormously important role in local communities for everyone, but in particular for those who are most vulnerable in deprived areas and elsewhere.

Already libraries do very good work, but central and local government must work together, and with partners to make local people aware of their libraries, and we must

ensure that libraries can deliver what these people need and want. I would like to see library services engaging with communities, and the individuals in these communities much more. We will be working with partners to help library services around the country better engage with communities. I am very pleased to announce that we will provide £4 million over 2006-08 to continue library improvement work (£6 million including this financial year).

Libraries need to occupy buildings which are well maintained and attractive and welcoming to local people. Local authorities are primarily responsible for ensuring that this happens. DCMS is helping with PFI credits. I am delighted that the Big Lottery Fund is developing a building programme for community libraries which will help deliver really excellent services for local communities.

DCMS's Five Year Plan says everyone should have the opportunity to use the highest quality and most accessible libraries, open at times that match local demand, for example in the evenings or on Sunday. I endorse that, and look forward to working with local authorities, and other partners to achieve it.

David Lammy

Conclusion & Recommendation 1

• We commend the Government for attempting to establish a national strategy for the provision of library services, and national standards for the quality and performance of those services, in accordance with its statutory responsibilities. We were, however, dismayed by the chopping and changing that has taken place in the process of trying to settle on a set of workable arrangements. We suspect that the overall policy of granting “freedoms and flexibilities” to local authorities may have been applied too liberally by DCMS in this area to the detriment of improvements in library services; not least the 50% of such services that remain persistently below standard.

Conclusion & Recommendation 17

• In summary we believe that the list of standards should be extended and/or revised to include measures of: the number of adult and children’s book loans; the provision of material for users with disabilities; extended opening times; value for money and the three Es (efficiency, effectiveness and economy – including the balance of management and frontline staff); free access to the internet; and the quality of user consultation (and subsequent action).

Conclusion & Recommendation 19

• The right standards, properly reported to Government and triggering remedial action in the event of poor performance are all crucial elements in helping to improve the quality of the service. We recommend that the DCMS reviews its system with this in mind.

Conclusion & Recommendation 30

• We believe that a clearer standard for opening hours should be put in place to fulfil the Minister’s stated objective of informing users. We recommend that this be augmented by a challenging target explicitly aimed at encouraging libraries to open outside normal office, and particularly school, hours and at weekends; subject to local demands.

Response:

1. The Public Library Standards were introduced in April 2001, largely in response to concerns about the deterioration in the quality of public library services overall and, in parallel, a reduction in their usage. Between 2001-02 and 2003-04 the standards primed improvements across those library services. For example, 75% of library services now have longer opening hours than they had in 2001-02 and two-thirds of them now make a greater number of stock acquisitions.

2. We want to encourage local communities to take an active part in using and supporting their local libraries. Opening hours of libraries, for example, should reflect community needs, and we will look at ways in which library services can engage more closely with communities. Libraries already have a successful track record in this regard – surveys reflect the importance which people attach to libraries, and a generally very high satisfaction rate for services, but we want to ensure that this engagement continues into the future and build on the existing successes. Some library services are already experimenting with new models of community engagement and we will help to develop that.

3. Making the standards available and more meaningful to local people – written in language that they can understand, rather than in purely technical language – will strengthen the value of the standards to local communities. We will pursue that aim.

4. Looking at authorities' approach to compliance with the standards overall, by the end of 2003-04 the performance of 66% of authorities were assessed as "good" or "excellent". The standards have thrown into sharper relief the successes and where there are difficulties, both within individual authorities and across the country generally. Together with the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), DCMS is now seeking to address those difficulties through an improvement programme (which the Committee praised) and by a revised set of public library standards (service standards).

5. We recognise the importance of the areas of activity that the Committee would like to see assessed additionally through the service standards. However, they have always been intended to measure core activity. Once that is being delivered to an acceptable level, there comes a point where it is for authorities to decide what other provision is right for the needs of the communities they serve. That is the direction that Government policy towards local authorities generally is moving and library services are being treated in the same way.

6. The standards may now be fewer, but they are no less stretching and they still contain indicators for customer satisfaction. A target for children's overall satisfaction with library services is newly introduced. We and the MLA have undertaken to keep the Public Library Service Standards under review, and we are seeking to find the right balance between stability and change to ensure that the standards continue to reflect the key areas of public library activity and take account of emerging means of delivery.

7. Of course, the standards are only one way of encouraging good practice amongst authorities. There are others. For example, the Audit Commission proposes to include, as part of the culture block of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of local authorities for 2005, an indicator on active borrowers as a percentage of the population. Public library impact measures launched in March 2005 will give library authorities an incentive to reflect the provision they make to address a wide range of social, cultural and community agendas. The best library authorities will already be making substantial contributions to those agendas. They will also be those with the best understanding of the kinds of people they are serving and their needs. That is why the new impact measures

have been linked to the use of community profiles. Again, some authorities will be practiced in using community profiles to help plan their provision. For those that are not, DCMS and its partners have provided them with a basic community profile model to encourage tailored provision. Impact measures will also provide library authorities with a tool to use in demonstrating the impact of libraries in the areas of the shared priorities of central and local government.

Conclusion & Recommendation 2

• We commend the British Library in its efforts to support and advise the public library sector and recommend that such links be developed further in the future with achievable targets being set to enable progress to be monitored and assessed.

Response:

8. The British Library has been working well with library services and we agree that these links should be developed and improved.

Conclusion & Recommendation 3

• We support the continuation and development of the Public Lending Right Scheme as a mechanism for encouraging and sustaining writing talent. Furthermore, the PLRS contributes to the development and maintenance of important links between writers and libraries and, through libraries, to readers.

Response:

9. We agree that the Public Lending Right is a highly successful scheme and much praised.

Conclusion & Recommendation 4

• We recognise and support the importance of listening to the results of consultation with service users – and we were extremely impressed by all the Idea Stores had to offer (inside and out) – but we regret that the word “library” seems to have accreted such negative overtones. We would far prefer to see the re-invigoration of what libraries mean to the public (by improvement of the services) than the re-branding of institutions.

Response:

10. We agree with the Committee’s view on the importance of listening to the views of library users (and to those who could be using them, but don’t currently). The best library authorities do listen to local people and tailoring provision to the actual needs of community is the ethos behind the recently launched public library impact measures.

Active engagement with the local community is the hallmark of a good library service and we will encourage that.

11. Surveys suggest that very nearly everybody, even those who do not use them, believes that libraries are important. The DCMS view is that the word “library” remains a meaningful one.

12. In recent years we have seen the opening of new and iconic library buildings, the exciting advent of the People’s Network and other improvements, as demonstrated by the progress authorities have made against the public library standards. The increased number of visits to our libraries suggests to us that libraries are again connecting with people in a way that they have not in some while (and visitor numbers are still less than they were 10 years ago).

13. Through the development of a marketing initiative that will soon be launched, the MLA is seeking to raise public awareness of all the services a modern day library service delivers.

Conclusion & Recommendation 5

• We are in no doubt that, while libraries are about more than books (and newspapers and journals), these traditional materials must be the bedrock upon which the library services rest no matter how the institution is refreshed or re-branded in the light of local consultation. The explosion of relevant new technologies has to be embraced by institutions but this should be done in the context of their key functions to gather, order, present and disseminate, challenging, as well as relevant, material and information for their local communities.

Conclusion & Recommendation 6

• We recognise that libraries are viewed as safe public environments and as such have the potential to act as a suitable home for services meeting a wide range of community needs and wishes. However, it is equally clear to us that libraries must not be overloaded with objectives or expectations that strain their resources or inhibit the fulfilment of their core functions as outlined above. Libraries and their staff cannot be expected to constitute a one-stop shop for all a community’s demands for information and advice without the appropriate allocation, and clear demarcation, of resources.

Conclusion & Recommendation 7

• All libraries, however, whatever their location, should be set core minimum standards of provision focused on a core purpose to provide access to the written word, including high quality and relevant books – both modern titles as well as the classics, and otherwise, of the past – newspapers and journals and the internet, all in a welcoming and safe environment at the hours that their users want. Once these fundamentals are in place, a library may then build on the range of services it offers

or the range of services that the local authority, after consultation and with appropriate funding, seeks to co-locate on the site. However, within this plethora of services, the notion of simply reading for pleasure must be fundamental.

Conclusion & Recommendation 8

• When over half of public libraries are rated as below an acceptable standard by the Audit Commission, it is our view that the foundations must first be sound before libraries diversify into other areas.

Conclusion & Recommendation 14

• Having emphasised the importance of books and reading, we recognise that libraries can offer more to the communities which they serve. Public libraries have always been part of tackling social exclusion (whatever this objective has been called over time) and we would encourage a continuing focus on those areas where libraries have a unique contribution to make to this end.

Response:

14. We agree with the sentiments expressed by the Committee in these areas. However, we also believe that the various activities and services offered by the modern day library should not be viewed as mutually exclusive. The common thread in everything they do is service to the community and it is the duty of library authorities in general, and library managers in particular, to ensure that service is a good one.

15. When viewed against others changes to the world we know across the past 150 years, the purpose of today's library is not radically different from that inspired by the work of William Ewart and Joseph Brotherton. Books and reading remain at the heart of our libraries' mission. The following appeared in the Ministerial foreword to the *Framework for the Future* Public Libraries Strategy document "One of the triggers of a desire for lifelong learning comes from the pure enjoyment of reading, which libraries can help to foster".

16. When the Public Library Standards were refreshed in October 2004, the targets relating to stock acquisition and replenishment were retained. More recently, the Department, working with the Audit Commission and Arts Council England has developed a fiction and poetry stock tool to encourage a wide choice of quality library provision in these areas.

17. Libraries are rightly expected to promote the love of reading. However, these days, books are not the only means to the written word. The internet can provide another means to reading matter. For many, there will be no substitute for the printed page but the fact remains that access to works by Byron, Dickens, Shakespeare and Tolstoy is only a mouse click away, as, of course, are all the other digital resources held on the world wide web. Additionally, with the right adaptations to the equipment, computers can greatly enhance access to reading matter for people with visual impairments. Reference works

are increasingly being offered on a web-only basis which makes it incumbent on library services to maximise access to the internet.

18. So the promotion of the love of reading amongst all ages and the facilitation of informal learning are still at the forefront of what public libraries do, but libraries are community buildings and should be used for other community purposes. As well as their promotion of reading and learning, Framework for the Future saw libraries' great potential as enablers of access to digital skills and services including e-government, and facilitators of measures to tackle social exclusion, to build communities and develop citizenship. They do this through their core functions – these are impacts of the work of public libraries, not something separate from their functions.

19. It is crucial that library authorities work up the detail of how they engage with these agendas based on their expert knowledge of local needs. DCMS and MLA, through the development of impact measures, have put the profile of local communities at the centre of library service design. In some places, authorities have fully embedded libraries in community functions and vice-versa and there are some good examples where, for example, careers and local information points work well actually within the library building. Elsewhere, authorities have kept these functions separate. DCMS cannot, nor would we wish to, prescribe what services should be offered by libraries beyond what is required by statute and under contractual obligations in the context of the People's Network. We would encourage any approach that has community need at its heart and will continue to work with the library service to promote community engagement strategies.

Conclusion & Recommendation 9

- **We believe the balance between book loans and book sales is in large measure due to the reduced price of books from different sources on the one hand and poor book stocks in many libraries on the other. We welcome the fact that books have, at least, a place in the nation's shopping basket. Public libraries must seek to capitalise on the public's obvious appetite for reading.**

Conclusion & Recommendation 10

- **We believe that the improvement of the quality, range and number of books in stock in our public libraries should be made a priority. The current average spend on books of 9% of total funding is very low; especially in comparison with the 1980s when 17% to 18% was the norm.**

Conclusion & Recommendation 11

- **A substantial increase in the percentage of funding spent by each library authority on books should be a priority. The precise level, or formula for setting that level, must take into account variations between libraries, their current stocks and the demands of the communities they serve. However, we recommend that each library**

authority reviews its investment in books against a new Public Library Service Standard seeking improvement in the desired outcome: book issues per head of population and, perhaps separately, book issues per child.

Response:

20. Since the introduction of the original Public Library Standards around two thirds of authorities have reported an increase in the amounts they spend on stock acquisitions. We have retained the stock acquisition and replenishment targets in the new service standards. Books and other materials amount to some 13% of library budgets.

21. If, as the Committee concludes, falling issues are as a result of poor stock, encouraging additional investment in stock and helping authorities with tools like the fiction and poetry stock quality health check, should, at least, reduce the current decline in issues. Improving book purchasing and book handling processes should give libraries better value for money.

22. There could be many other reasons why book issues have fallen. Research shows that natural trends towards buying rather than borrowing are more to do with people wanting to keep books for reference, to re-read or just because they want to own them than any problem with the stock in the public library. Also, we need to take into consideration that society has changed over time and the fall in issues may be due to the service not keeping up with social trends and increasingly diverse communities. We cannot do anything about societal trends towards buying rather than borrowing but we are working hard to try and ensure that services meet the needs of their communities, for example through outreach work which encourages more people to read.

Conclusion & Recommendation 12

• We commend the Government's recent decision to fund Bookstart and we note that it is the Government's intention to extend this programme to provide further free books to children at eighteen months old and two years of age. Of course, once ignited, any enthusiasm for books and reading on the part of carers and their charges must be tended effectively by access to a wide choice of suitable material, as well as attractive environs, at local libraries.

Response:

23. The Government has been core funding Bookstart for 2 years and last year's decision to expand the programme has been widely welcomed. The public library role in supporting Bookstart is a crucial one, the programme is not just about giving out free books, it is the advice on how families can share books, the associated activities such as rhyme time sessions in libraries and the continued access to children's books through public libraries that makes the difference to families' reading habits and children's development.

24. Library authorities are improving the services they offer for this early years age group: 96% run under 5's sessions. It is also important to help young children and their families make the transition from early years support to activities for older children and the work being done by The Reading Agency with public libraries on activities such as the Summer Reading Challenge is essential to help keep children engaged.

25. We agree that an attractive environment has an important effect on whether children as well as their parents or carers will want to use the library. Most libraries have made a significant effort to make the children's areas distinctive with bright colours, toys and soft furnishings as well as books. In many libraries, however, more needs to be done.

Conclusion & Recommendation 13

• We urge DCMS to foster the cooperation between public libraries and The Reading Agency, together with primary schools in particular, to work together to plan and introduce more initiatives to nurture a love of reading across the country.

Response:

26. We continue to work closely with The Reading Agency on a number of issues including services for young people, partnerships with publishers, the BBC and of course primary schools. DCMS also works closely with DfES on a number of related issues including encouraging links between libraries and Children's Trusts. Developing the nation's love of reading is a key role for libraries and the work that The Reading Agency has done to support and promote this has been vital. We also value the work being done to nurture a love of reading in young people and adults and are working with DfES and The Reading Agency to help facilitate this.

Conclusion & Recommendation 15

• If local authorities are the correct level of government to manage the country's library services – and we received no evidence to the contrary – then the DCMS is probably best qualified to hold overall policy responsibility and the logical source of strategy, advocacy and targeted resources with which to seek improvements.

Conclusion & Recommendation 16

• While we see no case for moving responsibility for libraries to a different department, it is vital that the DCMS raises its game and acts far more effectively as a champion and advocate for libraries across Government. In the absence of levers with which directly to achieve improvements against the statutory criteria for a satisfactory service, the DCMS must establish other means to secure improvements which we discuss below.

Response:

27. In terms of who delivers public library services, DCMS believes that the existing local authority works well where the parent authority recognises the value of its libraries and shows sufficient commitment towards them. The problems that exist stem largely from the fragmented nature of the sector. With the launching of the *Framework for the Future* strategy followed an action and improvement plan, the Public Library Standards and, more recently, the Public Library Impact Measures.

28. DCMS, working with the MLA, is making a difference and we believe the gap between the best and the not so good authorities is narrowing gradually in some key areas. Steady progress is being made and DCMS and the MLA will continue to actively look for ways of improving our libraries and accelerating the pace of improvement. In line with the Government's look across all local services, this could include consideration of fundamentals such as governance and delivery models. An additional £4 million will be made available for improvement work over the years 2006-08 (that is £6 million for improvement work including 2005-06).

Conclusion & Recommendation 18

• We hope, and expect, that the library impact measures, being drawn up by the government and the library sector together, will eventually enable the DCMS and local library authorities to assess the outcomes of library service provision in a specific community, with a view to the improvement of those services and those outcomes.

Response:

29. We agree. People have always known that having good public libraries is a desirable end in itself and, instinctively, that they contribute significantly to the public good. Now, with the first set of impact measures, which were developed in partnership with the Audit Commission, the MLA and the sector itself, using the framework of 5 of the seven shared priorities of central and local government, we will begin to be able assess tangibly the impact that libraries make across a range of key community agendas through undertaking core library work.

30. As additional appropriate data is identified or becomes available, the impact measures will be developed and extended. The MLA will lead this work on behalf of DCMS. As now, the Measures will be linked to a community profile to encourage library provision tailored to the particular needs of local people. Over time, the impact measures should prove to be a powerful tool for DCMS, the MLA and the sector to use with Government departments, parent authorities, parent bodies and other stakeholders.

Conclusion & Recommendation 20

- **We believe that Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA) have an important role to play in bridging the central/local divide with respect to library policy. CPA has the potential to connect performance against national library standards to local government decision-making over priorities; supplying something of a “stick” to augment the potential “carrots” available from the centre via the DCMS and MLA**

Conclusion & Recommendation 21

- **We strongly recommend that the meeting of national library standards by a local authority be made a key factor in the eventual overall CPA score to establish a mutually reinforcing mechanism to link national and local responsibilities in this area which has so long been the subject of “frustration” for the Secretary of State amongst others.**

Response:

31. We agree with the Committee’s assessment of the importance of embedding the library standards within the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Framework. Work is in hand to include the Public Library Service Standards in a newly created CPA Culture Block (they have already been included in a new suite of Best Value Performance Indicators). In 2006-07, we envisage that the Public Library Impact Measures will also be a part of the CPA process.

Conclusion & Recommendation 22

- **We believe that the MLA, the Government’s Peer Review programme and the Library Improvement programme contain the seeds of an effective programme for change and should be considered for significant coordination and expansion.**

Response:

32. The Library peer reviews and leadership training are elements within the Framework for the Future Action Plan/DCMS Library Improvement Plan. The Peer Reviews undertaken so far have been welcomed, and the results achieved successful. This area of work has been welcomed widely.

Conclusion & Recommendation 23

- **We recommend that the DCMS reviews the case for new legislation to govern public libraries, standards and framework, and report to this Committee on its conclusions in its reply to this Report.**

Response:

33. DCMS does not see a compelling need for new legislation at present.

34. Public Library Standards have already primed substantial improvement across the sector and, we believe, the envisaged link between the standards, and other library indicators, and the Comprehensive Performance Assessment Framework will achieve the same desired results. We would see library improvement fitting into the overall Government intervention policy on local authorities and, for example, Best Value legislation exists separately from the library legislation.

Conclusion & Recommendation 24

• A long hard look at efficiencies within and across the public library sector – with one eye on the potential for economies of scale (where local responsiveness will not be inhibited) – is well overdue. We recommend a new initiative aimed at inspiring an efficiency drive within libraries and library services generally; including a substantial shift of resources to frontline services. This should be co-ordinated at a national level by DCMS and MLA with the assistance of the Audit Commission. Progress should be driven by the inclusion of a value for money indicator amongst the national library standards.

Response:

35. DCMS and MLA commissioned a report on the library book supply chain and library efficiency which will be published shortly. The main recommendations that we will take forward are that library services should adopt common practices and standards in the processing of books, that they should adopt common requirements which would reduce costs for suppliers (and for library services). We would want to see common standards adopted, and we want to work with the MLA and library authorities to ensure this happens and that the requirements are minimal. The other main recommendation is that library services should purchase books collectively and preferably nationally in order to strengthen library services' position with suppliers, and to reduce the burden of 149 local authorities undertaking this work separately. Several models for delivering this are suggested and we would wish to provoke a discussion about which model is most likely to succeed, and to implement that model.

36. There will not be a library service standard for value for money as a CPA indicator is being developed to measure this.

Conclusion & Recommendation 25

• According to the MLA: “a survey conducted 10 years ago identified a backlog of building repairs and refurbishments totalling £650 million in England alone. There is reason to believe this potential cost has increased substantially.” This suggests a total significantly higher than the £240 million that can be extrapolated from the

Department's figures. There is manifestly a problem and with such vast, if differing, amounts being put forward as estimates, the solution cannot be simple.

Conclusion & Recommendation 26

• We recommend that DCMS, ODPM, MLA and local authorities work actively together to produce a more accurate picture of the condition of the public library estate and to estimate the potential call for capital investment. This needs to be prioritised along a spectrum from essential and urgent maintenance, through timely repair, to desirable refurbishment. Those libraries that merit consideration in heritage terms should be identified. A plan for action is needed that reflects and balances the realities of available funds with the identified priorities. We believe that the public library estate, in principle, merits assistance from a partnership of local and central government alongside appropriate Lottery distributors.

Conclusion & Recommendation 27

• We recommend further consideration be given to extending the role of PFI projects in the area of libraries.

Response:

37. DCMS recognises the key importance of this issue but also believes that this matter should be viewed in perspective. As well as the iconic library buildings built in recent years, there are many more bright, attractive and welcoming library buildings around the country.

38. Library buildings, like any other local government delivered service, are ultimately the responsibility of parent authorities. However, DCMS acknowledges that some library buildings require some form of urgent care. The Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) have begun an audit of the condition of the public library "estate".

39. DCMS has been pleased to allocate £90m of its Private Finance Initiative credits to date to public library projects. Additionally, DCMS has announced that £130m of PFI credits will be available for projects over the next two years and that public libraries will be one of the priorities. The successful bids are expected to be announced shortly.

40. DCMS is delighted that the Big Lottery Fund is considering developing a community library programme.

Conclusion & Recommendation 28

• We would urge local authorities to consider more frequently the possibility of including provision for library development in section 106 agreements with developers.

Response:

41. Decisions on the matters to be included in planning obligations are for individual local authorities, based on planning judgement and taking account of the Secretary of State's guidance which is set out in Circular 1/97 and in the draft revised Circular of November 2004). In setting guidance, the Government's aim is not to prescriptively set out a list of acceptable and unacceptable obligations, but to outline the principles and underlying acceptable obligations. If a library can be seen to fit with these principles in relation to a particular development, it may be a legitimate to use s106.

42. In principal, s106 agreements may be used to mitigate a development's impact on the locality. A large enough development may create the need for a library, so this might be provided in whole or part through s106.

43. In areas of significant growth, s106 contributions may be "pooled" to cover the cumulative impacts of several developments. Several developments might together create a need for a library where a single development would not.

Conclusion & Recommendation 29

• We would support the notion that, where possible, new libraries be co-located with other public services depending on the circumstances of a particular community.

Response:

44. We agree. As the "Framework for the Future" document says "The modern services libraries should offer increasingly depend on partnerships with education, learning, leisure, health and e-government".

45. Framework for the Future also makes the point that "..... Successful existing libraries, such as Chesterfield, exemplify the spin-off benefits from a successful library in a town centre. Successful libraries attract people to a centre and so contribute to economic activity.....". But it is also true that a library's popularity increase dramatically by being placed within a critical mass of community or commercial activity. Tower Hamlet's innovative ideastores both contribute to and feed off the community vitality of their sites near the markets at Roman Road, Bow, and Chrisp Street, Poplar. Coventry's new library in a Mall at the Arena Retail Park opposite a major supermarket is another good example of this.

46. Nevertheless, we believe that the Committee are right to add the caveat that the arrangement needs to be right for the community being served. The most successful library authorities will be the ones most in tune with the lifestyles and living culture of local people.

47. Libraries co-located with other authority services also need to be planned carefully if the potential synergies and efficiencies are not to be lost. Co-locating a public library in a school, for example, can be a good idea in principle, but the benefit will be lost if older users do not feel a sense of ownership of the library or, worse, feel intimidated about using it, or if the library is not easily accessible.

48. These provisos are important but not insurmountable and, where it meets a clear community need, we support the extension of library co-location and critical mass siting.

Conclusion & Recommendation 31

• We recognise the challenges inherent in such a development; in terms of demands on staff and on service resources. However, many other organisations have changed their culture and have achieved increased opening hours with flexible working patterns which actually allow staff to balance more effectively home – and work – life. We expect that, in a majority of residential areas, local communities would prefer extended opening hours but we recommend that local library authorities make it a priority to ascertain the views of both their existing users and the wider community in this area and act accordingly.

Response:

49. We completely agree that library authorities should ascertain the views of their communities and shape the service accordingly, that is why there is a current project concerning community engagement which aims to encourage each library authority to assess more closely the needs of their communities. In terms of opening hours, the inclusion of a specific library service standard has already increased the opening hours in 75% of library authorities. The workforce is becoming more flexible to working hours but this is not something that can be solved overnight, the trend is in the right direction and we will continue to work to support this. We believe it is important that public libraries open when people need them – perhaps on Sundays or in the evening (depending on local needs).

Conclusion & Recommendation 32

• We believe that charging for the People’s Network contravenes at least the spirit of the 1964 Act which permits libraries to impose fees only “where facilities made available to any person by a library authority go beyond those ordinarily provided by the authority as part of the library service.” We believe that the provision of the People’s Network in all public libraries, coupled with the Government’s target for universal access to the internet, suggests strongly that the service now falls within the statutory definition of a facility “ordinarily provided by the authority as part of the library service” and charges should not be imposed. Given evidence we received on the variations in the charges that libraries do impose, we further recommend that, where charging for services wrongly persists, the case for an applicable national standard be reviewed.

Response:

50. We note the Committee's comments in respect of the People's Network. The original legislation (to which the Committee's conclusion and recommendation referred) was amended in 1989; our view is that the amended legislation does not oblige authorities to offer access to the People's Network free at the point of use. However, it was certainly the intention when the People's Network was introduced that access to it should be free. The People's Network has given the public library network a new lease of life, and seems certain to have been a major contributor to the first increases in visits to our public libraries for many years.

51. DCMS and MLA will continue to look at ways to acknowledge tangibly the efforts of English Library authorities that have good access and social inclusion policies, and this could include their arrangements for the provision of the People's Network to users.

Conclusion & Recommendation 33

- **We recommend DCMS, ODPM, MLA and local authorities review plans and budgets for the costs of maintenance and upgrading of the system with a view to exercising the considerable purchasing power of the combined sector.**

Conclusion & Recommendation 34

- **We recommend that the NAO undertakes a study of the People's Network to assess the value for money secured by its procurement policy. Furthermore, the NAO should, perhaps in cooperation with the Audit Commission, identify whether savings can be made in the future along the lines suggested above.**

Response:

52. At the inception of the People's Network, local authorities had to provide a sustainability plan before receiving funding. It is for them to find the funding to secure the sustainability of the network. It is the responsibility of each library authority to decide how much money to allocate to their library services which includes the procurement of ICT equipment. People's Network ICT procurement should be viewed in the context of wider local authority ICT procurement. Libraries are funded through the local government funding mechanism.

53. We will consider in the context of wider local government best practice, collaboration between library authorities in procuring, implementing and supporting new ICT systems. Decisions about National Audit Office (NAO) value for money studies are a matter for the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Conclusion & Recommendation 35

- **Provision of access to libraries for people with disabilities should be a high priority for local authorities and this requires a co-ordinated policy. We recommend that such a policy is drawn up following discussion with the Disability Rights Commission.**

Conclusion & Recommendation 36

- **We recommend that secure funding is made available for the maintenance and development of Revealweb over the longer term.**

Conclusion & Recommendation 37

- **We recommend that DCMS takes a lead within Government in securing funding to support the production of a much greater range of material in alternative formats which are accessible to people with disabilities. We believe that the provision of material in such formats should be the subject of a national standard.**

Response:

54. The MLA has developed “The Disability Portfolio”, a collection of 12 guides on how best to meet the needs of disabled people as users and staff in museums, archives and libraries. It gives invaluable advice, information and guidance to help overcome barriers and follow good practice.

55. Library services do a great deal to support people with disabilities, particularly those with visual impairments and we are supportive of this work. Libraries stock resources in alternative formats and many have magnifying equipment and other technologies to assist people with visual impairments.

56. The People’s Network is a valuable tool for lifelong learning for older and visually impaired people. A high percentage of libraries have installed software to increase the accessibility to those with sight problems. A 2003 survey showed that 84% had screen magnification software and 75% had text-to-speech software.

57. In late 2004 the DCMS funded the National Library for the Blind to run regional workshops for public library staff covering issues of accessibility for people with visual impairments and giving practical advice on how to offer an inclusive service.

58. The MLA supported Revealweb with a set-up grant of £300,000 over three years. This was made on the understanding that it becomes sustainable from March 2006. We will be undertaking further liaison with the managers of Revealweb and hope that a solution can be found for sustainability.

59. Government involvement in securing more titles in alternative formats is currently lead by the DTI, with DCMS and DfES having interests. The aim is to establish a system of trusted intermediaries to which publishers can send their electronic files and books. This would allow alternative formats to be available simultaneously with general release.

60. MLA will establish a working forum to assist collaboration between publishers, third sector organisations and government.

Conclusion & Recommendation 38

• We recognise and support the profession's moves to train and qualify people from within but we strongly believe the profession must not be complacent. It needs to market itself more effectively and to cast its net more widely among potential recruits.

Response:

61. We are committed to helping existing library staff to widen their skills base to adapt to a changing service; however the committee is quite right to say that new recruits are needed to help change the culture of the library service to more readily meet the needs of the communities they serve. A large proportion of library staff are due to retire shortly; research from the South East Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (SEMLAC) has highlighted that 40% of public library staff in the South-East will retire within the next 10 years, and the service needs to attract new people who have the necessary skills to fill this gap.

62. A key component of the marketing plan for libraries, funded through Framework for the Future, includes a recruitment campaign highlighting the wide range of skills required to work in public libraries. This will work in two ways, promoting to the public what a modern library service offers and attracting the people with the characteristics and skills needed to help realise the vision of public libraries outlined in Framework for the Future.

63. The MLA's workforce development plan outlines 4 strategic objectives to achieve a skilled and diverse workforce across the sectors: a workforce fit for purpose; enhancing leadership and workforce skills; empowering learning and change; and research for action.

64. As part of this plan, the MLA is working with key partners such as CILIP and Lifelong Learning UK to develop new accreditation routes to support people gain qualifications through on-the-job training as well as the traditional library schools route.

65. Key activities being undertaken in 2005 / 2006 include:

- Funding Positive Action Traineeships and Apprenticeships in libraries, and exploring with Lifelong Learning UK ways to take forward this work.
- Identifying the barriers (and actions to address them) to entering careers in libraries from the perspective of young black and minority ethnic people and those who influence their choices.

- Conducting a demographic survey of volunteers and identifying effective practice in volunteer learning and development.
- Developing a web based Learning Needs Analysis to identify and meet the skills needs to deliver the Framework for the Future vision.

Conclusion & Recommendation 39

- **The library profession must recognise its shortcomings in this area of leadership and advocacy and plan both to train its staff internally and to recruit people with appropriate experience from outside the profession. Library leaders of the future need skills, crucially including management skills, beyond those that come with a professional librarianship qualification.**

Response:

66. Improvement of leadership within the public library service is a key component of Framework for the Future and the Workforce Development Strategy referred to above.

Key activities include:

- Framework for the Future's "Leading Modern Public Libraries" Programme is aimed at strengthening leadership at all levels within a service: Heads of Service, Senior Managers and Future Leaders. There is a strong focus within the course content on advocacy skills, political awareness, strategic thinking and transformational leadership. 148 of the 149 library authorities in England have taken up the opportunity offered by this programme, including 119 current Heads of Service. DCMS funding, through Framework, is providing 85% funding for three places per authority.
- 2 Library Fellows are being sponsored on the Clore Leadership Programme in 2004 and 2005.

Conclusion & Recommendation 40

- **Although they are not strictly within the terms of reference of this inquiry, we believe that the assessment of what is happening in school libraries is extremely important and that the Government ought to be in a position to ascertain whether schools who have had funding delegated to them are in fact spending that money on library services and whether delegation of such funding is having a positive or negative effect on library services in schools.**

Response:

67. The Government believes that schools should have good library provision, and that buying in a school library service can be an important method of securing that, especially for primary and special schools. That is why local education authorities (LEAs) are allowed, if they wish, to devolve funding for primary library services on an earmarked basis. However, this is a local decision and in many areas the LEA has decided to delegate funding to all schools, not always on a specifically identifiable basis. Schools' expenditure from budget shares is tracked by the Consistent Financial Reporting (CFR)

system but this is primarily a benchmarking device, not a set of accounts; and care needs to be taken that excessive data requirements do not add to the bureaucratic burden on schools. At present Departmental spend within schools is not collected in CFR but the content of returns is reviewed annually. Overall the Government believes that placing the decision on spending at school level helps to keep library services customer focussed and efficient. In particular it is not necessarily the case that a library service used by a school needs to be provided by the school's own LEA.

68. The DfES does provide some funding for schools to manage their extended services, but this goes direct to LEAs who are expected to spend it at school level and work with schools to deliver an extended schools strategy. It would be for individual schools, in consultation with their LEA, to decide whether to develop their library provision as part of their extended services and activities. However, as there is great flexibility in how this funding can be spent, the DfES does not monitor how much goes to particular services such as library provision.

Conclusion & Recommendation 41

• Ofsted should undertake a thematic study on the state of school library services and the relationship between schools and public libraries. In addition, Ofsted, in its report on a school, must include reference to how that school provides its library services and the standard of its provision.

Response:

69. From September this year, school inspections will be shorter, sharper and more focused on outcomes, making use of the school self-evaluation and other data to generate hypotheses which will then form the core of the inspection. Inspection reports will be much shorter, about four to six pages long, and will no longer contain the detailed subject information that is contained in the current reports. Resources, including libraries, will not be a routine part of the inspection framework as, arguably, they were before. However, inspectors will focus on libraries if there seem to be real strengths or particular areas of concern in this area that impact on pupils' achievements. It is unlikely that inspections will routinely give a view about the quality of the school library.

70. However, Ofsted are currently looking at good school libraries as part of the subject inspection programme for English this year. The visits which finish this summer will inquire about the impact of the local SLS and links with public libraries. This is only a small part of the survey and the evidence is likely to be limited. A report is due out in the autumn and will also feature in summary form in the English section of HMCI's 2004-2005 annual report.

71. We will review this with Ofsted in the light of the findings from the current work and will consider whether it is appropriate to carry out a more detailed study of library services within the forward programme of subject and thematic reviews.

72. Our guidance on extended schools makes clear that public libraries have an important role to play in increasing community access to cultural opportunities, and our guidance suggests that schools can draw on resources provided by libraries and actively engage with them to deliver family learning, lifelong learning and study support for the whole community.

Conclusion & Recommendation 42

• We commend the Government for including, as one of their exemplar designs for Building Schools for the Future, a model providing for the co-location of public libraries with schools.

Response:

73. To encourage top quality design in the Building Schools for the Future programme, and in the wider schools capital spend, eleven exemplar designs for schools were commissioned from leading architects. They comprised five designs for primary schools, five for secondary, and one all-through 3 to 18 school. Naturally all of the designs included good library resource centres. Those for secondary schools, the sector covered by Building Schools for the Future, also included a public library as an option in addition to the core design of the school.

74. The co-location of public libraries with other public services such as schools is often a beneficial arrangement to the local community and can enhance the service to the public. However, it may not be a suitable arrangement for all communities, the location of libraries is very important. People must have access to libraries in the places they need them and they must be welcoming.