

Who's in charge?

Responsibility for the Public Library Service

A report by Tim Coates

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Libri

Charity for Libraries

Author's note

I am grateful to the Laser Foundation and the Libri Trust for commissioning, providing funds for and distributing this work and further to the Robert Gavron Foundation for their contribution to the costs. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of LISU and BML in the gathering of information.

I owe especial thanks to Hampshire County Council who gave access to and discussed their financial and performance figures which are quoted. I must stress that the conclusions I have reached from both the Hampshire and the national figures are entirely my own; I have not asked for Hampshire's endorsement and the recommendations for action are not intended specifically for Hampshire, but for all councils. Whether Hampshire would accept them in toto or in part is for Hampshire County Council to decide.

Errors and omissions are entirely of my making, although the numbers quoted are from the published sources.

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Foreword by

Councillor John Waddington, Executive Member, Recreation and Heritage, Hampshire County Council;
Bernard Naylor, Chair, the Laser Foundation; and
Kiffer Weisselberg, Chair, the Libri Trust.

Tim Coates in this report has brought new perspectives to the operation of public libraries. Some of his views are readily welcome; some will be more difficult for those in the library world to embrace. He finds weaknesses in the service, but he also offers solutions to the problems he has identified. He says himself that this is a working paper which he hopes will lead to further consideration and action. In the pursuit of renewal of the public library service we are pleased to endorse that view and encourage his work and hope it will lead to change and improvement.

The funders, in particular, are grateful to Hampshire County Council for their encouragement of this study. In response to such generosity, it is important to re-emphasise the author's comment that nothing in the report implies commitment from Hampshire.

JW
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Executive Summary

- 1 In the past seven years, use of museums and archives in this country has doubled.¹ Since visitors have been recorded, use of the public library service has fallen each year until 2003/4, for which figures are yet to be fully reported. In the past seven years of decline in use, funding of the library service by local councils has risen by 25%.²
- 2 In the library service there is so much good work in progress to introduce reading to those who are excluded and to those who are isolated. Libraries have always been a centre for learning through life. However, today's reality is that if we do not address the fundamental structural problems of the library service, there may be no libraries to provide these excellent services to readers in ten or fifteen years' time. Those who are responsible for libraries must change what they are doing, and the way they approach their work. Change in the library service requires change in the library profession and in the way in which library professionals are managed by councils.
- 3 This independent report is a working paper which takes a very broad view of the issues, identifies the problems of the library service and lays out that which needs to be addressed. It cannot and does not offer a prescriptive solution to every single question raised. It is intended as a first step in what must be an urgent programme of action.
- 4 The report finds that those responsible in local councils for managing the library service have lost users because, while they have focused effort on some particular needs, they have not been able to
 - a Respond to the urgent public requirements of a library: the need for a broad range of books and reading material; the need for libraries to be open at times when users are able to visit; the need for the entire community to find libraries to be clean, welcoming places to visit and in which to study;
 - b Devote the resources needed to meet these requirements;
 - c Control costs, improve productivity and maintain value for money for taxpayers;
 - d Bring continuous improvement to operating systems and management;
 - e Report to and involve their elected councillors in the need to allocate resources and measure service in any way adequately. As a consequence councillors have not been made fully aware of the extent of the public dissatisfaction and decline in use of the service. For this reason, councillors have been unable to fulfil their duties and have not insisted on improvement where they should have done so.
- 5 This report also finds that, while the DCMS and the Audit Commission have recognised some of these problems and proposed many initiatives to remedy them, all these proposals have been ineffective:
 - a Because they did not sufficiently recognise the decision making processes that operate within councils, and
 - b They did not use their authority to insist upon improvement.
- 6 This report recommends areas of action for the attention of councils. In particular it calls on councils to commit themselves over a number of years, and, without increasing overall funds, to:
 - a Treble expenditure on books and reading material.
 - b Increase opening hours by 50%.
 - c Institute a programme of library redecoration and redesign.Councils should, by careful planning, be able to achieve this reallocation of resources by improved productivity and the introduction of new systems and methods of working.
- 7 The report emphasises the essential role played by "friends of libraries" and other library "contacts" in the community and calls for councils to provide these groups with clearer, more understandable information about the local library service.
8. The report also proposes ways in which Government could support a programme of change designed to bring about these improvements.

¹ Information from the website of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, March 2004

² See page 5. Source: CIPFA / LISU

Recommendations

- 1 **Local Councils** should follow a strategy as described in this report, including action plans, from pages 14 - 22. Within the text are specific suggestions of those areas where several councils can work together to bring improvements.
- 2 The national infrastructure of the library service should be reviewed. **The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS); the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and the Museum, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and other appropriate bodies** should act on the recommendations on pages 23 -25. This work requires a senior level of project management together with the influence and challenge of experts who have experience other than working in libraries.
- 3 **The Audit Commission** should act on the recommendations on page 24.
- 4 There is a need for a body of “pathfinder library services” which adopt similar approaches and share the progress they make with each other and with outsiders who have experience of other forms of service to the public. Councils should participate in this work which would properly be led by Local Councillors who should be supported through this programme of change by a project team appointed by the Minister responsible. **Such a project should be funded by central Government (DCMS and ODPM) and those charities which concern themselves with libraries. The project would take at least 3-5 years to complete.**
- 5 **User Groups and Friends of libraries** should act on the recommendations on page 25.
- 6 The “Peer Group performance” programme initiated by the Government, and intended to improve the management of council library services should involve and receive significant input from **people with experience and expertise obtained outside the library service.**

Introduction

- 1 The British, in common with people all over the world, have an ever-increasing need to read and to have access to information. This comes as societies communicate more and strive to make education more accessible. The presentation of the written word in various media has been, for the past two decades, at the forefront both of developing technology and of high quality publishing and retail marketing. The use of books, magazines and newspapers has been as central to this growth as the use of the internet. The increased interest in reading is occurring in all age groups and in all corners of society. Public libraries, free of subscription, have existed for 150 years in this country to help all people meet these needs.
- 2 The Government has recognised the potential of libraries to play a series of additional roles in society. This report will not re-present this work, but recognises its importance as described by the Minister of State in the House of Lords: "One of the main things that libraries can do to make a real difference to people's quality of life is the promotion of reading and informal learning, and indeed of formal learning. Framework for the Future³ identified the learning offers which libraries will make to the community and which will be marketed as national activities. Those are: early years services, namely Bookstart, book bags, and encouraging parents to share books with children from an early age; learning for young people, which involves the Positive Activities for Young People programme for the vulnerable eight to 19-year-olds, and to steer them towards reading. That is the work of the Reading Agency, which is particularly concerned with literacy targets and opening up the world of the creative imagination to people whose homes, I am afraid, are book-free zones..."⁴
- 3 The public library service is held in high esteem by the general public and for it they pay more than £1bn⁵ each year. Nevertheless, where one would expect use of free access to reading material to have grown, in the past ten years the number of visitors each year to libraries has declined by 21%; the number of books borrowed has fallen by 35%; and the national cost of the service has increased by 39%. The combination of these factors means that the cost of each visit to a library has nearly doubled. The expenditure on reading material has fallen to 9% of the total funds available.⁶
- 4 Those responsible in both local and central government for managing the public library service have not been able to prevent the continued long-term decline of the use of public libraries.
- 5 At a national level, the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) and its equivalents in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have responsibility but no effective executive authority or power to implement new ways of thinking about and operating libraries. The DCMS's report 'Framework for the future of the library service' and the action plan⁷ to implement it described the Government's view of the role of public libraries but were both conceived without sufficient reference to the expectations or expressed need of the public and the reasons why they do or do not currently choose to use libraries.
- 6 Lack of co-ordination between departments of Central Government and between Central and Local Government in their attempts to bring about improvement has resulted in good plans which in part have failed because of unsuccessful communication and understanding of the practical and budgetary issues which face local managers and councils.
- 7 At local level, councillors carry responsibility for the service and allocate funding for it but they need to exert more influence over the quality of service and give stronger direction and leadership. Performance management is poor and planning is disconnected from the preparation of budgets. The extent and nature of the problems are such that the heads of library services do not have the authority to act and resolve them. Because costs in other areas are difficult to reduce, whenever savings are needed it is the book budget along with opening hours and buildings maintenance which bear the brunt of cuts. Alternatively, library closures are proposed, even though these measures inevitably result in a reduction in service to the public. Cost control is not directed so as to improve or maintain the service, but rather to avoid making difficult decisions with which public servants feel it unfair to task their staff. In contrast to other sectors, local councils readily employ more people, but are reluctant to find ways to reduce staff costs or improve productivity even when public service is seriously at risk. So few books have been purchased for such a long time that the whole national public collection of library books is now inadequate, making a description of

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the public library as the “University of the Street Corner” a gross overstatement.⁸ The platform on which the Government had hoped to build its beneficial and inclusive services lacks the structure to support this load.

- 8 Faced with a multitude of policies and initiatives both from their own council and central Government, each library authority must unpick the knot of priorities in order to operate a service for its customers. This report recommends how each authority should meet these challenges, and face up to the climate of decline and the requirement for change.
- 9 The key aspects of the programme of recommended actions described later in the report are these:
 - The councillor responsible for the library service is clearly identified as the individual who leads, makes priorities and sets the standards for the library team and monitors performance.
 - The intention is to bring about change without significantly increasing the running costs of the service.
 - Priorities for the service are defined by known library user needs:
 - Attractive, welcoming, accessible and safe buildings, designed to meet the library needs of all sections of the community and able to act as study centres;
 - An extensive and wide range of books, computers, reference works, electronic databases, newspapers and magazines selected to meet the needs of all sections of the community whether they are currently library users or not;
 - Long opening hours from early morning to late evening and including Sundays; improved access for those who may be in any way at a disadvantage; and mobile libraries and home services which seek out the remote and less mobile in the community.
- 10 These are the essential preliminaries not only to an overall improvement in the library service but also to providing resources for outreach and reader development for those sections of the community who might not currently use their library, but for whom libraries could be a most useful resource.
- 11 By setting local user-based performance targets, the plan provides for improved performance measurement; improvements to library design and facilities; better management practices including the increased empowerment of local library managers; more efficient book purchasing, labelling and cataloguing procedures; better selection of stock; improved professional practices and training which equips staff to meet library user needs. The plan also means making the difficult decisions which are sometimes avoided by library authorities and which will enable a fundamental re-allocation of resources for materials in order to improve the quality of service to all library users.

The recommendations acknowledge that bringing about these improvements requires fundamental and long term change to existing practices and will require the most careful management.

³ Framework for the future of the library service DCMS 2003

⁴ Hansard 17 March 2004

⁵ The total figure for 2001/2 was £1,067m which includes £136k annual revenue charge for capital costs

⁶ Data from LISU, the Library and Information Statistics Unit, which in turn comes from returns made by local councils to CIPFA, the professional body which sets standards for public finance administration

⁷ “Vision to Action” DCMS/Resource (MLAC), 2003

⁸ “The People’s network” DCMS/Resource (MLAC), 1999/2000



PART ONE

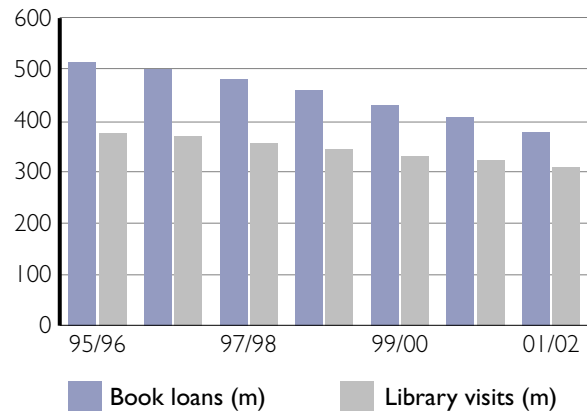
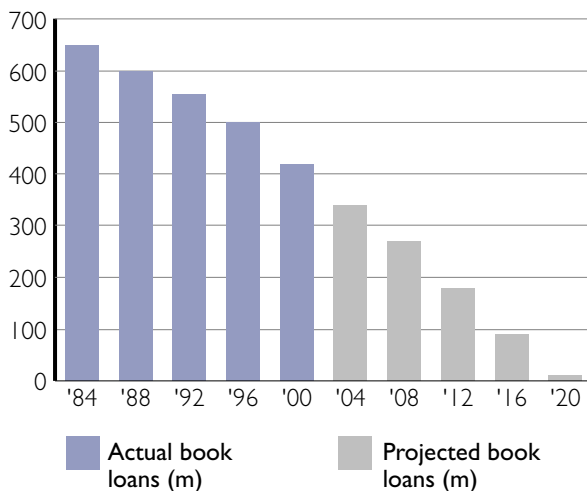
The national library service

Libraries are a relatively small part of the operation of any Local Authority and are perceived to present few, if any, problems or difficulties compared to the major issues such as housing and education. Libraries are generally only a source of taxpayers' overt concern if there is a particular local issue: a proposal to close or re-site a library, for example. Many councillors accept that management of libraries should be left to the professionals; if the library professionals do not highlight problems, then there are no problems to fix and management time can be focused on areas where problems are more evident.

Councillors are often only aware of the public response to the library service through polls that put libraries among the most popular of a council's services and through statistical surveys of users (rather than non-users).

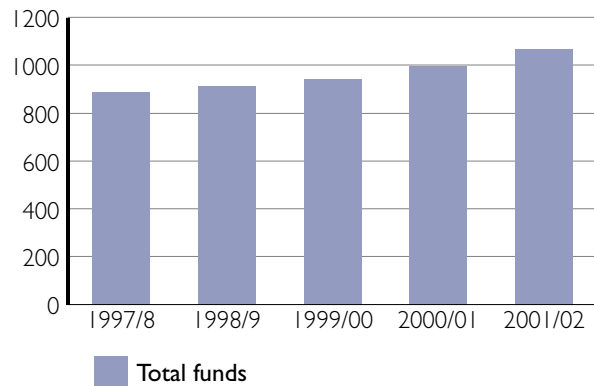
However, these sources mask both the serious decline in use of the service and its increasing cost and consequent deterioration in value for money.

The Audit Commission in its report: "Building Better Libraries"⁹ highlighted the dramatic rate of decline in use and predicted that unless changes are made, libraries will effectively have stopped being used within 20 years.



In parallel with this decline in usage, costs continue to increase. The Library and Information Statistics Unit recorded last year that the overall expenditure on the service throughout the UK has increased by around 25% over the past five years to £1bn pa in 2001/2.¹⁰

In this case we do not need to set the parameters for assessing value for money in the library service. In simple terms, if a service is without separate charge and the public decides not to use it, then the service is *de facto* without any value to these individuals. By definition, therefore, where visits and usage are declining, so also is value for money.

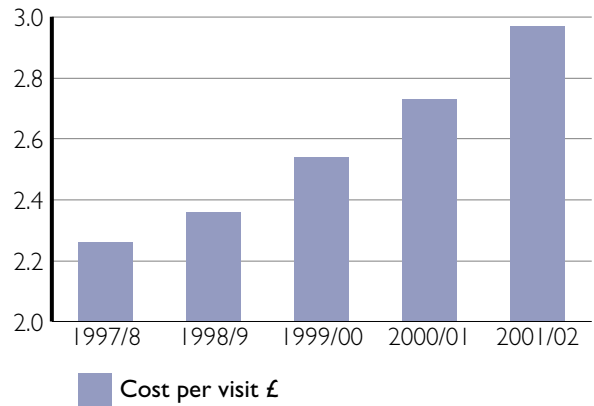


The decline in use measured over the same period as these increased costs has resulted in a catastrophic decline in the value for money, measured as the cost of a visit. The escalation of costs coupled with falling numbers of users has meant that the cost of each library visit has now increased by

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more than one third since 1997. The number of visitors continues to fall; costs continue to escalate; so that by 2001/2 a library visit cost £2.92, representing a reduction in value for money of over 31% since 1997/8 - 19% in real terms.

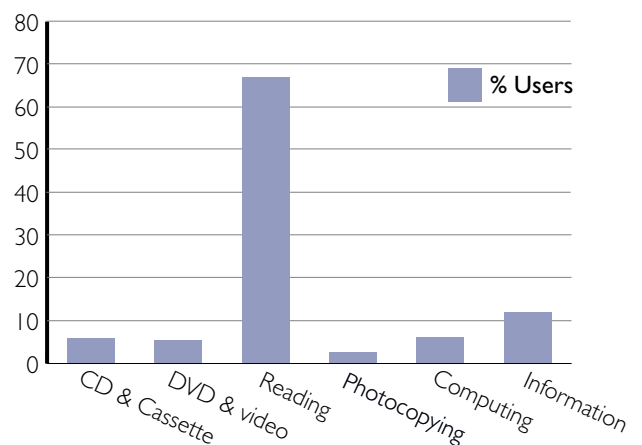
All of this information is publicly available, and in response there have been many initiatives¹¹ and reports in recent years from departments of central government on aspects of the public library service¹². The focus of these has been to persuade library managers to plan effectively, to operate to higher standards and to improve the value for money they give. Yet initiatives have not been effective and recommendations have not been implemented: value for money has decreased, and the number of visitors to libraries continues to reduce¹³.



Because the number of users and borrowers has gone down, library managers appear to have started to believe that the public no longer want libraries as they used to be, i.e. for books and reading; they believe that initiatives should rather be focused on outreach to non users or to developing reading skills among those who are disadvantaged. These are valuable and important programmes, which must be protected but they are not what, in market research,¹⁴ the majority of the public say they want. The library service has to order its resources and priorities so that it addresses all its requirements in due proportion. It is because the majority are being neglected in the pursuit of the minority that so many people find nothing useful in libraries, and have ceased to use them.

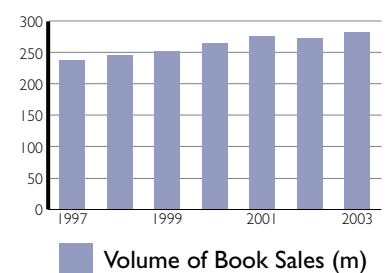
It is unfortunate that discussions about renovation of the library service become polarised so that those who campaign for and develop outreach, or information technology are somehow set against those who call for an improved range of books. Of course this is nonsense. All of these things must be provided, and if they are to be done, they must be done properly and in a thoroughly professional manner. That is what the public are entitled to demand for the funds which they pay. That is why after many decades of emphasis on matters other than books, there is an enormous need to restore balance, and the importance of the book collections has to be re-emphasised.

Indeed, the results of surveys do not show a decline in the desire for books among library users. The most recent (2001/2) Public Library User Survey,¹⁵ which by definition only surveys current library users and does not include those members of the public who have deserted the library service, shows that reading – overwhelmingly – is still the prime reason for anyone to visit a library.



This eagerness for reading and for books in general is confirmed by data from the general book trade where sales of books continue to rise rapidly. Since 1997, the number of books sold has increased by some 19%¹⁶. One explanation for this increase is the relatively high level of retail innovation which characterises today's High Street bookselling environment.

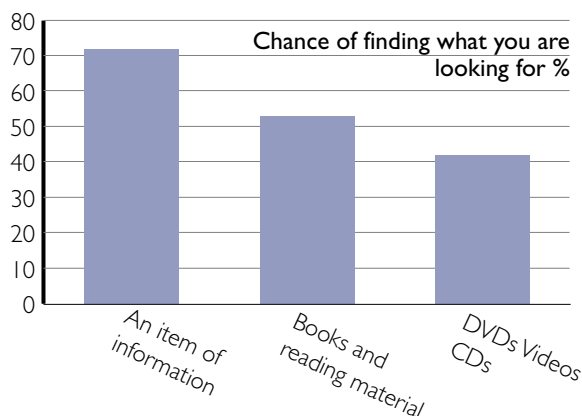
Not only are ranges of books deeper and wider than they traditionally have been but bookshops have focused on making their premises delightful welcoming places to visit: open all hours; regular author events; comfortable furniture; tea and coffee facilities. The development of systems and services by Amazon has transformed the ability to provide rapid home delivery of readers'



special requests. This is not to say that public libraries should slavishly copy the retail book trade, which itself provides far from perfect service, but there are important lessons which could help arrest the decline of public libraries.

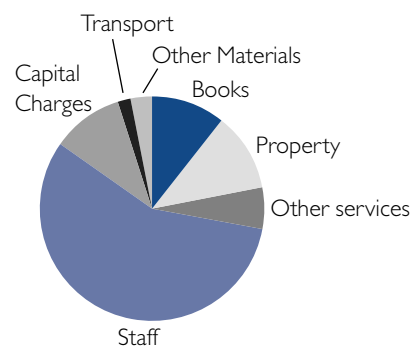
To give just one simple example: a major influence on any library user is the likelihood of finding what one is looking for when one visits; the near 70% of library users who want to read have a bare 1 in 2 chance of finding the book for their purpose¹⁷.

No bookshop or indeed any shop would survive if it operated to such standards. Figures of less than 90% are normally unacceptable, and if a trip to a library is not to result in a frustrating and fruitless search, libraries must build up their book stocks to match user expectations.



The Public want libraries as they always have been, and the reasons they do not use them can be seen in the way the library budget is spent. Books, on average, account for 9% of the total funds available in each council for the library service, a proportion which has fallen in recent years and is mirrored by the decline in library use. Although Staff costs take up more than 50% of the budget, the staff is not deployed in extending opening hours so that libraries are open when users can use them – after work, and on Sundays.

Thus the reason the Public is stopping visiting libraries is because their local libraries have poor selections of books and reading material, they have short opening hours and they are often inconveniently situated, dilapidated and, even, unsafe to work in. The public does not want a new kind of library; they just want a good efficient library that is up to date and pleasant to use. The Government and all local councils rightly see the important role the public library should play in helping people to learn throughout their lives and to be able to use information provided more and more on computers. Yet this ambition can only be fulfilled if the local library is already seen as useful and welcoming.



Reports on the library service have been directed at officers and professionals directly responsible. However, the principal finding of this report is that many of the changes for which those reports call fall outside the authority of chief librarians: in reality only councillors and senior council officers are in a position to take action to resolve these matters. Only they can understand the constraints that operate and, where possible, endeavour to remove them. Only they can be demanding of the library service managers, in a way that will induce effective action. Leadership is what is needed above all else; it is needed in each council;¹⁸ and this leadership can only come from responsible councillors and Chief Officers.

⁹ Audit Commission 2002

¹⁰ CIPFA "Actual" data

¹¹ The initiatives include: the introduction of performance indicators, best value indicators and public library standards; the introduction of annual library plans and their subsequent replacement, in part, by position statements in some councils, Best Value Reviews and Inspections; CPA, and the various recommendations and actions arising from the reports listed below and others including for example those describing Government policy on social inclusion and disability discrimination.

¹² The reports include: Audit Commission: *Due for Renewal* 1997; Select Committee report on Public libraries: 1999 Resource (MLAC)/ DCMS The people's network 1999; Approach to the Public Library Standards 2001 Audit Commission : Best Value Statement 2001; Audit Commission: *Building Better Libraries* 2002; *Framework for the future*, DCMS 2003; *Turning Vision into Action* Resource (MLAC) September 2003. In addition to these and other reports, of which a full list appears in Building Better Libraries, the LISU annual library statistics are an invaluable source of information and a stimulus to action.

¹³ Audit Commission, *Building Better Libraries*, 2002

¹⁴ MORI – Audit Commission 2002 Research carried out for Best Value Reviews

¹⁵ Reasons for using a library 2001/2 (Public Library User Survey: CIPFA)

¹⁶ Books and the Consumer 2003, © BML/TNS 2004

¹⁷ Data from the Public Library User Survey (2001-2)

¹⁸ Charles Leadbetter, of Demos, in his report "Overdue", 2003 highlights the need for leadership

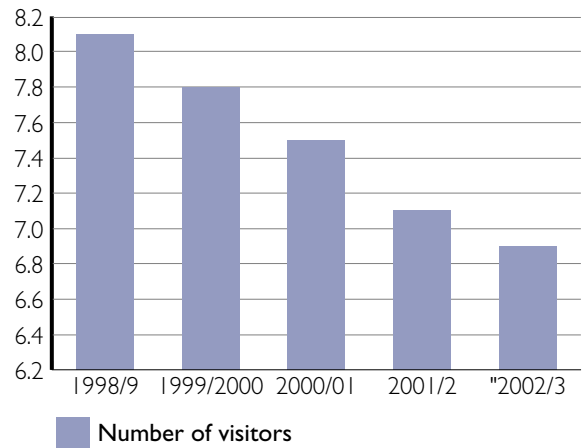
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PART TWO Hampshire County Library Service

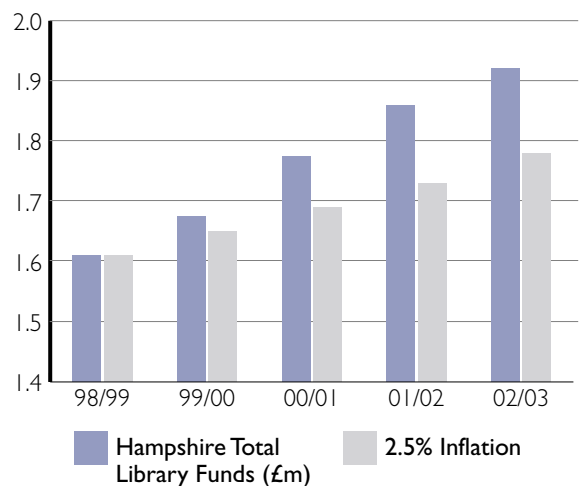
Libraries are not operated as a national service. The service is local - each of more than 200 councils in the UK offers a library service to its residents, a duty required by law. As part of the preparation of this report therefore it was helpful to be able to review the library service of one large council and compare it with the analysis of the national performance. This is a process which each council can readily undertake.

More detail is available than within the national picture:

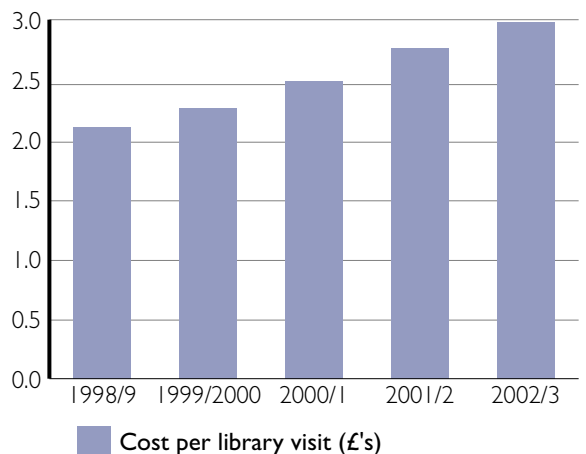
- The decline in the use of libraries in Hampshire has been just as great as that of other councils.



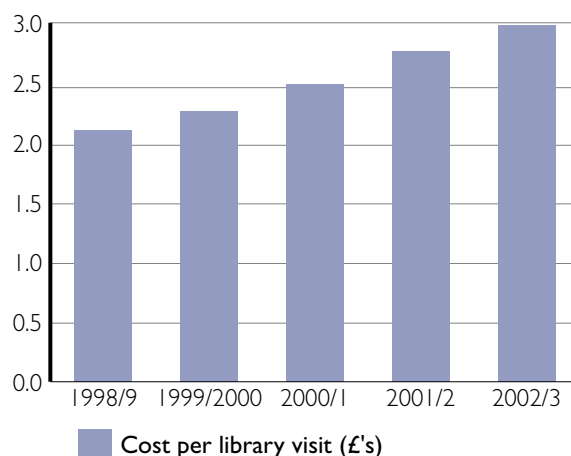
- Reduced numbers of visitors are not the result of inadequate funding. Total funds available to the library service have risen well above inflation for the past six years.



- Reduced library use and continued escalation of costs also produces reduction in value for money in Hampshire as in the rest of the country. The cost of each library visit has grown by some 40% over the past five years.



- As in the rest of the country, the fall in value for money has come at the same time as a contraction in the use of the library service in the county. Book lending is down by some 14% over the past 5 years. It is logical to assume that these levels of decline are the result of the poor performance of libraries in delivering to user expectations. Residents' reading habits and information requirements are unlikely to have changed: it is much more likely that they see other ways of satisfying their needs than using the services of the library.



- That said, the productivity of libraries within Hampshire varies very widely. Of the 54 libraries and the mobile libraries, the largest 30 libraries of Hampshire account for 90% of the usage. 10 libraries account for half the usage. In those 30 largest libraries over the past 4 years the usage pattern has been as follows:

- 2 libraries have experienced increased use of 11.8% and 20.3%
- 3 libraries have experienced a decline of between 0 and -5%
- 3 libraries have experienced a decline of between -5% and -10%
- 6 libraries have experienced a decline of between -10% and -15%
- 11 libraries have experienced a decline of between -15% and -20%
- 4 libraries have experienced a decline of between -20% and -25%
- 1 library has experienced a decline between -25% and -30%

The two libraries in which usage had improved had received increased stock levels and had a high standard of local management. Even among the ten busiest libraries, visitor numbers fell by 13.6%, and productivity varied widely as is shown in the table below in the column marked "Staff/10k Visitors".

	Visitors	Opening	Staff	Staff / 10k Visitors
Library 1	486,880	45.5	18.5	2.6
Library 2	455,680	50.0	23.5	1.9
Library 3	403,263	52.5	21.2	1.9
Library 4	320,339	50.0	29.4	1.1
Library 5	307,535	49.5	23.0	1.3
Library 6	294,100	42.0	12.4	2.4
Library 7	273,434	42.5	11.8	2.3
Library 8	265,717	50.0	20.6	1.3
Library 9	254,825	41.0	13.1	1.9
Library 10	247,215	41.0	14.6	1.7
Average	330,899	46.4	18.8	1.8

This exhibit is not intended to imply that the only work library staff do is cope with visitors, on the contrary of course they do a great deal more. It does however illustrate the need for a discussion about why these variations occur, to ensure that the organisation and staffing of the library is as productive as it can be.

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If all the libraries in this group were managed as productively as library I (which, incidentally, has the most awkward building layout in the group), then in theory it would be possible to increase the opening hours of these 10 libraries by 44% to 67 hours a week, and meet the national standard at no extra cost.

- National standards are set for a number of parameters: distance of residents from library; opening hours; number of libraries open more than 45 hours/week; visitor numbers; and user success rates and many more. On some of these measures, Hampshire already meets the standard, but on many of the most significant measures, the library service has failed to deliver: the number of visitors is 20% below standard; opening hours overall are 30% below standard, and 50% below for larger libraries.

Standard	National Measure	Hampshire 2001/2
% Residents within 2 miles of a library	85%	86%
Aggregate Opening Hours Per 1000 population	128hrs	83hrs
% larger libraries open more than 45 hours per week	100%	47%
Percentage of requests for Books met within 7 days	50%	44%
Number of visitors per annum per 1000 population	6,600	5,626
Adult library users successful In finding a particular book	65%	57%
Adult library users successful in finding particular information	75%	78%

- Hampshire has also been below standard on the most common use of a library as shown in the Public Library User Survey: “how likely it is that the book you want will be in the library?” The national standard for this is an undemanding 65% - a level of customer satisfaction that would ensure the demise of a commercial bookshop or indeed any provider of service, retailer or otherwise, to the general public.

Author	Title	Chance of finding In the libraries of Hampshire
Jane Austen	Sense and Sensibility	83%
Luke Rhinehart	The Dice Man	5%
Fyodor Dostoevsky	Crime and Punishment	54%
Terry Pratchett	Mort	39%
J.D. Salinger	The Catcher in the Rye	42%
Jack Kerouac	On the Road	54%
Katherine Mansfield	The Garden Party	32%
J.R.R. Tolkien	The Two Towers	84%
John Steinbeck	Of Mice and Men	53%
Joseph Heller	Catch 22	36%

This table is drawn from the online catalogue that shows titles which are “on loan” and when titles are “on the shelf” and shows the % chance of finding them on the shelf. There may, therefore, be other copies out on loan. A random physical check of these titles showed that even when the catalogue described them as being “on the shelf”, quite often they were not. The catalogue is not always accurate.

The purpose of the table above is to show the chance of success of a reader who, spontaneously wants to find a particular title to read straight away. The ability to respond to this kind of demand has a great influence on the reputation the library will have in its community.

Lists of this kind are, of course, merely samples: this is only an illustration: the items on the list have no significance except that they are books that many people read. Tests of this kind do, however, provide a useful indicator for library managers. This particular list was chosen because of its importance in bringing student age readers into libraries and it is not then surprising to find that the audience for these kinds of titles will go somewhere else to find them.

Opening hours have been a particular problem for Hampshire; performance is between 30 and 50% below that required by the national standard. Most shops, nowadays, are open longer than 60 hours per week. Library opening hours could usefully be benchmarked against, or compared to, nearby shops, supermarkets or restaurants.

Libraries in Hampshire open	
55 or more hours per week.....	Nil
50-55 hours per week.....	5
40-49 hours per week.....	14
Less than 40 hours.....	35
Total.....	54 libraries

Who's in charge?

Hampshire's analysis of their libraries shows that the great majority of current visitors are long standing loyal users but their number is falling. There is a need to broaden the appeal of the libraries to introduce a wider and younger audience, while continuing to look after the needs of those who currently use the service. This means understanding and addressing the library needs of all in the community, of whatever background or stage of life, in a better way than is currently the case.

Market research shows that in Hampshire and across the country, there are three factors which dominate the views of users and non users and determine whether or not a library is likely to be used

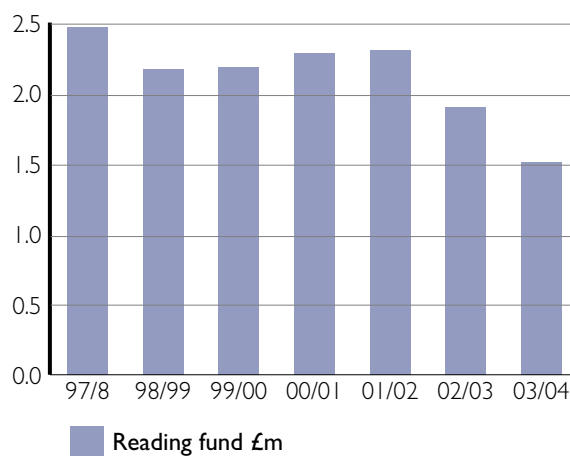
- The range of books and materials and whether it is likely to satisfy the particular need.
- The location, appearance, welcome, convenience and general state of the library building.
- Whether the library is open when it is needed.

It is because libraries score poorly against these three measures relative to their competitors, that for many people they are no longer a place of first resort.

Fewer than one in twenty users ask any questions of staff, and of those only a small portion of these ask questions which require a trained response. The need for qualified staff support is for a very small portion of the customers, but for those it is important and a unique service. The library service needs to find a way of analysing and addressing that requirement in due proportion to resources available.

Hampshire has allocated less and less to stock of material, so that the quality of the book collections has become poor and out of date; they have not spent sufficiently on the refurbishment and redecoration of their buildings, so many are now unattractive and unwelcoming, and the opening hours of the libraries are now shorter than many shops and other public facilities in the county which are open late and seven days a week.

The resources available to the council to run its library service amount to approximately £20m per annum (appendix 2). A great part of the resource allocated by the council is taken up with a large staff and management structure (see appendix 1), the cost of which is increasing faster than inflation; a substantial number of professional librarians are not on the opening rota of the libraries and the procurement and cataloguing process is very costly. Very approximately, it costs Hampshire more than £20 to buy a £10 book. (See appendix 3) While considerable change, retraining and redeployment would be necessary, some of these human resources need, over time, to be re-allocated to service the requirements of users: improved stock; longer opening hours; and improved buildings and facilities.



The conclusions that this report draws from this analysis are:

- There is a need for a robust system of performance measurement which would inform management where they need to take actions.
- Market research needs to be instituted that will provide the basis for
 1. an understanding of the library needs of those residents who do and do not use the service.
 2. A regular and constant measure of the performance of each library in meeting those needs.
- Opening hours should be increased gradually, as quickly as staff can be re-deployed. The long term target should be eventually to open all libraries from early morning to late evening.
- Book and material buying should be directed to meet the needs of users and non users, and the book fund should be increased as quickly as funds can be reallocated to it from other library expenditure.
- There needs to be a programme to smarten and redecorate the library buildings, and a model devised for how this can be done economically. This will take place over several years, perhaps even a decade, so priorities need to be set based on the state of existing buildings and the scale of their potential use.
- The council should move towards giving individual library managers much more freedom to make their own library useful within its own community and to give them the responsibility and resources to provide a service that is always improving.
- The high cost of the professional, managerial and administrative element of the staff indicates that the council should begin a review of library qualifications and professional practices. This should ensure that the staff resources are allocated so that the service provided to the public is what the public needs, and not what traditional professional practices have determined. All library staff should be trained to give the best possible service at all times. This work could be done in alliance with other councils. Hampshire has been designated an “excellent council” by the Audit Commission, and it could work with other similarly designated councils to pursue this and other questions.
- Also using this ‘Network of Excellence’, Hampshire should initiate a review of purchasing and lending procedures with the intention of reducing their cost and improving the service to users.

3

PART THREE Action plans

The plans in this section are intended to have application in all councils

If library services are to improve, it is desirable that the councillor with responsibility for libraries and senior officers direct and challenge the library service much more emphatically than has been the case in the past.

A council should require that planning and operation of the library service is based on clear, concise and comprehensible information based on measured performance of each library and quantified understanding of the needs of the residents. This is a substantial and fundamental change from the old annual library plan and budget which should be replaced by a much more robust process involving market research to establish user requirements, plans based on user requirements and regular progress meetings to review actual performance data in order to agree appropriate management actions.

This new process would bring the library service more into line with the other services for which the council is responsible and consequently makes it easier for other councillors and the public to scrutinise and understand the performance and plans of the library service.

A council needs the following elements of an action plan to halt and reverse decline:

A	Planning and budgeting	Page 15
B	Performance management	Page 16
C	Opening hours	Page 17
D	Reading material	Page 17
E	Welcoming and well designed libraries	Page 18
F	Managing individual libraries: Large and small	Page 19
G	Managing the Service	Page 19
H	Appropriate staff for giving service	Page 20
I	Acquisition, supply and loan systems	Page 21
J	Managing Change	Page 22

A

Planning and Budgeting

As part of the planning cycle the council should give a directive to officers setting out clear objectives and targets. It is suggested that such a directive should be along the following lines:

The overall purpose of the annual plan is to arrest the decline in visitors to libraries and to so organise resources that in the year 2008/09 the number of visitors is thirty percent higher than was achieved in the year 2002/03

- 1 The plan will describe the proposed use of resources and the projected performance for five years, the first year of which will form and correspond with the budget for 2004/5.
- 2 Since lower numbers of library visits indicate reduced satisfaction with the library service, the plan should discuss the reasons for the decline in use in different groups in the community.
- 3 The plan should describe methods for increasing visitor numbers in each individual library.
- 4 The plan should show how the usage of the library service can be increased among all social and age groups.
- 5 Special emphasis should be given to the appearance and presentation of the library by the materials on offer, and by improved access to the service, so that the particular needs of those who are in any way disadvantaged can be addressed.
- 6 Monthly visitor projections for the years of the plan should be provided against which the plan can be monitored in addition to the other measurement criteria.
- 7 The plan should show how each part of the budget will be spent in order to address the objectives that have been set. In particular it should show how the book and other stock funds are spent, what discounts are obtained and how the money is used to address the needs identified in paragraphs 3 and 4.
- 8 The plan should provide strategies for meeting all the national standards for libraries and describe the resources and timetables required to achieve them. Detail should be provided not only of the standard to be met, but the performance in the past five years against each standard along with a measurable projection of the intended progress towards meeting or continuing to meet the standard.
- 9 A great deal of time and money is spent, and probably wasted, on the processes of acquiring and processing stock at many points in the service. The plan should describe steps to be taken with suppliers and with other authorities to rationalise these processes and make them more efficient. A relevant standard for this activity will be the cost accepted by commercial book-sellers for this activity.
- 10 The plan should describe ways of continuously monitoring the public response to libraries, indicating how to highlight weaknesses in the service and how to respond to them.
- 11 The plan should discuss, cost and prioritise all recent central government initiatives and council policies and directives and indicate how the library service will make use of all this work in order to improve the service to the public and evaluate the success of initiatives undertaken.
- 12 The plan should include a response to all recent research carried out on behalf of the library service, to show how that work is being incorporated into the improvement of the service.
13. The plan should also include proposals for delegating responsibilities to library managers, together with proposals for their selection and training to develop their ability to give service to the public and lead the library in its community. The training required and the resources needed to do this work should be identified and budgets should be delegated to them, with appropriate support to help achieve these objectives.

B

Performance management

To produce the necessary information to operate the service there is a need for a library service to create a new job - Finance and Performance Manager. This person, reporting to the head of the library and information service, should produce a range of data, including:

- Measures of the performance of each library, for internal use. **Weekly.**
- A rota of market research and mystery user performance. **Monthly.**
- A report on the costs and performance of each library and the central costs and performance of the whole service. **Monthly.**
- A report for the Council on the performance of the service relative to that which had been planned and budgeted including a monitor of performance against the national standards for libraries. **Quarterly.**
- A three to five year strategic plan to provide a perspective for annual plans.
- The **Annual** plan and budget should be consistent with and refer to each other. They should be presented together.

All reports should be consistent, succinct, timely and accurate. Above all they should be accessible - clear and comprehensible to councillors and the public.

In addition, local market research should be carried out and regular contact with communities established. Several methods can be explored, for example:

- A number of user groups or 'friends of libraries' should be set up. The purpose of these is to bring individual libraries and their managers into closer contact with the communities they serve, and to develop services accordingly.
- A "mystery user" routine should be set up which constantly monitors the appearance, the welcome and the quality of the services offered in each library.
- Library services should participate in independent surveys of residents' views of leisure and educational activities within the authority, so that there is a picture of users and non-users. (The opinions of lapsed and potential library users are particularly important.)
- The Finance and Performance Manager should carry out the coordination and dissemination of information from these activities; the results of the "mystery user" routines should be built into the continuous monitoring of library performance.

The population surrounding each library, and across the whole authority area should be analysed in detail to ensure the Library Standards are being met. Census information is readily available for each electoral ward. This can be combined with other market research data to build up profiles for the catchment area of each library as the basis for more locally targeted marketing, promotion, and community work.



Opening hours

The points to consider are

- Increasing opening hours will be a gradual process. One should not expect staff suddenly to change their hours of work and terms of employment.
- Different and flexible arrangements of working hours can often be both attractive and very useful to staff. This is an opportunity to discuss possibilities and see if there are ways that libraries can be open longer and staff rotas can be arranged to meet people's needs. For some people part-time, flexible, evening and weekend work suits their lives better than regular 9-5 work. Some, for example, may be glad of evening work, and be able to provide perfectly intelligent well informed service to customers.
- Some libraries handle more loans and queries and have greater numbers of visitors, than others with the same number of staff. There is a need to ensure that all libraries are as well and productively organised as possible.
- In some cases, consideration should be given to using the resources of user / friends groups to extend opening hours.
- All those who work in the library should be on the opening rota, with the exception possibly of the manager of a large library.

Ideally a library should be open every day from early morning to late evening – seven days a week. The service should aim to be open at times which suit library users.



Reading Material

The library, as a public service, can provide a far more valuable community service than any commercial operation

- It can seek out and provide for the most excluded. The stock is the most important aid to being socially inclusive and to meet special needs.
- It can hold stock of the most interesting and specialist work.
- To stay useful and relevant, the library has to compete with commercial operators. It also has to carry items which are popular with the general public, in order to maintain its credibility with those whom it seeks to attract. Like a public service broadcasting operator, it is of no value, and not worth public investment, if it is only used by a minority.
- The collection of books, magazines and newspapers must be designed to be useful to all needs of the local community, and not just those of the habitual users. It is through the collection as well as the ambience of the library, that the library signals a welcome to those who perhaps feel that the library is not a place for them.
- The service needs to analyse the reading needs of different groups in the community in order to ensure that what is being provided matches what people want.
- There should be more copies of a greater number of titles so that the service is able to satisfy 95% of demand in larger libraries from copies on the shelf. A lower target can be set for each smaller library with support systems for obtaining other books required as quickly as possible.
- Hampshire has a total library space of more than 300,000 sq ft. It is the view of this report that maintaining a satisfactory collection of reading material in this space demands a budget of £4-5m for new items to replace old ones each year. This is more than three times the current spend, and it will take time for the council to build its purchasing to this level and maintain it in real terms. This is certainly the right objective and at this level the council will be able to offer an outstanding service to all in the county. Other councils should carry out a similar calculation based on their own libraries.



Welcoming and well designed Libraries

Many public libraries throughout the country are drab and dismal. It is as if there were an assumption that any attempt to create an attractive space is a waste of taxpayers' money. Yet it is a far greater waste to offer an unwelcoming service in an unpleasant environment resulting in no visitors. Nor is the creation of an interesting space a job for an amateur. In the last twenty-five years hoteliers, retailers, restaurateurs, employers and operators of public places have all learned how to make buildings appealing and attractive and to provide the right atmosphere for those using the building. Library design, including the creation of identity and the briefing of appropriate designers, should be performed by experienced people.

The layout of any public place is vitally important in terms of being helpful and welcoming to those who want to use it.

- Most obviously, the book collections need to be easy to browse and well signposted with intelligent and intelligible categorisation. Many libraries have shelving that is too low and shelves which are partly empty. (Librarians argue that their obligation to meet the new Disability laws determines book shelf design, but these laws apply to all retailers and givers of public service... supermarkets are subject to the same restrictions and they have to optimise the use of their valuable display space. So do libraries) Library displays are often both unattractive and wasteful of space. It is essential to have as wide a range of stock as possible available at all times to those who wish to browse the collection.
- Organising the space within the library is important to the whole experience. Users have a right to feel comfortable and wanted in the library space they pay for.
- The area for study and reading needs to be quiet and clean. It should provide appropriate dignified personal space for each reader. Desks and tables need either to have computer terminals or a facility for readers to use their own.
- The help and issue desks need to be visible but not the first thing a visitor sees. They are there to provide help, not to be security check points.
- Libraries should be accessible to everyone, easy to use and navigate. Whilst the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act ensure buildings are designed or modified with the needs of disabled people in mind, there is a need locally to consult people with mobility difficulties and parents with push chairs to ensure layouts work well and special requirements are catered for.
- It is impossible to overemphasise the importance of good lighting. Working places, browsing areas and counters all need quite bright light. There is a need to make sure every day that all light bulbs are working, and particularly, if some of the light has to be provided by fluorescent tubes, that these are regularly cleaned, and are working properly. Fluorescent tubes attract dust so that they often operate at less than half design power.
- Cleanliness and general presentation are vitally important in creating a good image of the quality of service. The library must be cleaned every day, windows and light fittings must be washed regularly, and bookshelves and working areas must be dusted. Displays of books and all material must be checked constantly to ensure smart presentation and that everything is in the place a customer would expect to find it.
- Display windows should always be interesting and attractive, and need to be checked and changed regularly. Notice boards should be cleared of out of date information. The library and its staff must always be as smart and well presented as they can possibly be. Retail experience is that the best advertisement for a service lies in the way the building in which it is offered is presented to the public.

F

Managing Individual Libraries

In many library authorities managerial responsibilities for an individual library are shared and there is no one person clearly responsible for the performance of each individual library. Aspects of the operation of each library are controlled by several people, not all based in that library. Outreach services to the community and the opening hours are the responsibility of some, whilst the stock, administration, general presentation and services offered in the authority's libraries are the responsibility of others. Such a sharing of management is expensive and inefficient. If the library is unsuccessful it is not clear to whom responsibility falls to remedy the situation. In fact, no one will have noticed there is a problem. Clearly it is desirable that the responsibility for all these aspects of any library should lie with one person who has within their resources the ability to direct effort where it is needed.

Staff are naturally anxious to have more control in order to provide a good service in their local community. This means being able to respond to local needs by providing the reading and reference material appropriate for all the sections and groups in their area and developing helpful and fruitful relationships with all who could use the library.

Library services should aim to move towards greater locally empowered management of each library within a framework of discipline created by measurement of performance. In order to support the individual local managers, training should be developed to assist in the transition to this new way of operating.

A council should be as determined to provide as good a library service for people in small towns and more remote areas as it is in the larger towns. This ambition is also well defined in the library standards laid down by the Department of Culture Media and Sport. There are ways in which a council can do this which make the service more cost effective than it would otherwise be. Buildings can be shared, perhaps with school or church facilities. Volunteer staff can be used. Smaller libraries can obtain items of stock from those in other towns.

Similarly the operation of mobile libraries should be regularly reviewed to ensure that the service they give is as beneficial to communities as it can be.

G

Managing the Service

In place of the traditional management, administrative and professional structure of public library services, there is a need gradually to move to a small management team of 3-6 people in total in any local authority. These then would be the only staff not on the opening rota of the libraries. (Hampshire has more than 190 people in this category). Within such a small management and administrative team of the service, in contrast to current structures, there is a need for certain skills to be given greater prominence. These skills may be shared with other councils, or with other departments of the same council, in order to keep the management overhead to an effective minimum. They fall under the following headings:

- 1. Head of Service.** This job has overall responsibility for delivering the library and information service as directed by the Council and ensuring that the service represents best value.
- 2. Finance and Performance management.** This includes the measurement and interpretation of data from library users, potential users and residents generally. There also needs to be skill in budget management and planning and in the training of library managers to operate performance management systems. These skills need to be present in a person of high standing who is in a position to influence councillors and senior managers.
- 3. Property management and design.** This involves the ability to manage the portfolio of buildings and maintain them to a high standard. The expertise could easily be shared with other departments of the council, or other library services in a consortium, but the experience for the work should be broad and include commercial sector retailing and design work.

4. Stock purchasing. The service needs an experienced buyer familiar with suppliers, with standard practices, and with knowledge of how commercial sector buyers operate. This expertise also could be shared with other councils in a stock consortium or buying group.

5. Systems development and library information services. As more high quality reference information becomes available and in pursuit of the government's desire that libraries play a full role in the digital age, a council needs access to expertise which can ensure that the systems available to readers are as advanced as they can be, both in a technical sense, and in terms of information available. Again this expertise could be shared between councils.

6. Human resources management. As the service goes through major period of management change, there is a need for experienced support and guidance to be available.

In addition to these three to six there should be no more than 3 or 4 clerical staff. A council may think it appropriate to have within the library management team some expertise in matters of delivering service to more deprived areas of the community, and in developing reading skills. These roles, however, should not be a reason for accumulating more management personnel but should be somewhere integrated into the skills of the management team.



Appropriate staff for delivering service:

Professional qualifications

Most library services make a distinction between 'professionally qualified' staff and 'library assistants'. However the public assumes that all staff working in a library are librarians, and would hope to receive the best possible standard of service from whomever they address a request for help. The distinction may not be helpful in giving the best possible service at all times.

Clearly there is a need to make sure that the service given to the public is the best it can possibly be, and that all staff have the training that allows them to give service to the best of their ability and makes best use of their knowledge and experience. The demarcation between professional and non-professional staff should cease.

It is not possible in this report to audit the skills required and identify those which exist. Such a study needs to examine the use the public make of the service (and the improvements that users and non-users would like to see) and compare those with the current arrangements:

- The difference between the roles of professional and non-professional staff
- The training they receive
- The content of qualifications
- The remuneration and cost of staff
- The support roles played by the existing professional and training bodies

.... and match these against the needs of the public.

One council could undertake such a review along with other councils. Change, if it is necessary, needs to be duly and fairly understanding of the contribution made by individuals and subject to proper and well managed programmes. The professional associations and training institutions will in turn need to respond appropriately to these new service-centred requirements.

Book Acquisition, Supply and Loan Systems

In 2003/4 Hampshire will spend £1.4m with suppliers for reading material. The administrative cost and all the associated overheads will cost approximately a further £2.0m (See Appendix 3) This is made up of consulting, selecting and approving orders; entering data on to systems; processing and preparing items for loan; re-distribution and handling of stock; re-cataloguing; labelling and stamping, the maintenance of library lending systems; approving and paying invoices.

Those processes, which are substantially the same as those a commercial book buyer would undertake (with the obvious difference that preparation for loan is replaced by preparation for sale), would only cost commercial operators approximately £70,000. The costs to commercial operators cannot be more because otherwise they would not be able to afford to sell the goods. In other words, the process in this library service alone costs nearly £2m more than it needs to. The position in Hampshire is the same as that found in most councils.

Libraries label all the books they handle so that they can be easily identified when returned from loan and replaced on the correct shelf. Yet the jacket of more than 95% of books makes perfectly clear where they should go. There are very few books that need a further identification. Booksellers do not receive stock back from loan, but they do replace most of what they sell with identical or similar items. Booksellers find they can place items in displays without adding additional identity labels.

Only the very largest libraries and bookstores need to have more detailed classifications than that which is printed on the book or within standard databases.

There are now some councils who are no longer applying classification labels to their collection of books.

Library systems are extremely cumbersome. For example: libraries identify a copy number for each book, yet for the great majority of books there is only one copy in any one library. If a library lends a copy of a book to an identified member of the public, it may not be necessary to add extra labels to say which copy the person has borrowed. So there needs to be an examination of systems to see if there is any way that the huge cost of labelling and identifying copies of books can be reduced. There have been many studies in recent years on the effectiveness of different library methods and practices, but rarely do they consider the costs that are involved.¹⁹

In order to reduce these unnecessary procurement costs, there needs to be a re-examination of each stage of the process from selection, the passage of information and goods through the supplier, to the book or other item being displayed in the library. Suppliers are willing to help in the process of making the whole supply chain more efficient. But it has to be recognised that the excessive costs are the result of traditional library methods, and in the future these will need to be changed and the teaching of library methods will need to be different.

Systems developments in the last two decades in the book industry, which operate between publishers, wholesalers and retailers, have transformed both the cost and the speed of delivery systems. Nationally held, standardised databases of the output from publishers all over the world have removed the need for anyone to re-catalogue items, unless they operate in the most specialist environment.

Every council should actively strive to operate with the minimum processing and handling of items that are being prepared for loan. Whatever action is taken in a national context, the great part of the excess cost lies within the library service itself and the reduction of that cost is a management task that each council will need to pursue.

The public library service should adopt standard industry systems, and participate in the advantages brought constantly by further refinement of these systems. The classification used in these systems is being improved all the time. For example, it is foreseeable that books on Amazon will be searchable for words in the content, in the future. If libraries stay outside the groups developing such improvements, they will never be able to give the service that matches their competitors.

Sophisticated systems have become developed for 'Point of Sale' operations, but could readily be adapted for 'Point of lending and return', and thus great savings could be made.

Managing Change

The strategy described in outline in the preceding pages represents a substantial programme of change for those who work in the library service and those who are responsible for providing service to the public. This report cannot reflect the detail of how such a transformation can or should be managed. It is a major undertaking. Change is often exciting for those who devise it and appallingly stressful for those who have to carry it out. There are different ways of making it work and this report is not the place to examine them, but it would not be a complete assessment if it did not highlight and bring to the attention of those involved the need to reflect carefully on the impact of all those involved in the library service.

This is not a reason not to take positive action... it is a reason for proceeding in a certain way.

¹⁹ Perspectives of Public Library Use, Bohme and Spiller, BML/LISU 1999, summarised over 50 recent published papers on developments in the public library service. Only one of these - "Due for Renewal" published by the Audit Commission - discussed the costs of operation including activities such as cataloguing.

Other Recommendations

1. DCMS and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council

The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) is the body designated by the Government responsible for implementing “Framework for the Future”, a ten year plan for the national library service. In their action plan they have identified a set of steps and projects which need to be undertaken in pursuit of their target. In support of that work this report makes the following recommendations.

Recommendations

- a. It must be made clear that responsibility for the performance of the service lies in the hands of local councillors. Otherwise there is confusion about roles. The MLA should persuade, explain, clarify and demonstrate, and above all it should show an understanding for the problems facing each councillor who has to make necessary decisions to achieve the benefits of the framework.
- b. The two aspects of a council which need to be much more clearly addressed by the Museums, Archives and Libraries Council are: the allocation of funds within the library budget; and the requirement of each council to have a clear understanding of the requirements residents have for their local library service. If they do not do this, recommendations they make do not contribute to solving the problems actually facing a council.
- c. In the same way that senior council officers need to challenge their library services to be efficient and professional in the following areas, so the Museum, Libraries and Archives Council must seek the best possible solutions to improve current methods of:
 - Performance measurement and management
 - Market research and understanding customers
 - Budgeting, planning and clear presentation of information about the service.
 - Control of costs, particularly in central non-front line functions
 - Improvement of productivity in libraries
 - The face to face provision of customer service
 - Identification of the particular community needs of each local library
 - Property management
 - Presentation of libraries
 - Identity and design style
 - The qualification and training of staff
 - Acquisitions processes
 - Contracting processes
 - Cataloguing and labelling
 - Lending systems

However it is particularly important to recognise that the successful completion of these tasks depends upon whether the solutions meet the need of councillors and users.

- d. Analysis of many of these issues requires more experience than that which is available in the public library service. The Museums, Libraries and Archives council should call for help and advice from others well outside the library world, not only in other fields of Government but also the retail and other sectors in order to inform their solutions to these problems. If this programme of work is to be carried out with the urgency needed, the Government needs to be certain that the MLA has the ability and resource to complete the task.

2. Audit Commission

The Audit Commission has been particularly active in pursuit of improvements to the library service. Their report "Building Better Libraries" drew attention to the declining use of the service and was the first document that demonstrated through substantial market research the extent and the reasons for the public dissatisfaction with the service. The Commission has also been open in its endeavour to enhance its own activity in pursuit of improvements in the service. These recommendations are intended to help them achieve that.

Recommendations

1. The decline in use and the decrease in value for money in the public library service should continue to be a cause of great concern to the Audit Commission. The actions of the commission to ensure continuous improvement, including the Best Value Programme have evidently and plainly not been successful. It may not be sufficient to operate routine procedures when a failure of this magnitude is taking place. There is a need for special action.
2. The Commission should actively support the development of a better national performance management framework for the public library service in partnership with DCMS, the Museum, Libraries and Archives Council, local authority representatives and others from outside the public sector. Performance data should be published at least quarterly and be available, for each library authority, for public scrutiny.
3. Under existing performance assessment routines it is possible for a council to be rated as having satisfactory or even good or excellent performance but for the library service to be below standard. The Commission must continue to draw the attention of the appropriate council to this weakness when it occurs, insist on appropriate action and maintain vigilance until the problem is resolved.
4. The Audit Commission judgments about performance which is unsatisfactory for the public are often not strongly enough expressed for a council to realise that action must be taken. There is a place for politeness, but there is also a time for insistence, otherwise the commission becomes party to failure.
5. It is not sufficient to measure only against benchmarks and beacon operations. The Commission must also observe the trend of performance. A service could have good figures relative to other councils but usage may be in decline and costs may be on the increase, and either of those on their own should be sufficient to call for action to be taken by the council. Since the dramatic increase in cost per library visit has occurred in councils which the Audit Commission has defined as "excellent", one must question the process used.
6. The Commission recognises the important role played by Scrutiny panels within councils. They must ensure that this function is being performed correctly, rigorously and as frequently as circumstances demand. In the case of the library service, a scrutiny panel may be the only check on the activities of officers and it must be well informed and effective.
7. The Commission supports "Peer performance processes" to seek improvement. However such a process is unlikely to succeed unless it introduces a significant element of outside experience. The library service is failing, in part, because it is unable to cope with competitive activity from commercial operators and unless the managers learn how those operations work, they will never be effective in restoring value for money.

3. User Groups and Friends of libraries

User groups or “friends of libraries” fill two absolutely essential roles in the life of public libraries

1. If a library or the libraries of a council were wonderful and fulfilled all the expectations of every section of the community and were a beacon of enlightenment, there is still an abundant need for those working in the library to have a constant point of contact with the views of residents from all walks of life. This dialogue is about what people need, how it is changing, and how people can participate in this great cultural activity. It is a box of ideas
2. However, as this report shows, there is often a further need which is to cajole, by whatever means are available, the library to improve what it does. What follows is a simple check list of points that a user group might find helpful.
 - The person responsible for the library service in most councils now is “The cabinet member whose portfolio includes public libraries”.
 - The chief librarian answers to this councillor.
 - The cabinet member answers to the whole council, but performance of the library service will be subjected to the attention of “a scrutiny committee” which will certainly include and probably be chaired by a member of the party in opposition.
 - The public are entitled to insist that information about the public library service is available, clearly presented, comprehensible and timely. Often it is none of those things.
 - There are certain key figures which should be clear:
 - What are total funds available? This is the sum of four items:
 - The council revenue grant;
 - Income from loans, fines etc;
 - Any other grants, for example from lottery funding or Government schemes; and
 - The “Capital charge” which reflects capital spending spread over a number of years.
 - How much of that total is being spent on reading material? If this figure is less than 25%, then the quality of the collections will decline during the year, as items go out of date or missing. The national average is currently 9%.
 - Are visitor and book issues declining or rising and by how much.

A user group will have its own agenda, but these figures may better inform the discussions.

- Experience has shown that pressure to improve a library service is difficult to apply, as one tries to balance politeness with a need for action. Councillors are there to help resolve these problems.

Appendix 1

Hampshire: Management and Staff	
Head of Service	1
Head of Operations	1
- Customer Services Manager	2
- Change Facilitator	1
- Staff on the opening rota (54 libraries and 12 mobiles)	314
- Library Managers	20
- Service Development Team Leaders	8
- Service Development Team Assistants	8
- Information and Life Long Learning Librarians	21
- Local specialist history librarian	2
- Children's and Youth Librarians	23
- Equal Access Librarian	8
- Reader Development Librarian	22
Head of Strategy and Performance	1
- Standards and Quality Manager	1
- Staff Development Manager	1
- Project Officer	1
- Technicians	2
- Services and Contracts officer	1
- Administration officer	2
- Clerical Assistants	3
- Van Drivers	4
- Caretaker /relief driver	1
ICT Manager (Recreation and Heritage Dept)	1
- ICT officer	1
- Systems Librarian	1
- Systems officer	1
- Systems assistant	1
- ICT Technician	1
Head of County Services	1
- Head of Children's Youth and School Services*	1
- Senior Librarian*	1
- Term time librarian*	0.9
- Library Assistants*	1.5
- Area schools librarians*	6
- Schools Library Customer Services Manager*	1
- School Library Service Development Manager*	1
(*Posts marked are jointly funded with the Education Department)	
- Children and Young people service development manager	1
- Information and Lifelong Learning Manager	1
- County local studies librarian	1
- Local Government services librarian	1
- Information librarian	1
- Information assistant	1
- "Special Project" manager	1
- "Special Project" assistant	1
- Senior librarian, Information services	1
- People's network development manager	1
- Digitisation project officer	1
- Equal Access Manager	1
- Asian Languages librarian (Home office funded)	1
- HMP librarian (Home office funded)	1
- Library assistant	1
- County Stock Manager	1
- Stock development librarians	3
- Acquisitions Manager	1
- Acquisitions Librarians, team leader and assistants	11.5
- Requests Manager	1
- Requests Team leader, librarians and assistants	10
- Music Librarian	1
Total	511.9

Appendix 3

Acquisition Costs

There are two supply chains in a library service: The "Loan and Return" chain is the one that involves library users; The "Acquisition" supply chain involves all the activities whereby items are added to and deleted from the collection of stock available to the public.

The two chains are independent of each other in the sense that the volume of transactions in one is not related to the volume of transactions in another. (Unlike in a bookshop where the two chains are part of the same process and have related volumes.)

The task here is to identify the cost of "The Acquisition" process and answer questions, among others, on value and speed. Could it be cheaper? Could it be faster?

Efforts to make supply chains more efficient generally endeavour to identify the number of people involved, the number of transactions of information, and particularly the number of handling points. The "Total Cost" is the cost of all those added together, with all the overheads they incur.

The processes involved in the acquisition supply chain are at least:

1. Deciding to acquire an item
2. Approving its selection
3. Assessing whether the acquisition falls within a budget
4. Recording the selection on the library system
5. Transmitting to and recording the selection on the supplier's system: placing the order
6. Whatever processes are required of the supplier
7. Receipt of the goods into the library process unpacking, confirming delivery note data
8. Chasing of orders
9. Research and Supply of reserved orders
10. Whatever processes take place in central handling, labelling cataloguing, identification etc.
11. Whatever information is passed between central and branch locations
12. Despatch and transport from central to branch
13. Receipt of goods at branch
14. Further acceptance of delivery
15. Further labelling
16. Entry on to branch systems
17. Identification of items to be removed
18. Removal from branch systems of items being replaced
19. Approval of invoices on library system
20. Approval of invoices on council system.

These processes involve systems and overheads; where the tasks are carried out by professional staff, the cost is higher than work carried out by non professional staff.

In Hampshire the Total Cost of the service is approximately double that of the staff cost – i.e. the overhead allocated to each person is approximately equal to their salary cost.

No work measurement of these processes was carried out, but it is possible to estimate the cost of the Acquisition process as part of the whole library cost as follows:

- The central stock management team has 28.5 staff - approximately £1.0m
- There are approximately 90 professional librarians in the county, part of whose role is to determine the quality of stock in the libraries. The assumption made is that 20% of their work involved this activity - approximately £900k
- Each individual library spends time receiving, labelling and eventually removing stock – approximately £100k

A total of £2.0m of the total library service budget of £19-20m is probably spent on the Acquisition supply chain. The actual amount spent on books in the year 2003/4 will be £1.4m. Thus, the total cost of books and the various acquisition processes is £3.4m.

In simple terms and after allowing for book purchase discounts, Hampshire spends over £24 every time it buys a £10 book. This is broadly in line with figures actually measured in other authorities. It is far too high a cost.

Book Industry Supply Chain initiatives of the past fifteen years have been successful in tackling the root of these problems.

In libraries the processes involved in acquiring books slow down the delivery of the item to the hands of the final customer. In both book shops and web-based retail operations these costs and times have been dramatically reduced, and the service to customers has improved. Book shops used to take six weeks to obtain special items; nowadays most requests are met within a few days at little cost to the customer.

The introduction of book wholesaling and industry wide catalogues on one single database have made tremendous differences to the service and the information available to the reading public. Libraries have not sufficiently participated in and adapted their operation to these improvements. That is the reason why they needlessly waste so much resource.

About the Author

Tim Coates has thirty years experience in publishing, book retailing and consultancy and, in the past five years, has become closely involved in the work of public libraries. As a business analyst with degrees from Oxford and from Stirling University (M.Sc Econ) he became senior retail systems manager and market-planning manager for WH Smith in the 1970s and 1980s. At that time he was known as a national expert on space and staff planning in retail operations, on stock-control methods and distribution and he is recognised as an expert on supply chains in the publishing industry, and on retail design and branding. Recently he was invited to join the team commissioned to re-design Marks and Spencer's shops, because of his experience in retail marketing. He is a qualified work study practitioner and is a Fellow of the Institute of Production Control.

He became marketing director of Webster's bookshops, managing director of Sherratt and Hughes, managing director of WH Smith in Europe and then managing director of Waterstone's. In 1992, he left corporate retailing and opened his own large book shop in London, the first in the capital to open 24 hrs, with a café and all the features which have become the style of modern book stores. He is one of a small number of those, including Tim Waterstone, recognised to have achieved a revolutionary transformation in book selling in the UK in the last twenty years. He is now praised for his publishing of historical archives, both in print and on the World Wide Web, where he is the editor of a "Sense of Place" website and the recipient of an "NOF" grant. He is also a Bloomsbury author.

He has analysed and written about the public library service since 1999 and has advised Ministers, the DCMS, and the Audit Commission on practical improvements to libraries. He was an adviser to the Audit Commission for their publication "Building Better Libraries" in 2002. He has participated in Best Value Reviews in Westminster and Oxfordshire, and has advised a number of other councils and library friends groups on improvements to their service.

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