

CILIP Survey on Police, Surveillance and Libraries, June 2008

Survey undertaken by CILIP's Policy & Advocacy Unit; report written by Jill Howard, Policy Support Officer.

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1. Introduction

CILIP had received a number of reports concerning increased police or other security agency activity with regard to libraries and their users. In order to establish how widespread it is and whether there are any issues causing concern to librarians with regard to professional ethics surrounding user privacy, censorship and freedom of access to information, we sent out a survey to heads of library services.

The short survey (sample attached at Appendix 2), comprising six questions, was sent out by the Policy and Advocacy Unit in June, with the cooperation of SCONUL, SCL, CILIP Prison Libraries Group, CILIP in Scotland and CILIP Wales.

2. Summary

The survey was sent to 640 library services in England, Scotland and Wales and the response rate was nine per cent. We received 55 completed questionnaires from 44 public libraries, 10 academic and one prison library in England, Scotland and Wales.

75% of respondents (41 libraries) reported incidences. The total number of incidents mentioned was 134. Most respondents (70%) reported between one and three incidents.

We were not given details of the types of incidents in just under half of these (59) but where type was mentioned, the most common was criminal, with 'other', terrorism and pornography/paedophilia all at around the same level of 12-15 incidents.

More statistics from the survey results are set out in the tables at Appendix 1 below.

3. Results

Police activity

The results of the questionnaire have revealed that libraries *are* experiencing legitimate police and security agency activity. Forty-one libraries reported activity – 75% of those that completed the survey. One library commented that:

The police appear to be more aware now of how people use libraries, the types of facilities we provide and the numbers of individuals we deal with. We are therefore more on their radar and so queries are on the increase.

Nearly three quarters (71%) of libraries reporting incidents stated that to the best of their knowledge, the police followed proper procedures and were making specific enquiries with good reason.

We have found the police to be entirely considerate and helpful on each occasion and have had no cause to question the procedures they have followed.

Fishing

In the majority of cases respondents felt there was no police ‘fishing’ and this was therefore not an issue. Five libraries said that there had been ‘fishing’ by police. This was just nine per cent of respondents and 12% of those library services that reported incidents. One library was asked to supply details of what Muslim patrons were reading. Another turned down a request for websites visited by library member as it was perceived to be a ‘fishing expedition’.

Earlier in the year we had reports of Special Branch officers visiting our individual libraries to introduce themselves and to encourage staff to report any suspicious behaviour on the part of customers directly to them, particularly if it involved terrorism, political extremism and animal rights.

Only recent involvement with the police has been an enquiry from them about our policies and guidelines for internet use. The officer enquiring spoke to one of my colleagues and said his particular interest was extremist religious sites. He asked that we contacted him direct with any incidences of this nature, should we ever get any.

Policies

The survey revealed that 38% of respondents do not have a formal policy for dealing with police requests and 13% only have a formal policy covering data protection issues.

There is a wide range of policy types, from comprehensive policies covering all aspects, to short statements around data protection. Most services with policies reported that the policy *had* been followed in relation to incidents.

One library commented that it was better having a policy:

Felt uncomfortable in supplying information without knowing reasons but feel better now knowing procedure in place, which has to be adhered to

The majority of library services (84%) collect data and only nine per cent do not give information to their users about the monitoring of their activities. Libraries mentioned that information was given in their computer access acceptable use policy and that the policy has to be accepted on screen every time a user logs in.

Appendix 1: Results tables

- 1 – Number of responses, number reporting incidents
- 2 - Geographical spread of responses
- 3 - Types of library services
- 4 - Libraries reporting incidents
- 5 - Number of incidents per library
- 6 - Type of incidents
- 7 - Procedures and fishing
- 8 – Formal policy
- 9 – Data & user information

Table 1: Number of responses, number of incidents

1: CILIP PSL Survey	No	%
Completed surveys	55	
Libraries reporting incidents	41	75

Table 2: Geographical spread of responses

2: CILIP PSL Survey	No	%
Geographical spread		
England	37	67
Scotland	13	24
Wales	5	9

Table 3: Types of library services

3: CILIP PSL Survey	No	%
Types of libraries		
Public	43	78
Academic	10	18
Prison	1	2
National	1	2

Table 4: Libraries reporting incidents

4: CILIP PSL Survey	No	%
Libraries reporting incidents	41	75
England	27	66
Wales	4	10
Scotland	10	24
Libraries not reporting incidents ¹	15	27

1. Includes one library that was unsure how many incidents there had been

Table 5: Number of incidents per library

5: CILIP PSL Survey	No	%
Number of incidents	41	75
1-3 incidents	29	70
4-7 incidents	6	15
8+ incidents	6	15
Total number of incidents	134	
Police initiated interventions	118	88
Library initiated interventions¹	14	10.5
User initiated interventions¹	2	1.5

1. Actual figures may be higher – libraries did not always specify who initiated the police intervention

Table 6: Type of incidents

6: CILIP PSL Survey	No	%
Total number of incidents	134	
Types of incidents		
Not specified	59	44
Criminal	32	24
Other ¹	15	11
Terrorism	12	9
Pornography	11	8
Paedophilia	4	3
Unclear	1	1

1. 'Other' category includes missing persons, unspecified internet misuse

Table 7: Procedures and fishing

7: CILIP PSL Survey	No	%
Procedures		
Correct procedures followed	29	
Incorrect procedures & informal communication	8	
Fishing	5	

Table 8: Formal policy

8: CILIP PSL Survey	No	%
Policies		
Have formal policy	24	44
Only data protection policy	7	13
Do not have formal policy	21	38
Not answered/unclear	3	5

Table 9: Data & user information

9: CILIP PSL Survey	No	%
Completed surveys	55	
Data kept		
Not answered	1	2
Yes	46 ¹	84
No	8	14
User information given		
Not answered	2	4
Yes	48	87
No	5	9

1. Includes library services that stated that IT departments keep all/some data

Appendix 2: Sample survey

Survey on Police, Surveillance and Libraries, June 2008

CILIP has received a number of reports concerning increased police or other security agency activity with regard to libraries and their users. We are seeking evidence about this in order to establish how widespread it is and whether there are any issues causing concern to librarians with regard to professional ethics surrounding user privacy, censorship and freedom of access to information. We are asking about this, not just within the context of extremism and terrorism, but also with regard to suspicions of other criminal activity.

We would be grateful if you would kindly complete this short survey (6 questions) which is being distributed with the cooperation of SCONUL, SCL, CILIP Prison Libraries Group, CILIP in Scotland and CILIP Wales to heads of library service.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Barbara Stratton
Senior Policy Adviser
CILIP: the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals

Cover sheet

Name of library service:

Contact name:

Email:

Phone:

On what terms are you giving CILIP the information requested in this questionnaire?

- a. We may use your statistics in a global total **YES / NO**
- b. We may use anonymised anecdotal information and quotations **YES / NO**
- c. We can cite the name of your service and attribute any anecdotes or quotes. **YES / NO**

Please take as much space/pages as you need to complete this survey.

Please send your return **by 27th June 2008 if possible** (but later returns will be accepted) with the subject line **CILIP Policy Survey (June 2008)**

- **by email** (*preferred*) to **cilip-policy AT cilip.org.uk**
- **or fax** to **020 7255 0501**
- **or post** to **CILIP Policy Survey (June 2008)** at the address above

Name of library service:

1. Please describe the number and types of instance of police or security agency interventions (including requests for information or other actions) that have occurred in your library and information service* since January 2006 (if you can not supply figures since January 2006, please provide whatever is available).

*including ICT services for which your library/information service is responsible

It would be helpful to know if in each case

- a. To the best of your knowledge they followed proper procedures within the law
 - b. You felt they were making a specific enquiry with good reason, or
 - c. Whether you felt they were making an informal general request that could be interpreted as a 'fishing expedition'
2. Do you have formal policies or protocols outlining the procedures to be followed in such circumstances? If YES, **please supply a copy (electronically if possible) with your questionnaire returns.**
 3. Were those procedures followed in each instance? Please describe where they were not.
 4. Is data kept identifying ICT users and their activities? If YES, for how long?
 5. What are users told in general about the monitoring of their activities in or by libraries and the use of their data?
 6. Is there anything else you wish to add or comment on? *(take as much space/pages as you need)*