



## **All-Party Parliamentary Group on Libraries, Literacy and Information Management: Inquiry into the Governance and Leadership of the Public Library Service in England**

### **The Submission of Evidence by the Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals**

#### **Introduction**

- 1) The Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals (CILIP) is pleased to have this opportunity to provide evidence to the Group's Inquiry on Governance and Leadership of the Public Library Service in England. Many of our 21,000 members work in public library services and all appreciate their importance to the public good and the fact that they act as a shop window for the library and information profession at large.
- 2) It is pertinent to note that in a time of recession libraries become even more important in the lives of individuals and the communities they are part of. Evidence is mounting of increased usage as people appreciate the resources they can access mostly without charge. The free loans of books, the advice and signposting, the IT resources, the learning spaces and events – all help to sustain the spirit, engage the mind, support everyday life and build hope for the future. It is important to acknowledge and advocate the large number of positives that are represented by England's public library services.
- 3) In the short time available we have identified only key points under each of the six lines of Inquiry. If requested we would be willing to expand on particular points that might interest the Inquiry either by further submission or in oral evidence.

## Lines of Inquiry

1. **What are the strengths and weaknesses of the present system for the governance and leadership of the public library service in England?**
  - 4) CILIP regard the following things as “non-negotiable”:
    - a) ***The statutory basis of the service*** – It is important that the service is seen as statutory rather than discretionary by the government, local authorities and the public more generally. The public library service is a national service that is delivered locally and plays a significant role in many of the key priority areas for England: in fostering education and literacy, community development and cohesion, individual development and well-being, culture and creativity, and an informed citizenry
    - b) CILIP believes that the statutory basis of the service in the Public Libraries & Museums Act (1964) needs strengthening. The requirement for public library authorities to provide a “comprehensive and efficient” service has long been shown to be a weakness in the Act as the terms lack the necessary clarity and robustness to enable effective assessment of compliance. They need to be tightened and underpinned by mandatory standards and proper review procedures. This would help improve transparency and accountability and underpin the “library entitlement” of individuals and communities. It is important that both the Minister, with responsibilities to “superintend” the public library network, and the public more generally have the necessary information on which to be able to form judgements on the performance of public library services. In the case of the Minister it is also important that he or she should be willing to use the powers of investigation or intervention contained in the 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act when the facts and public interest justify it<sup>1</sup>.
    - c) ***A service that is free at the point of delivery*** – Under the 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act local authorities have to lend or provide access to printed material without charge to the user. This provision discriminates against non-book materials that have become increasingly important in today’s information landscape. CILIP remains of the view that the provisions of the Act should be extended to include non-book material and use of the People’s Network. It is an unpalatable irony that when the government is seeking to focus on the harm of digital exclusion many public library authorities are seeking to recoup the cost of ICT investment in the People’s Network by introducing charging.

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<sup>1</sup> These powers of investigation and intervention are contained in sections 1 and 10 of the Act

Knowledge has the same value whether bound in a book or present in a database or website and access should be on the same terms. This is not to argue that all services provided by a public library should be provided free at the point of delivery – specialist services where costly mediation is required by skilled staff – e.g. in genealogy research – are added value and therefore might attract a charge.

- 5) Amongst the **strengths** of the current system we would list:
  - Delivery through local government – accountability to local people
  - Helpful and expert staff who are committed to the service
  - Closeness to local communities
  - A service trusted by many
  - A service that enjoys immense popularity
  - A diversity of providers leading to innovation
  
- 6) Amongst the **weaknesses** are:
  - Lack of “superintendence” and leadership from central government in England
  - A confusing array of bodies with a role in “leading” public libraries
  - The frequently limited access of Heads of Library Services to the strategic management of the authority
  - A lack of clear vision and sense of direction
  - No significant central funding
  - No mandatory framework for service evaluation
  - A wide diversity in levels of provision

## 2. **Should local communities have a greater say in decisions about the public library service?**

- 7) Seven levels of community engagement were identified in the recent Big Lottery Community Libraries Programme. It is important that local communities should feel that their local library is “theirs” and be able to influence the resources it makes available, the services it delivers and the way those services are delivered. Partnership with users in service development is now, rightly, regarded as a critical factor in providing effective services and increasingly a legal obligation on local authorities.
  
- 8) As well as seeking to provide their own services in partnership with users, libraries also play an important role in capacity building and enabling communities to develop the resilience needed to shape their own environments – cultural as well as physical - for the betterment of all. This is done not only by supporting individuals – enabling them to develop their own knowledge, skills and confidence, and perhaps become local leaders - but by the support

given to local community and third sector organisations through the provision of meeting spaces, neighbourhood notices, information provision and networking and encouragement.

- 9) However there are limitations to the extent of such engagement especially in regard to the top levels of engagement where “ownership”, “management” and “control” of a library service point are involved. There are important issues that have to be addressed:
  - a) Public libraries work best as networks (at local, national and regional levels) where individual libraries are integral parts of a broader network, contributing as well as receiving from other points in the network. Therefore each individual library has to be managed in the context of the needs of the whole network
  - b) It is important that public libraries are underpinned by standards and that all service points reach a minimum level of provision and service if they are to be seen as a public library. Where the authority does not manage the library service – or a particular service point – itself then a service level agreement needs to be in place
  - c) Some issues are complex and require professional judgement – as with the recent debate over controversial stock or children’s access to the internet. It is important that professional advice and guidance is available and that the nature of governance or ownership of a service point or service points does not circumscribe the library entitlement of any user or potential user.
- 10) It is an unfortunate fact that much of the impetus towards community ownership of smaller public service points has been more the result of budgetary restraint than commitment to community ownership with the necessary investment to facilitate that and make it work effectively.
- 11) A continuing concern, and this crosses all services, is that community ownership is often ownership by part of the community and the service and its ethos will not be conducive to full community use. Balancing these competing local interests is the role of the local authority. It could be argued that the question about whether local communities should have a greater say in decisions about public library service is really a question about whether local people should have a greater say in decisions made by local Councils.
- 12) However properly researched and funded partnership models where the above issues are addressed and the community management work within the overall parameters of the library service may be feasible and could add a rich new dimension to the

library offer. The recent Big Lottery Community Libraries programme has encouraged experimentation and innovation in community engagement – the Meadows library in Nottinghamshire<sup>2</sup>, for instance, will be run by a local management committee in partnership with the overall library service management.

### **3. Should central government do more to superintend the public library service?**

- 13) The simple answer is “yes”! It has been a consistent disappointment of CILIP that most Ministers have been unwilling to use the powers of investigation and intervention they have. Most recently this appeared to include the Wirral and the approach of the Secretary of State for Culture in not intervening attracted widespread condemnation. However the recent news of a formal Inquiry into the Wirral is welcome although there needs to be an explicit framework put in place governing such action and intervention.
- 14) As the Conway report – Professional Standards of Service<sup>3</sup> - recently indicated there is now no formal regulatory framework for public libraries that Ministers can access to form objective viewpoints as to whether public library authorities are fulfilling their statutory requirements. Part of any package therefore must include the development of an appropriate regulatory framework based on standards and the current “voluntary” set developed by the Museums, Libraries & Archives Council (MLA) – “The Library Benchmark”<sup>4</sup> - may be the basis for one. It should be the aim that all citizens in England receive their “library entitlement”. We understand that the DCMS Public Library Modernisation Review is looking at the idea of user entitlement and it would be helpful to explore how this might be integrated into a regulatory system.
- 15) It is important that superintendence or regulation through direct investigation or intervention is seen as a last step. More important to most library services will be central encouragement and the practical support that can be offered for innovation and improvement by a development agency drawing on the expertise of the whole public library sector (and beyond).

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<sup>2</sup> For brief details see: <http://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=2293>

<sup>3</sup> Professional standards of service: report. Patrick Conway. CILIP 2008.  
See: <http://www.cilip.org.uk/policyadvocacy/statements/conwayreport/default.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Library Benchmark. MLA, 2008. See:  
[http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/raising\\_standards/improvement/~media/Files/pdf/2008/library\\_benchmark.ashx](http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/raising_standards/improvement/~media/Files/pdf/2008/library_benchmark.ashx)

#### 4. Are local authorities the best agency to provide public library services?

- 16) CILIP still believe that local authorities are the best agency to provide public library services. Local authorities are:
- a) The local place-shapers;
  - b) They are accountable to local people and public libraries provide services tailored to local need;
  - c) They are in the best position to ensure that the public library service is incorporated into local area plans and other strategic documents;
  - d) They can enable partnership working with other local services and agencies;
  - e) They either have a direct role or overview in all the policy areas that libraries contribute to – culture, education and learning, community development, economic development, health, and personal and community well-being; and
  - f) They are accountable both to local people (as the local Council) and, in their role as Public Library Authorities, to central government.
- 17) But individual local authorities will never be the only provider. The reality of reduced budgets and the need to provide seamless services with the user at the centre mean that partnership is increasingly the only model that will meet requirements. This may be through:
- a) Shared facilities and services – there are many examples of libraries being co-located with other services whether run by the local authority or some other agency (e.g. a Cambridgeshire library located with a GP's surgery); and many public library services are members of shared stock procurement collectives some of which bring together libraries across different sectors (notably with the Higher Education Sector).
  - b) Partnership working on specific programmes – Again examples are numerous but important ones coordinated at a national level include the BBC Raw campaign (Reading and Writing skills)<sup>5</sup>, the Summer Reading Challenge for children<sup>6</sup>: the Inspire programme (providing a framework of local access agreements allowing users to make use of libraries in different sectors)<sup>7</sup>: the Enquire service within the People's Network<sup>8</sup>; Bookstart (a scheme providing pre-school children with free books and

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<sup>5</sup> BBC Raw & Libraries see: <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/RaW.html>

<sup>6</sup> Information on Summer Reading Challenge at: <http://www.readingagency.org.uk/children/summer-reading-challenge/>

<sup>7</sup> For Inspire programme see: <http://www.inspire2.org.uk/>

<sup>8</sup> For Enquire service see: <http://www.questionpoint.org/crs/servlet/org.oclc.home.TFSRedirect?virtcategory=10836>

encouraging parents and carers to share books with their children)<sup>9</sup>; and a range of partnership activities with local health agencies. This approach to service provision will increase and enrich the library experience for most users.

- 18) A few local authorities have gone further and “externalised” or “contracted” out the provision of the public library service to other providers but retaining overall accountability at the authority level. In most cases responsibility has been devolved to a library trust; in one case (Hounslow) to a private sector company; and in the case of a few individual library service points governance has been vested in a community or voluntary group. Where this happens the important point is that a service level agreement is in place which underpins the quality of service received by the user, including access to suitably qualified staff. We have voiced our reservations about the limitations of community governance, especially where it is reliant on the work of volunteers alone, in the answer to question two. There may be a diversity of provision. But there must be equality in the delivery of service to all local people, and there must be accountability by the local authority for service delivery.
- 19) However CILIP contends that although local authorities should remain public library authorities, increasingly there are parts of the service where it makes more sense to provide it on a national or regional level. Examples of this include the development of the People’s Network, the development of such electronic information services as Enquire on a sustainable national basis; central procurement of electronic services and digital content; central negotiation of copyright and intellectual property matters; the facilitation of such projects as a national library card; as an entry point to public libraries for those organisations interested in partnering with the national network; and through national staff upskilling programmes in things like the teaching of information literacy. There may also be a case for the development of regional hubs, along the lines of the renaissance programme in museums, funded to provide explicit services to the users and staff of all library services in the region.
- 20) This strongly presupposes a national fund for public libraries in addition and separate to local authority funding. It would be delivered through some form of national library development agency possibly based on the current MLA. Inevitably any such development would need to be properly researched and costed and a prospectus produced. But CILIP doubts whether only local provision, and the need to get consensus across more than 150 separate public library authorities on every cooperative arrangement in England, is any longer a sustainable way forward.

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<sup>9</sup> For Bookstart scheme see: <http://www.bookstart.org.uk/Home>:

**5. What are the governance and leadership roles of the Advisory Council on Libraries (ACL), the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)?**

- 21) The governance and leadership structure for public library service in all countries tends to involve a tripartite arrangement: central government; various intermediary or advisory bodies at national level; and the delivery agency. In the UK (except in Northern Ireland) the delivery agency is the local Council in its role as a Public Library Authority and CILIP recommends continuation of this role for reasons outlined in the answers to earlier questions.
- 22) In England at government level the responsible Department is the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) – but DCMS has little power or influence with local Councils. A more effective arrangement at government level – in terms of links with local authorities and with the outcomes expected of library service – would be a partnership involving DCMS with DCLG (Department of Communities & Local Government), DCSF (Department of Children, Schools and Families), DIUS (Department of Innovation, Universities & Skills), and possibly DoH (Department of Health).
- 23) In other parts of the UK there is a single intermediary/advisory body: SLIC (Scottish Library & Information Commission)<sup>10</sup> in Scotland, LISC-NI (Library & Information Services Council – Northern Ireland)<sup>11</sup> in Northern Ireland, and CyMAL (Museums, Archives & Libraries – Wales)<sup>12</sup> in Wales. In England there are two such bodies: the Advisory Council on Libraries (ACL)<sup>13</sup> and the Museums, Libraries & Archives Council (MLA)<sup>14</sup>.
- 24) ACL is the statutory advisory body (the successor to LISC-England). While ACL may have been advising government in private, it has not been visible to the public library community or the wider public since the work done to develop Framework for the Future when Tessa Blackstone was the responsible Minister. The contrast with the evolution of LISC-Wales (into CyMAL) and LISC-Scotland (into SLIC) is stark.
- 25) MLA is a Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB) which assumes a “strategic” and “developmental” role for public library service in England. MLA has had three Chairs, four Chief Executives, and

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<sup>10</sup> For SLIC see: <http://www.slainte.org.uk/Slic/slicindex.htm>

<sup>11</sup> For LISC-NI see: <http://www.liscni.co.uk/>

<sup>12</sup> For CyMAL see:

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/cultureandsport/museumsarchiveslibraries/cymal/?lang=en>

<sup>13</sup> For ACL see: [http://www.culture.gov.uk/what\\_we\\_do/libraries/3408.aspx/](http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/libraries/3408.aspx/)

<sup>14</sup> For MLA see: [www.mla.gov.uk](http://www.mla.gov.uk)

four organisational iterations since its inception in 2000: as Resource; as the original MLA with nine regional offices; as the “MLA partnership” with regional involvement at Board level; and as the new slimmed-down MLA. Originally it was formed by the merger of two previous NDPBs, the Museums and Galleries commission (MGC) and the Library and Information Commission (LIC). While the MGC had a long tradition of providing executive functions on behalf of government for the museums and galleries sector, there was no such tradition in the public library sector: no such NDPB existed in the library domain prior to the establishment of the LIC in 1995.

- 26) The LIC was established as an advisory NDPB which then developed two areas for which it took on executive responsibility: research across the LIS sector; and the development and implementation of the Peoples Network for the public library sector across the UK. The LIC was regarded as adding value for the LIS sector because of these two roles. At the same time LISC-England was seen as adding value for the LIS sector because it not only gave advice to government but it also spoke with an independent voice on public library matters, lodging an annual report (along with but clearly separate from the Secretary of State’s annual report) with Parliament.
- 27) At present, the value added by MLA for the LIS sector remains unclear – other than the legacy of taking forward the Peoples Network (from the LIC) and Framework for the Future (from the ACL). It could be argued that the establishment has diluted the focus of the former LIC, neutered the voice of the former LISC-England, and yoked public libraries into an arbitrary relationship with museums and galleries which is proving counterproductive in terms of the other relationships which public libraries in England need to establish at national level – with learning, with health, with communities, with public libraries in other parts of the UK, with the other parts of the library and information sector.
- 28) The latter point is especially important. The Advisory bodies in the other three UK nations – LISC (Northern Ireland), CyMAL, and SLIC – all see their roles as encompassing the whole library and information sector and not just public libraries. However the MLA has now limited its remit to public libraries. This contrasts also with its predecessor, the Library & Information Commission, which made a point of focusing on its relevance and support for the whole library and information sector.
- 29) Proper governance and leadership at national level in England requires: different arrangements within central government (possibly a partnership rather than the sole locus for libraries lying with DCMS); different arrangements at the advisory/executive/developmental level (possibly a single body

rather than the potential confusion of roles between ACL and MLA); and a focus on libraries which enables a range of relationships to be developed rather than the arbitrary yoking of libraries with museums and galleries.

- 30) There are other key organisations that exercise a leadership role, although not strictly speaking within the governance structure of public libraries. We would include ourselves in this - through our interest in workforce development, the promotion of best practice and the role we have in providing objective expert opinion and comment. All of this within the context of acting in the interest of the “public good” as a charity. The British Library is another such agency - in many countries the national library has a leadership role in the profession and general library development in the country. It will be important for us all to act together in promoting and supporting the development of England's public library system

**6. What changes (if any) are required to improve and strengthen governance and leadership?**

- 31) Experience in the two parts of the UK where the most impressive developmental work around governance and leadership has taken place in public libraries in recent years - Scotland and Northern Ireland – would suggest that four changes are required, as follows:
- a) A clear vision such as the work done on “Delivering Tomorrow’s Libraries”<sup>15</sup> in Northern Ireland, with demonstrable political commitment for that vision from central government.
  - b) A regulatory framework based on entitlement and improvement such as the PLQIM (Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix)<sup>16</sup> introduced in Scotland.
  - c) A development agency with a focus on libraries and a clear link both with government and also with the local authorities responsible for service delivery, such as SLIC in Scotland.
  - d) Commitment to a stream of investment to improve library services and facilities, as is being done in Northern Ireland through the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure and the new Northern Ireland Library Authority.

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<sup>15</sup> Delivering tomorrow’s libraries: principles and priorities for the development of public libraries in Northern Ireland. Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Northern Ireland), 2006.  
See: [http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/lmb\\_final\\_libraries\\_doc-2.pdf](http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/lmb_final_libraries_doc-2.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Building on success: a public library quality improvement matrix for Scotland. Scottish Library & Information Council, 2007  
See: <http://www.slainte.org.uk/files/pdf/slic/PLQIM/plqim.pdf>

## **Conclusion**

If you have any queries relating to CILIP's submission of evidence, then please contact:

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April 2009  
Charity Number: 313014