



Public libraries: political vision versus public demand?

Public libraries

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of the paper is to review UK government policy on public libraries since 2003, and to examine its relationship to other forms of demand for public libraries

Design/methodology/approach – The published literature from government and professional bodies is reviewed, alongside published statistics on library use.

Findings – Since 2003 public libraries have been the subject of sustained interest from UK government, in the form of a range of policy initiatives and incorporation in the Best Value and more recent Common Area Assessment monitoring frameworks. Alongside this, professional bodies and other commentators have put forward views on the role of libraries, but even taken together it is not clear that these represent the needs or aspirations of library service users.

Originality/value – This paper provides an overview of the demand for UK public libraries, and its synthesis will be of value to librarians, government departments and professionals in this and related fields.

Keywords Public libraries, Government, Government policy, Library users

Paper type General review

1. Introduction

After years of being a vaguely defined “good thing”, the late 1990s onwards have seen the UK’s public libraries receive an unprecedented level of government attention. Two major initiatives – the People’s Network and *Framework for the Future* – have, in modern policy terms, articulated a central view of libraries’ role in society. At the same time, the growth of a performance management culture in local government has meant that libraries have been obliged to plan their work and to monitor its outcomes to an equally unprecedented degree.

This paper seeks to examine the aspirations for the public library movement presented by *Framework for the Future* in light of the realised demand for existing public library services revealed by the 2001-2002 Public Library User Survey. In doing so it will seek to address the question “Do library users demand what the Government wants them to have?”.

2. The emergence of a national agenda for public libraries

The importance of central government for public libraries has increased dramatically in recent years. Since its origins in the Victorian era, services were highly local in their outlook and circumstances. Nevertheless, even in those early days, many of the themes we see today were emerging, such as looking to national government to provide a context and, perhaps a little optimistically, additional funding.



The Public Libraries and Museums Act of 1964 stipulated only that local authorities provide a “comprehensive and efficient” service, a description which left much open to interpretation.

From the 1970s onwards, whilst some library services continued to enjoy reasonable funding, years of cutbacks in many other services left others in, arguably, dire circumstances. The notable case of Derbyshire County Library Service, which was threatened with severe cutbacks in 1990-1991, resulted in the only intervention by national government under the terms of the 1964 Act.

Initially, national political interest in public library services was, arguably, negative in its attitude to the service, or at least was perceived as much by many in the library profession. In addition to financial cutbacks, alternative models of provision, essentially to weaken local authority control were examined. Options such as outright privatisation through to the compromise Trust options were tested.

At the same time, this creation of a stronger national debate around public libraries also had a more positive side with the development work for the bid to the Millennium Fund, set up to fund major projects to celebrate the year 2000. This proposed the establishment of a national project to provide public access internet services in all public libraries, at a time when access from home was still expensive and technically difficult. Whilst this ambitious proposal did not win Millennium funding, it provided the basis for the later successful New Opportunities Funding for the People’s Network. Perhaps just as importantly, it promoted the idea of more positive national intervention.

Whilst it was the Conservatives under John Major who, in the latter days of their administration, approved the funding for the People’s Network project, the current situation represents a significant development of these prior themes by the New Labour government from 1997.

2.1 Framework for the Future

This process reached a significant stage with the publication of *Framework for the Future: Libraries, Learning and Information in the Next Decade* (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2003; for a summary, see Appendix 1). According to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) web site:

Its purpose is to help local and library authorities agree on the key objectives for the public library service with central government and local communities.

Framework was written by a team of 20, chaired by Alex Stewart, Director of the Museums, Galleries, Libraries and Heritage Group of DCMS, with other DCMS officers and many familiar names from the public library world such as John Hicks (ACL), Chris Batt (Resource), and Martin Molloy (Derbyshire) amongst others.

Given that there has never been a national strategy for public libraries before, the document clearly sets out to win friends, both within the profession and outside. The style is very much of advocacy and celebration, for example:

Imagine a place through which every newborn baby is given a package as a birthright, which gives them access, for life, to an endless supply of books, music and films as well as the World Wide Web ... There are places like this all over the county: public libraries (p. 11).

There is an up-beat introduction from the then Minister for the Arts, Tessa Blackstone, and many glossily illustrated case studies of successful services.

The initial chapters are the most “visionary” in tone, describing a re-energised, confident service retaining many traditional values of community service and support for reading and learning but doing so in innovative ways, using new technology and working in partnership with other agencies. Of course, one of the most radical innovations is that there is a national strategy: *Framework* itself.

Along with this is the concept of national “offers”, described as:

... a simple change to the way in which libraries operate – that the library service should focus its efforts in the key areas identified in this framework and, as far as possible, that the same national offers should be available in every library (p. 43).

What these national offers could be is only hinted at and with the strong provisos that they are voluntary[1] and open to wide local interpretation[2].

Whilst primary responsibility for *Framework* lies formally with DCMS, the equally – if not more important – issues of funding and performance management for local government is provided by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. It is this latter Department which is responsible for the Best Value performance management process, established by the Local Government Act 1999.

2.2 Other national developments

2.2.1 Best Value. Best Value has been one of the most significant factors influencing public library development. This process aims to drive increased efficiency within the public sector, without resorting to privatisation, although it should be noted that diversity of providers (including private enterprise) is encouraged. All local authority services are subject to this assessment, with each score contributing to the overall Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) for the Council.

This final score is treated very seriously by local politicians and managers, and the fact that the score can be affected by the quality of the library service creates a very strong incentive to take libraries seriously. Unfortunately, during the first years of operation, the public library score was part of the Libraries and Leisure element, which had a lower weighting (half) in the overall score than others, due to Audit Commission concerns about the extent and robustness of the performance indicators available to the sector, though these were better for libraries than many other parts of leisure.

The Libraries score was made up of the following elements:

- the results of an Inspection;
- performance measured against the Public Library Standards; and
- an assessment of the quality of the service’s Annual Library Plan.

The Best Value Inspections are undertaken by the Audit Commission. They are intended to make a detailed qualitative judgement about services, how they fit within the wider Local Authority strategies, appropriateness to local circumstances, value for money and the actual quality of services.

Inspections do not necessarily encompass just library services, and they often include sport, heritage and arts services, depending on the individual negotiations between the local authority and the Audit Commission. Equally, other thematic inspections, such as those covering services to children, include elements of the library service amongst others. Of course, this means it can make it difficult to extract a clear verdict about the library service involved.

The inspection process entailed library services providing documentary evidence before the actual visit. “Mystery shopping” exercises would also be carried out. The inspection itself would be undertaken by, usually two, inspectors who would interview councillors, senior local authority managers, staff at a variety of levels and any appropriate groups, such as Friends Groups, as well as visiting premises. Scores consist of two elements: quality of service (excellent, good, fair or poor) and prospects for improvement (excellent, promising, fair or poor).

More recently ideas such as “value for money” and “outcomes” have arrived to present their own sets of challenges. In the context of this paper it is worth noting that these ideas have been introduced as part of the overall performance culture in which local government functions are defined and monitored by central government. Guidance on value for money provided by the Audit Commission envisages a service that works in consultation with its users, gaining their approval for changes made. “Outcome focus” is proving harder to define, and from both the authors’ own experiences it is often difficult for a local authority to distinguish between “outputs” and outcomes. The latter requires a focus on the difference actually felt by a user or group of users. The more a service is generic – as opposed to, for example, case based social work – the more it is difficult to define this. Is it true that because x people borrowed library books, x people were able to gain more control over their lives?

Changes in the inspection regimes in 2008-2009 with the creation of Comprehensive Area Assessments have used the ideas of outcome focus and value for money to look at what life is actually like for citizens in a given local authority. From the point of view of libraries, it might seem clear that this is a welcome opening, but at this stage it is by no means clear that it will necessarily mean a service that responds to expressed needs rather than to a more subtly prescribed set of wants (see www.audit-commission.gov.uk/localgov/audit/CAA/Pages/CAAframework.aspx).

2.2.2 Annual library plans/position statements. Library services were required to submit to DCMS an Annual Library Plan, after having first had it approved by a full meeting of the Council. This latter element is in itself significant, as it helped to raise the profile of libraries within their own authority. The planning year followed the standard financial year, or March to April.

The format of the Plan was standardised, so each authority produced a plan according to the same structure. Although the details of this varied somewhat each year, the structure basically consisted of a textual description of the service and its policies followed by a table showing the detailed plans for the following year.

2.2.3 Public Library Service Standards and Best Value Performance Indicators. Introduced in 2001, the Public Library Service Standards represent, for the first time, a more detailed description of what is meant by “comprehensive and efficient” (for a summary of the 2006 Standards, see Appendix 2). A shorter version was issued in 2004 (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2004).

The level of the Standards were set based on current performance of all library services in these areas, with the Standard usually being set at the level of the top quarter of national performance.

How successful have they been? A sample analysis between 2002 and 2004 has shown encouraging improvements in the number of services that meet key Standards (see Table I).

Why have they been effective? Whilst there may be a degree to which they have provided a focus for the energies of managers, their real significance lies in their impact on CPA scores, as they are included within the Performance Indicators for the Culture Block.

2.2.4 Impact measures. Since the Standards primarily measure activity, rather than the impact of that activity, there has been a sustained attempt to develop more sophisticated impact measures to accompany the Standards and linked to the shared priorities agreed between national and local government.

The approach is to firstly identify robust research that demonstrates the impact of an activity – for example, that the Book Start scheme to introduce children to books at an early age increases both literacy and numeracy for those children when they start school. The impact measure then identifies the proportion of children benefiting from the initiative. At the time of writing, the impact measures have not yet been accepted.

2.2.5 Culture Block. In 2005, libraries were incorporated within the new Culture Block for scoring purposes. This included sport, arts and heritage (including museums) and was linked to improved performance indicators. Importantly, the previous lower scoring was dropped, meaning that the new Block is of equal weight to other areas of council services.

2.3 The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA)

Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries (see www.mla.gov.uk/index.asp), was established in 2000, absorbing the Library and Information Services Council (LISC), changing its name to the clearer Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) in 2004. MLA is a non-departmental public body (NDPB). Funding is provided by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

The organisation is managed by a Board, consisting of representatives from the sector and elsewhere. The current chair is Mark Wood, who is also Chair and Chief Executive of Independent Television News. Amongst other high profiles from the library sector, the Board includes Lynne Brindley, Chief Executive of the British Library, and Bob McKee, Chief Executive of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals.

Several well-known figures from the public library world have been recruited to senior positions, including the Chief Executive Chris Batt, previously head of Croydon Libraries and a frequent contributor to the then *Library Association Record*, before moving on to take charge of the People's Network project. Similar “names” have been recruited from the museums and archives domains.

2.3.1 Strategies. MLA's overall strategy is *Investing in Knowledge: A five Year Vision for England's Museums, Libraries And Archives* (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, 2004a). This briefly outlines the vision for the sector's role in:

	2002	2004
PLS1 (i) Proportion of households living within specified distance of a static library	55	62
PLS1 (ii) Proportion of households open during convenient hours	69	75
PLS3 (i) Aggregate opening hours per 1,000 population	23	50
PLS17 Annual items added through purchase per 1,000 population	45	72

Table I.
Percentage of authorities meeting the Standard in 2002 and 2004

- education, learning and skills;
- communities and creativity;
- the knowledge economy; and
- networking knowledge.

It places *Framework for the Future* together with the other domain strategies (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, 2001, 2004b).

It should be noted that MLA covers England, whilst Scotland (Scottish Library and Information Council), Wales (CyMAL; Museums Archives and Libraries Wales) and Northern Ireland (Library and Information Services Council) have their own equivalent bodies, with whom MLA works to liaise through the Joint Forum representing these bodies set up in 2003 (see www.mla.gov.uk/action/regional/devadmin.asp).

2.3.2 Regional Agencies. A notable feature of MLA is its strong emphasis on regional working. There is a regional MLA body (Regional Agency) for each of the nine English regions, the geographic boundaries corresponding to those of the Government Offices:

- East Midlands;
- East of England;
- London;
- North East;
- North West;
- South East;
- South West;
- West Midlands; and
- Yorkshire.

Each is an independent organisation (usually being both a registered charity and limited company, with their own Boards of Governors), but all receive funding from the national body (£8.5m in total for all Agencies in 2003-2004) and undertake business planning according to a Shared Planning Framework. In reality, each Regional Agency operates a delicate balance between independence and working within the national partnership.

The role of the Regional Agencies includes:

- advocating for libraries to bodies within their region, in particular the Regional Development Agencies;
- supporting the delivery of national programmes at regional level;
- identifying opportunities for investment; and
- gathering data at a regional level.

Set up between 2001 and 2004, the roots of each Regional Agency are very different according to the circumstances within that region. For example, some remain membership bodies. Of particular relevance to public libraries, some regions have continued to support library representative organisations, such as the London Library

Development Agency, to work in parallel with the MLA Regional Agency. Their internal structures also vary, some appointing specific library officers, whilst others adopt a completely cross-domain approach.

Until the referendum rejection of regional devolution in the North East in 2004, there seemed the prospect of Regional Agencies becoming more independent still, including the possibility that they would be funded by their regional representative bodies. Since then, although there continues to be a growth in the influence of regional bodies, the balance has tipped more in favour of working together and with the national MLA.

2.3.3 New MLA Partnership. During the course of 2005-2006, MLA and the Regional Agencies undertook a fundamental review of their activities and organisation. The review was partly influenced by the Gershon Review (HM Treasury, 2004a) (which seeks to reduce the cost of “back office” functions to release more resources for the “front line” of public services) and the Lyons Review (HM Treasury, 2004b) (which encourages government agencies based in London to relocate outside the South East).

The new MLA Partnership has been approved, with the Regional Agencies retaining their independent status but reporting to one Board. The management and work of the whole Partnership will be more co-ordinated, whilst retaining a degree of regional ownership. At the same time, the national MLA organisation has been restructured.

The Partnership’s Strategic Aims are:

- to increase and sustain participation;
- to put museums, libraries and archives at the heart of nation, regional and local life;
- to establish a world class and sustainable sector; and
- to lead sector strategy and policy development.

2.3.4 Key areas of cross-domain work. Before moving on to examine the Framework Action Plan, it may be useful to consider some aspects of MLA’s work that cuts across the three domains of libraries, museums and archives.

2.3.4.1 Inspiring Learning for All. Inspiring Learning for All is a framework for organisational development which places the user at the heart of the service (see www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk/). “Learning” is defined extremely broadly, to include any activity that leads to a learning benefit, such as simply borrowing a book! It recognises that people’s individual learning styles are very different, and that services should accommodate these.

ILFA can be used as a self-assessment tool, and/or a framework for planning. The framework checklists that are used for self-analysis use the “4 Ps” to focus on aspects of the service important to users:

- *people* – providing more effective learning opportunities;
- *places* – creating inspiring and accessible learning environments;
- *partnerships* – building creative learning partnerships; and
- *policies, plans, performance* – placing learning at the heart of the museum, archive or library.

It includes the Generic Learning Outcomes, a methodology for capturing evidence of the “softer” outcomes of much library activity, under the headings:

- knowledge and understanding;
- skills;
- attitudes and values;
- enjoyment, inspiration, creativity; and
- activity, behaviour, progression.

For data collection, it encourages the use of open-ended questions to obtain the often unexpected responses of users. Techniques are included on the site to then code these responses under the headings given above.

At a time when performance measurement is so often geared towards what we can measure easily (issues, visitors, etc.), the GLOs represent an opportunity to capture and promote a deeper understanding of the real impact of libraries on people’s lives.

2.3.4.2 Learning for Change: Workforce Development Strategy. MLA (see www.mla.gov.uk) has identified several key challenges for its Workforce Development Strategy (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, 2004a, b):

- the gap between the ethnic make up of the workforce and the communities they serve;
- low number of people with disabilities in the workforce; and
- ageing workforce population.

In response, the action plan proposes a range of actions such as positive action traineeships, leadership training and further research.

2.4 Framework for the Future *Action Plans*

Both *Framework for the Future Action Plans* (see Appendices 3 and 4 for summaries) have been funded by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport with MLA as the managing body (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2003; Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, 2008). Both versions have been consciously developed in partnership with the Society of Chief Librarians, as the plans need the support of the sector to succeed and have impact on the ongoing work of libraries beyond the lifespan of the project funding.

2.4.1 *Achievements so far*. Between 2003 and 2006, implementation of national programmes through the *Framework for the Future Action Plan* has achieved:

- a national marketing strategy for public libraries;
- publication of key advocacy resources;
- a national leadership programme, Leading Modern Public Libraries, with over 400 participants to date;
- 14 library peer reviews, which have provided support to individual library authorities and helped to improve services;
- revised Public Library Service Standards implemented;
- pilot impact measures that demonstrate how public libraries can contribute to achieving the Shared Priorities;

- clear understanding of efficiency challenges facing public libraries, the potential for change and first stage in implementing better stock procurement;
- strategic partnerships to support the work of libraries, including the BBC, IDeA and publishers;
- a range of national reading and learning programmes being implemented, including Vital Link, Extended Bookstart, etc.;
- People's Network Service providing a 24-hour online enquiry service (Enquire) and access to reading and information resources.
- practical support to enable libraries to engage with, listen and respond to communities, also enabling public libraries to attract significant lottery funding over the next three years;
- audit of library buildings completed to identify investment needs as the first stage in a national buildings strategy; and
- online resources to support library staff and managers developing or refurbishing buildings, and providing services to disabled people.

2.5 The Reading Agency

Although not part of the MLA Partnership, The Reading Agency is a charity whose role is strongly linked and several Framework projects are delivered by the Agency, with funding via MLA and elsewhere.

Its roles include:

- national programmes in libraries, including the Summer Reading Challenge, Chatterbooks reading groups and the Vital Link;
- partnerships – linking libraries to broadcasters, the book trade, the youth service, and others;
- research, policy and promotion – exploring and publicising the benefits of reading and libraries; and
- developing practical resources: training, toolkits, promotional materials.

2.6 Select Committee Report 2005

The Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee undertook a review of public libraries policy in 2005, taking into account the views of a wide range of stakeholders including a significant lobby arguing for a more bookshop style approach, focusing on core book lending services. The resulting report (House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2005) focussed on:

- the poor state of many library buildings, reporting that “A significant deterioration in the public library estate is (however) a scandal that must be rectified”; and
- the success of the People's Network and the danger of these services gradually ceasing to be free.

The report of the Select Committee, together with evaluation of the previous Framework Action Plan, has fed into the next round of the Plan, covering 2006-2008 (agreed by the Minister in May 2006).

2.7 Regional Framework Plans

The development of the MLA Regional Agency network and increased regional level working amongst libraries, Regional *Framework for the Future* planning and activities is emerging. These link regional to national planning and reflect the strengths and priorities of the individual regions.

In the North West, for example, the 2006-2007 Plan included activities from MLA North West, SCL and its sub-groups and the Time to Read reader development network. The main regional development priority in this plan is a major project based on Fulfilling Their Potential, aimed at improving the involvement of 11-19 year olds in services and advocating for the role of the sector in the key priority area of children and young people.

3. How successful have these developments been?

In 2004, former Waterstones bookseller Tim Coates published *Who's in Charge*, via the newly created lobbying charity, Libri (Coates, 2004)[3]. The report highlighted the decline in book issues, arguing that this is due to inefficient management combined with the distraction of providing new services such as internet access. It argued that councillors should be more proactive in ensuring a focus on books and bookshop-style efficiency.

Coates enjoyed some success in galvanising media attention, much of it critical of public libraries, with the headline-grabbing prediction that, at the current rate of decline in book issues, libraries would cease to exist by 2020. This sparked a number of journalists to reopen the "books versus computers" debate, typically indulging in rambling reminiscences about the dusty library of their childhood in "a northern English slum" (*The Times*, 2006). Nevertheless, although the problem of declining book issues remains, many of the wider indicators of the health of the public library world are very positive, and have, indeed, improved further since it was issued in 2004 (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, 2007, 2008):

- (1) Visits to libraries are increasing year on year after a period of steady reductions, largely, but not exclusively, due to the appeal of the People's Network:
 - 2001-2002: 318,155;
 - 2002-2003: 323,042;
 - 2003-2004: 336,951; and
 - 2004-2005: 339,708.
- (2) Spending on libraries has increased (net expenditure):
 - 2001-2002: £825,331,000;
 - 2002-2003: £878,171,000;
 - 2003-2004: £950,529,000; and
 - 2004-2005: £990,441,000.
- (3) Libraries are buying more books:
 - 2001-2002: 11,019,000;
 - 2002-2003: 11,959,000;
 - 2003-2004: 11,976,000; and
 - 2004-2005: 11,990,000.

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- (4) Library opening hours have improved (number of libraries open more than 60 hours per week):
- 2001-2002: 36;
 - 2002-2003: 54;
 - 2003-2004: 62; and
 - 2004-2005: 78.

These figures demonstrate the success of the whole public library network to the challenges of meeting the changing needs of modern society, from individual library staff and services, through the organisational and political structures at local, regional and national level. Furthermore, the public library world now has a much stronger regional and national framework of policies, plans and organisations to deliver them. And the next steps? Public librarians have often, rightly, complained that their value is not frequently enough recognised by key decision makers. A key role for the MLA Partnership is advocacy for libraries. *Framework for the Future* provides valuable policy and planning links between national priorities and delivery in individual services. Further work is already in the pipeline around providing evidence of libraries impact and linking this to key national, regional and local plans is a high priority for MLA.

Key current activities include:

- a high-profile Head of Libraries Policy has been appointed with national advocacy as a key objective;
- a research and evidence strategy is being developed; and
- a process of Regional Commentaries has been established by DCMS to bring together the agencies concerned with the whole Culture Block, improving co-ordination, enhancing partnership working with authorities and supporting increased self-assessment.

4. What does the government want from libraries?

The first sections of this paper ended with an attempt to gauge the success of a wide range of policies: how successful have these developments been? This section will look at who “owns” policy for libraries and asks “How do these policy initiatives translate into a picture of what libraries are for?”

The concepts of value for money and outcome focus mentioned above have within them the idea that a policy action should have some end in view. This may seem self evident, but both ideas present a real challenge: activity is not enough – results matter. If an authority is not clear about what those results should look like, then it cannot be clear if a given activity has actually benefited any users or customer.

It seems logical to start by looking at what policy statements and the objectives set for libraries say about what they are meant to achieve. This in turn will be used to attempt to define the nature of demand for public libraries – to say what they are for.

In reply to the 2004-2005 Select Committee report on public libraries (House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2005), the Minister for Culture said:

[Public Libraries] provide access for Reading for pleasure, to learning, knowledge, information, guided by skilled people in spaces which are or should be welcoming and neutral – free for use at will, without compulsion (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2006).

The Minister went on to stress the importance of the People's Network, and to state that:

Books remain at the core of libraries work. . .

The New Labour approach to libraries has been one that is common to a number of areas of its activity. It has set out a vision, set out a list of possible targets and in some instances given direct support to meet those targets. In others it has sought to use more limited support for pilot projects to inspire others to follow examples of best practice. Many public libraries might argue that the reality has been more coercive than that, but for the first time they have been handed a set of tools to tell their local government parents what it is the library does, and what it should be doing.

For the purposes of this discussion the "demand" aspects of *Framework for the Future* can be said to be:

- public libraries are important in wider community, cultural and social development;
- they are valuable vectors for the development of reading; and
- they are a part of developing IT awareness and participation.

This characterisation of "demand" is at a less detailed, more strategic level than that spelt out in PLSSs, and significantly it begins to define a concept of what sort of general "good thing" public libraries might be:

- they are good to have as they contribute to social and cultural development; and
- they are good to have to support efforts to develop education and participation in technological change.

4.1 Public Library Service Standards (PLSSs)

Discussed above, PLSSs are, in performance management terms, a definition of what a public library should be in terms of the government's vision for the service.

In summary, the primary features of a library service noted in PLS are:

- access to library buildings – proximity and opening hours;
- stock purchases;
- availability of ICT;
- book requests met;
- number of visits; and
- satisfaction rates.

4.2 Best Value Performance Indicators

According to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG):

Best Value provides the statutory basis upon which councils plan, review and manage their performance in order to deliver continuous improvement in all services and to meet the needs and expectations of service users (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2009a).

The Best Value process attempts to provide a review framework and assessment criteria for local government on the basis of a rigorous internal examination of the

libraries' role and functions combined with external assessment. If PLSSs represent the codification of one set of demands, then Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) represent another, closely related, set.

Here, the demand that is being measured is threefold:

- (1) the demand from central government that a local authority improves;
- (2) the perception from government that it should meet the needs of its users – however and by whom these are defined; and
- (3) the expectations of its users.

The Department for Communities and Local Government sets out their role in this area of local government in a way which illuminates the general role of BVPIs:

BVPIs provide a rounded view of local authority performance delivery. They are designed to:

- enable central government to monitor progress over a period of time;
- allow authorities to compare their performance against that of their peers;
- provide residents with information about the performance of their local authority. (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2009b).

Table II gives the 2005/06 Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) for cultural and related services. In comparison with other areas of local government, for example, housing, where the local authority must demonstrate that they meet at least 14 Best Value Performance Indicators these BVPIs are very tightly defined and cover a number of aspects of the service in great detail. Libraries would seem to be much less regulated in this way than housing departments, but it should be noted that the effect of BV220 is to push up the actual number of steps that must be met to comply.

Government interacts with libraries in three main ways:

- (1) by setting overall policy objectives and detailed plans – administered either directly or via intermediaries;
- (2) by setting performance targets for local authorities which include libraries; and
- (3) by setting specific standards for libraries, again either directly or via intermediaries.

Indicator	Description
BV114	The authority has a Local Cultural Strategy
BV118	Percentage of library users who found the book they wanted/reserved it and were satisfied by the outcome
BV119	Percentage of residents satisfied with the Authority's Cultural Services
BV220	Compliance against Public Library Standards ^a

Notes: ^aBV220 is divided into four sections: BV220i, number of PLSS the authority has complied with; BV220ii, general progress the authority has made against the PLSS from the previous financial year; BV220iii, where the PLSS are not met, the number of individual standards that authorities are within 4 per cent of achieving; BV220iv, provision to the general public apart from that offered in static libraries (i.e. mobile libraries and other service points as defined in PLSS1)

Table II.
Best Value Performance Indicators 2005/2006 for cultural and related services

It is worth noting that whilst the term “government” may mask a range of internal divisions and changes in personnel and viewpoint, once a policy statement or programme is initiated, for its lifetime that may be taken as a single definitive statement.

Taken as a whole, then, this interaction is a significant body of work, and sets the overall regulatory framework, and framework of strategic expectations in which libraries must function. Until the 1990s, this interaction has effectively been limited to setting an overall legislative framework, and setting the fiscal framework in which local authorities functioned. Now, sufficient is present to allow some general conclusions about what “government wants”.

First, it wants libraries to be part of an overall strategic approach to culture, education and leisure. This is of significance to libraries as it means that they may not in themselves be the focus of policy, not necessarily its only or even major vector.

Second, government wants libraries to perform a number of roles – it does not want them solely to lend books, for example. However, it does want them to be visited, and it does want books to be sought and borrowed. Libraries must also be places where ICT is available, and where education and self-development can happen.

Finally, it wants a clear demonstration that library end-users are satisfied with the service they receive. It is worth noting that this view acknowledges only two “customers” for libraries:

- (1) the end user; and
- (2) the government itself.

5. Public demand

The previous section has attempted to use published documentation to outline the nature of demand for (and demands on) public libraries from national government. It shows that one facet of this demand is the apparently simple proposition that library users should be stratified with the service offered, and that to government, these users are the general public (as opposed to the other user communities identified here – for example, local authorities and the library profession).

There is a wide range of evidence currently available to those wishing to interpret public demand:

- Taking Part – a new DCMS survey of participation in a wide range of cultural activities (see www.culture.gov.uk/Reference_library/Research/taking_part_survey).
- The General Household Survey, undertaken every three years to support CPA assessment, though this only deals with basic satisfaction with services.
- A wide range of surveys and consultation undertaken for specific national and regional projects, particularly by the MLA Partnership. Examples include the Bolton Museums, Libraries and Archives: An economic valuation from MLA North West (see www.mlanorthwest.org.uk/ourwork/researchanddatacollection/index.asp?id=511,89,11,89).
- Similar studies undertaken by individual library services.
- The national Public Library User Survey.
- Articles on users’ views or specific campaigns featured in the professional, national and local press.

5.1 Public Library User Survey

PLUS – Public Library User Survey – will be discussed here as the main and most detailed set of national level data available to anyone wishing to characterise end-user demand for public libraries. It is a nationally run survey of public library visitors. It is supported as a subscription service by the Institute of Public Finance, the trading arm of Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), and its format and results are closely allied to the needs of annual CIPFA statistics taken by libraries and PLS monitoring.

Most libraries will run PLUS in some, if not all, of their libraries annually, and will run the “junior” version, Children’s PLUS, at least once every three years. Both surveys use a nationally agreed and carefully thought out set of questions, backed by a methodology which allows any library authority to produce data of an acceptable standard.

PLUS is a survey of library visitors, so it is a self-selecting sample:

- PLUS does not measure non-users; and
- PLUS does not measure – except through its free text comments – aspirations for the service or potential demand. It is a measure of the services actually used.

5.1.1 National results. Taking an overview, what can the PLUS results say about public library demand? The Adult and Children’s versions use very similar methods, and in some respects for the general purposes of this paper their results can be taken together.

To judge if, in broad terms, users are satisfied with the service they are offered now, Table III compares satisfaction with elements of the public library service.

On the basis of this evidence, the public do seem to be largely satisfied with the library service they have in front of them. The largest dissatisfaction is with the most traditional aspect of the service – i.e. stock – with just less than one in five finding the service either adequate or unsatisfactory. Interestingly, next to this comes the newest service, one in ten rates ICT as either adequate or unsatisfactory.

These two areas would seem to be those in which improvements might be needed, whereas in broad terms satisfaction levels with staff and information provision are so high as to make the benefits of any additional resources or initiatives incremental at best.

5.1.2 Who uses public libraries?

Gender. Just under 60 per cent of adult public library users are female, 56 per cent of Children’s Plus respondents.

	Good/very good	Adequate	Poor/very poor
Overall	95	5	0.5
Books/other materials	81	17	2
Information/enquiry service	94	6	0.2
ICT	90	8	2
Staff helpfulness	98	25	0.2
Staff knowledge	96	4	0.2

Note: Figures shown are percentages

Table III.
Public Library User
Survey satisfaction
results

Age range. PLUS bands its 14 + users from 15-75 + . It is worth noting that with libraries regarding an “adult” as a customer of 16 + this may not actually fit with libraries’ own figures. Taking these bands:

- libraries are somewhat more successful at attracting the 5-15 year old segment of the population than might be predicted from population alone;
- just over 10 per cent of all adult users surveyed were under 24;
- those of working age – the 25-64 band – represent 61 per cent of the sample; and
- the over-65s represent 27 per cent of the sample – one adult user in four is over 65.

Comparing this to the background population, the results are shown in Table IV.

On the basis of the PLUS figures, public libraries are more successful than would be predicted on the basis of a straightforward sample of the adult population in attracting:

- those between 25 and 34 – by about 4-5 per cent;
- those aged 45 and 64 – by about 2 per cent; and
- those aged over 65 – by about 2 per cent.

They are less successful with:

- those aged under 20 – by about 3 per cent; and
- those aged 20-24 – by about 2 per cent.

Clearly, more of the library using population is older than is younger, as received wisdom would suggest. However, one small surprise is that libraries do seem more able to attract the 25s to 34s than we might perhaps expect.

Ethnicity. Only the adult survey asked this (Table V).

Again, it seems that public libraries attract a reasonable cross section of the population, although they perform somewhat less well in attracting people who described their ethnicity as black than with other groups.

Age range	PLUS	National over 15s ^a	National base
0-4	Children’s Plus 1999-2002 – 29 of those surveyed		6 overall population – 32 of under 15s
5-9	34		6.3- 33
10-15	37		6.6-35
15-19	4.8	c. 8	c. 6
20-24	5.4	c. 7.5	c. 6
25-34	12.6	c. 8	c. 7
35-44	17.3	c. 28	c. 22
45-54	15.4		
55-64	15.6	c. 29 ^a	c. 24
65-74	17.4	c. 10	c. 8.5
75 +	9.8	c. 9	c. 7.5

Table IV.
PLUS user characteristics
compared to national
population: age

Notes: Figures shown are percentages. ^aAged 45-64
Source: <http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk>

Employment status. For obvious reasons, this was asked only of adult respondents (Table VI).

Here, the broadly predictable picture from age and ethnicity breaks down. Libraries do not attract those who are working in numbers any where near that which their distribution would indicate. At one level this might be said to validate efforts to put resources into libraries to develop resources for returners to work and those interested in continuing education, but it should not be forgotten that it is not just the unemployed who need new skills.

5.1.3 What do respondents use libraries for? PLUS asks users to state what they did during their current visit to the library. As such, these PLUS data allow a comparison between the priorities set by government and the services actually demanded by users. It can also offer a potential corrective to pressure group statements from either side: do users really want more ICT/fewer books or do they continue to use libraries primarily as a source of “traditional” services?

Table VII gives the national figures for activity during the current library visit from the 2005/2006 PLUS.

From the figures shown in Tables VII and VIII, it seems that at *c.* 80 per cent of users are using the library for more than one sort of activity. This complicates simple statements about “what users want” or “what people think libraries are for”, but nevertheless some points do seem certain.

Allowing that lending and information seeking are “traditional” library activities (and that use of the internet is not information seeking) then around 68 per cent use traditional services – around two thirds of these for books. Just under 20 per cent seek

Group	PLUS	2001 Census
White	<i>c.</i> 90	<i>c.</i> 91
Mixed	<i>c.</i> 1	<i>c.</i> 1.3
Asian	<i>c.</i> 4.5	<i>c.</i> 4.6
Black	<i>c.</i> 1.5	<i>c.</i> 2.3
Chinese or other	<i>c.</i> 1	<i>c.</i> 0.9

Note: Figures shown are percentages

Table V.
PLUS user characteristics
compared to national
population: ethnicity

Status	PLUS UK excluding Scotland	2001 Census – England and Wales only
Full time employment	23	12
Part time employment	14.5	40.5
Self employed	5	8.2
All employed	32.5	60.7
Unemployed	5.5	3.4
Retired	37	13.6
P/T student	3.6	5 ^a
F/T Student	7.5	2.6
Looking after home/family	9.6	6.5

Notes: Figures shown are percentages. ^aEconomically inactive students

Table VI.
PLUS user characteristics
compared to national
population: employment
status

AP	Activity	Percentage of users
62,2	<i>Book based/lending services</i>	
	Borrow/return/renew book	64.9
	Borrow/return/renew AV item	28.3
192	<i>Information-related</i>	
	Seek information/find something out	22.6
	Read newspaper/magazines	15.7
	<i>ICT-related</i>	
	Use a computer	16.2
	Use internet	18.6
	<i>Facilities/events</i>	
	Use photocopier	7.2
	Attend event/exhibition	2.6
	Sit to work/study	14.1
Table VII. PLUS services used	Browse (target services not stated)	28.2
	Other	8.3

	Theme	Percentage overall use
Table VIII. PLUS services used ranked by demand	Lending activities	93.2
	ICT	34.8
	Information	28.4
	Facilities	23.8

information – rising if internet use is included. ICT is demanded directly by another 2 per cent.

5.1.4 The public and libraries. Using PLUS as the sole gauge of demand for libraries has some inherent problems, however its use here parallels that made of it by libraries, and hence one of the more significant channels of information into policy formation.

PLUS only measures what of the existing range of services users actually consumed on a given library visit, and if they found that satisfactory. Thus it cannot represent any strategic aspirations on the part of library users – so exact point for point comparisons with government demand are not necessarily possible. Conversely, its strength is that it measures take up.

With these caveats, some basic conclusions seem possible:

- Of PLUS respondents the majority used – demanded – the lending service offered by public libraries and two thirds of these wanted books. Hence, to the majority of PLUS users the main service demanded is book lending.
- Just over a third use ICT facilities. ICT use – an important facet of national planning – is a significant component of demand, but is heavily outweighed by more “traditional services”.
- Libraries are demanded for a range of services other than lending books, but at no point do these services appear to outweigh lending books.

6. Other perspectives

Librarians: We are not the proprietors of coffee shops or keepers of computers (Jefferson, 2008).

This paper has noted that librarians and the information profession are an audience for public libraries, and that they do want things of public libraries, but it is difficult to quantify just what this might be as the circumstances in which their positions are given differ widely. For example, should we take what we have heard in a library staffroom as more representative than the views set out in a paper from the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP)?

Some authorities have chosen radically to restructure their public libraries provoking comments such as that quoted above and CILIP itself has issued a full report on the role of professionals in public libraries, and is linking this to the overall question of service in public libraries (Conway, 2008).

In the context of this paper, the report is of significance as it represents the highest profile statement of views on behalf of the library profession for some time. It is worth noting, though, that its viewpoint is that of “librarians” not necessarily all library staff. The report draws on research with ten public library authorities, and notes:

... demand led provision focussed on the user as customer, rather than client or indeed citizen, is the norm. This leads to what has been termed a “retail experience” (Conway, 2008, p. 18).

It sees professionals as providing “case work” in support of a wide range of educational and recreational/leisure needs, and notes a decline in this function and with it the ability of public libraries to cater for “broader social need”.

The juxtaposition of the terms “customer”, “client” and “citizen” is an interesting one, as is the distinction between “demand” and “need”. Implicit in this is the assumption that a purely transactional “customer” actually wants or needs more from the library than they are making manifest by direct demand.

In endorsing professional standards of service, CILIP appears to present librarians as guardians of a wider role for libraries, and argues for the wider involvement of library managers – seen as professional librarians – in shaping local government policy for libraries. Its position is that the inclusion of libraries in wider areas of service has reduced their ability to contribute to a wider agenda, as well as limiting access to opportunity for library professionals.

What is unclear from this report, and from professional comments such as that given in *Update* quoted above and seen on, for example, The Good Library Guide blog (Good Library Guide, 2007) is why the view of library professionals should be preferred, or indeed how needs are to be defined against demand. Equally it is not clear that in speaking for professionals in this way, the report, or indeed CILIP represents the majority of those who work in libraries, and, as such can be expected to have a “demand” for them both as workplaces (librarians’ careers are not the only careers in libraries) and as part of the community.

Some general themes in the librarians’ views suggest themselves:

- libraries should remain in being;
- libraries should respond to customers needs rather than expressed demand;
- libraries should provide free access to knowledge and entertainment;

- libraries should form part of an integrated approach to social development; and
- libraries should maintain “professional standards”.

In addition to this, alongside what might be termed “content” issues, the UK government and the UK library profession have also been working on what might be termed “packaging”.

Traditionally, this has been something that librarians have shied away from, tainted as it seems to be with a lack of substance and a concentration on show, yet both audiences do agree that for either agenda (or both) to be successful users must come into libraries. For the library profession there remains the question of how far down a traditional picture can be sacrificed to seeing users through the door. At the time of writing, CILIP is about to host the Public Library Authorities Conference for 2009. Its theme is “Impact, Inclusion, Information: the value of libraries in their communities”. With topics including digital communities, governance and the importance of libraries in the Third World, it will be interesting to see how far the professional view of libraries’ role shows the influence of end users.

6.1 The Reading Agency

We believe that reading can transform people’s lives. The more you read the more you know. The more you read, the more you imagine. The more you read, the better you understand, and the better you can connect to people. Our mission is to inspire more people to read more (Reading Agency, 2009).

The Reading Agency specialises in developing reading activities in libraries in partnership with agencies such as the Arts Council England, publishers and other funders. Headline activities include:

- The annual Summer Reading Challenge: a well-established and successful programme for children and young people, run during the school summer holidays. Most public library services participate.
- Love Libraries: a more recent marketing campaign to get everyone excited about what public libraries can do for readers. This has featured library “make overs” as well as centrally produced publicity materials.

Although the focus is on “traditional” reading and book services, the approach is very modern, with an emphasis on activities, marketing and working with partners at national and local level. Further details can be found on their web site at www.readingagency.org.uk

6.2 Alternative views

One of the more controversial characters involved in the debate about the future of public libraries in recent years has been Tim Coates, a former Director of booksellers Waterstones. Notable for the pamphlet “Who’s in charge: responsibility for the public library service” (Coates, 2004) and numerous media appearances, his message has been that libraries should focus on books, adopting the more efficient practices of the book trade. He was able to achieve considerable media and political profile for his views:

Alongside Tim Coates, the charity Libri was established, supporting and developing these views. Libri described its aims as:

... to encourage a vibrant and relevant public library network, focused on its prime responsibility of providing books the public with a good choice of books for reading and reference. A network where each local library can develop as a centre of community involvement, and which everyone in the local community wants to use (Libri, 2007).

The Coates/Libri perspective has often been seen as opposed to the Government vision, expressed by *Framework for the Future* and MLA, which proposes a broader remit encompassing community development, information and ICT. Whilst there remain fundamental differences, the two sides were able to find common ground on the need for efficiency savings, particularly in the area of stock purchasing which has become a major area of development for MLA. Tim Coates has retained a strong interest in the role of public libraries commenting on the most recent set of proposals from the DCMS (Coates, 2009).

Further evidence of reconciliation was provided by the announcement that Libri will close, citing development of the MLA *Framework for the Future* Action Plan as providing, “real hope” that MLA can “develop a workable strategy for significant improvement”.

An interesting side note here is that if the coming together of these two views is an indicator, then “efficiency savings” and “significant improvement” can be seen as near synonyms for at least two interest groups. This tallies well with calls for value for money in public services noted above. However, value for money as discussed by the Audit Commission has an explicit assumption that costed options will be put to service users: it is not evident that either the MLA or the Libri view takes this approach. Both make the assumption that their proponents have a commonly acceptable and accepted view and represent what library users actually aspire to.

6.3 *Alternative views of libraries*

This section has presented a sample of some differing perspectives on the role of libraries, and hence differing demands on libraries.

Wider demand – in terms of expressed opinions in the media – has not been sampled, and varies with the context and viewpoint of the commentator. In general, the view might be characterised as set out at the start of this article: public libraries are a vaguely defined “good thing” associated with good books and learning. This would appear to be an area for useful future research, as would views from within education at all levels.

In some senses, whilst more focussed, The Reading Agency takes a position along these general lines, seeing libraries as vectors for the development of a love of reading and of reading skills. This is certainly one aspect of the government view, but it is only one, and the Reading Agency position does not necessarily look at roles outside its brief.

Although appearing radical at the time, Tim Coates’ and Libri’s views bore more on how libraries should be run – cost effectively and concentrating on “core” services – than on what libraries should do. The position held no fundamental critique of the existence of public libraries.

As sampled here, the professional view of libraries would appear to go further than the others in this section. CILIP acknowledges a wide role for all forms of library, and particularly for public libraries, but retains a strong belief in their fundamental importance as entities and in the need to retain a high level of skills amongst staff at all

levels. In this it would appear to be paralleling views expressed by both government and by PLUS respondents: libraries should be staffed by knowledgeable, appropriately trained people.

7. Conclusion

Do library users demand what the Government wants them to have? Tables IX and X juxtapose some of the more general conclusions reached from a survey of measures of library demand. As they illustrate, when audiences are combined with the types of measure, a sequence of intention, or desire for libraries from the strategic aim – as given in *Framework for the Future* – down to the individual user’s outcome can be formed.

This seems to show that there is nothing inherently incompatible about the two sets of demands – that from users and that from government – yet the nuancing is quite different. Library users do use ICT. Government does want libraries to have ICT and for it to be used. This does not, however, necessarily mean that faced with choices library users would make these choices in the same way as central government might.

Part of the issue here is the lack of direct, published testing at a national level of users’ (and non-users’) reactions to the changes in libraries brought about by

Measure	Audience represented	Libraries are about:
PLSS	Central and local government	Accessible, visited facilities, with public IT. Book stock, successful information provision and helpful knowledgeable staff
BVPIs	Central and local government	Books and visitors through the door. Good levels of satisfaction
<i>Framework for the Future</i>	Central government	Libraries play a role in building communities, culture and literacy – both conventional and IT
PLUS	Library users	Books, well regarded staff and physical environment.

Table IX.
Measures of library demand

Customer	Needs
Central government	Libraries working as part of overall strategy
Local government	Libraries contribute to overall best value/attainment of PIs
Practitioners	Libraries should remain in being, free at the point of demand and be responsive to demand Libraries should support a range of reading related activities Libraries should be cost-efficient
End users	Libraries should have books, offer a pleasant environment and be staffed by knowledgeable, helpful people

Table X.
Statements about demand by user community

government initiatives. Taking PLUS as a guide, library users do not seem to demand the degree in interlinked ICT and educational focus that might be seen to be part of government policy. They want books to borrow in a pleasant setting. There is nothing in any of the policy documents reviewed here that means that they cannot have this *per se*. What is untested, and where there would appear to be a gap in perceptions, is if there is a real demand for the sort of library that could result from choices being made to allocate resources to just one strand – perhaps the dominant strand – in the vision for libraries. Equally, if users are using libraries to do what is envisaged in policy, does it matter to a policy-making audience that this may only be incidental?

Pressure to conform to one vision may force library authorities into models of libraries which responds to designated needs, rather than realised demands, and so it may be that now, and in future, library users will be given the service that it has been decided they need, rather than that they want.

At present there does seem to be broad agreement on the general objectives and functions of libraries. It seems that the two “sides” are in broad alignment, but that this may be more a matter of good fortune and perhaps the generalised nature of the discussion than through careful planning and deep consultation. Given that policy is being driven by wider, top-down objectives, it is fortunate that this does seem to accord with the wider demand. Furthermore, because there is no element of market segmentation (apart from children), the picture of demand is a very broad brush one which may hide considerable dissatisfaction in certain quarters. There is anecdotal evidence of this at the extremes: traditionalist book-lovers and ICT-favouring teenagers (who may be conspicuous in this debate by their absence). A proper debate (which may come through Local Area Agreements) and more sophisticated market segmentation may serve to give a more detailed picture of the alignment between government policy and public demand.

Notes

1. “The way in which the national expectations are met [...] should be entirely a matter for local authorities and their partner organisations” (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2003, p. 14, section 7.12).
2. “These national offers must however be tailored to local circumstances” (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2003, p.44, section 7.10).
3. Another notable, critical report is Leadbetter (2003).
4. Intended to include “virtual” visits to library web sites. However, ongoing difficulties in agreeing a definition mean that this has not yet been included.

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Appendix 1. Summary of *Framework for the Future*

Scene-setting chapters on:

- "The Position of Libraries", celebrating "historic strengths, future potential" but admitting to "Constraints and challenges"; and
- "Libraries' Modern Mission" to renew through evolution, public value, distinctiveness and local interpretation of national programmes in order to meet the mission based on the three themes developed in the next three chapters.

Books, reading and learning:

- Reading is important not just for books, but also the internet, and is linked to participation in social and cultural life.
- The importance of developing reading skills in very young children is highlighted, and libraries are encouraged to participate in the Sure Start programme, as well as working more closely with schools, supporting students in further/higher education and working with the adult literacy.

Digital citizenship:

- Libraries have an important role in tackling the "digital divide".
- A leading national role is identified for Resource to develop services, suggestions including national content and enquiry services.

Community and civic values:

- Perhaps the least well developed section, with community described as "an elusive, intangible quality".
- Focus on making library buildings "fit for purpose".

Delivering change:

- Greater recognition by central and local government.
- Stronger leadership.
- Better performance management.
- New relationship with the business community.

Appendix 2. Summary of current Standards (2006)

- PLS 1 Proportion of households living within specified distance of a static library.
- PLS 2 Aggregate scheduled opening hours per 1,000 population for all libraries.
- PLS 3 Percentage of static libraries providing access to electronic information resources connected to the internet.
- PLS 4 Total number of electronic workstations available to users per 1,000 population.
- PLS 5 Percentage of requests for books met within seven, 15 and 30 days.

- PLS 6 Number of library visits per 1,000 population[4].
- PLS 7 Percentage of users 16 and over who view their library as “very good” and “good” in the Public Library User Survey.
- PLS 8 Percentage of users under 16 who view their library service as “good”.
- PLS 9 Annual items added through purchase per 1,000 population.
- PLS 10 Time taken to replenish lending stock.

Appendix 3. Framework Action Plan 2004-2006: summary

Work Package 1. Building capacity to deliver transformation:

- 1.1 Develop and promote the role and contribution of public libraries through a clear vision supported by effective advocacy and communication.
- 1.2 Build libraries’ capacity to improve through better quality of leadership and workforce skills.
- 1.3 Implement innovative solutions to achieve maximum impact from available resources.
- 1.4 Achieve excellent planning and quality assurance systems to ensure sustained improvement.

Work Package 2. Books, reading and learning:

- 2.1 Promote literacy skills and an appetite for reading and learning.

Work Package 3. Digital citizenship:

- 3.1 Provide access to the services people need through effective use of ICT.
- 3.2 Contribute to the achievement of e-government (UK online) targets for service take-up and audience engagement.

Work Package 4. Community and civic values:

- 4.1 Deliver an inclusive service that reflects and helps build cohesive communities.
- 4.2 Provide library premises that meet the needs of twenty first century communities.

Appendix 4. Framework Action Plan 2006-2008: Summary

Theme 1. Telling the story:

- 1.1 Implement the public libraries national marketing strategy and plan.
- 1.2 Further develop strategic partnerships with, for example, the BBC.

Theme 2. Building communities:

- 2.1 Ensure public libraries are accessible and responsive to the communities they service – implement BIG Lottery Fund Community Libraries Programme (with currently £80 million earmarked), work to simplify membership procedures.
- 2.2 Improve public library buildings as community spaces – develop a strategy for improving buildings, promote good design.

Theme 3. Developing capacity and improving performance:

Public libraries

- 3.1 Use performance management tools to improve services including further revision of the Public Library Service Standards.
- 3.2 Facilitate improvement in those authorities most in need – including further Peer Reviews.
- 3.3 Maximise spending on frontline service delivery through efficient ways of working – particularly the national approach to stock purchase.
- 3.4 Develop leadership and workforce capacity at every level – further leadership training and development, “Their Reading Futures” reader development training.

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Theme 4. Modernising customer services:

- 4.1 Improve reading and learning services – wide range of activities, mainly continuing and developing activities in the 2004-2006 Plan.

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