To Chief Librarians in England And Other Stakeholders

29 April 2004

CONSULTATION ON THE SERVICE PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS

In late February, Bill Macnaught, Chairman of the Advisory Council on Libraries (ACL), wrote to all Library Chiefs in England giving the proposed direction of travel for the Public Library Standards. A facsimile of that note is attached here for the benefit of others with an interest who did not receive it. Since then a working group, working with the ACL, has compiled a proposed set of service public library standards. The proposed new standards are attached here at Annexe A with additional notes at Annexe B, outlining the rationale for their selection. DCMS would now value the views of the sector and other stakeholders on this proposal. A list of those involved in the whole process is contained within the report compiled by Martin Jennings which is referred to below.

In essence, the new service public library standards will be a streamlined version of the existing standards. What we have tried to do is to retain the best of the existing set with slight modifications, dropping those of the existing standards that are felt either to have served their purpose already or, in the light of experience, not to have proved to be as helpful as was first hoped.

The streamlining of the standards accords with the commitment within the Framework for the Future document to review the standards to ensure “they fully reflect the new (Framework for the Future) strategy and do not impose an unreasonable administrative burden on local authorities to deliver quality services to meet local needs”. The closer alignment to the F4F strategy will be delivered through the introduction of impact measures which will more locally focussed and will aim to highlight the contribution that libraries make to wider corporate agendas. The impact measures are at an earlier stage of development and we will keep you in touch with progress on them up to and including a full consultation before their introduction, planned for 2005-06.
As the data underpinning the service standards is essentially the same as that for the existing standards we aim to introduce them this year. Although no final decision has been taken, we envisage that they will stand for a reasonable period. However, over time, we envisage certain standards will be developed further to address previously expressed concerns or aspirations.

We recognise, because authorities tell us, the value of the public library standards as an advocacy tool and we hope that the new service standards, to be supplemented later by impact measures will continue to be helpful. However, in the context of the local government modernisation agenda the standards are intended to encourage improvement in the performance and penetration of library services. The Government’s general approach is to seek improvement that is “stretching” but achievable and we are trying to create revised standards in this vein.

If you visit the IPF website [www.libplans.ws](http://www.libplans.ws) you will be able to see (highlighted) a paper by Martin Jennings that explains how we have arrived at the current proposal and mentions a number of issues that have arisen in the development work. These include what “stretching performance” might mean and options about at what base the standards should be set. You may find it helpful to study the paper as it will provide a perspective on the questions that might arise from your own consideration of these new proposals.

Returns should be made to Phillip Harwood-Davis at the above address or in e-form to [philip.harwood-davis@culture.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:philip.harwood-davis@culture.gsi.gov.uk). Please could you supply any comments in tabular form with the number of the relevant standard on the left hand side and the relevant comments to its right. Any general comments should be contained in a covering letter or note.

Copies of all of the papers enclosed here will be posted on the DCMS website, [www.culture.gov.uk](http://www.culture.gov.uk) (with a link to the “libplans” site)

I should be grateful for any views on these proposals by Friday 11 June.

Les Pedrick
Annex A

PROPOSED SERVICE PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS

ACCESSIBILITY

SPLS1- Proportion of households living within specified distance of a static library

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority type</th>
<th>% Population within</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 mile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner London</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outer London</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unitary</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sparse authorities defined as the 10% of authorities with highest sparsity of population indices. Source: Ward Sparsity 2001 census indicator. (see http://www.local.odpm.gov.uk/finance/0405/cen2/wdspar2.xls)

The authority’s own estimate of the proportion of households served by mobile libraries on scheduled routes and other service outlets* offering a range of library services open to the general public will be accepted as a contextual indicator when assessing the proportion of households served by static libraries.

NB. Colleagues are invited to suggest a definition for “other service outlets” which allow accessibility by broad sections of the public and are not part of an organisation for a limited number of people (eg homes for the elderly).

SPLS 2 - Aggregate scheduled opening hours per 1,000 population for all libraries

ICT PROVISION

SPLS 3 – Percentage of static service points (as defined by CIPFA) providing electronic information resources connected to the internet.

SPLS 4 – Total number of electronic workstations with access to the internet and the libraries catalogue (available for public use through both static and mobile libraries) available to users per 1,000 population
PERFORMANCE, USAGE AND SATISFACTION MEASURES

SPLS5  Requests

i  Percentage of requests for books met within 7 days
ii Percentage of requests for books met within 15 days
iii Percentage of requests for books met within 30 days

SPLS 6  Number of visits to the library website per ‘000 population. (See notes at Annex B)

SPLS 7  Number of library visits per 1,000 population

SPLS 8  % of library users who view their library service as:

i  very good
ii  good
iii  adequate
iv  poor
v  very poor

STOCK

SPLS 9  Annual items added through purchase per 1,000 population.

SPLS 10  Time taken to replenish the lending stock on open access or available on loan.
Notes on the Proposed Public Library Service Standards

The PLS numbers here refer to the existing Standards

PLS 1(i) Retain - We are proposing a sparsity element for authorities with sparse populations as shown. As now, regularly operated mobile services can be included as contextual information. Over time, we would like to explore ways of including more explicitly mobile and other service point provision when both logistical and definitional questions have been overcome. See the NB relating to other standards outlets at Annex A.

PLS 1 (ii) Discontinue - It is considered that authorities should respond to local needs to define what convenient hours for their populations are. For that reason, it is envisaged that PLSs 1(ii) and 3 (ii) will be subsumed into the forthcoming impact standards.

PLS 2 (I&ii) Discontinue - External influences make this no longer compelling as a standard. Results fluctuate year on year. The evidence suggests that this standard has outlived its usefulness.

PLS 3 (i) Retain - We are proposing to change this standards definition from actual to scheduled opening hours to iron difficulties of collection and consistency between authorities. The target of 128 hours to be retained.

PLS 3 (ii) Discontinue - See PLS 1 (ii).

PLS 4 Discontinue - Significant progress has been made against this standard and it is felt to have served its purpose.

PLS 5 Subsume - with PLS 6 ii into a new proposed standard (PLS 3). In the longer term we propose to explore the introduction of a standard that will reflect the breadth and range of services available on-line.

PLS 6 (i) Retain - with the current target of 6 per 10,000 population. Definition to include only those workstations with access to the internet and/or the libraries catalogue available for public use within public libraries as defined at PLS 1 including mobiles.

NB. We recognise that many colleagues may consider that this has limited value as an indicator and it is high on our list of priorities for further development work. However, given the importance of this area for work for libraries, and until we have something better, we propose to retain the indicator in this form. In that context we would welcome colleague’s information on the following:
- Confirmation that you can provide information in 2003-04 for web site hits on your library website (Yes or No).
- How your authority’s IT system can count web site hits for the library service web site and catalogue access.
- Your views on measuring transactions with library services and other services through the library portal.

**PLS 6 (ii)**  Subsume – see PLS 5.

**PLSs 7&8**  Discontinue – These standards have served their purpose.

**PLSs 9 (i-iii)**  Retain.

**PLS 10**  Retain – In the longer term the measure of virtual visits needs to be standardised and the standard to include other forms of remote access.

**PLS 11**  Retain – [recalibrated?] For the longer term, consideration will be given to an active user definition to record all forms of regular use.

**PLSs 12-15**  Condensed - into one standard around users’ overall view of the library services overall provision.

**PLS 16**  In abeyance – subject to issues of practicality and definition being resolved.

**PLS s17&18**  Retain.

**PLS 19**  Discard – There are difficulties of the classification of qualifications across authorities and measurement of this standard would need to be standardised to be consistently comparable. However, the importance of staff skills to library services is acknowledged and the introduction of a staff related standard at a later date will still be kept under review.