



Chartered Institute of
Library and Information
Professionals

Professional Standards of Service

Report by

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Introduction

- 1 The term 'professional standards of service' is one of common currency and not just in public service. The private sector, particularly retail and service industries, regularly employs the term to denote quality, while increasingly voluntary organisations and the growing third sector describe their work in the same manner. Since 1997 codifying standards of service has been a priority for government and public libraries.
- 2 There has also been growing debate in a number of arenas about responsibilities of what have been termed 'professionally' qualified staff. In education, classroom assistants undertaking duties previously done by teachers are commonplace. Legal executives now carry out routine work once the province of solicitors. Community support officers have, in some instances, replaced trained and experienced police constables. Many tasks, once the sole preserve of a medical general practitioner, are now provided by nurses and health workers.
- 3 In Library and Information circles this discussion, though intensifying in recent years, probably began in the 1960s with debates about team librarianship in public libraries.
- 4 The nature of professional responsibilities, and the competencies, attitude and approach required for library staff working in communities, has also been a topic for debate. Pat Coleman's 1981 publication 'Whose problem?' when discussing the library's role and purpose in serving disadvantaged groups and the marginalized in society, argued persuasively the problem was not those communities of non users who failed to patronise libraries, despite clear personal need, but the outlook of librarians themselves. The clear conclusion was library staff, particularly those who deemed themselves 'professional' had a public interest responsibility.
- 5 Few would now argue librarians in the 21st century require a knowledge and skills base covering community development, advice work, the cultural sector and broader relationship management, as well as those traditional areas of documentation, bibliography and the organisation and dissemination of knowledge, including ICT.
- 6 During 2007 the issue of 'professional standards of service' was the subject of press comment, parliamentary debate, a petition on the Prime Minister's website, and representations to CILIP. These

concerned proposals by a number of public library authorities for the delivery of services, statutory under the 1964 Public Library and Museums Act.

7 Why should CILIP get involved? The preamble to 21 objects in CILIP's Royal Charter states: -

"The objects of the Institute shall be to work for the benefit of the public to promote education through the establishment and development of libraries and information science ..."

8 Given this public interest obligation, and taking into account the comment and representations, CILIP undertook to: -

- Begin work on defining what CILIP understood constituted a professional standard of local public library service
- Define the roles of library and information professionals within the skills mix of a modern public library service
- Continue a dialogue with government
- Review the position in the authorities specifically brought to the attention of CILIP as giving cause for concern.

Authorities Giving Cause for Concern

9 This report focuses on that fourth action line. I was asked to undertake the task in December 2007 and report back. The 10 authorities, subject of representation to CILIP, press comment and in some cases parliamentary comment, were Cumbria, Dorset, Dudley, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Hillingdon, Kent, Lambeth, Medway and Northumberland.

10 CILIP had been advised of three areas of concern: -

- Proposed library closures and the consequent reduced accessibility
- Proposed staff reductions including the removal of professional posts
- Proposed transfer of assets and responsibility for the library service to local community groups, leading to reduced accountability and potentially a two-tier service.

11 The remit for this particular piece of work, one of the four strands in CILIP's action plan, was: -

- To establish a credible process by which CILIP can assess whether a public library authority is providing (or intending to provide) a professional standard of service for local people.
 - To follow up lines with 10 public library authorities where proposals for change have been brought to CILIP's attention.
 - To submit a report to CILIP analysing the proposals for change, drawing out any general conclusions, which might emerge, from that analysis, and determining whether each of the 10 public library authorities is likely, in the light of their proposals for change, to provide a professional standard of service for local people.
- 12 A Steering Group comprising Martin Molloy (Derbyshire), Jane Hall (Sunderland) and Tony Durcan (Newcastle, and current SCL President) was established to progress the work.

First Task - Establish a Process for Assessing a Professional Standard of Service

- 13 The legislative base, the 1964 Act, should provide a benchmark. However, that oft-quoted clause, "It shall be the duty of every Library Authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof" has been open to interpretation.
- 14 To assist with this interpretation, DCMS in 2001, produced the first set of Public Library Standards. Though not legally binding, by 2005 an amended version, updated and including Public Library Impact Measures, was incorporated into performance indicators for the Culture Service area in the Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA) by which local authorities were assessed.
- 15 Though from 2008 Local Area Assessments will replace CPA, and Public Library Standards/Impact Measures by a single National Indicator, local authority scores for 2007, published in December 2007, are a starting point for assessment of standards.
- 16 Seven performance indicators in the Culture Service area relate to libraries: -
- C2 Public Library Service Standards on Access - PLSS 1, 2 and 6
 - C3 Public Library Service Standards on ICT provision - PLSS 3 and 4
 - C4 Active borrowers as a percentage of the population
 - C6 Readers satisfaction Libraries
 - C11 Public Library Service Standards on stock - PLSS 5, 9 and 10
 - C13 Cost per visit (libraries)

C14a Public Library Service Standards on satisfaction - assessment of users 16 and over, of their library service.

- 17 For counties, these account for seven of the ten Culture Service performance indicators. In London boroughs, metropolitan districts and unitaries, there are 17 indicators in total, reflecting a broader range of responsibilities for sport and recreation.
- 18 In some cases, an authority's Culture Service score may also be informed by Best Value inspections of a substantial part of the culture function that has been published since January 2005.
- 19 Performance on each specified indicator is assessed as above or below two levels or thresholds, to make three performance groupings: -
- Above the upper threshold - comparatively high performance
 - Between the thresholds - satisfactory performance
 - Below the threshold - comparatively low performance
- 20 The overall Culture score is then determined from all indicators, leading to a service assessment 1-4: -
1. Inadequate performance, below minimum requirements
 2. Adequate performance, only at minimum requirements
 3. Performing well, consistently above minimum requirements
 4. Performing strongly, well above minimum requirements
- 21 Local Authority CPA scorecards for 2007 provide the latest external assessment of performance and, based on Public Library Standards and Impact Measures, can be used to judge standards of provision. They provide a benchmark, however imperfect some commentators might suggest.
- 22 Assessing 'professional' is far more problematic. The word has perhaps become devalued over the years and is now used imprecisely to describe an approach or outlook, quality and, of course, paid as opposed to voluntary status. This is far removed from the traditional notion, where a person described as 'professional' was pursuing a higher calling linked to duty, service and obligation.
- 23 The Law Society's guide to Professional Conduct runs to 893 pages, that of CILIP to just three. Yet both have much in common. In terms of this particular task, the CILIP code attached at annex one could be considered relevant. It sets out five areas of responsibility: -

- Personal responsibility
 - Responsibility to Information and its users
 - Responsibility to colleagues and the Information community
 - Responsibility to society
 - Responsibility to employees
- 24 While all five are pertinent, the second and fourth are particularly important for public library authorities. Specific guidance relates to user needs; bias; value judgements; conflicting priorities; the public good; equality in provision; and the vulnerable in society.
- 25 Exercising judgement is a feature common to all practitioners, in whatever occupation, claiming the status of profession. This extends beyond carrying out tasks in a prescribed manner and adhering to established procedures and processes. Judgement includes making choices, determining relative priorities and advising on courses of action. In terms of the Information Continuum, running from dissemination through interpretation, advice, mediation and ultimately to advocacy, exercising judgement comes into play, particularly beyond straightforward dissemination.
- 26 Judgement is inextricably linked to experience, an appropriate body of knowledge and a current skills set. Again, this is true of all occupations whose practitioners go beyond the provision of services in terms of an established set of procedures. Clearly, tasks once requiring what could be termed a professional knowledge and skills base may, in the course of time, be judged to be satisfactorily carried out by others. Hence the reassessment, in many areas, of the levels of experience, knowledge and skills required and the consequent growth of legal executives, classroom assistants, and community support officers etc.
- 27 But, in terms of carrying out their obligations under the 1964 Act, public library authorities might reasonably be expected to provide a 'professional' service in four areas: -
- A satisfying experience for the user/client/customer visiting the library, in terms of environment, procedures, and stock and services, provided by courteous, helpful and knowledgeable staff.
 - A developed casework approach relating to individual needs, where the user benefits from an officer's professional judgement. This could cover, for example, information and advice, reading development, learning opportunities both formal and informal, and specialist subject support in local studies, business and commerce, health etc.
 - Determining local operational priorities for a library or group of libraries and developing local partnerships with other organisations, taking into account the profile of the community and its needs. This would cover stock management, use of spaces, activity

programmes, information and advice, learning programmes, and making judgements about use of resources to target groups, whether from a particular spatial area, age range or interest.

- Providing strategic leadership and advocacy, recognising responsibilities to provide an adequately resourced and proactive library service which influences social and public policy in the local authority area. Developing strategic partnerships regionally and nationally to progress corporate objectives and the legitimate aspirations of people and communities.

28 Therefore the process for assessing professional standards of service covered two dimensions: -

- The CPA Culture Block score for 2007, which included seven performance indicators stemming from Public Library Standards/Impact Measures.
- A judgement on the capacity of an organisation to deal with four areas of professional work discussed in the preceding paragraph.

Second Task - Follow Up Lines of Enquiry with 10 Public Library Authorities

29 The selection of these authorities, whilst not arbitrary, could not be regarded as entirely systematic. Several others, including Buckinghamshire, Conwy, Devon, Hertfordshire, Worcestershire and Waltham Forest, had been cited in local and regional press for proposed closures, changes in service delivery and indeed staffing structures. The ten chosen however, were specifically drawn to the attention of CILIP.

30 The particular concerns expressed by individuals, local organisations, cultural commentators and the press, are hardly a new phenomenon. For two decades at least, there has been debate about standards of service and what constitutes a “comprehensive and efficient” public library service. Closure programmes in particular have been the subject of demonstrations locally, while activists in communities have, over the years, sought to maintain services. At a national level, a number of voluntary bodies campaigned against closures.

31 Consequently the 10 authorities selected, with a degree of justification, could feel somewhat aggrieved. However, earlier in 2007, when first alerted of charges, CILIP had written to each one, requesting information about decisions taken, and implementation programmes. Some were very forthcoming and maintained a dialogue with CILIP in the intervening months. Others were more reluctant to explain their position.

- 32 In preparing for this study, it was agreed with the Steering Group that visits to the 10 selected authorities should form the basis for discussion. A letter from CILIP informing authorities of the Study is attached and this was followed up with a further letter from myself seeking to arrange a meeting. These are attached at annex two
- 33 Eight authorities agreed to participate. Gloucestershire declined, as did Hillingdon who did not reply to the correspondence. Freedom of Information requests were lodged with these two authorities.
- 34 At the individual meetings with senior management and in a couple of instances, cabinet leads, discussion was structured around the following: -
- External assessments covering the CPA scorecard and any Best Value inspections.
 - Management arrangements for libraries, covering both the executive and political dimensions.
 - Drivers for change which had influenced the decisions taken.
 - Detail of the changes that had prompted representations to CILIP.
 - Professional Standards of Service and the authorities' approach using the typology set out in paragraph 30.
- 35 In the time available it was not possible to discuss the issues with local communities, users, staff or those responsible for raising their concerns with CILIP, the press or MPs. Understandably senior management sought to justify decisions taken by the authority.
- 36 A fact sheet for each authority was provided in draft to the lead officer for correction and amendment. These are attached at annex four. Apart from Medway, feedback from the authorities was received and factual corrections incorporated.
- 37 The final sections of the fact sheet, 'Conclusion' and 'Determination' are my opinions. Whilst seeking to incorporate the authorities' perspective, these views are obviously my own.
- 38 Fact sheets have also been prepared for Gloucestershire and Hillingdon on the basis of information in the public domain. A response was received from Gloucestershire but at the 13 May no reply had been received from Hillingdon.
- 39 Discussions revealed that, in most cases, changes in methods of service delivery, and of structure, had been carefully considered. Changes were being progressed for two main reasons: -

- Financial, with regard to savings targets required of the service by the authority, or because the revenue base was insufficient to maintain existing standards of service.
- External assessments and the need to improve performance within a context of effectiveness and efficiency.

40 By the time of the discussions in February and March 2008, implementation of the proposals giving cause for concern had largely been completed, or detailed timetables drawn up for implementation. This exercise has therefore been reflective.

41 It is understood civil servants from DCMS visited at least two of the authorities to discuss the changes. No action was taken following these visits.

42 A determination, taking into account the process discussed in paragraphs 13 to 28 has been arrived at for each of ten authorities

Cumbria: Unlikely to be a reduction in professional standards of service from current levels of provision in the communities affected by the introduction of Library Links.

Dorset: A possible reduction in professional standards of service could result from decisions taken in respect of staffing, reductions in opening hours and the future impact of plans for the transfer of some smaller service points to community ownership.

Dudley: Unlikely to be a reduction in professional standards of service from current levels of provision in the communities affected by the introduction of Library Links.

Gloucestershire: From published information and the response to an FoI enquiry, it is probably unlikely there will be a reduction in professional standards of service.

Hampshire: A possible reduction in professional standards of service could result, arising from the loss of professional librarian posts and the consequent reduction in capacity to handle detailed casework and deliver development opportunities locally.

Hillingdon: Given the limited information received on the 19 May in response to the FoI request, a determination is therefore not possible at this stage.

Kent: A possible reduction in professional standards of service could result, arising from the loss of professional librarian posts and the consequent reduction in capacity to handle detailed casework and deliver development opportunities locally.

Lambeth: With the library service review suspended, no overall determination is possible at this stage as there has been no change to existing standards of service.

Medway: A possible reduction in professional standards of service arising from the loss of professional library posts and the seeming lack of an overall strategy for the library service.

Northumberland: Unlikely to be a reduction in professional standards of service in those small communities where the community ownership model is being progressed.

Third Task - Overall Themes to Emerge

- 43 In addition to discussions with the eight authorities, meetings were arranged with MLA, Demos and also CILIP officers. Matters explored covered the notion of 'professionalism', approach to standards covering both the qualitative and quantitative, and issues surrounding what could be considered an appropriate body of professional knowledge for library and information workers.
- 44 A number of themes emerged, none of which are new. What is different is CILIP's decision to set in train work on teasing out what constitutes a professional standard of service. This piece of work needs to be seen in the context of the broader CILIP strategy discussed in paragraph 11

External Assessment

- 45 In all authorities visited, the influence of outside organisations assessing performance has been important for the library service in the last decade, particularly as these verdicts have been critical to the authority's overall CPA rating.
- 46 Public Library Standards and Impact Measures providing the greater number of performance indicators for the Culture Block assessment, resulted in certain cases, additional base budget provision, particularly for stock and improving opening hours.
- 47 The Best Value regime and inspections focused attention on broader strategic issues, including service delivery methods to smaller communities, engaging with traditional non users and hard to reach groups, ICT developments and, in several cases, the way in which a culture of change was being fostered.
- 48 At the same time, Public Library Plans were introduced by DCMS. All public library authorities were obliged to submit a report in a prescribed format for assessment. While not specifically looking at standards, these plans examined critically an authority's approach to its

responsibilities under the 1964 Act, the management arrangements and planning processes for service delivery and development.

- 49 While the content of Framework for the Future may have been largely unexceptional, particularly for more developed public library services, this national strategy, released in 2003, did provide an overall vision for the 21st century service, and a national benchmark at least in respect of aspiration. For ambitious authorities it provided an opportunity to emphasise the corporate role public libraries had to play in furthering community and civic values, digital citizenship and building capacity to deliver improvements, as well as the traditional responsibility for books, reading and learning.
- 50 These development areas and an authority's progress were integral to the structure of Library Position Statements, which superseded the earlier Public Library Plans. They provided a discipline for public library authorities to examine strategically, strengths and weaknesses against national guidance on what constituted a 'comprehensive and effective' public library service.
- 51 Tensions have always existed between central and local government, with the latter fiercely protecting its autonomy and being highly critical of what is seen as a centralising agenda for the last 25 years. A mixture of expenditure controls, erosion of responsibilities and tougher inspection/assessment regimes, has caused many commentators to suggest local government has been replaced by local administrations.
- 52 Yet this does not seem to be the case as far as the statutory public library service is concerned. Central government has been clear, that despite more rigorous assessment of performance and planning processes, local government must determine priorities for the service, in the light of local circumstances and its relative priority corporately. The current minister has continued the trend of distancing DCMS from local arrangements, stating it would be most unlikely for DCMS to exercise its statutory right under the 1964 Act and intervene where an authority's performance was causing concern.
- 53 It could perhaps be argued local authorities are fully aware of this and now, a decade on from the introduction of standards and library plans, have called central government's bluff. They know it is most unlikely any real action will be taken by DCMS as a consequence of a reduction in service standards.
- 54 With Public Library Standards and Impact Measures no more, and library position statements long abandoned, the statutory service, accounting as it does for less than 2% of local authorities' expenditure, may well become more marginalized in a local authority's priorities.
- 55 The new national indicator, NI 9, upon which libraries will be judged in the Comprehensive Area Assessments, is one of 198: -
'The percentage of adults (16+) in a local authority area who say they have used a public library service at least once in the last 12 months.'

It is a virtual mirror image of NI 8 Adult Participation in Sport, NI 10 Visits to museums and galleries and NI 11 engagement in the arts. Good performance will be a statistically significant increase in the figure.

- 56 It is arguable what this will say about professional standards of service. In an attempt to fill the void MLA, following a wide ranging consultation, have recently launched the Library Benchmark as a successor to Public Library Standards. However laudable the 23 performance indicators are - covering satisfaction, participation, access, resources and efficiency - the Library Benchmark is a sector led voluntary improvement tool.
- 57 Local managers will be encouraged to benchmark their own progress, make comparisons with other services and plan improvements. In fact, exactly what was being done in Library Position Statements. The difference being, those Position Statements were a requirement, had to be agreed by the Council, signed off by the relevant cabinet lead, and were then assessed by DCMS.

Management Arrangements

- 58 In addition to heads of service, the initial letter from CILIP was also sent to the relevant chief officer. Of the eight authorities with which discussions took place, comments were forthcoming from two chief officers. In two further authorities cabinet leads contributed to the discussion.
- 59 The head of service is a second tier officer in four authorities, reporting directly to the chief officer, and a member of the directorate's management team. Where the officer was third tier (see annex four) they would form part of a divisional management team and have access to the full director's management team by invitation and on specific issues relating to their remit.
- 60 Library services are increasingly, though not always grouped with Adult Services. In some cases the directorate covers an even broader brief that can include economic development, environmental services and regulatory services, as well as the more predictable cultural remit.
- 61 Authorities reported the public library service often changed directorates. One advised it had been located in four different directorates in the last ten years. While no reporting structure should ever be set in stone, these changes appear to have more to do with administrative tidiness than any fundamental service philosophy. Often the public library service seems to be seen as a makeweight.
- 62 In similar vein, cabinet leads will have wider responsibilities covering a number of services. An interesting practice in Dorset was discussed where backbench members take responsibility for a particular service

area. This strengthens the scrutiny role and supports the work of the cabinet lead.

- 63 For several years there has been a regular refrain bemoaning the position of chief librarians in local authority structures. As far back as 1990, the then Association of Metropolitan Authorities in its guidance pamphlet 'Libraries and Cultural Policy,' recognised the right of a local authority to determine the appropriate reporting structure for the statutory library responsibility. However, it went on to suggest that whatever arrangements were put in place, the head of service, if not a chief officer in their own right, should have access to the key decision making arenas of the Council. This was to ensure the authority benefited from the broader role libraries had to play in respect of corporate policy and objectives.
- 64 This study suggests such access is patchy and if the head of service does attend corporate management team and/or cabinet, it will be specifically for library matters. Heads of service may be engaged in second/third level officer discussions on broader corporate matters, eg access to local authority services, but the opportunity to contribute at a strategic policy level is more restricted.
- 65 Given Framework for the Future and the library service's corporate role, local authorities are missing a trick. Their networks, opening hours, visitor levels and popularity with the public, indicate public libraries are ideally placed to deliver on corporate agendas associated with community engagement, one stop access points and mediated advice and information, as well as culture, learning and leisure activities. In 2005, a cabinet lead at the Public Library Association Conference declared, that in his authority, libraries were the cornerstone of the council's cultural and community service offer.

Budget Priorities

- 66 In all cases, revenue budget savings targets were critical. Evidence suggests capital was not such a problem and, as well as external funding, a fair amount of local authority resources were being made available for refurbishments and ICT.
- 67 Public Library Standards had also resulted in some additional investment for stock and opening hours, but by 2005, budget pressures were a reality. While it was acknowledged the library service was of course important, there was no evidence to suggest this extended to sustaining revenue budgets in real terms, let alone providing growth.
- 68 The corporate priority in virtually all authorities was adult social care and this looks to be the case in the medium term. Savings targets year on year appear to be set for the library service by the particular corporate chief officer, with varying degrees of involvement from the head of service. In a number of cases strategic guidance determined

where the savings had to be found by excluding particular areas - property, opening hours, stock.

- 69 The library service accounts for barely 2% of an authority's revenue budget and as a consequence of efficiency savings over the years, there is virtually no room for manoeuvre when further reductions are required. As several financial commentators have noted, the smaller the budget the greater the problem in achieving savings targets without affecting service standards.
- 70 The result is that arguably disproportionate levels of managerial and political time are employed, for marginal savings achieved in relation to the overall authority budget.

Professional Standards of Service

- 71 This study suggests authorities believe professional standards of service relate to 'doing what you do well' and putting the customer first. For most, library provision is and should be demand led, based on the views of users.
- 72 Several authorities cited results of surveys, which stressed customers wanted better stock, longer opening hours, and a modern, pleasant environment. These were the priorities for management.
- 73 In terms of the typology discussed in paragraph 27, all authorities began the discussion on professional standards by stressing the steps taken to ensure users received an excellent customer experience. This included attention to building layouts, guiding, presentation of stock, and minimising bureaucracy in terms of operational procedures.
- 74 Customer training for front line staff was a priority and the recruitment of bright, smart 'people people' an essential management task.
- 75 At least one library was visited in each of the 10 authorities - as a visitor. Without exception, the experience was first class. Staff were personable and helpful in terms of queries about layouts, booking procedures for computers and location of particular areas of stock.
- 76 Paragraph 27 discussed three further dimensions of professional service. In general, authorities agreed the 'casework approach' for more involved individual enquiries formed part of the service offer and contended this was available, albeit not in every library. However, some authorities suggested the demand for this support was reducing, particularly with the penetration of home computers, powerful search engines and the availability of information in digital formats.
- 77 Authorities too were satisfied there was sufficient local capacity at an appropriate level to determine priorities for stock, its selection and promotion, information and advice services, learning programmes and

activities for particular groups, as well as making judgements about use of resources. Larger authorities pointed out, this work would be undertaken at a strategic senior management level.

- 78 Exercising strategic leadership and advocacy in the authority was seen as a difficulty, because of limited access to chief officers, corporate management team and cabinet.
- 79 Overall, the study suggests a demand led service focused on expressed demand is the priority in terms of professional standards. Needs, particularly the unexpressed of individuals and communities, are less of a priority and the capacity to develop local services relating to meet these needs is reducing. Opportunities for advocacy on behalf of the service are limited given the position of heads of service in managerial structures

Knowledge, Skills and Competencies

- 80 All authorities subscribe to competency based recruitment of staff. Most though require some posts to have that competency evidenced by a professional qualification in librarianship.
- 81 Opportunities for professionally chartered librarians in all authorities are reducing, thereby confirming the 2006/07 CIPFA actuals. While posts in libraries overall dropped by 1.5% on the previous year, the figure for professionals was 12%.
- 82 Authorities appear to see a reducing role for the professionally chartered librarian in the 21st century, as a consequence of a better educated population, with increased access to digital information. The role of specialists in particular subject areas is questioned.
- 83 Rather the priority is a well trained staff, carrying out agreed procedures, proficient in customer care and providing a demand led service.
- 84 In some cases, professional staff were seen by management as being opposed to change, inflexible, defensive, often working at inappropriate levels and a relatively expensive resource in the context of the service budget.
- 85 The need for better performance management and project management skills was stressed in a number of cases, as were generic competencies in negotiation and partnership working.
- 86 There remained a degree of support for CILIP and its work in regulating entry to the profession. Some authorities were supportive of the new framework for qualifications, and the emphasis on encouraging progress to chartered status through experience and practice, rather than qualifications alone.

- 87 However, in some instances considerable disillusionment was expressed with CILIP. In these instances CILIP was not considered to represent the public library domain in an effective manner, its approach to professional qualifications was dated, and as a membership organisation was thought to be defensive of the status quo.

Governance, Community Engagement and Volunteers

- 88 Four of the authorities were in the course of implementing new models of service delivery to small communities, involving transfer of responsibility to local communities, developing library links, co location or a mixture of all three.
- 89 These strategies were not being pursued lightly. In many cases the work resulted from Best Value recommendations. In all instances considerable work had gone into preparing options, undertaking extensive consultations, reflecting on the results and carefully determining the best solution.
- 90 Invariably budgets were key. While performance of smaller libraries with limited opening hours and range of services was an important issue, the need to make savings was often the deciding factor.
- 91 The community ownership model advocated by Government figured in authorities' thinking. So too did co location, particularly with other community and public sector agencies, though in Cumbria this had also been trialled with the retail sector through the Co-op.
- 92 Whichever approach was adopted, responsibility for the local service, property and staffing would rest with the host organisation, in some cases town and parish councils or, where established, a community trust.
- 93 It was recognised the public library authority retained a statutory responsibility under the 1964 Act and service level agreements, monitoring or provision, support systems for stock, staff and broader activities programming were being discussed.
- 94 Adopting such an approach was in all cases an alternative to outright closure with no replacement provision, or serving the community with a mobile library service.
- 95 Particularly noteworthy was the position in Dorset, where the number of libraries necessary to satisfy statutory obligations for a 'comprehensive and efficient service' was critically examined. They concluded a network of 21 libraries would be sufficient, given the population of the county and its distribution. This could have resulted in outright closure of 13 libraries. While this option is not being pursued, a programme of transfer to community organisations is being progressed. This could

ultimately result in a parallel public library service to some communities should the authority determine its statutory responsibilities are fulfilled with a network of less than the present 34.

- 96 Transfer of assets and responsibilities, as authorities discovered, is not a straightforward matter. Apart from involved legal and personnel issues, matters concerning relationships with the local authority, eligibility for finance and support, as well as the sustainability of the new arrangements, are open to question. This community ownership model is fundamentally different from sub contracting to another organisation, where the ultimate responsibility for the service remains with the local authority.
- 97 No public library service operates without volunteers. Models for community ownership generally included the use of volunteers to staff the library. Essentially this is no different from the service as a whole depending on volunteers to deliver housebound reader services, manage homework clubs, index local material or organise children's activities. The authorities pursuing this model recognised both the opportunities and challenges of such a development.

Conclusion

- 98 This short study provides an introduction to what should be more detailed discussions by CILIP and in government and local authorities, on the role and purpose of the public library service in the 21st century and what constitutes a professional standard of service.
- 99 Assessing the level of service provided, has moved on from the late 1990's when there was an emphasis on 'inputs' rather than 'outputs' and 'outcomes.' Even so, on a couple of basic 'input' measure there are considerable variations in the level of provision across England as the 2006/07 CIPFA actuals show. Determining an appropriate level of provision in terms of access, let alone making a judgement as to what constitutes a 'professional standard of service' is therefore problematical,

a. Population per service point open ten hours per week plus

	High		Low	
Inner London	30,222	Lambeth	14,840	Greenwich
Outer London	25,256	Havering	13,808	Richmond
Metropolitans	20,541	Birmingham	10,010	Doncaster
Unitaries	33,100	Darlington	7,660	Rutland
Counties	19,764	West Sussex	8,155	Northumberland

b. Acquisitions per thousand population – Public Library standard

	High		Low	
Inner London	621	Westminster	135	Lambeth

Outer London	363	Richmond	191	Bexley
Metropolitans	338	Oldham	123	Trafford
Unitaries	350	Middlesbrough	103	Bath/ NE Somerset
Counties	355	Buckinghamshire	154	Wiltshire

- 100 This study has clearly shown the importance of Public Library Standards, Library Position Statements and service assessments through the Best Value regime and later CPA. All authorities were strongly influenced by this external monitoring, and in many cases resulted in the service being accorded a degree of recognition in corporate priorities and resource allocation. While wide variations in provision exist across the country, as paragraph 97 shows, there was at least a benchmark against which this could be assessed. Whatever their shortcomings, Public Library Standards clarified to a large extent, local authority obligations under the 1964 Act.
- 101 Best Value, Public Library Standards, and Library Position Statements were therefore important in the development of the service offer during the last decade. Having seven performance indicators in the CPA Culture block has been beneficial. There has to be concern for a future in which the one library indicator in the Local Area Assessment, is subjective and adopting the Library Benchmark entirely voluntary
- 102 When it comes to judging what constitutes a 'professional standard' one is faced with even more imponderables. At one level, demand led provision focused on the user as customer, rather than client or indeed citizen, is the norm. This leads to what has been termed a 'retail experience' by a number of commentators. That is not to disparage qualities of customer care in the retail sector. For too long public services of all descriptions were aloof, treated users with disdain, and in certain instances staff considered themselves rather superior to those engaged in retail. This approach was unforgivable and has been consigned to history. Nowadays a quality experience for the user should be a 'given' and in most instances is just that.
- 103 But all authorities suggested a developed professional service was available through specialist casework, dealing with the information, learning, recreational and creative needs of the individual. However, it was recognised access to this standard of service was restricted and indeed might become more so. Furthermore it was suggested by some, that as a consequence of higher educational standards and improved access to recorded knowledge in digital formats, casework was no longer required to the extent it once had.
- 104 The role of the public library service in identifying broader social need in relation to information, advice, learning and creative opportunity remains, but it appears the capacity and overall structures in which to deliver this aspect of a professional service is problematical.

- 105 The public library service has always been managed as part of a broader service. Recently this was generally within a Culture/Leisure/Community Services directorate, which enjoys a high degree of natural coherence. It is arguable how effective a service grouping can be that combines those universal services at a community level, with targeted provision such as Adult Social Care.
- 106 These 'super directorates' appear essentially administrative in nature, the various functions managed in discrete silos with only limited integration. By and large, the public library service has restricted access to the key decision making arenas and this results in opportunities for the authority to capitalise on the library service's infrastructure and experience, not being fully utilised.
- 107 Consequently, there appears limited opportunity for an officer from a public library background to progress their career corporately, particularly where the directorate has as its primary focus, adult social care.
- 108 Models of governance and accountability will naturally evolve as part of the broader objective to encourage engagement and participation in civic life. The community ownership model, as well as other innovative solutions for service delivery, particularly in small communities, must be investigated, tested and evaluated.
- 109 From this study, there is nothing to suggest the governance proposals being progressed should lead to a deterioration of existing service standards. Indeed the reverse is probably true, for otherwise the communities would have received a much reduced level of provision or indeed none at all. However, the success or otherwise of various options should be reviewed.
- 110 The motivation for changes in governance arrangements usually stemmed from financial pressures. It would be interesting to see the model tested in a climate where resources were not the issue, but rather the approach was being investigated for its own merits.
- 111 Money inevitably is a problem. Public library budgets are being reduced and the room for manoeuvre is virtually non-existent. It would appear from the study, heads of service have only limited influence on the strategic financial planning discussions in an authority, principally due to their position in the management structure. It is also clear the effort, angst and effect on public service, arising from cuts, is disproportionately high to the savings made in a service accounting for barely 2% of a local authority revenue budget.
- 112 But this situation is not new. The 1980's and early 1990's were just as difficult, and no doubt the same was true for earlier generations of public librarians. The context though is different. In a digital age, where

content creation, its production and dissemination have been revolutionised and information and knowledge is regarded as a commodity, some would contend the information intermediary is no longer required. But in the knowledge economy, gaps between the information rich and information poor are ever widening, and this is frequently accompanied by alienation from social and political structures. Therefore, the importance of mediated support, advice and guidance, freely accessible for the citizen, is of even greater importance if social exclusion is to be overcome.

- 113 Competency based recruitment is the norm, where formal qualifications, professional or otherwise are regarded only as 'desirable.' The authorities visited, in the main wanted CILIP to retain its regulatory role in respect of entry to the profession. However some were highly critical of CILIP's performance in recent years. The new qualifications framework was welcomed, with its emphasis on experience coming from a range of work backgrounds and not just libraries – marketing, ICT, community work as well as other cultural service domains being mentioned.
- 114 It also needs to be recorded that in some instances, senior management considered some 'professional librarians' to be operating in a 'comfort zone' and not fully embracing new ways of working. Management of change is challenging and again this is a matter that requires detailed consideration, probably within a context of professional development
- 115 In this respect, it would be beneficial for CILIP to begin discussions with professional institutes covering culture, leisure and community services, regarding 'professional standards of service' and the body of knowledge, skills, and experience considered necessary in the 21st century.
- 116 There has to be concern about the developing vacuum at a national level regarding monitoring and evaluation of the statutory public library service. Similarly, after some solid work during the period 1997- 2003, less attention is being given to strategic planning, in the context of a broader cultural and community service offer, which contributes to national governmental policies. DCMS has already distanced itself from its superintending role in the 1964 Act. There have been no statements from the Advisory Council on Libraries, charged with advising government on public library matters, in response to the considerable body of comment surrounding decisions taken by local authorities. MLA has progressed the voluntary Library Benchmark, but its capacity to champion adoption would seem problematical, with the effective demise of its regional infrastructure.
- 117 Authorities while seeking to provide a 'professional service' as discussed in this report, are in some instances undertaking a fundamental re-assessment, often stemming from financial pressures.

There has to be concern the public library service of the future will provide a predominantly 'retail' offer, focusing on aggregated demand expressed in relatively simplistic opinion polls. Its capacity to enhance that offer with a casework approach to individuals and develop partnerships to improve access to opportunity for the community as a whole, taking into account social need, could be compromised.

- 118 Framework for the Future set aspirational goals for the public library service, recognising its importance to civic renewal, combating exclusion and supporting individuals and communities in making sense of an increasingly complex world. From this short study and reports from other authorities, there has to be concern at the reducing capacity of the public library service across the country to deliver on that agenda, and consequent implications for the future health of the service.
- 119 Finally, CILIP as a chartered body has responsibilities for safeguarding the public interest in respect of library and information services and the trustees will need to take that into consideration.

Recommendations

- 120 It is recommended CILIP
- a) Draws this report to the attention of DCMS, the Advisory Council on Libraries (ACL), Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and the Local Government Association (LGA)
 - b) Request clarification from DCMS about the role of ACL and MLA in respect of their responsibilities for superintending the implementation of the 1964 Act by public library authorities.
 - c) Seek discussions with LGA and the Society of Chief Librarians (SCL), regarding the preparation guidance for public library authorities, on the role of the public library service and its management arrangements.
 - d) In the absence of effective national monitoring of performance from 2008, seek discussions with MLA about ways of robustly progressing voluntary engagement by public library authorities with the Library Benchmark.
 - e) Urgently progress the two strands of work concerning the skills mix required in a modern public library service and what constitutes a professional standard of service, as well as the new qualifications framework.
 - f) Begin discussions with other professional institutes in the culture, leisure and community service sectors regarding professional standards of service

- g) Urgently consider the position of CILIP towards public libraries, taking into account its responsibilities for the public good laid down in the Royal Charter