

# **Independent Report on Public Libraries, chaired by William Sieghart**

Submission from the Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals (CILIP)

## **Summary**

This evidence comes from the professional body for library, information and knowledge professionals. More than three thousand of our members work in public libraries and their practitioner voice is represented here. The submission was drawn up with the active participation of a number of our special interest groups including the Public and Mobile Libraries Group, the Youth Libraries Group, the Information Services Group, and the Local Studies Group. In addition a number of CILIP Councillors were directly involved in its preparation and other groups within CILIP provided written comments.

### **Your questions:**

#### **1. What are the core principles of a public library service into the future?**

The core of the service is based on its values. It is about free and equal access to information, reading and learning, building knowledge, increasing literacy, supporting people and communities to use information effectively, and developing skills and abilities relevant in the digital world.

We believe that these values are delivered through professionally run services. The public library workers of today fully acknowledge their changed role in the digital age, but passionately believe that their role supporting and advising people on their own reading, learning and knowledge journeys is still an essential one.

#### **2. Is the current delivery of the public library service the most comprehensive and efficient?**

We believe that there is a lack of evidence to confirm that the public library service is delivered in a comprehensive and efficient way and we make proposals in our submission about what might be done to improve this at a national level.

The core service as defined in the 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act<sup>1</sup> is now too limited. It needs to embrace the digital age. However, the principles in the Act remain relevant. The library service is needed as much as ever, but its purpose is changing. We need to establish its role in society afresh.

We also believe that there is a lack of definition of what a comprehensive and efficient library service should look like according to the 1964 Act, and therefore it is very difficult to measure something against a moving target.

We believe that the closure of public libraries and withdrawal of mobile library services across England has created a postcode lottery of provision and there is a real need to define what every citizen should expect as an entitlement under the terms of the 1964 Act.

### **3. What is the role of community libraries in the delivery of a library offer?**

We understand the question to refer to ‘community managed libraries’ as opposed to the more generic term for libraries based in communities.

We are very concerned when community led libraries are separated from local authority support, creating a lack of connectivity in terms of legal duties, breadth of services, professional expertise and quality risks impacting on the public.

We acknowledge the great contribution that volunteers make to public library services but their role should be complementary and help to enrich the service. In most cases they still involve the substitution of paid library staff with volunteers and we are opposed to this. They are not a cheaper alternative to paid staff and cannot offer the same service.

These factors risk a two tier service being developed. We believe there should be an honest discussion about what is happening with the use of volunteers in the delivery of library services and research into the impact on communities.

### **4. Our proposals for the Panel’s consideration:**

We believe that there are some key issues that should be considered by the Panel:

- A: Can the Panel begin the process of articulating the vision of the Public Library Service based on the work of Arts Council England: a positive and wide ranging role, delivered by forward thinking library practitioners?
- B: What entitlements do the service users of public libraries in England have, no matter where they live? How can users have more confidence in the services they provide?

- C: Can the Panel promote research into the social and economic impact of libraries and create a new public understanding of their purpose?
- D: Can the Panel scope a Road Map towards 2020 which sets out what is needed to ensure that there is a Public Library Service in England that meets the needs of communities and is still comprehensive and efficient?
- E: How can there be a national development and improvement programme for public libraries based on outcomes, not metrics, and on impact on communities
- F: Can the Panel recommend where leadership of the sector should rest to ensure future delivery and sustainability?
- G: Can the Panel begin an open discussion about how community managed libraries fit into an overall library service and what guidance local authorities need?

## **Our submission**

Public libraries in England have been amongst the most reviewed of all public services. Arts Council (England) (ACE) has just delivered on its “Envisioning” Project<sup>ii</sup> to create an overall vision for the public library service and a set of key priority areas.

**It is time to decide the future of the Public Library Service in England.**

### ***1. What are the core principles of a public library service into the future?***

The core of the service is its value base. It is about free and equal access to information, reading and learning, building knowledge, increasing literacy, supporting people and communities to use information effectively, and developing skills and abilities relevant in the digital world.

The distinctive characteristic of a professionally managed service is its values and ethics. It should demonstrate the importance of impartiality in approach to information and inclusivity in reach to communities, as well as high levels of customer care. It should promote and deliver community access to information, ideas, reading and learning. There should be respect for the privacy and confidentiality of users and an understanding of information law and ethics.

The public library, whether in its physical or virtual form, should be a welcoming and safe environment, with trusted and knowledgeable staff who can help people to access the information they need. These values are delivered through professionally run services.

**The public library workers of today fully acknowledge their changed role in the digital age, but passionately believe that the need to support and advise people on their own reading, learning and knowledge journeys is still an essential one.**

The role of library staff is changing to become enablers of people, helping them to participate effectively in the digital world. The Society of Chief Librarians and Arts Council England funding of the Tinder Foundation to deliver a public library workforce development programme<sup>iii</sup> on digital skills and NHS funding to support public library users gain the online skills necessary to access health information and improve health literacy<sup>iv</sup> are real signs of a recognition of the future role of Public Library Services.

Public libraries deliver free and equal access to information, reading and learning resources. They empower people to be effective users of information and confident in the use of digital technology. They provide a professionally led service where all users and communities should have advice and support to help them with their learning and information needs.

**The Public Library Service must relate to the complex and varied needs of communities in society today.**

**Our proposals for the Panel's consideration:**

**A: There is an urgent need to articulate a vision of the Public Library Service based on the work of Arts Council England: a positive and wide ranging role, delivered by forward thinking library practitioners.**

We are very concerned that a focus on the cultural aspects of library services is seen as only one facet of their contribution to society. The social and economic benefit of the Public Library Service is every bit as relevant and vital in delivering access to services that benefit health, economic regeneration, skills development and learning, public information, digital inclusion and literacy, and local information.

In our recent response to the Culture Media & Sport Select Committee Inquiry into the Arts Council (England) we challenged whether ACE was the right body to be the development agency for public libraries for similar reasons and quoted one library manager who typified the feedback we received from our members:

*“Right now my authority is benefiting from participation in an ACE funded project to bring artistic endeavour to hard-to-reach people. This is valuable in that it will raise our profile and bring some new audiences into libraries. Even so, the partnerships I really need to be able to attract for funding and to secure stakeholder acceptance of the core value of libraries’ contribution to the community are with education, health and business sectors.”*

**B: What entitlements do the service users of public libraries in England have, no matter where they live? How can users have more confidence in the services that they provide?**

The public library service is active in promoting literacy; sharing the joy of reading; inspiring and enabling learning; supporting health and well-being; encouraging skills development, business and entrepreneurship and underpinning democracy.

At the local level libraries are place-shaping services connecting people and acting as knowledge hubs for local communities. Professional service development and skilled staff are essential to make these things happen as well as to identify developing needs and new ways of providing services.

**C: Can the Panel promote research into the social and economic impact of libraries and create a new public understanding of their purpose?**

We would strongly suggest that the Panel recommend significant research into the social and economic impact of libraries. A national debate among thought leaders, educationalist and economists could develop a new public understanding of the purpose of the Public Library Service and its role in society and the economy.

**2. *Is the current delivery of the public library service the most comprehensive and efficient?***

The core service as defined in the 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act is too limited. The Act was conceived in a predominantly print age and we must recognise that we are in the digital age. For example, it needs to incorporate ebook loans and access to the internet as core parts of the service to be provided without charge at the point of use.

Also there is a lack of definition of what a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service should be according to the 1964 Act, and therefore each local authority has interpreted this differently. It is very difficult to measure something against a moving target.

We make proposals in our submission about what might be done to improve this at national level. England is becoming a patchwork of public library provision. Libraries are being closed or handed over to community management with no formal record of what is planned or currently provided by local authorities. There is a loss of specialist staff in areas such as children's work, local studies and in the development and maintenance of special collections and services. So even where buildings remain the quality of service provided may be compromised.

**We believe that there is a lack of evidence to confirm that the public library service is delivered in a comprehensive and efficient way.**

In his response to the *Select Committee Inquiry into [Public] Library Closures*, the Minister agreed to provide an assessment of the state of the sector<sup>v</sup>. The only ministerial report since is the *Annual Government Report to Parliament on public library activities 2012/13*<sup>vi</sup>.

This report only made reference to CIPFA statistics and listed projects and initiatives being undertaken by stakeholder groups but did not contain any further research evidence or information or provide an assessment of the state of the sector.

**We strongly believe in accurate evidence, not anecdotes. There needs to be research into the national picture of provision and the future trends.**

The Wirral Inquiry<sup>vii</sup> has been recently used by DCMS as an indicator of what an authority needs to do to comply with the Act, quoting the need for proper planning based on an assessment of local needs and an understanding of how the service delivery models proposed could meet those needs within available resources. However, there is no government requirement to produce plans at the moment.

We suggest that there should be a new requirement for public library authorities to lodge library plans with DCMS (but not necessarily to a prescribed form) to allow effective information gathering and a clear national picture.

**We believe that the closure of public libraries and the withdrawal of mobile library services across England has created a postcode lottery of provision and there is a real need to define what every citizen should expect as an entitlement under the terms of the 1964 Act.**

Changes in the structure of local government were supposed to provide a greater sensitivity to the needs of communities with the local authority as both place-shaper and voice of their community. The loss of economies of scale was supposed to be mitigated by joint provision, shared services and better procurement.

In England 151 authorities still run their own library services with a tiny number of exceptions. Some of these are very small, and the fact that there are so many authorities must lead us to question whether the service overall is efficient.

There are lessons that could be learnt from the rest of the UK.

In Northern Ireland, five former Education and Library Boards have become one new authority, the Northern Ireland Library Authority (NILA)<sup>viii</sup>, operating outside Government. The economies of scale achieved have helped NILA deal more effectively with the reductions in funding it has faced recently.

In Wales there are now also serious proposals to reduce the current twenty two local authorities by about half to improve the cost efficiency of service delivery<sup>ix</sup>.

We believe that local authorities are the best place for library services but we think that this should be examined to ensure that the best model is achieved.

**The lack of systematic evidence regarding the state of the Public Library Service in England contributes to a lack of an improvement culture.**

Unless there is a culture of improvement across the Public Library Service, then the increasing fragmentation of service across more providers is likely to continue. DCMS with ACE should be much more active promoting greater efficiency through partnerships, shared services and other arrangements that provide economies of scale and challenge local authorities to deliver this.

**Our proposals for the Panel's consideration:**

**D: Can the Panel scope a Road Map towards 2020 which sets out what is needed to ensure that there is a Public Library Service in the England that meets the needs of communities and is still comprehensive and efficient?**

The focus on localism has been a barrier to the development of national standards that would support local delivery and identifying major economies of scale. The public library is a national brand and some elements of it can be delivered more effectively on a national scale.

The *Universal Offers*<sup>x</sup> developed by the Society of Chief Librarians are evidence of this and should be expanded into other key areas of public library activity, particularly supporting learning.

**E: How can there be a national development and improvement programme for public libraries based on outcomes, not metrics, and on impact on communities?**

There are good examples to learn from across the UK.

Wales shares the same primary public library legislation as England. The Welsh Government, its agency CyMAL and local authorities have developed *Libraries Inspire*<sup>xi</sup>, a national libraries development plan. They are also working towards a common Library Management System (LMS) for public libraries opening up the potential for greater efficiency savings and enhanced services at the same time.

This demonstrates that some things can be done more cost effectively at a national rather than a local level, particularly procurement including e-content and the negotiation of the relevant licences. Some services are already brokered nationally with publishers, the NHS, the BBC and others.

There are other aspects of the service better planned nationally, for example a single national public library card or the universal library registration of children as library members are potentially exciting projects that need national direction.

Greater integration of systems and improved inter-operability must form an important element in moving towards shared services. These developments need strong national brokerage, leadership and local political commitment.

Above all, user expectation should be at the centre of the service. We believe that a set of national user entitlements should be common across England. A rigorous development and improvement programme for public libraries, measured by outcomes, should support these entitlements.

In 2011, the Government consultation paper on *Open Public Services* described its role in national public services (those delivered by or accountable to central government) as focusing on several key roles including establishing and enforcing core entitlements, setting floor standards enforced by independent regulators or published data, and ensuring fair access to services<sup>xii</sup>. This is precisely what we would advocate for public libraries and the powers to do this already exist in the 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act.

**F: Can the Panel recommend where leadership of the sector should rest to ensure future delivery and sustainability?**

We are currently being asked to comment on the abolition of the Advisory Council on Libraries<sup>xiii</sup> and have recently submitted evidence to a CMS Select Committee Inquiry into the role of Arts Council England<sup>xiv</sup>.

There are a number of great library champions amongst politicians and heads of library services, but we need more. The fragmentation of responsibility across a number of Government departments, agencies and local government does not provide convincing or credible leadership for the sector. Delivering the type of agenda we have set out in our proposals needs leaders who can:

- Promote a shared vision for the public library service
- Promote the national public library brand as well as the importance of its local delivery and place-shaping potential
- Set up a national development and improvement network and programme
- Facilitate effective workforce planning and staff development across the service
- Enable the sector to take the necessary measures to come through the recession with a sustainable, resilient and future-facing service.

**3. What is the role of community libraries in the delivery of a library offer?**

We understand the question refers to ‘community managed libraries’ as opposed to the more generic term for libraries based in communities.

Locality’s recent study<sup>xv</sup> identified five different types of library falling into two main groups:



- Independent community libraries usually managed and run by volunteers and with no direct local authority support (we call this ‘community led’)
- Co-produced community libraries with varying levels of Council support (we call this ‘community supported’)

Our most serious concern is that *community led libraries* are often completely divorced from the main public library service. There is a real risk of their growing insularity as they have no access to innovative practice and professional support. Accountability for data protection, stock selection and privacy may also prove difficult. As they are often treated as ‘outside the 1964 Act’ there will be no thresholds of quality.

Community supported libraries are usually considered part of the statutory service and are encompassed by quality control mechanisms within the overall service. They are increasing in number and although reliant on the work of volunteers they will often also employ paid staff. Full local authority library service provision is not available and in most cases they will involve the substitution of paid staff by volunteers.

**CILIP acknowledges the great contribution that volunteers make to the public library service. We see their role as complementing paid staff, enriching or extending the reach of services.** We are concerned that many authorities see them as a cheaper alternative to paid staff and commend them as examples of community engagement and entrepreneurship.

The National Federation of Women’s Institutes (NFWI) report, *On Permanent Loan*, says that volunteers often feel unsupported in what they are expected to do and unaware of what is actually involved. The NFWI said:

*“... only certain communities have the resources to effectively set up and run a library and we are concerned that the proliferation of these models could effectively lead to a ‘postcode lottery’ of library services with the creation of a two-tiered system of library provision that undermines the benefits of skilled and trained library staff and under-estimates the role that they play in both delivering an effective public service and supporting communities”<sup>xvi</sup>.*

**Our proposal:**

**G: Can the Panel begin an open discussion about how community managed libraries fit into an overall library service and what guidance local authorities need?**

**We are against the substitution of paid staff by volunteers precisely for the reasons given in the NFWI Report:**

- **The potential development of a two-tier service**

- **The lack of recognition or understanding it reveals of the added value provided by staff.**

The NFWI report also recommended:

*“In the interest of users, library professionals and volunteers, there needs to be an **honest discussion**, spearheaded by the Government, about whether and how community managed libraries will fit into the overall library service with corresponding guidance for local authorities. Volunteers have an important role to play yet there is a danger they will reach saturation point and in relying on volunteers to deliver day to day services, we risk losing sight of the added value that volunteers can bring to the service more widely, for example through assisting with reading schemes”<sup>xvii</sup>.*

## **CILIP**

CILIP: the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals is the leading professional body for librarians, information specialists and knowledge managers. CILIP’s vision is a fair and economically prosperous society underpinned by literacy, access to information and the transfer of knowledge.

More than three thousand of our members work in public libraries and their practitioner voice is represented here.

As our funding comes from member subscriptions and our own commercial activity we are able to act as an independent voice of the profession reflecting the knowledge and expertise within our membership. CILIP is a registered charity, no. 313014 and more information about us can be found at [www.cilip.org.uk](http://www.cilip.org.uk) .

### **Contact Point**

If you wish to follow up any of the points made in this submission then please contact:

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## REFERENCES

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- <sup>i</sup> Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964. For text of the current statute see: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/75>
- <sup>ii</sup> Arts Council England. Envisioning the library of the future. For further information see: [www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/supporting-libraries/library-of-the-future/](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/supporting-libraries/library-of-the-future/)
- <sup>iii</sup> Society of Chief Librarians, 2014. E-learning course will help library staff bridge digital divide. [media release]. Available at: <http://www.goscl.com/category/media-releases/>
- <sup>iv</sup> Society of Chief Librarians, 2013. Libraries to benefit from £1 million NHS funding for improved online services. [blog]. Available at: <http://www.gmers01.org/libraries-to-benefit-from-1m-nhs-funding-for-improved-online-health-access/>
- <sup>v</sup> “We will of course honour our commitment to publish a review of what has happened in libraries in England and what the service looks like. It is a commitment which we will fulfil, in collaboration with the LGA and the Arts Council, at the end of 2013 – rather than at the end of 2014 – and annually thereafter. As requested during the evidence session and committed to, this review will include the range of developments across the library sector, including development work carried out by authorities, the LGA, the Arts Council and other sector partners, and the cumulative outcome of library service restructuring” *from*: DCMS, 2013. Government response to the Report of the Culture, Media & Sport Select Committee, Third report of Session 2012-13: Library Closures (p10). Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-response-to-the-report-of-the-culture-media-and-sport-select-committee-third-report-of-session-2012-13-library-closures>
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- <sup>vii</sup> DCMS, 2009. Local inquiry into the public library service provided by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council led by Sue Charteris. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/.../wirral\\_local\\_inquiry.doc](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/.../wirral_local_inquiry.doc)
- <sup>viii</sup> For further information on the Northern Ireland Library Authority (NILA) see: <https://www.librariesni.org.uk/AboutUs/OurOrg/Pages/About-Us.aspx>
- <sup>ix</sup> BBC News Wales Politics, 20 January 2014. Williams Commission report calls for fewer councils [news report]. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-25776603>
- <sup>x</sup> For more information on the universal offers see the SCL website at: <http://www.goscl.com/universal-offers/about-universal-offers/>
- <sup>xi</sup> CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales, 2011. Libraries inspire: the strategic development framework for Welsh libraries 2012-16. Welsh Government. ISBN: 978 0 7504

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647490. Available at:

<http://cymru.gov.uk/topics/equality/inclusivepolicy/impactassessments/librariesinspire/?lang=en>

<sup>xii</sup> Open public services White Paper presented to Parliament by the Minister for Government Policy, 2011. (Cm 8145) ISBN: 9780101814522. (Section 7.5, p51). Available at:

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<sup>xiii</sup> DCMS, 2014. Proposed abolition of the advisory Council on Libraries: a consultation.

Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-abolition-of-the-advisory-council-on-libraries>

<sup>xiv</sup> Information on the Culture, Media & Sport Select Committee Short Inquiry into the Arts

Council England available at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/culture-media-and-sport-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/work-of-the-arts-council-england/>

<sup>xv</sup> Locality, 2013. Community libraries: learning from experience: guiding principles for local authorities. [commissioned by Arts Council England and the Local Government Association].

Available at: <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/browse-advice-and-guidance/community-libraries-learning-experience-guiding-principles-local-authorities>

<sup>xvi</sup> National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI), 2013. On permanent loan? Community managed libraries: the volunteer perspective. (Summary, p3). Available at:

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<sup>xvii</sup> Ibid. (first recommendation, p18)