



Response by Arts Council England to:

William Sieghart and the Advisory Panel commissioned to produce a report on public libraries by the Department of Culture Media and Sport and the Department of Communities and Local Government.

March 2014

Summary

What are the core principles of a public library service into the future?

The research that Arts Council England undertook in its role as the national development agency indicates that there is consensus on the purpose and principles of a public library:

Public libraries should be trusted spaces, free to enter and open to all. In them people can explore and share reading, information, knowledge and culture. There is a clear, compelling and continuing need for a publicly funded library service

There are three essential ingredients that define the public library:

- *a safe, creative community space that is enjoyable and easy to use, in both physical and virtual form*
- *an excellent range of quality books, digital resources and other content*
- *well-trained, friendly people to help users to find what they want either independently or with support*

While the purpose of libraries endures, the means of delivery needs renewal.

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

Local authorities face challenges in fulfilling their duty regarding public libraries. They are a democratic connection between local people and local services, but the re-design and development of national offers require strengthened national leadership.

We unequivocally support the continued statutory basis for public libraries, and would support new legislation if it strengthens the quality of library services. We believe that any alternative to the current structure of library authorities, should be tested to ensure it delivers a more robust and resilient framework, and not weaken what we have now.

We believe that public libraries now need their version of the Renaissance programme for regional museums; a national development programme designed to complement and strengthen local authority investment in libraries.

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

The principle of involving communities in the design, delivery and management of their library service has been a positive development over many years. Support for community-managed libraries to help them succeed should be strengthened. It is vital to put in place arrangements under Public Lending Right to protect the legitimate creative rights of authors.

Arts Council England

The Arts Council is the national development agency for the arts, museums and libraries in England. Our mission is 'Great art and culture for everyone'. We work to achieve this through advocacy, partnerships, development and investment.

Our refreshed strategy for 2010 - 2014 sets out how we will achieve our mission and five strategic goals:

1. Excellence is thriving and celebrated in the arts, museums and libraries
2. Everyone has an opportunity to experience and be inspired by the arts, museums and libraries
3. The arts, museums and libraries are resilient and environmentally sustainable
4. The leadership and workforce in the arts, museums and libraries are diverse and appropriately skilled
5. Every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts, museums and libraries

Arts Council England and the development of public libraries

The Arts Council took on responsibility for supporting and developing public libraries in October 2011. Central and Local Government share the statutory responsibility for funding public libraries in England, and deciding what services are provided.

Our role, as agreed with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), is that of developers, not funders; advocates not inspectors. We sit outside the statutory responsibilities, but we use our experience as convenors, developers, partners, advocates and investors to support and encourage the development of libraries.

The Arts Council is well positioned to support public libraries. We fully recognise their broad contribution of public libraries, and bring particular expertise to their role as cultural hubs. We are able to join this with our role in literature supporting new writing talent (linking literature and reading development), and offer a rounded view on issues such as Public Lending Right, e-publishing and e-lending, and copyright. We are exploring ways in which libraries can increasingly be seen as places where people can experience great art locally. For example, reading levels were improved when live dance was integrated into the Summer Reading Challenge in 2013, and partnerships with BBC, BFI and Channel 4 could see streaming of digital content into local communities.

Envisioning the library of the future

The long term well-being of public libraries is important to the Arts Council. *Envisioning the library of the future* was a major research project we undertook in 2012/13 to help us to understand the library landscape, and how we could enable them to develop. It was designed to help us and our partners in the library sector to set out the value, role and purpose of public libraries with more clarity, pointing out ways they can respond to change in order to remain at the heart of their communities. It will provide the focus for our work in the future.

In our response to the research, the Arts Council set out its vision for public libraries and the focus for their future development. The key points in our response were that:

a. There is a clear, compelling and continuing need for a publicly funded library service.

We heard this from people at every stage of our research. It didn't matter whether they use libraries or not, people are vocal and passionate about their value.

b. Public libraries are trusted spaces, free to enter and open to all. In them people can explore and share reading, information, knowledge and culture.

c. There are three essential ingredients that define the public library:

- a safe, creative community space that is enjoyable and easy to use, in both physical and virtual form
- an excellent range of quality books, digital resources and other content
- well-trained, friendly people to help users to find what they want either independently or with support

d. Having set out what libraries are, we then say what they are for, namely to:

- develop basic skills and habits of modern literacy and learning with the help of books and digital resources
- support business and economic growth by information and skills development
- help us understand ourselves, our place in the world, and the heritage of the communities in which we live
- encourage us to explore our own culture and creativity, and that of others
- improve our health and well-being by helping us to make sense of what is happening to us and how we can shape our lives
- build a healthy democracy by providing free access to reliable information through which we form our opinions

e. Based on the evidence from our research, we identified four priorities to sustain and develop a 21st century public library service:

1. Place the library as the hub of a community
2. Make the most of digital technology and creative media
3. Ensure that libraries are resilient and sustainable
4. Deliver the right skills for those who work for libraries

Post envisioning activity – what happened next?

We recognised that to build an effective 21st century library service, collaborative leadership is required in partnership with a range of agencies, each of which have their own distinctive responsibilities.

- Department of Culture, Media and Sport where the statutory oversight of public libraries in England sits
- Local Government Association who represent the local authorities with the statutory responsibility and democratic mandate to ensure public library services are provided
- Society of Chief Librarians who are the leaders of public library services
- Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals who are the professional organisation for librarians
- British Library the national hub of knowledge, information and expertise

This 'Post-Envisioning Partnership,' which includes representatives from the five organisations listed above, is working with us in developing a 'narrative' which sets out a rounded perspective about the state of the sector, its successes and challenges, and

the role the library service can play in the life of this country. In addition the Arts Council is investing in activity that takes the four priorities forward.

Since October 2011, the Arts Council has invested over £5 million in project funds, research and development, enabling national 'offers' to be efficiently procured, and in commissioning others, such as *The Reading Agency*, to undertake vital work with libraries. We have found ways to make Arts Lottery funding hospitable for public libraries, and used our funding to match that of Government Departments and other partners to develop new initiatives, such as *Enterprising Libraries*.

Our plans for the 2015-2018 spending period will further Arts Council investment in the development of public libraries. We employ library specialists, but a wider range of our expertise is increasingly embracing public libraries – this is particularly true in the case of our work with children and young people (notably Arts Award and the work of the Bridge organisations), audience engagement, and creative media and digital. The appendix to this submission provides evidence of the activity undertaken by the Arts Council since October 2011.

Context for public libraries

'Envisioning the library of the future' showed that changes in society and in new technology are transforming ways in which people experience library services. These challenges have to be met at a time when the downward pressure on public funding is unprecedented.

Funding decisions taken by Central and Local Government have the greatest impact on the success and resilience of public libraries, and their capacity to transform, in turn, how they contribute to the success and well-being of this country.

What are the core principles of a public library service into the future?

We strongly suggest that *'Envisioning the library of the future'* and the Arts Council's response (see above) provide robust evidence that can inform the deliberations of your Panel, in particular to address the first of the three questions posed in your call for evidence. In brief it sets out what a library is, and what it is for.

Public libraries were set up to give everyone the chance to explore ideas, learning and cultural opportunities through books and information. The advent of new technology has opened up vast new opportunities for discovery and creativity. In addition, many basic services such as job seeking, renewing the TV Licence, and obtaining financial assistance depend on access to the internet and email. Lack of affordable consistent infrastructure combined with a deficit of skills and confidence means not everyone can

take up or make the most of these new opportunities. So while some people can find some aspects of traditional library use elsewhere, the library's purpose as a meeting of minds, and of democratising access to opportunity endures.

While the purpose endures, the means of delivering it requires renewal. More than anything else library users crave a constantly refreshed range of books and services, and up to date technology that works. We are concerned that this may become beyond the capacity of local authorities to sustain and yet, set against the overall scale of public sector expenditure, only a relatively modest investment is required.

The current structure and role of public libraries

When the Public Libraries Act (1964) came into force there were 1,982 library buildings in England. Ten years later this had become 3,116. The number changed little in the next twenty years, but there was further growth until 2009 when it reached 3,501. Recent reductions (and estimates vary between this formal CIPFA data and that gathered from budget proposals and media reports) should be seen in this context.

Local authorities have made considerable investment in improving the condition and presentation of libraries – including the accommodation of computer terminals and brighter, more welcoming children's libraries, and the emergence of facilities to make the buildings comfortable such as sofas, coffee and toilets.

We can look back at the Victorian and Edwardian eras when Carnegie and others enabled the library service to grow – including some extraordinary cathedrals of culture in the big cities. The last few years has seen new or refurbished major city libraries open in Newcastle, Liverpool, Birmingham and, this week, Manchester, as well as other new approaches such as the Idea Stores in Tower Hamlets, the Hive in Worcester and the Forum in Southend (the last two being combined public and university libraries)..

In 1964 the library service and the building were synonymous, but in the period since then the service has become increasingly available beyond the walls of the library. This began with community based services but has grown considerably as more services become available digitally. The Arts Council believes that the space in a library remains a crucial aspect of what the service offers, but it is hard to imagine that the combination of the growth of the virtual offer and the financial pressures will have no impact on the size of the network of library buildings. In the same period, other community based facilities have faced similar dilemmas from Post Offices to pubs, from the NHS to churches.

There is an opportunity for radical change, to secure a resilient and successful library service for present and future generations. Such change should take care to sustain

and enhance the enduring strengths of public libraries that have served this country well for so many years. There are different models and their merits should be explored. The Arts Council is ready and willing to play its part in that process.

The current structure for public libraries distributes responsibilities across several organisations. This is why collaborative leadership is at the core of the approach we have taken and have described above. We have identified that the highest risks facing the public libraries service are those associated with the pressures on local authority funding. Painful decisions are already being made, and current budget profiles will mean that this process will continue for some years to come. In some places, this has led to libraries closing or moving to community management, in others services have experienced 'hollowing out' - where book and other collections are not sufficiently renewed and the capacity to respond to community need is eroded.

The challenges faced by local authorities should not mask the strength of the democratic connection between local people and their local services. Nor should the value be lost of the integrated library network where the whole is genuinely greater than the sum of the parts, and where the main beneficiary of this is the library user.

Realising the potential of libraries also requires a change in their strategic positioning. We applaud those councils who have recognised this value by placing them:

- as community hubs for culture, creativity, learning and well-being
- as channels of existing and new service delivery - a resource for other services and organisations to deliver services that are 'digital by default' when access to networks and devices and the confidence to use them, is far from universal (eg benefit applications; business development; jobs, skills and careers advice).

This requires a change in approach in Whitehall and town halls, and greater qualities and capacity of leadership in the library sector - locally and nationally. It will mean a clear and strategic positioning of the public library service at the heart of information, learning and digital access, backed up with a focusing of investment to equip libraries to deliver benefits that include better quality service and levels of saving across the public purse in excess of the investment required.

Successful delivery of local library services is widespread. Across the country we are aware of wonderful examples of local authorities connecting with their local communities working to ensure library services are relevant to the needs of local people. In a time when reports of failure and decline are common, these often go unremarked and are not celebrated. The challenge is to bring about the service re-design and improvement

required for a 21st century library service. Much of this will be most efficiently achieved through a strategic approach, on a sub- regional, regional or even national scale.

Given the current challenges faced by local authorities, we believe that there is a compelling argument for a major national development initiative for public libraries. The Renaissance museums programme provides a useful model¹. In this programme, national coordinated investment has worked alongside local authority investment to transform the state of our regional museums. Local authority and independent museums have benefitted from strategic development funds which have transformed museum practice in big cities and rural communities. Renaissance provides a national framework but the ideas and local application emerges from those who will deliver the results.

The basis for such a framework exists in *Envisioning*. Something of this scale, while small in comparison with most Government programmes, would provide a powerful opportunity to make a positive intervention in the quality and resilience of England's public library services – achieving benefits of the type being pursued in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. The delivery of a library Renaissance programme would require a strengthened mandate and capacity for the agency charged with supporting the improvement and development of public libraries.

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

We unequivocally support the continued statutory basis for the public library service in England. For us the question is not whether there should be a statutory basis but what form that should take. We would support new legislation if the Panel's recommendations bring change that strengthens the strategic position of library services. It should be a means to that end and not an end in itself.

The Public Libraries Act (1964) contains frustrating anachronisms and ambiguity, but we would be concerned to avoid a limited refresh of the legislation simply to bring currency to its language and terminology.

The phrase 'comprehensive and efficient' has become the basis for the Secretary of State's judgement of whether or not to intervene to require a local authority to provide a service that meets the statutory requirement. We recognise that, in recent years, Government has looked to local authorities to define what represents a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service in the light of local needs. If the Government is minded to

¹ The Renaissance Museums programme began in 2002 with an investment of £70m per annum which by 2010 resulted in an injection of £300m. The current per annum level of Renaissance funding is £41m.

take a greater role in defining the level of service required to comply with legislation, then additional arrangements will need to be made to monitor and, if necessary enforce compliance.

The question posed to the Panel suggests taking a view as to whether the overall structure and governance is comprehensive and efficient. The large number of local authorities undoubtedly builds inefficiency into the system, although the intent is to make the service locally relevant and responsive.

Collaboration and joint procurement of stock and library management systems have been widespread over many years. Examples of whole service sharing/ partnering are taking root (especially in London and the south-east), but the evidence from several feasibility and pilot projects suggests there are significant barriers to this becoming more widespread on a voluntary basis. These include costs exceeding benefits, and concerns about sustaining political support. The perception of inefficiency persists, but also of unfulfilled potential. The lack of nationwide coherence and the loss of opportunities for national approaches and partnership building inhibit the development of a stronger, coherent national offer by libraries.

The strategies adopted through mechanisms such as the Society of Chief Librarians' Universal Offers, and by commissioning delivery through a third party such as the Reading Agency's Summer Reading Challenge are pragmatic and borne of circumstances. Nonetheless we heard through the *Envisioning* research that there is considerable frustration across the sector and among potential partners/stakeholders at the slow pace of development.

Beyond a small range of core services (such as book lending, information provision), some would argue that England presents a library service that is neither comprehensive nor efficient. The counter-balance to this view is the benefit gained from local accountability as represented by the democratically elected local authority. The passion and fervour generated by local communities about the future of their library suggests that losing this connection should not be lightly undertaken.

A number of models could be considered involving differing levels of collaboration or types of combination. Examples can be cited from other countries but care should be taken before imposing a model from a very different context. Some countries have stronger frameworks for collaboration (smaller states or a federal approach), and others have a more centralised system of government with limited local accountability.

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

The principle of involving communities in the design, delivery and management of their library service has been a positive development over several years. We (and the MLA before us) have supported this trend and believe it should be developed. In addition, the community has participated in the delivery of services for many years (the volunteers delivering books to those confined to their home is a story of often unsung heroes and heroines). Through the BIG Lottery Community Libraries programme the practice of involving communities in the design, delivery and management of libraries emerged as excellent practice.

The recent emergence of community-managed libraries is of a different nature, and is perceived in different ways largely because they have been born more of financial pressures than service improvement. In many cases, community groups and individuals have put themselves forward to enable their local library to remain open. Many would say that they haven't chosen this option willingly, but do so as a last resort. Others have said the experience has been very positive and has resulted in improvements. The experience varies across the country according to local circumstances.

The local authority, as the body with the statutory responsibility for the delivery of the service, decides whether community-managed libraries form a part of the local statutory provision. This will heavily influence the level of support provided to community groups, including the supply of stock, access to the library management system, and professional support.

Less widespread is the type of social enterprise that takes on the running of a community library as part of a wider portfolio of services providing benefit to the local community, and securing an income stream to cross-subsidise the full range of activity.

Access to the support these groups feel they need to make their venture a success is a frequent frustration. The nature of that support usually involves access to basic advice and guidance and examples of key documentation, and access to capacity building to help emerging organisations understand what is required of them and develop the skills they need. Arrangements are in place to enable this support to be provided, but it is under-resourced and not sufficiently well-known to fulfil its function. Government need not deliver this support function but could commission others to provide it..

Very few community-managed libraries have been operating for long enough to be sure whether they will sustain themselves beyond the initial energy that came from responding to proposals for change. It may be that, over time, some of these community-managed libraries will develop a business model that enables them to be resilient, and to become a permanent feature in the library offer available in England.

Others however, are likely to lose impetus and the volunteer base may become too small to be sustainable. Unless support for them is provided then community-managed libraries are likely to remain a highly variable localised feature.

Outside of the limited definition of community-managed libraries are alternative business models for the operation of a whole service that have been developed by local authorities, often supported by the Arts Council or, previously, MLA.. These are not described in any detail here but include:

- Trusts (e.g. Luton, St Helens and Wigan)
- Mutual/Industrial provident (e.g. Suffolk and York)
- Commercial contracts (Carillion in Hounslow, Croydon, Ealing and Harrow)
- Partnerships (e.g. Essex/Slough; Bromley/Bexley; Westminster/Kensington and Chelsea/Hammersmith and Fulham)

Finally, but of significant importance, Public Lending Right (PLR) is an important feature of the public library service by enshrining the right of the author to benefit from people reading what they create. While not always the case, community managed libraries often sit outside of arrangements for recording library borrowing for the purposes of PLR. We see it as vital that this is addressed if community managed libraries are to be seen as a feature of future provision.

Arts Council England

Contact for any further information:

Brian Ashley
Director, Libraries
brian.ashley@artscouncil.org.uk

APPENDICES

A: Arts Council England and the development of public libraries

If the Panel would like to obtain further detail about how the Arts Council has supports the development of public libraries in England, we have provided a set of links below:

[An overview of the Arts Council](#)

[Our mission, goals and strategic framework](#)

Envisioning the library of the future:

- [Arts Council website page](#)
- [Arts Council England Response](#)

[Libraries Grants for the arts](#)

[Library Development Initiative](#)

[Enterprising Libraries](#)

[Automatic Library Membership](#)

[Reference Online](#) and [Enquire](#)

[ILfA refresh](#)

[Economic contribution research](#)

[Community managed libraries research and guidance](#)

[Designation scheme](#) – supporting some libraries with significant collections

[The Reading Agency](#) – receives extensive core and project funding from the Arts Council that enable them to deliver many of their well-recognised projects

[Society of Chief Librarians](#) – many aspects of SCL's Universal Offers are developed or delivered with Arts Council funding (eg Books on Prescription, workforce skills, digital leadership and Library 21)

B: Overview of Arts Council – Libraries Investment

Decision Year	2011/12		2012/13		2013/14 (YTD)		Grand Total	
Programme	No. of Awards	Amount awarded (£)						
Grants for the arts - Libraries	-	-	4	314,200	50	2,487,366	54	2,801,566
Automatic Library Membership	-	-	17	40,543	-	-	17	40,543
Core funding to NPO towards library development	-	-	1	130,000	2*	253,347	3	383,347
Enterprising Libraries	-	-	1	34,200	11	705,240	12	739,440
Libraries Development Initiative	13	231,893	-	-	-	-	13	231,893
Managed Funds Project	5	54,060	3	20,950	7	104,190	15	179,200
Museum and library activity for Bridge organisations	10	500,000	-	-	-	-	10	500,000
Grand Total	28	785,953	26	539,893	70	3,550,143	124	4,875,989

*This shows investment for the NPO Funding years 2013/14 and 2014/15. All awards for this strand belong to The Reading Agency.

NB: This table does not include the costs of the 'Envisioning the library of the future' project: £211,425

