Libraries : A Vision

The Public Library Service in 2015

Laserfoundation

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Introduction

This discussion paper is the outcome of a two-day seminar for librarians held at Bedford in 2004. It was organised by the Laser Foundation (*see Appendix*). Those who attended were mainly young middle managers (The Futures Group). Each section of this paper was drafted by a different hand, and then edited to achieve some uniformity of style.

It has not been found possible to remove all duplication, nor would all delegates agree with all of the sections. This is, after all, a discussion paper on one of the most contentious, but important social questions of today : the future of our public library service.

Some Conclusions

- There will continue to be a need for a public library service which is "free at the point of delivery"; there will also be a need for premium services (Section 4) which may be home delivery, professional research services, access to the national back catalogue etc, all of which should be on a full cost recovery basis. (Section 14)

- Library services must follow retailing in being "customer-led". (Section 5)

- The introduction of Radio Frequency Identification systems into libraries can revolutionise allocation of staff time. (Section 6)

- In a world of rapid social and technological change libraries too must learn both to change and to encourage the careers of those who can manage change. (Section 6)

- Library staff may have to adopt a corporate appearance, wearing a uniform, or adhering to a dress code. They must spend more time "on the floor", and be as well trained as good shop assistants in customer relations. Good staff must be properly paid; less than adequate staff must be helped to leave. (Section 9)

- Management skills are in short supply; library school syllabuses are out of touch with today's needs. (Section 9)

- The division of responsibility for libraries between national and local government is serving the public badly. A radical change in both governance and method of funding is needed. (Section 10)

- In the future there will be no "one size fits all" library. Each will reflect local needs. Some will share a site with other local services, or with commercial premises; others may be "virtual libraries". (Section 15)

"This too shall pass. The constant questioning of a library's reason for existing is a very good thing. Libraries have continued to evolve to find their appropriate function—their core service. They will continue to get funded and continue to exist."

Director, OCLC Network

# 1.	The Context

Among the factors which were identified as affecting the future of libraries were:

Population factors

- The average age of the population will be greater
- Working hours will be longer for people at all levels
- Retirement age will be later
- The profile of health care will alter with more emphasis on provision for the elderly
- There will be more people with mobility problems

Personal incomes

- There will be greater polarisation between haves and have nots
- The number of those who can afford to be active consumers of services will increase
- There will still be many people on "low salaries" - in terms of what they can purchase by way of "life opportunities"
- There will be a range of public bodies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) attempting to improve the position of "the have nots"
- People will experience greater financial risks, and have less financial security (pensions, housing market etc)

Social factors

- The "age of leisure" will be as far away as ever
- Society will be more fragmented and there will be fewer and weaker common threads
- Many people will have long-term care responsibilities. This will tend to isolate them, and make them less mobile. They may have less time to spend outside the home and need more services delivered to their homes
- "Virtual communities" will develop among some users of IT

Technology

- The pace of change will accelerate. The next generation will take for granted significant technological advances which have so far not been heard of
- Technological change will be all-pervasive in the fields of information, and communications
- New technologies will be adopted earlier in their development
- Technology will provide support for an individualised and mobile culture rather than a culture of shared resources

Consumer world

- The contrast between the socially responsible, the socially passive and the socially irresponsible will become sharper
- Self-determination (choice) will be a stronger theme
- Service providers will become more specialised

- Consumers will be more discerning, and more demanding. They will expect immediate service at the place and time of their choosing
- People will be accustomed to paying for premium information and services e.g. Newspapers, Magazines, Cable, Amazon
- Delivery to the home of both physical and "virtual" desired items will be regarded as the norm

Education

- The education system will have become two-tier, with a larger role for private education at all levels, and tension between public and private provision
- There will be more mature learners, people starting or returning to study later in life
- There will be more degree holders
- There will be greater availability and take-up of technology-supported home study

2. Public Library Service Today

The public library service is not noted for attracting publicity. However, two recent episodes will have been welcomed by those who believe that "there is no such thing as bad publicity".

Who's in Charge, a report prepared by Tim Coates for the Libri Trust and largely funded by the Laser Foundation, directed heavy criticism at public libraries. It pointed to a serious decline in recent years, both in loans and in visits, and attributed it to a misdirection of funds. Libraries, it argued, are now spending too much on administration and not enough on their book stock and on direct service to users, such as improved opening hours. In terms of service, the report looked overwhelmingly for a greatly increased concentration on book-lending. Apart from a serious demand for budget restructuring, the report placed most hope in major revisions to administration, a substantial increase in devolution of managerial authority to the managers of individual local libraries, and a much firmer steer from local politicians with responsibility for the library service.

Overdue, a report prepared by Charles Leadbeater for Demos, portrayed libraries as "sleepwalking to disaster". It too focussed on the decline in loans and visits as evidence of a service in serious, possibly terminal, decline. It placed more emphasis on the need for leadership from the national centre, a leadership which it felt could not be forthcoming from the existing structure. However, it did recognise that libraries had much unrealised potential, and that there was an important role for them which they were currently carrying out inadequately. It recognised that, across the whole country the picture was far from uniform, and that there was evidence, here and there, of innovative thinking and of a determination to take practical measures, not only to arrest decline, but also to seize opportunities to develop and introduce new services, responding to changes in society and technology. But overall, the tone was downbeat. The general impression given was of a service where the bad substantially outweighed the good.

If Leadbeater described a library pot that was more than half empty, *Framework for the Future*, the 10 year strategy report of the Department for Culture Media and Sport and the subsequent public library development plan of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council saw it as more than half full. It put forward a considerable list of measures needing to be taken to improve the service, but its message essentially was that, by taking detailed practical steps, just as were being urged on other public services "in need of renewal", the public library could redeem itself without radical rethinking.

Within the service itself there is some recognition that all is not well. The diagnosis contains a number of elements:

- Libraries are low on the list of government priorities, and receive insufficient funding, especially for the renewal of buildings and the modernisation of services
- There is complacency among staff, a failure to recognise and adapt to changing trends, and an aversion to risk
- There is a degree of fatalism about changing social trends
- There are issues about funding and direction at the national level which are contributing to strategic weakness, a lack of decisiveness, and unacceptably wide variations in service across the country
- There are problems within the management of the service itself, and particularly some doubts about the strength of the senior management cadre
- There is a failure to recognise the existence and performance of competitor services
- There is an ageing customer base
- There is a lack of the most useful performance data, for example about who does and does not use libraries
- There is a failure to recognise some of libraries' important strengths, e.g. their role as community spaces and to build on this
- There is a poor understanding of the social changes which are having an effect on libraries' operating environment.

3.   Positioning the Public Library Service for the next generation

If there is to be a dynamic public library service in 2015 it will need to build on its existing strengths. Emphasis must be on:

- Access : virtual and physical access to services, wherever the customer may be
- Support : the information and support customers need to achieve their objectives
- People-focus : working out with customers what they need and then providing it
- Personalised service : the services they require, whatever their needs
- Responsive service : always listening to the users
- Dynamic service : flexible, adaptable

In ten years time, the public library service must have carved out a clearly defined role of which the following will be the principal characteristics:

Culture

- It must have reaffirmed its position as a central element of UK culture
- It must be regarded as a major player in encouraging the enjoyment of that culture

Access to Information

It must:

- Provide free access to a wealth of information, particularly national and local government information
- Be a simple-to-use portal to information which cannot be supplied free to the user
- Be the major player in providing access to commercially non-viable information
- Provide information to the individual home, physically and virtually
- Be known for the reliability of the information it provides

Social Inclusion

It must be a major force working for social inclusion:

- Making the riches of our culture available to all
- Defending freedom of information
- Promoting diversity of opinion
- Offering unbiased service provision
- Providing support to children and young people who have no alternative access to information and guidance
- Supporting an increase in social interaction among those groups and individuals who would otherwise become isolated

Collections

It must offer:

- A range of books and other resources not easily available elsewhere
- Books and other resources which are out of print
- Access to special collections, and the national back catalogue
- Local history and information
- Niche market information

Role of staff

Its staff must be recognised as:

- Having expert knowledge of collections and resources
- Skilled in the evaluation of information
- Expert in local information, and the major information source about local authority services especially education and social services

Space

It must provide:

- Open, neutral space, both physical and virtual
- 'Hot desk' space for those who need it
- Space for activities promoting social interaction and social engagement

4. Users of the Public Library Service in the next generation

Despite criticisms of declining levels of demand libraries have a loyal customer base which, for its size and its persistence, many retailers must envy. The public library is still a trusted resource. The next generations' users will still see a public library fulfilling its traditional role as the source of reading and reference materials, as a community physical space, and as a hand-holding service for anyone needing help with their information requirements.

However, a broader role beckons but libraries will need to show more imagination and mental agility in the way they look at their user community. They will need to segment them by the nature of their requirements, sometimes they will need to segment them by their financial status. At the two extremes, there will be cash-poor and time-rich people for whom the public library service will be the only information and reading source, and time-poor, cash-rich people who will be willing to pay for additional, premium-priced professionally delivered services.

Public services like the public library are not well known for their readiness to take risks, and it is unlikely that libraries will or should ever behave with the full-blooded entrepreneurial spirit which animates some parts of the private sector. Still, the most important distinction, for public libraries, is between those who currently use the service and those who do not. In the next generation the public library service may offer a scaled service ranging from a basic 'corner shop' and 'no-frills' service, to a 'hyperstore' full service. The most important challenge, if the libraries are to substantiate their claim to relevance in ten years time, is to demonstrate that the numbers using the service have increased and that the service's claim to play a pre-eminent role in the cultural life of the nation has been enhanced, not that a particular service model has been sustained.

5. Customer-led service

Although the "library brand" gets immediate recognition from the public at large, and evokes positive memories with many people, recent controversial reports (such as *Overdue* and *Who's in Charge*) have highlighted the question: what do libraries stand for? Other published statements such as *Framework for the Future* clearly make a basic assumption about the question but do not explain the basis for the assumption. Generally library planning is reactive and public libraries do not lead, they follow. They respond to central and local government policy and agenda, changing when that agenda changes.

Just as all societies, cultures, and economies are in a state of flux, under intense stress from the changes unleashed by technology, so too are public libraries.

Research carried out by the American Library Association shows that:

- Libraries are popular but often misunderstood
- Libraries are rooted in nearly every community, including schools, campuses and businesses across the country, but are often not visible
- Libraries are unique, but facing new competition

Any consideration of how public libraries will fit into society in 2015 must be based on research, into UK culture at large, including the public and private sector, local communities, users and non-users.

Market Research: the process

Some research is done, but libraries rarely implement the results in full, and even more rarely on their own initiative. Statistics and information are mostly gathered for outside agencies and initiatives such as the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), Audit Commission, and Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Interpretation is most often carried out by the agencies involved in the collection, with libraries competing against each other only to meet standards. Moreover, this information collection does not provide for use evaluation. To obtain a true sense of their place in the future, librarians themselves will need to manage the information gathering process and to set the information in the context of what is happening in society as a whole.

Competitive Analysis

Within their local authorities, libraries can be viewed as business entities in so much as they:

- Deliver services, programmes, and information directly to the public
- Develop, store and move their stock or inventory
- Provide customer service, training, and support, and
- Engage in commercial activity, such as charging fees for IT, research, and popular stock items, and sell supplies and promotional merchandise

Libraries no longer enjoy a monopoly for some types of provision. For example bookstores and web cafes offer book clubs, children's programmes, and prizes. Part of market research for creating a library brand is competitive analysis. The marketing of the library brand will need to ensure that the brand is clearly differentiated from other companies and products. Libraries will no longer be able to depend on there being no competition.

6.   Innovation, adaptation and change

Looking at tomorrow

Predicting the future is risky, but not as risky as failing to do so. To provide services that people need, tomorrow's libraries must know what people need today, and must have predicted it yesterday.

Services which are developing need to do more than spot and follow trends. They need to:

- See changes in society, and predict the effects of these changes free from the restraint of existing practice
- Understand technology, lifestyles and attitudes which may be completely outside libraries' current world
- Expect changes, look for them, assess them, and the consequences that they may bring

Creating change by innovating not following

In an environment of rapid technological change, libraries must explore the potential of new technologies to recreate the meaning of library services, library users, and the relationships between them. There are many examples of new technology being used for old uses, with no real exploration of what it can do. For example, netLibrary uses web-based texts to create e-books that are issued like traditional books. A more inventive use of the same technology might be to create a national electronic back catalogue for storing out of print texts that can be downloaded by library members to wherever they happened to be, with an automatically calculated royalty fee to the copyright owner, charged to the loaning authority. Format could be audio, large print etc.

"**Change has become a cliché, a worn-out concept that has lost its power to inform. At the same time change continues to be a constant—and, indeed, what would be the alternative?**"

OCLC Environmental Scan 2003

We no longer know the boundaries of possibility

Change is a constant and the rate of change is accelerating. Even as we contemplate this picture of 10 years hence the library sector is hopelessly behind what is happening in the ICT and media industry. For instance, some of the scenarios painted in the 2003 OCLC Environmental Scan, http://www.oclc.org/membership/escan/default.htm give a flavour of what is already in the art of the possible; what is already being planned; and how young people, students and children are accessing information and knowledge, infotainment and fun and being innovative in how they run their lives.

How will public libraries meet the needs of the information ecologies of the future? Will we be working in a completely changed environment filled with blogs, wikis, amazoogles, podcasts, wi-fis, blackberries and mp3s? Will these technologies have become archaic hangovers supplanted by a novel fauna? Will the disruptions caused by chasing the next big technology paradigm cause the extinction of skills and values we wish to conserve?

These aren't new issues, though perhaps we have hidden from them for too long. If public libraries are to be useful information environments in the future we need to be able preserve the best and most useful of the past; ignore passing fancies and dead-ends; and embrace the best and most useful of the future. How will we know how to separate the sheep from the goats?
Action, resources, innovation and training in the public library sector is urgently needed, now, if it is to survive and be relevant in 2015 and beyond.

RFID (Radio Frequency Identification)

The adoption of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) by libraries nationally has the potential to revolutionise the allocation of staff time by:

- Automating issues and returns
- Making returns an unattended 24 hour service
- Making inventory and sequence checking both rapid and painless

It would also greatly reduce theft.

RFID is a combination of radio frequency based technology and microchip technology. RFID book tags are electronically charged with identification data, readers (sensors) interrogate the tags and the automated library system processes the information.

If library users were to have RFID membership cards there would be further advantages.

At present RFID chips are expensive and the systems on the market are not compatible. A cooperative drive by local authorities for the adoption of standards, perhaps in association with the book trade, would enable book printers to encode basic identification at source. This would reduce costs.

7. Managing change

Public libraries embody core values which benefit the community. In order to sustain these public libraries must:

- Avoid stagnation
- Continue to embrace change which delivers added value to customers, communities, and society at large
- Work proactively

Public libraries need to embrace a culture of change, to recruit more people skilled in creative thinking, and to nurture those skills. An environment committed to innovation requires information professionals with creative qualities who can thrive in an environment that encourages experiment and research. Training must acknowledge the diversity of specialisms required for services capable of rapid development.

Change management needs managers

Change is rarely a neutral event. If change is to be of benefit somebody needs to manage it. Change management must be directed at:

- Optimising beneficial change
- Challenging the panic response: "here is a crisis — something must be done — this is something — this must be done"

To manage change effectively, libraries must:

- Know where they want to go
- Identify opportunities
- Have staff charged with effecting change
- Give their change managers the time to implement changes.

Champions for change

Libraries are not well supplied with change managers. The volume of objectives listed in the Framework for the Future Action Plan — addressing a vision of public libraries that was current before the turn of the millennium — indicates that public libraries are short of change managers. For the future the service needs:

- Leadership which identifies, nurtures and empowers change managers
- Improvements in the corporate environment, so that change managers can challenge bureaucracies
- A commitment to the increase of resources for progressive programmes
- To overcome complacency inspired by the public libraries' statutory basis
- To recognise the competition for funds from other local government departments providing more quantifiable benefits (but see also section 10 below)

8.   Marketing

In the public library of 2015, marketing will play an increased role in the planning of services. Adopting a marketing oriented planning process will require libraries to develop a better understanding of their service and collections ("their brand") and of what drives current and potential library users.

Establishing the brand

Libraries need to take tips from the best of commerce. There is nothing alien to the core values of public libraries in the major tips which guide branding and marketing for the private sector. They include:

- Take ownership of your brand and control what it means to your customers
- Keep your brand simple and consistent
- Make sure your employees understand your brand and believe in it
- Make sure you communicate your brand at every possible opportunity
- Live up to what your brand promises
- Be continually on the lookout for opportunities to make improvements

One size cannot fit all

Given the great diversity of communities within the United Kingdom, and the local level at which library services are delivered, the future viability of the public library will depend on identifying specifically defined markets ("micro-markets") within the marketplace. Market research will be

required, for the identification of the genuine needs, wants, expectations and value systems of the people that form these micro-markets. The marketing mix will reflect local diversity.

The place of marketing

Marketing:

- Challenges our vision for public libraries, because it may require libraries to interact with their user communities in ways which are new
- Helps position libraries precisely within a defined market place *vis-à-vis* other local services and activities
- Supports advocacy at national and local level, because it provides the evidence to justify the provision or diversion of resources in favour of services for which demand has been established

However, if it is to make a real difference to libraries, marketing needs to:

- Interact with strategic planning – nationally, regionally and locally
- Penetrate all areas of library activity as a way of thinking and working
- Be sustained
- Be driven by an honest and objective evaluation of the realities of the service.

9.   Staff

Greatest asset? Greatest cost?

Public libraries have seen many significant changes in recent years, among them:

- Revolution in the use and deployment of ICT for service delivery
- Development of the People's Network
- Challenges from a rejuvenated book trade
- Renaissance in library buildings with exciting approaches to design
- Rediscovery of books as "good things"
- Increased government recognition of libraries' role in supporting social cohesion

Staff almost always score highly in terms of friendliness and approachability in customer surveys. However, when asked about how knowledgeable staff are, satisfaction ratings are lower. Furthermore, these scores are responses to surveys of library users and most services achieve an active membership of fewer than 30% of the resident community.

Many staff currently lack the skills to deliver the kind of service customers and potential customers are entitled to expect. New Opportunities Fund ICT training, introduced in the context of the installation of the People's Network, is currently the only national initiative aimed at equipping staff at all levels with skills for delivering a modern library service.

Important gaps in expertise include:

- *Customer care.* This is a feature of the training programmes of many library services, but in some areas behaviour towards library users has to be seen as evidence of poor or non-existent training

- *Marketing and presentation of services.* Basic concepts of the service are still far from universally understood. For example, marketing services properly includes having them available at times that are convenient to users

- *Product knowledge.* This was once a skill on which librarians prided themselves but it has declined in recent years. Knowing something about the materials in the collection, and being able to advise customers, broaden their horizons and increase their choices are essential attributes for good library staff. The de-skilling of library staff in this area of expertise may be one reason for the continuing fall in book issues from public libraries

- *Managerial skills.* Most senior managers in library services have risen through the ranks, starting as librarians and gaining (or not gaining) managerial skills along the way. There are many excellent managers from within this group, but there appear to be very few people to take their place in the future and no clear ideas about where the next generation of senior managers will come from

Library staff in 2015

By 2015 staff will have to be:

- Flexible and multi-skilled
- Willing and able to work different patterns of hours, including national holidays, and perhaps starting at 6am or working until midnight as part of normal working
- Extremely comfortable with ICT and other new communication developments
- Knowledgeable about stock
- Pro-active and confident about approaching customers and offering help
- Highly competent in information management, referral and other skills
- At managerial level, skilled and experienced in managing staff and services, rather than having "professional" skills only
- Ethnically more diverse, reflecting changes in population distribution especially in the major conurbations

They may also have to adopt a corporate appearance, wearing a uniform or adhering to a dress code in order to increase their visibility and to further encourage customers to approach them. They will spend more time "on the floor" as do staff in the retail sector, thereby encouraging interaction with customers.

Reports such as *Building Better Library Services* have emphasised the need for libraries to co-locate and integrate with other services to better reflect the way people want to access them. This offers opportunities for integrating staff, perhaps realising economies of scale, enabling extensions to service hours through using different approaches to working, better staff development opportunities and potentially new approaches to paying staff.

Recruitment

A more robust approach to recruiting staff at all levels will need to be developed if libraries are to get the kind of staff they will require.

Libraries will need to:

- Look for staff in different places, away from the traditional recruiting areas favoured by local authorities. Some staff in the retail sector appear well suited to libraries' changing requirements
- Sharpen the focus on services to children and young people, and possibly involve young people themselves in the recruitment process
- Ensure that the recruitment process is an honest one with the authority setting out clearly what it expects from staff, and what staff will get in return

Recent years have seen increasing discussion about the desirability of qualifications for librarians and whether authorities should demand them for specific posts. Given the changes required of libraries over the next decade if they are to flourish, staff will need skills which go well beyond the content of any present day library school syllabus. This will have to change if the schools are to remain relevant.

Retention

Once good staff have been recruited, libraries must encourage them to remain in the service by offering incentives which are competitive with employment sectors with which they will be coming into competition.

Release

These changes in library staff requirements will draw attention to staff who will have little to contribute to the new service and who are unable or unwilling to change, or who may even actively work against the revised objectives of the service organisation. It is vital that these people leave and a variety of methods should be used to assist them in this.

Remuneration

Library staff have historically been amongst the lowest paid of local authority workers. This is partly because large numbers of staff need to be employed to cover the hours and range of service points in each authority. It may also be due to library work being seen in the past as a "woman's job" with attendant discrimination. This low level of remuneration runs through all levels which creates a vicious circle with good staff leaving to find better paid work elsewhere and difficulties in recruiting new staff of appropriate calibre.

There is a clear tension between the need to pay enough to attract and keep good staff and the need to work within cash limits, and to resist taking money away from other important areas, especially the materials fund. It will not be possible to resolve this without a major overhaul of the remuneration system for library staff. For basic grade pay this will need to take place at national level. Library authorities will also need the freedom to pay more senior staff the appropriate amount for their skills.

10. Governance

The different portfolio responsibilities in central government, as well as in regional government and local authorities, conflict and create an unstable environment in which to deliver a public service. Public libraries can no longer afford to be caught between central and local, or regional, government.

Central Government

The role of central government in the governance of public libraries should be to:

- Set policy
- Identify broad objectives over a three to five year period
- Allocate funding to achieve these
- Define appropriate standards

At present policy and standards are set by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), whilst funding is allocated through the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). In addition, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and other departments to a lesser extent have an influence on the work of public libraries through linked projects such as Surestart. Although there is a risk that a Public Libraries Division would be swallowed up in a larger government department, the case for locating public libraries within the remit of a single major department, where policy, funding and standards could be linked, is strong.

Local Government

Public libraries, often one of the most fiscally responsible local authority departments, can no longer afford to be in the frontline to pay for local budget crises.

Local councils will continue to have a role as providers of public library services. However, there are currently 149 authorities responsible for services in England alone, ranging greatly in size. This number should be reduced.

An alternative and radical approach to the handling of funding would be for the appropriate central government department to devolve the funding for the public library service to regional MLACs, which would commission service delivery for each region. Services might be delivered by a local authority within its own borders, or by one authority on behalf of several others. Thus services could be provided on either a local or sub-regional basis depending on what was appropriate in terms of service and cost.

However funding is channelled, whether it be through local government or regional agencies, public libraries need ring-fenced budget support from central government if they are to respond to national policy and standards.

Community Governance

There is a clear trend in current thinking in favour of bringing government, in various policy areas, closer to the citizen and developing more intense links between service and user needs. Although many Friends' Groups already exist in public libraries, the nature and purpose of such groups varies. Communities should have a much greater say in the way their local public library operates, how funding is allocated and in identifying specific local objectives.

11. Partnerships

Librarians have a strong tradition of working with one another in partnerships, usually in order to share resources and expertise.

There are increasing opportunities for the development of partnerships. Public libraries can rightly portray themselves as key parts of the community network. They already have an important role in helping people to develop their personal skills for the knowledge economy, and this could be developed further. The People's Network is markedly enhancing their credibility with respect to ICT and making them a more obvious partner for the delivery of ICT-based services, whether of local or national government or non-governmental. They are well-placed to help partners who have other social and political agendas.

They can operate with great flexibility. For the local community, they are the comfort zone, offering an intellectual sanctuary which is non-commercial and non-judgmental. They can further develop their role as the "public face" of their parent authority, its leisure facilities, art galleries, theatres and concert halls, its learning opportunities, and its increasing e-local government profile. They can provide a window onto other public services, such as employment, health, e-government, tourist information, police, and registrar. They can promote a regional agenda of business promotion and development, economic regeneration, and tourism. They can strengthen their links with the wider library and information network, promoting access to their resources as complementing their own. They can work more closely with private sector entities, with bookshops, supermarkets, telecommunications and the media. Libraries are already active in many of these relationships but the future is likely to make it more desirable and more attractive for them to work on partnerships as a major feature of their method of operation.

Practicalities

A service more orientated towards working in partnerships will need to be hard headed. Partnerships are hard work. If they are to be successful, they need to live up to the expectations of the partners and must be based on transparent and equitable sharing of power, resources and skills. Successful partnerships usually feature:

- A clear statement of each partner's objectives
- A realistic assessment of resource implications
- A balance of cost and benefit between partners
- Mutual awareness of local context and needs
- Appropriate project management and communication mechanisms
- An exit strategy

12.   Funding

How will society wish to pay for access to books, information, AV material, newspapers and periodicals, the Internet and the many other services likely to be required in 2015?
Will there be a continuing desire to ensure the service is free at the point of delivery or will society have reached a point where the community is not seen as the provider? Who will own and deliver services in the future, the local authorities (as now)? a regional government? or some private sector provider?

Options for public funding

Public funding of the public library service should not be taken for granted, either in principle or in the form it currently takes. However, if libraries were to become a privately-funded service there would need to be a return for the investment. This would lead to the demise of a universally free service. While public funding is the only guarantee of free access to the service at the point of delivery, the particular form it takes could change.

- Core funding could be moved from local to central government with national standards laid down to ensure consistent delivery, leaving local councils to add value to the service by local finance if they so wish
- Publicly funded trusts have been used increasingly in recent years for the provision of public services. The future may see a move to provide funding for libraries in this way rather than directly from local or central government

New sources of funds

Library managers will need to be open-minded about possible new sources of funding, without surrendering the core values which inspire the service. Options for additional or alternative funding (not necessarily mutually exclusive) which will be worth exploring include:

- *Charging.* Most authorities already impose charges for elements of the service, and there may be scope for broadening this approach and increasing some existing charges. The ethos of the library service will call for protection for the most vulnerable in society. In addition, the income from charges must be worth collecting and show a genuine profit when a realistic allowance has been made for staff time and other costs
- *New public domain providers.* There are already examples of trusts providing library services, but it is too early to say whether this presages an increase in the number of other organisations providing all, or part, of the service
- *Private sources.* Private funders of libraries will expect to see a financial return on their investment. In the face of this, libraries will want to protect the part they play in promoting social inclusion. Public/private partnerships could provide an answer if both parties can find common ground as well as meeting their individual objectives. For example, a bookshop and library could share premises with the library remaining free and the bookshop taking profits from sales, and absorbing the lion's share of the infrastructure costs. Similarly, a library could be sited within, say, a supermarket with the same type of result

- *Increased community contribution.* This could work if the community clearly understands what is on offer and what the commitment is going to be in both financial and people terms. The public authority could make buildings freely available to a local community, and provide the basic service, while the community could supplement this with its own input, perhaps in the form of additional funding or volunteers
- *Joint funding*. This clearly needs to be pursued both nationally and locally. Libraries need to prove the value they can bring - not least by attracting visitors - to other services with which sharing of premises is being considered. Joint funding should then be seen as meeting community needs and aspirations. A more informed approach from central government and some direction to local councils are both likely to be required. Possible examples include joint funding with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Connexions, and social services

13. Stock

The library: a community resource

The range, breadth, and quality of stock libraries provide is one of their key strengths. They give access to out-of-print books and are able to get hold of most, if not all, of the national back catalogue, and much more besides. Libraries also meet the needs of users by providing stock in a range of non-print media, such as audio books, CDs, DVDs, and videos. Providing access to a wide range of materials, wider, for example, than any bookshop, is a core service which libraries could exploit more vigorously.

If they are to give full meaning to the idea of the library as "a community resource", libraries need to strengthen their dialogue, both with users and with non-users, to ascertain what it is that they want the service to provide.

Developing procedures to provide the right stock

Libraries should develop methods for engaging with the community to ensure that they provide the stock that users want. In developing their stock, libraries should:

- **Plan.** Given the constraints on library budgets, it is particularly important for libraries to listen closely to their customers, and then to plan so as to prioritise their stock acquisition programmes in line with customer requirements
- **Do.** Libraries should select their stock with a view to meeting the expressed needs of the community, and ensure they are being efficient and cost-effective in the acquisition of stock to ensure they are getting the most out of library budgets
- **Review.** Libraries should keep the use of their stock continually under review to ensure it is relevant, accessible and fit for purpose

Avoiding redundancy of stock

Libraries need to be tough-minded about storing stock that it is no longer issuing. By feeding the outcomes of the review into the planning cycle, libraries will guarantee that priorities can be readdressed as users' needs and communities change and develop. Effective planning will ensure that each library has an understanding of why particular stock is being purchased, why it has been identified as a priority, and whether there are particular reasons for continuing to shelve materials

which, on use statistics alone, may not appear to justify it. But public libraries should also explore new ways of sharing resources across organisations and communities. More use could be made of working in partnership with academic or special libraries. In some instances, this could support a strategy of dispensing with less-used material and relying on a nearby library of a different kind to meet any occasional demand. It could also open up a vast range of specialist material to support students and other members of the public who begin their search for material in the public library.

Anxiety about redundancy of stock and concern about the use of resources account for one of the most commonly mentioned failures of the public library service. If a book suddenly becomes popular and is in high demand, the library rarely has sufficient copies to satisfy the users without making some patrons wait several weeks for their turn to read it. If sufficient copies are bought to meet demand fairly promptly, most of them will be surplus to requirements once a few weeks have elapsed and public attention has been diverted somewhere else. Libraries will have to decide either to admit that they cannot do anything more to satisfy these peaks of demand or else devise new models of provision, perhaps involving additional payment for a premium loan service, together with procedures for the rapid sale and de-accession of multiple copies once they have become surplus to requirements.

14. Services

In order to continue to provide services relevant to the community, library managers need to:

- Identify their catchment area
- Take a wide look at the market-base in the catchment area
- Engage with the whole community so as to be fully aware of local needs

Flexibility and adaptability will be increasingly essential. A service required now may be irrelevant a few years later. To take the example of the People's Network, in ten years time access to technology in the home may have increased which, in turn, may mean that banks of PCs may not be relevant. The population in 2015 will be more IT literate and basic IT courses therefore less relevant.

Premium Services

While ordinary library users are entitled to expect a high-quality service, there will still be those who are willing to pay a premium for services not currently provided. Examples of this might include:

- Access to a vast range of stock – particularly out-of-print titles and the national back catalogue
- Access to local history and information
- Provision of commercially non-viable information
- Preparation of research and search strategies by well qualified staff

Libraries could adapt the approach pioneered by Amazon. Library users are already familiar with online catalogues, online requests and renewals. A more flexible approach to the delivery of material could be a natural next step. Standard delivery would require collection from the local library. Premium delivery could be to the front door by first class mail as soon as the item becomes available. Even delivery within the hour could be offered for an appropriate fee using a contract

with a local delivery firm, provided the item is on the shelf. For all except standard delivery, costs would be passed on to the user. Libraries' vast reserves of back-catalogue fiction and non-fiction would constitute the exceptional resource backing up such a service.

Some libraries are already providing business services to members of the public and local businesses. The development of a premium service could involve special offers to both these communities. Businesses may request research, or the compiling of mailing lists. Library users who are job hunting may ask for information on a local company. Standard service would include directing the user to the relevant sources of information. An enhanced service could provide the user with paid for research time.

Every library authority has a wealth of local history and information. Standard service could be enhanced, for a fee, to include additional expert advice from librarians on particular sources, and how to use them, and on other avenues to try. Libraries could capitalise on the growing number of people who would like to research their family history or the history of their house, but who lack the time.

Essential components

The success of premium services for users and for the library authority is dependent on a few essential features. The service must be:

- **Timely.** Users will have a clear understanding that they are paying extra for the service to be delivered in a specific time frame. This must be met
- **Professional.** The service needs to be efficient and professional. Customers prepared to pay for that extra service will expect it to be hassle-free
- **Value-added.** Libraries need to identify the added value provided by the premium service, be it expedited delivery or the input of skilled research
- **Delivered in the way the user requires.** Users will pay a premium charge for an enhanced, trouble-free service delivered to them in the way they want it. Libraries will need to be able to match these requirements, offering a range of delivery options and formats (collection from the library, delivery to the home, fax, spreadsheet, MS Word document, email, scanned article)all at different costs
- **For profit.** This is an essential element for a premium service, not least to ensure fair competition with the private sector. If libraries can get the details right, prices can be set so that all the additional cost is covered by the charge to the user and a profit can be derived from the service. There is then potential to use some of this profit to support other services which are inadequately supported from core funding, especially services supporting individuals in need

15. The Library Environment

The "Carnegie Library" is a familiar, important and respected part of the urban landscape, but the library of the future needs to be suitably housed if it is to achieve newly defined purposes. Ken Worpole's *21st Century Libraries - Changing Forms, Changing Futures* is a useful starting point for a look at the library environment of the future and key design elements:

- Library design will need to reflect the service priorities for each individual location and particular set of users

- The quality of the library space, and its relationship to the street outside, remains a priority
- A library needs to be easy to navigate
- The requirements of IT need to be designed into libraries as part of its fabric
- Since most people use public libraries in their "domestic" time, the library should be relaxed in its interior design and furnishings
- Access must be capable of flexible time-tabling to accommodate different needs
- Given the wide range of users, in age, social strata and ethnic origins, libraries must be designed to accommodate varied needs and interests
- and as much as a place for borrowing and returning books, a library must fulfil many other functions, for example as learning centre, homework club and leisure venue

Another report *Better Public Libraries* focusses more on the library as service, rather than the library as building and highlights:

- The library as communication centre for residents, business travellers and tourists, and to anyone wanting to plug in their laptop
- The library as 'comfort zone' with flexible design incorporating study area, cafe, lounge and "chill-out zone" where young people can watch MTV, read magazines and listen to CDs on listening posts
- The library as a safe haven for children in both the physical, and the electronic public domain
- The library as 24 hour a day virtual service, not necessarily tied to any particular location

Library buildings

Despite the impression that the built environment of the UK public library service is in desperate need of refurbishment and renewal, some recent buildings have reaffirmed the importance of buildings for a service which, in practice, owns and must store and mediate many millions of physical artefacts. In so doing, they have offered insights into some of the central themes which should inspire a major building programme, for example:

- Some may be funded through private finance initiative (PFI) packages (Bournemouth, Newcastle-upon-Tyne)
- Some may incorporate retail space (Bournemouth, Brighton), a cafe (Bournemouth, Norwich), a hotel (Brighton), or a TV and radio station (Norwich)
- Some, perhaps smaller in physical scale, should set out to explore new perceptions of the library service (the "Idea Stores" of Tower Hamlets)

Libraries in buildings

Libraries should also embrace the idea that they might share a building with other public services. Instances of this are becoming more commonplace and recent examples in the north-east alone include:

- Former mining communities in Durham and Sunderland where the public library also operates as an 'electronic village hall'
- Bishop Auckland, where the library shares a rehabilitated town hall with an art gallery and theatre
- Houghton Le Spring, where the design of the new library centre also incorporates a children's nursery, a youth centre and local police facilities

- The award winning new library in March, Cambridgeshire, which houses the local Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths, as well as a Marriage Suite

A trend has been set and looks certain to develop, partly through the example of the Private Finance Initiative. Very big services (such as Birmingham) will continue to justify an "own premises" solution. But even they will be careful to collocate with other activities, both public and private (the commercial and retail sectors) which will offer synergies for their mission of service delivery.

For other library authorities sharing their headquarters with some other activity or enterprise will increasingly be seen not as an imposition but as an opportunity. As for the branch library, some of the accommodation solutions will have to be planned as temporary, possibly in respect of their location, and certainly in their internal arrangement of space. As communities arise, mature and decline the public library service will need to match these natural changes with a corresponding flexibility.

Libraries without buildings

For a service which is committed to reaching out to the whole population the greatest challenge is presented by those who live in scattered communities. The mobile library has been the classic solution and its familiar bulk may continue to serve a useful purpose for many years to come. There are also plenty of examples of resourceful approaches to ensuring a fixed library presence, perhaps in a village hall or other borrowed or shared accommodation. However, the continuing struggles of rural stores and post offices, and the decline of other services to far-flung communities are certainly a warning but may also constitute an inspiration. The story is one of unceasing efforts to identify and exploit alliances, with bus services, with postal and other delivery vans, or with health care or other transport services. Library authorities will need to carry their market research into a thorough study of the priority services required by such communities and an analysis of possibilities for collaboration which may enable them to be delivered in non-traditional and perhaps unconventional ways.

Such initiatives may not necessarily be limited to remote communities. There are other people whose ability to access the public library service may be inhibited not by where they live, but by how they live. Their lives may be so busy that they find it as difficult to get to the library as to get to the supermarket. There are undoubtedly small traders who have already identified these as a niche market and have tailored a service to match their particular requirements, and increasingly the large-scale operators, especially the supermarkets with their e-services, are catching up with this market, and delivering to the door at times which would seem surprising if it were not that their stores have also revised their opening hours to suit a 24/7 culture. In coming years, the regular library user who has never set foot inside a library should become an increasingly common phenomenon, and, while it might be argued that someone who never visits a major library is missing out on a valuable and enriching experience, the public library's mission to serve the whole community has to preclude judgments of that kind.

Appendix

The organiser for the Bedford seminar for middle managers was the Laser Foundation. The Foundation was set up in 2001 with the transfer of funds from Laser (London and South Eastern Library Region) to the grant making trust the Laser Foundation.

(For further information about the Laser Foundation contact the Company Secretary at Frances@laserfoundation.org.uk or tel: 01257 274833, or visit the Futures Group Web site at http://www.futuresgroup.org.uk to download the discussion paper or to discuss and comment upon the paper)

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"All public institutions…should give returns for their cost; and those returns should be in good degree positive, definite, visible and measurable … Common sense demands that a publicly-supported institution do something for its supporters and that some part at least of what it does be capable of clear description and downright valuation."

John Cotton Dana, a key figure in 20th century librarianship

"Libraries of all types provide a broad range of resources and services for the communities they serve. They preserve our rich and diverse culture and history and transmit it from one generation to the next. They provide economic development. They provide extraordinary opportunities for recreation and enjoyment. And they serve as a primary social agency for education, providing resources and services that both support and complement agencies of formal education."

Robert S. Martin, the Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services