

The LIBRARY Campaigner

Supporting friends and users of libraries

Libraries...

Breathing magic, knowledge and inspiration into our lives

Enriching the people and places they serve

... the **difference** that libraries make

Offering a rich and diverse range of services
Bringing reading and learning into our lives
Strengthening relationships between staff and the community
Creating a space that is owned by everyone

the **heart** of the community

... the **challenge** that libraries face

Put libraries at the heart of our lives
Show politicians the difference that libraries can make
Develop services and activities that meet people's needs and reach new customers
Build on the passion and dedication of library staff

our idea

...the heart of the community

our vision

Our vision is of libraries at the heart of the community.

Opening up a world of books, music, films and technology that brings people and cultures together – a celebration of the diversity and richness of our lives

Offering a space for every curious mind that seeks knowledge, imagination or escape

Creating a hub for services as rich and diverse as those who use them

Reflecting the best culture of public service and creative imagination

Bringing magic to our lives and pride to our communities

THE NEW PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS

– see page 7

IT'S ALL ABOUT READING

– see page 12

THE LIBRI WARS

– see page 14

A new official image for public libraries!

– see page 10



THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN – AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

**To advance the
lifelong education of
the public by the
promotion, support,
assistance and
improvement of
libraries through the
activities of friends
and users groups.**

Executive Committee Meetings 2005 dates

January 22 (Birmingham)
March 19
May 14 (AGM)
July 9
September 17
November 19

The Officers and the Executive Committee meet regularly every two months, 1–4pm on a Saturday, usually in central London. Campaign members are always very welcome to attend. If you want to come to a meeting contact the Secretary to receive an agenda.

We would like to hold more of these meetings in the regions, both to encourage members to come and to help those committee members who have a long journey to London. Last year a meeting in Lewes was managed, and the first meeting for 2005 will be in Birmingham.

If a local group would like to invite us to meet in their area, we would be delighted to come.

Another date for your diary:
20/21 April 2005
the

Library and Information Show
at the NEC in Birmingham.
The Campaign hopes to have a stand again.



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Thanks to ...

- **Unison**, for its continued and valued support.
- **CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals)** for permission to adapt certain material for this issue from its journal, **Update**.

Chairman's Message

I was elected Chairman of the Library Campaign – supporting Friends and Users of Libraries at its AGM last May, so I thought I had better introduce myself to those members who don't know me. My formal name is Brian Hall, but I am known to all my friends as Tim, for reasons that are far too boring to go into here (though it has, on occasions, been helpful for people to believe I am two different people!).

I am a Chartered Member of CILIP (I was, in fact, the last person ever to be awarded a Certificate of Merit by the old Library Association for my services to the profession), but I have not worked in public libraries or any other publicly funded library for 40 years. I have been, and still am, a genuine library user. Becoming a library user and observing them from the outside has been a salutary experience. It was one of my motives for getting involved with the Campaign when it began 20 years ago.

I have also spent 36 years teaching librarianship at what is now the University of Central England. Although I took early retirement last year, I still do some teaching on public librarianship, mainly because there is no one else left to do it!

I agreed to stand for election as Chairman of the Campaign because I had long felt that we needed someone to be a figurehead, someone with experience and someone with a high profile to provide some leadership. This is not, in any way, to decry the admirable and outstanding work done by the various officers of the Campaign – notably Andrew Coburn as Hon. Secretary and the two Directors we have had over the years. The resignation of Jill Wight, for whom I always had enormous admiration, coincided with the gaining of charitable status and the subsequent new constitution and re-alignment of the Campaign. All of which provided us with an opportunity to re-assess our priorities.

Chairman's Message

Brian M. Hall
Campaign Chairman



Rightly or wrongly, the Campaign has been seen by many senior librarians as part of the trade union movement, concerned primarily with improving the lot of library workers. Our re-alignment to become primarily an umbrella group for Friends and User Groups opens up new challenges and opportunities – and as we achieve better libraries, so the lot of library workers will also improve.

I have pledged myself to lead from the front and to be pro-active. This is a busy time with the introduction of the new Public Library Standards (see pp.7–9), the adverse publicity for libraries achieved by the infamous Coates Report (see pp.14), and the recently announced House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee enquiring into government policy on public libraries (to which we have submitted evidence).

I have a feeling that with the introduction of People's Network, some parts of government think they have done their 'bit' for public libraries, and that they can now safely be put on the back burner. We have to adopt a high profile to ensure this does not happen.

Other plans in the pipeline include a reconsideration of the role of the Campaign's Director. In the meantime we are using some of the money saved to buy in expertise to get some important jobs done, not least the redesign of the website, which is very out of date.

I shall also be writing to people in government, professional bodies and commercial organisations and to our colleagues in other groups such as

The Campaign is grateful to the 50 or so Unison branches which affiliate – we would welcome more, as well as individual Unison members joining us as individual members. Recently we have become aware of an unofficial email discussion group for Unison library stewards. This is not intended for non-Unison people, and is not trying to get involved with the Campaign's business. Unison library people who want to join would, I imagine, be welcomed. Contact the Secretary to be put in touch.

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Owain Hammonds

CONTENTS:

- 3 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT
- 4 SECRETARY'S SLOT
- 5 PEER REVIEW – WHAT'S THAT? It's a health check for library services that users should get involved in, says Sarah Wilkie.
- 6 CAMPAIGN TREASURER'S REPORT by Martin Wright
- 7 THE NEW PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS: These set the targets for local libraries – for the next three years.
- 10 WHAT ARE LIBRARIES FOR? The community role of libraries is increasingly valued, says Laura Swaffield.
- 12 LIBRARIES ARE FOR READING! Reading is the foundation of the development work for public libraries – and it's very exciting! says Miranda McKearney.
- 14 THE LIBRI WARS: The hottest debate of 2004 has been the one started by Tim Coates's report, says Laura Swaffield...
- 14 LIBRARIES IN CRISIS? ... but some of Tim's assertions need to be taken with a pinch of salt, argues Ayub Khan.

Friends of Museums and those in Archives, to tell them of our new beginning. I also want to investigate ways of creating a database of Friends and User Groups and to encourage more such groups. We desperately need to halt the decline in our membership and to attract more sponsorship from outside.

We intend to organise a re-launch of the Campaign as soon as we have our new Business Plan and Marketing Plan sorted out.

I sincerely hope that those of you who share my passion for libraries and their social, cultural and educational values will join me in this Campaign. If any of you would like to be more actively involved, at either local or national level, I'd love to hear from you.

Brian M. Hall

Where next?

It seems a long time since the last issue of the Campaigner – and it is. Some readers may be surprised and perhaps disappointed that we have not made more progress in relaunching ourselves on the back of achieving charitable status. Though the Executive Committee shares this feeling, there are reasons. Members, as well as being entitled to know what they are, may feel moved to offer support, advice or practical help...

A large part of the delay is down to pressure of work on our most active members and officers. I have been involved in a part-time postgraduate management course at work, as well as awaiting and being part of a major procurement exercise to replace the library management (computer) system. Meantime Geoff Smith is increasingly tied up with the affairs of the NHS as the new Patients Advice and Liaison Service gets off the ground. And Eric Hirons Smith is now a full-time student (which at least legitimises his taste for beer, if he needed that!)

At the same time we have realised that we need to think more deeply about the direction in which we want to travel. Our new Chair, Brian Hall, is drafting a paper to help take this forward. There was a general feeling that until this is known, we should not advertise for a new Director, since that person's role will be dependent on more strategic decisions.

On the other hand, Brian has been working on finding someone to redesign our website. Although we have had some compliments on it in the last few months, it has not been updated for up to a couple of years and we desperately need to do this. If there are any budding (or actual) webbies out there we would still be interested to make contact.

Meanwhile ...

As you will have read elsewhere, a fair amount has been going on in the wider library world and we have managed to keep in contact with most of it.

The public library standards have been revised (see pp.7-9). The Campaign put in some comments but as the final version has even fewer actual standards than the draft, it appears that we did not convince! It is particularly concerning that the standards about service points have been watered down or qualified in

the small print. Nonetheless this is still a tool for Friends and User Groups to employ in quizzing their authorities.

As I write, people are rushing to get their submissions to the Commons Select Committee investigation into public libraries. The short timescale does not help (about two weeks from the announcement of the investigation to the deadline) but it is good that this will be the second enquiry the Committee has conducted in four years.

I am not sure if there has ever been anything similar before. Last time, the Campaign was asked to give oral evidence. We are willing to do so again if asked. After I finish typing this, our written submission will probably be the next thing I do. It would seem that many of the things we said last time are still valid.

Update 2004

In 2004 the Campaign met Andrew Stevens, Senior Policy Advisor (Libraries) and others at the Museums, Libraries & Archives Council (MLA) three times, with another date arranged for December. This has enabled us to have an up to date briefing on a number of areas, including Framework for the Future (F4F, covered in The Campaigner no 66, spring 2003).

MLA, formerly known as Resource, this year reverted to a more meaningful title. It has a brief to advise the government and other bodies on issues relating to the three sectors in its title and, perhaps more importantly, to do (or commission) research and other work to take things forward.

Recently, work on F4F has been one of the main planks, since DCMS (the government department for libraries) has little or no money to put directly into this area.

MLA has developed an action plan for three years of work on F4F. At our October meeting we were given copies of the first half-yearly report. A lot of this work is being done with partners such as the Reading Agency (see pp.12-14) or the Society of Chief Librarians.

The Campaign has not had a chance to be a formal partner in the same way.

But in one area we were encouraged to get involved and, more importantly, to ensure that local groups participate. This

Secretary's Report

Andrew Coburn
National Secretary



Our meetings this year with the Museums, Libraries & Archives Council (MLA) have been productive and useful. I hope that Friends, Users, and Campaign members watch out for the chance to participate if their authority is peer-reviewed (see pp.5-6).

NOTE: Andrew Coburn also compiled a formal annual report for the AGM in May. As its contents have been covered in various issues of this newsletter, it has been left out for lack of space. Copies are available from the Secretary if desired.

is the new peer review scheme (fully explained on pp.5-6). The first reviews involved at least four user groups.

In other cases it was (presumably) not possible to contact relevant groups. Several more reviews are now being arranged (authorities not yet known), and we told the MLA that we would do what we can to get users involved.

We have also been kept up to date with MLA's project to come up with a national marketing message for public libraries (see p.10).

At our June meeting we were told about the Lending Time project funded by the Home Office and run by Community Service Volunteers (covered in The Campaigner no 65, autumn 2002). A new group has been established to carry forward work on community engagement, including toolkits on best practice, training etc. MLA indicated that we should be able to get fairly closely involved in this, even if we do not get a seat on the steering group. MLA will also be doing more work on the demographic profile of volunteers working in each of its three sectors.

Finally MLA has just produced a workforce development strategy.

Most of the material mentioned in this report can be found on the MLA website (www.mla.gov.uk – go to Action, then to Framework for the Future).

Public Library Peer Review? What's that?



Find out if your library service is going to be 'peer reviewed', advises Sarah Wilkie from MLA (Museums, Libraries & Archives Council). If it is, she urges, get involved!

One of the most effective ways of learning is from your critical friends. They can provide both a challenge and some practical advice and support. To enable public libraries to benefit from this kind of advice – from fellow librarians in other local authorities – a programme of peer reviews has been developed by the Museums, Libraries & Archives Council (MLA) and the local government Improvement & Development Agency (IDeA). It is part of the Framework for the Future plan of activity to transform public libraries.

What does it mean, and how can you get involved?

Peer review is helping individual library services understand how well they are working and supporting them in making improvements. It uses the knowledge and expertise of people working in and leading other library services, to share their understanding and spread good practice.

In addition to helping drive improvement in individual local authorities, the reviews also provide an opportunity to learn more about what makes some authorities perform better than others. This learning will help develop future programmes for public library improvement.

The review process is based on a model already established by IDeA, which has a high profile and high standing with local authorities. It is based on the principle that one of the most effective ways of learning is from your critical friends, who can provide both challenge and practical advice and support.

The programme seeks to target weaker authorities. The review is a voluntary process, undertaken with the full agreement of the local authority. This helps ensure a high level of ownership

and commitment to improvement. Libraries are showing strong interest in participating.

The review process

Reviews are carried out by teams consisting of three library 'experts' (drawn from comparable authorities – but not near neighbours), plus a councillor who has, or has had, responsibility for a library service in another authority and a managing officer from IDeA. Library experts (both officers and members) are accredited using a standard IDeA process that is used for all their reviews. Those who volunteer must demonstrate excellence in service management and improvement, and the ability to listen and work as peers.

Each review takes three days. The review starts with a presentation from the authority on the key issues as they see them. The peer team holds interviews with staff, senior officers, partners, users and others to test the strengths and weaknesses of the authority. All reviews seek to engage senior officers and members, including the Leader of the Council, Chief Executive, Cabinet Member, Director and head of service. The team will also meet with user forums, partners and a representative staff group wherever possible.

The review may identify issues about councillors' and officers' commitment, priorities, resources, customer focus, communication, performance management, etc. On the final day, the review team present their key findings to senior staff and, wherever possible, to councillors and the Chief Executive.

These findings are later included in a more in-depth report to the authority, which then becomes the foundation for an improvement plan. MLA provides

funding, through Framework for the Future, to enable the authority to carry out this plan. The funding is dependent on MLA (advised by the peer team and IDeA) being assured that the plan is a reasonable and rigorous response to the review and will lead to practical improvement.

Pilot reviews

Three pilot library service peer reviews have now been completed, in East Sussex, Bristol and Devon. The peers who took part were drawn from Liverpool, Newcastle, Derbyshire, Essex, Birmingham, Norfolk, Staffordshire, Lincolnshire and Sunderland. A workshop was held in September to start the process of evaluating the pilots.

The overwhelming view was that, while there were concerns about some of the practical arrangements, the reviews had been very positive experiences – both for the authorities under review and the peer teams who undertook them. One Chief Librarian said that Peer Review had been a challenging experience but very worthwhile, and had already made a significant difference to the way they were approaching some issues.

On the whole, the peers felt that they had gained as much as they had given through the process, both in terms of their own personal development and in the learning they were able to take back to their authority. And everybody involved was keen to point out that this isn't just about strong authorities helping the weak – all authorities have pockets of strength and weakness, and can learn from each other.

It is too soon to be able to evaluate more than the processes involved in peer review; a clearer idea of the outcomes will be available once the action plans for

To find out more about public library peer reviews, check out the MLA website:
<http://www.mla.gov.uk/action/framework/framework.asp>
 or contact Sarah Wilkie, Libraries Policy Adviser at MLA: sarah.wilkie@mla.gov.uk.

the pilot authorities have been implemented and their impact assessed. However, the early indications are that peer review will result in significant improvements in library service provision within the reviewed authorities.

Future reviews

Plans are well underway to roll out the scheme more widely. Six library authorities will benefit from a peer review early in 2005 – Bath & North East Somerset, Bradford, Peterborough and the London Boroughs of Ealing, Merton and Newham. A further six will have a review later in the year, but these are yet to be identified.

User involvement

As has been mentioned, wherever possible a peer review should seek to incorporate the views of users. In Bristol, members of the peer team met with the local Library User Group, a forum for representatives of the various individual library user groups in the authority. They referred specifically to this group in their report: 'There is a Library User Group that is actively involved, knowledgeable, committed and enthusiastic about the library service.'

The library service was praised in the report for frequently consulting users on specific issues, such as access to the Central Library, although feedback on these consultations is sometimes insufficient. One of the users who attended the meeting with the peer team said: 'We have a network of user groups covering many of the libraries and welcomed the opportunity to share their thinking with the Peer Reviewers. We feel we have contributed to protecting and improving the service ...

'From a quick reading of the Review Report I am pleased that it is neither a whitewash of the current situation nor simply destructive, and sets out useful recommendations for improvement. Our task is now to bring management, staff, user groups and ward councillors together to obtain a better hearing and more resources for the libraries.'

The message is clear: find out if your library service is going to be reviewed, and if it is, get involved!

Treasurer's Report

I am pleased to report that there was just a small deficit of about £280 for the year, mainly because the resignation of Jill Wight before the year end helped to improve the financial position, if not the Campaign's effectiveness. Subscription income is again lower and inevitably costs have risen. The reserves stood at about £2,200. Ideally the Campaign should have rather larger reserves, so that it could sustain activity for a longer period if there were a problem with regular income.

Although life membership is not now offered to new members, the existence of life memberships should be borne in mind in looking at the reserves, particularly for organisations that may have an indefinite life, as the Campaign has to continue to service these.

My thanks again to all who have supported us during the year, in particular Unison for its increased grant and payment for printing and for distribution of some issues of The Campaigner. I would also like to thank Jill Wight for her efficiency in supplying regular information to enable me to keep the accounts up-to-date and wish her well in her new career.

Martin Wright, Honorary Treasurer, April 2004

The Library Campaign: Income and expenditure for the year ended 31/3/2004

	Year ended 31/3/03			
	£	£	£	£
Income				
Unison grant		8,340.00		8,000.00
Members' subscriptions		4,761.00		6,293.00
Life memberships		—		100.00
Pledges		261.00		276.00
Donations		65.00		1,200.00
Conference income		630.00		—
Sales		6.50		65.50
Insurance claim		855.58		—
Interest		15.43		8.57
		14,934.51		15,943.07
Expenditure				
Campaign Director:				
Salary	8,822.18		9,748.80	
Overtime	2,205.60		2,437.20	
Employer's NI	918.82		891.10	
Pension	421.60	12,368.20	505.92	13,583.02
Postage		570.03		133.39
Telecomms		445.20		648.66
Stationery & computer supplies		340.65		245.53
Travel: outside meetings		111.05		57.54
Subsistence: outside meetings		140.60		5.17
Library & Information Show		—		177.35
Annual General Meeting/Conference		845.95		274.99
Steering Group travel		99.34		—
The Campaigner (<i>Paid by Unison</i>)		—		—
Materials Officer expenses		95.80		—
Website & domains		—		102.20
Miscellaneous		61.10		71.40
		15,219.04		15,229.25
Surplus/(deficit) for the year		(284.53)		643.82

The Library Campaign: Balance sheet as at 31/3/2004

	31/03/03			
	£	£	£	£
Assets				
Balances at bank:				
HSBC	10,018.48		10,124.90	
First Direct	—		94.66	
Alliance & Lster	737.66		358.26	
		10,756.14		10,577.82
Less liabilities and provisions				
Grant received in advance	8,000.00		7,280.00	
Creditors	518.76		775.91	
		8,518.76		8,055.91
Net assets		2,237.38		2,521.91
Represented by:				
Accumulated reserve at 1 April 2003		2,521.91		1,878.09
Surplus for the year		(284.53)		643.82
		2,237.38		2,521.91

New standards ...

They're here! The new public library standards are out – now renamed Public Library Service Standards (PLSSs).

What's up?

The draft version of the new standards was published in May. They will apply until 2006. And they will be a chief tool used to measure how well libraries are doing – by government agencies and by canny library users!

The final version emerged in late October. They are now called Public Library Service Standards (PLSSs) to distinguish them from the old Public Library Standards (PLSs).

The PLSs, the first-ever standards, came out in 2001. They proved to be very useful advocacy tools for librarians and library users alike, when arguing the case against cuts. Services were supposed to have met the PLSs by now. To few people's surprise, it didn't happen.

In 2004, just 48 out of 149 library authorities have sent comments on the draft. The DCMS wanted 'one comment per authority' and hoped library staff would channel their views through their service heads. Whether or not that happened, we don't know. The Library Campaign certainly sent in comments, on behalf of users.

What's new?

Experience with the old PLSs now informs the new PLSSs. Any changes have also been discussed in eye-watering detail by the DCMS and the ACL (Advisory Council on Libraries), which represents librarians.

The new PLSSs have been revamped to fit in with the DCMS's Framework for the Future (F4F) policy document and the new local authority CPA (Comprehensive Performance Assessment) process. This is understandable. Both devices were launched after the first PLSs came out, and libraries are now being required to work to them.

They have been 'streamlined' – from an unwieldy 19 to just 10 – to fulfil F4F's promise to ensure they 'do not impose an unreasonable administrative burden'. This is also understandable up to a point – local authorities have to measure a mind-boggling number of 'performance

indicators' and whatnot. They take up time and money, stifle local flexibility and sometimes even conflict with each other.

Whether the right standards have been deleted is, of course, another matter altogether.

What's been lost?

The chart (overleaf) shows which of the original PLSs have been junked. The reasons for abandoning them varied.

Some PLSs have been dropped because they worked. The minimum loan period and number of books was an easy one to adopt, so that's done – and gone. The standard for ICT provision was fulfilled thanks to People's Network funding. (The ICT targets that remain are frozen – the PLSSs recognise that, with no more money in the pipeline, services will do well just to maintain 2004 levels).

Some standards are in limbo. There's no longer a stock quality standard. All sorts of work was promised on developing a way to measure this, but little has come of it. Even the stock quantity standard has been watered down.

On qualified staff, the promised research has failed to prove a case for having a minimum number of them, or even to sort out the possible qualifications that might be most relevant.

One thing that's very much missing is any kind of sanction for councils that fail to meet the PLSSs. When the PLSs were first published in 2001, the DCMS promised something about sanctions 'shortly'. It never arrived.

Meanwhile, of course, library users did find that the old PLSs had a bracing effect on some tight-fisted councils. We were able to say, in complete honesty, that councils would be held to the standards and even that a Library Inspectorate was likely to be set up. That didn't happen either.

The new PLSSs have to be seen as a watering-down of the first PLSs. And – while all services really have improved their performance since 2001 – nothing much has happened to councils that didn't improve as much as others.

If library users need a weapon in the future, they may have to take another tack. See 'What's next?' below.

What's next?

Partly, we will have to reserve judgement until the whole of the standards have been published. Yes! On top of the new PLSSs, a completely separate set of 'impact standards' is now being developed. These aim to focus more clearly on what the library service is doing for its local area.

The core plan behind the government's F4F plan is to show that libraries contribute to all kinds of local and national government priorities. In particular, there is now an official set of basic 'shared priorities', agreed between the government and local authorities.

The impact standards, according to Bill Macnaught, Chair of the ACL, will 'provide demonstrable and measurable results, a more rounded picture of the role of libraries and an informed assessment for the CPA process from 2005-06 onwards'. (CPA has been widely criticised for downgrading the importance of libraries.)

The aim of the impact standards will be to 'focus on the way that libraries meet the needs of the communities they serve'. So they will be built around the 'shared priorities' identified for central and local government.

A key tool will be writing a 'community profile'. Some services already do this, so ACL hopes to draw on their work and find 'a common basis' to be used for all profiles.

Ghosts of some of the old abandoned PLSs may arise in the impact standards. For instance, some services have made changes to opening hours in order to conform to the detailed PLSs – although these were not truly convenient for the communities concerned. In future, opening times will not be prescribed but the impact standards will require authorities to find out what users want, and provide it.

What did the Library Campaign say to the DCMS during the consultation?

Friends and User Groups have a key role in advocacy to the councils providing public library services. The Public Library Standards provide an accepted benchmark against which users can and do evaluate the library service, advocate improvement and resist reductions. We are therefore concerned to strengthen the Standards in the interest of library users.

We welcome the intention of the DCMS and its ACL that the new PLSSs should align with F4F and take account of the impact of the service. However we see disadvantages to users if the existing standards are modified before the new impact measures are introduced. We ask that DCMS reconsider this presumption.

In any case when the impact standards are being devised we look forward to being able to have an input to and comment on them. Given the emphasis on 'community' we would be encouraged to see included some standard(s) relating to quality, quantity or depth of consultation with the public.

Our views on the specific proposals are:

PLS 1 (ii) This standard has enabled users

to argue to secure better opening hours and to retain opening hours when threatened by 'cuts'. It should be retained until the impact standards are introduced.

PLS 4 We are sorry to see the proposal to discontinue this, because users seek long and convenient opening hours. It has been found useful by users for the same reasons as PLS 1(ii). If it is not retained, there is a fear that authorities will drop below it as a way of saving money without closing smaller branches. Despite the much brighter view of funding in public libraries authorities are still being put in the position of finding such savings. This opens a door.

PLS 7,8 They may have served their purpose for libraries but they are a benchmark and comparator for users.

PLS 12-15 While we understand the PLUS system we are concerned that the results do not always reflect the opinion of users – many are reluctant to make critical comment on an appreciated service. It is not clear from the consultation document, but the implication is that there will only be one

number in response to this standard. The divisions into the existing standards enable at least some breakdown of actual satisfaction with use.

PLS 16 We are disappointed at the slow progress on this. For the library user this is critical and we ask that the work should be funded and completed quickly.

PLS 17, 18 We are glad to see these important standards retained and look forward to early completion of the data on large print books and audio books.

PLS 19 For the user the number and quality (not least in their training) of the staff that serve us is of great importance. We are sorry to see this benchmark discontinued before a new standard is introduced. There are currently a number of places where users perceive the number of librarians as being reduced without satisfactory explanation. This is perceived by users as dumbing down and confidence in services is likely to be reduced by these measures. A standard that gave some clarity to the actual situation, and perhaps enabled some comparisons, would be valued.

What's the final version?

The new PLSSs are to be 'the minimum standard of service that local people are entitled to expect'. And they will be the basis for a new Best Value Performance Indicator, to be piloted 'shortly'.

Some PLSSs may be seen as a watering down even of the 'streamlined' draft that the Library Campaign commented on in the spring. For instance, the standard for stock now specifies number of 'items' bought, without any specifics such as 'children's' or 'reference'. Is this flexibility, or abandonment of any attempt to define quality? Is it relevant that the total number is now reduced to 216?

At least failure has not (often) seen as a reason to drop a standard completely. Councils have almost universally failed to meet the old PLSs on number of physical visits and opening hours – but they remain in the new PLSSs. Both remain unchanged.

However, these two new PLSSs are

examples of a very notable feature of the new version – the amount of qualifying factors in the small print. This is a response to long-voiced criticism that some of the old PLSs were too rigid, and took little account of innovative outreach services.

So 'visits' now include virtual use (use of ICT terminals, council websites, remote use of library services to reserve books, use reference resources etc). This ducks for a time the enduring problem of how to define a specific PLSS to measure virtual use – but it also helps services to bump up their 'visits' numbers.

The same PLSS also makes it clear that 'visits' include use of the library element of multi-agency buildings, and purposes such as ICT or reader development events. This is a simple rewording to reflect modern practice.

But it also includes attending any meeting or event on the premises 'when it is

organised by or through the library service' – even 'to use the space set aside for library functions for any other purpose'. Is this flexibility – or a dilution too far?

As ever, there will be much argument over standard No. 1 – percentage of population within a certain distance of a library. The fine print lets councils make a case for including mobiles and 'other service outlets' (defined as available to the public, staffed and equipped with ICT).

Access to a static library has been another (lesser) failure, and the wording of the old PLS 1 led to endless arguments. But it has been a good advocacy tool for users fighting cuts-happy councils, and it seems no other nation has yet devised a better standard. This standard is also unchanged, although there is a different bit of small print to argue over – and there is a new concession for services in the top 10% of most 'sparsely populated' areas.

Find the new PLSSs, and supporting documents, on www.culture.gov.uk (in Libraries & Communities). There is a link to a detailed report on the underlying issues, the options considered and the enormous amount of research used in making decisions.

THE NEW 2004 PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE STANDARDS PLSSs 1-10

ACCESSIBILITY

PLSS 1 (old PLS 1[i]) – Percentage of households within specified distance of a static library: 1 mile – inner London 100%, outer London 99%, metropolitan 95%, unitary 88%; 2 miles – metro & unitary 100%, county 85%. Unchanged.

New provision for the 10% most 'sparse' local authority areas: 1 mile – unitary 75%; 2 miles – unitary 85%, county 72%.

NB: Councils that fail PLSS 1 can now bid for a higher score by showing how mobiles and 'other' outlets fill the gaps. When 'sparse' councils do this, the result must meet the 'non-sparse' standard.

PLSS 2 (old PLS 3 [i]) – Aggregated opening hours per 1,000 population: 128. Unchanged.

ICT

PLSS 3 (updated PLS 5) – % of static service points connected to internet. 100%.

PLSS 4 (old PLS 6) – Workstations with internet and online catalogue per 10,000 population (inc. mobiles, static libraries, other service points). 6. Unchanged (except the word 'and' used to be 'and/or').

NB: See also PLSS 6.

USAGE and SATISFACTION

PLSS 5 (old PLS 9) – Requests for books met: (i) 50% in 7 days (ii) 70% in 15

days (iii) 85% in 30 days. Unchanged.

PLSS 6 (old PLS 10 and 11) – Library visits per 1,000 population: 7,650 inner London (6,800 for 'enhanced population' ie users from outside the borough); 8,600 outer London; 6,000 metro; 6,300 unitary; 6,600 county. Identical to the old PLS 11 – but now councils can count in use of the library's web resources (both on the premises and remote) and visits to premises for events, etc.

PLSS 7 (new) – % of over-16s who view service as 'very good' or 'good' (on a 5-point scale that also offers 'adequate', 'poor' or 'very

poor', as in Cipfa Plus): 94%.

PLSS 8 (new) – % of under-16s who see service as 'good' (on a 3-point scale that also offers 'adequate/OK' or 'bad', as in Cipfa Plus): 77%.

These 2 PLSSs replace the more elaborate targets in old PLSSs 12-15.

STOCK

PLSS 9 (new) – Number of items (books & all media, for all ages) bought per year, per 1,000 population. 216. Replaces the much more elaborate quality and quantity targets in PLSSs 16 and 17.

PLSS 10 (old PLS 18) – Time it would take to replenish all stock available on loan. 6.7 yrs. (PLS 18 said 8.5 years.)

THE 'OLD' 2001 PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS PLSs 1-19

PLS 1 – A range of percentages for households within specified distance of [i] all static libraries and [ii]: libraries open outside 9am-5pm hours. Examples: for [i] 1 mile – inner London 100%, outer London 99%, metropolitan 95%, unitary 88%; 2 miles – metro & unitary 100%, county 85%.

PLS 2 – Emergency closures, or stops missed by mobile service: must match performance of top quartile of all library services.

PLS 3 – Aggregated opening hours per week per 1,000 population – 128.

PLS 4 – % of larger libraries open 45+ hours a week: must match performance of top

quartile of all library services.

PLS 5 – All static service points open 10+ hours a week connected to internet.

PLS 6 – Workstations with internet and/or online catalogue: 6 per 10,000 population by 2004. Internet at all static libraries by 2002.

PLS 7 – Books to be loaned for at least 3 weeks.

PLS 8 – At least 8 books at a time can be borrowed.

PLS 9 – Requests for books to be met: (i) 50% in 7 days (ii) 70% in 15 days (iii) 85% in 30 days. Provision for alternative formats.

PLS 10 – Visits per year to library's website: must match performance of top quartile of

all library services.

PLS 11 – Library visits per year per 1,000 population: 7,650 inner London (6,800 for 'enhanced population' ie users from outside the borough); 8,600 outer London; 6,000 metro; 6,300 unitary; 6,600 county.

PLS 12 – 65% of children/adults obtain a specific book they want.

PLS 13 – 75% of children/adults obtain the information they want.

PLS 14 – 95% of children/adults rate staff knowledge as good/very good.

PLS 15 – 75% of children/adults rate staff helpfulness as good/very good.

PLS 16 – A 'quality index' to be developed for adult fiction, adult non-fiction, children's books, reference, large print/cassette books, non-English books.

PLS 17 – Annual purchase per 1,000 population of 'items' (books, audio, video, subscriptions to electronic publications – but not journals): adult fiction 88, adult non-fiction 57, children's 69, reference 11.

PLS 18 – Time it would take to replenish all stock now on loan. 8.5 years.

PLS 19 – Service to show it has 'appropriate' numbers of staff with information management or ICT qualifications.

DISCONTINUED

These PLSs from the 2001 list have been junked. The DCMS says it plans to go on monitoring all these areas 'by other means', and may re-impose some standards in the future.

PLS 1 (ii) and **3** (ii) – Opening hours outside 9am-5pm or 'convenient'. Best hours should now be defined by local

needs, and rated in the new 'impact' standards.

PLS 2 – Opening hours or mobile stops missed out. Often dictated by outside forces; too much fluctuation. 'Outlived its usefulness.'

PLS 4 – % of larger libraries open 45+ hours. 'Significant' progress, so no longer needed.

PLS 5 and **6** (ii) – Static

libraries with online catalogue/ internet. Rolled up into the new PLSS3 on ICT.

PLS 7 & 8 – Loan period to be 3+ weeks, at least 8 books. 'Served their purpose.'

PLS 12-15 – Cipfa Plus surveys to show various % of adults/children got book/information they wanted; thought staff were knowledgeable/helpful. All

rolled up into the simpler PLSS 7 & 8.

PLS 16 – Quality of stock. Never defined, this standard is now 'in abeyance – subject to issues of practicality and definition being resolved'.

PLS 19 – Qualified staff. Hard to classify or standardise. But staff skills are important, and adding a future standard 'will be kept under review'.

What are libraries for?

Communities need 'culture'. It's not an optional extra. As politicians increasingly recognise this, library users are building up the ammunition they need to make their point. Laura Swaffield reports.

'Culture' is essential to successful neighbourhood regeneration – ranging from 'iconic' new buildings to grassroots community activities. So says the DCMS (Department for Culture, Media & Sport) in a consultation paper – Culture at the Heart of Regeneration – published in late summer.

This kind of document is useful to User Groups trying to explain the value of libraries to their local councils. And the Library Campaign sent in comments on your behalf. So, with luck, the final paper will better reflect the kind of points that users would like to make.

The original DCMS report already shows a growing understanding of the real issues. A few years ago, the idea of 'community regeneration' (or whatever it was fashionable to call it, from year to year) tended to be all about big, prestige projects – probably involving a glossy new building. Limited attention might be made to what the locals really wanted – especially if they wanted commonsense provision of unglamorous basic services.

Over the years, increasing lip service has been paid to the importance of 'consultation with the community'. As many readers will know, this often meant rather little. At best, there would be a couple of public meetings, which would be attended by the usual suspects who go to public meetings, and nobody else, and a report that was read by the same usual suspects and nobody else.

At worst (and I write from experience here!) councils would announce some grandiose scheme as a fait accompli, completely ignore any opposition expressed – and still swear to all comers that this process counted as consultation.

Most recently of all, a whole lot of reports have stressed that this

kind of thing won't do. It does not lay sound foundations for any kind of project – and false 'consultation' makes people angry, and is worse than no consultation at all. The reports have also admitted that true consultation isn't easy. It is hard work getting close to the kind of people who don't go to public meetings, and don't send in comments on fancy reports. It is slow. And that doesn't fit very well with the plans of commercial developers, or politicians (local or national) anxious to make a mark before the next election.

The new DCMS report does show a welcome shift towards recognizing this kind of reality. It lists the benefits of 'culture' within communities. The list is fairly familiar – from social 'glue' to job creation, from attracting new residents to giving locals a better sense of identity.

What is newer is the DCMS's confidence in asserting that these social goods are indispensable. DCMS plans to 'take more of a lead in helping ensure that culture is firmly embedded in regeneration'.

It will publish a 'delivery plan' early next year. This will have three priorities: building partnerships (between central and local government, public and private sectors); supporting delivery (disseminating good practice); and strengthening evidence.

There is, in fact, a growing pile of research trying to prove that 'culture' is good for people, and that the results can be measured. There are 'impact studies', and loads of 'evaluation toolkits' to show how to measure all this stuff and churn out some impressive numbers. But DCMS still finds some big gaps. Studies seldom go beyond counting the number of new jobs and visitors conjured up by culture in the form of visitor attractions. They almost never look at long-term consequences (good or bad).



This draft leaflet (two sides) shows the latest thinking on a planned campaign to draw attention to public libraries. The central theme will be 'Libraries at the heart of the community'. Andrew Coburn reports: 'The MLA has commissioned two firms named Dave and Provokateur to work up the Framework for the Future "vision" in a form that can be marketed nationwide. By October they had done their first draft, using interviews and focus groups of library staff and other interested parties – though apparently very few users. Now their task is to look in more detail at the audiences that libraries try to reach and how the message can be got to them. Finally, in 2005, there will be a campaign to launch and communicate the message. The Campaign has offered to be part of that process, which may well tie in with our own relaunch.'





Community library – ‘The Keith Axon centre was built as a community centre – but there were so many requests for a library that the Council (Redbridge) decided to make the centre dual-functional,’ reports Peter Richardson, who took this picture. ‘They produced a library with innovative rollable and reversible shelving, effectively clearing an open space for community functions.’

New, consistent assessment is needed, says the DCMS. Without strong evidence about what works and what doesn’t, mistakes will continue to be made.

The DCMS’s list of mistakes is again familiar: ‘top down’ flagship projects don’t work; projects must be tailored to the local community; consultation must be genuine.

What is newer is an admission that all this takes time, and often does not suit the very different priorities of commercial developers. Also new is a frank warning about the social danger of ‘regeneration’ that benefits only a well-heeled minority. It will bypass, alienate or even drive out the locals. And it probably will not last.

The age of expensive ‘flagship’ projects (funded by Euro-money or the lottery) is dying, the paper says. ‘It will, therefore, be increasingly important to explore and exploit the full range of cultural activity that can help regenerate communities.’

Libraries are praised for their work in both these areas: for building new landmark buildings that perk up the neighbourhood (like the now-famous Peckham Library) and for ‘extending their [services]’ use, joining up with other local services and providing a wide range of resources for their communities ... libraries can have a far-reaching impact on the culture of their community...’

This is fine. But the paper fails to make a link to another and unique role played libraries – helping people to learn. It ranges from just being a friendly, neutral place where people don’t feel intimidated to the very sophisticated things libraries are providing by themselves and in tandem with local colleges – all the way from basic ICT skills to helping users to get access to research collections in universities nationwide.

The report rightly stresses that culture can’t solve every regeneration problem, which often entails educating or training people. Libraries can do a lot, especially for people who have been put off education altogether by a bad experience at school – and this isn’t mentioned.

Culture at the Heart of Regeneration, and a literature review commissioned as part of the work, are at
www.culture.gov.uk

What the Library Campaign said:

These comments were compiled by Andrew Coburn, Campaign secretary, with input from committee members

The Library Campaign – supporting Friends and Users of Libraries is a Registered Charity with the objects ‘To advance the lifelong education of the public by the promotion, support, assistance and improvement of libraries through the activities of friends and users groups’, and is recognised as the voice of the library user. We are grateful for the opportunity to make this response to the above consultation document.

Friends and User Groups have a key role in advocacy to organisations providing library services. The campaign is keen to build relationships with similar groups operating in other fields including, though not only, museums and archives. In that sense the topic of this consultation is of even more interest as it implies several parts of the public sector working together.

In general we welcome the tenor of the document and the acceptance of the place of culture in supporting ‘social goods’ which are regarded as being so valuable. We are pleased that DCMS expects to take a greater role in regeneration projects and activity.

In terms of our area of interest we are disappointed that the case studies which refer to libraries, as well as the rest of text do so largely in terms of the buildings. As is acknowledged, the impetus of *Framework for the Future* and other initiatives is about content and services, many not delivered in a library building. We would have liked to see more recognition of libraries’ ability to assist in such things as education and training, widening citizen participation especially through e-services, as well as issues that are mentioned such as Surestart.

One point on buildings which does not appear but which users value, and which seems extremely relevant to the planning of regeneration projects, is that local libraries are seen as accessible community resorts/spaces. No other public facility matches the potential of a local library for integrating all classes, ages etc. in the use of a single space for multiple purposes. Unlike arts festivals, summer projects for young people etc. libraries are always there so that benefits can build up rather than dissipating over time. They are an essential tool for social cohesion at the micro level.

We are also intrigued that the ‘Where do we go from here’ section does not see a role for the Museums, Libraries & Archive Council (MLA) or similar organisations at a national level. One might have thought that these bodies acting together or individually might be able to support work the three areas of partnerships, supporting delivery and strengthening evidence. As far as MLA goes these are large parts of its current activity.

Libraries are for reading!

Framework for the Future (F4F) is the government's action plan for public libraries for the next ten years. Various bodies are working on projects within the framework. One of these is The Reading Agency (TRA), experts on reader development – basically, bringing books and people together by focusing on the reader. Miranda McKearney, TRA's Director, is an enthusiast for F4F...



Some people were disappointed by Framework for the Future (F4F), finding it quite bland. Many still have a rather hazy understanding of what it all means, how it might change things.

At first sight the document does feel a bit bland, but I think there are profoundly challenging things in it. Also, it's the first government library strategy for years, so for once there's a political focus on libraries.

We mustn't lose this chance to tackle libraries' political invisibility. This links to two other F4F challenges: clarity of purpose (libraries should offer distinctive services) and 'national offers' (what can everyone, wherever they live, expect from their library service?).

Libraries have spread themselves very thinly. F4F makes this a time to refocus on their core purpose. At The Reading Agency (TRA) we, of course, think that core purpose is reading. F4F's vision has reading as one of its key themes. Thank God! Outsiders see libraries as being all about reading, so I have always found it bizarre that this argument has needed so much winning among library professionals.

Political invisibility

Perhaps the biggest challenge for libraries is their political invisibility. F4F should be a turning point. Some people say it has come in the nick of time, that we are in the last chance saloon.

Certainly libraries have stunningly low visibility, and are still losing political capital. They haven't made the political inroads they need to benefit from public sector investment. There is a major refurbishment programme for schools – why not libraries?

TRA has done a lot of talking to policy makers in the past few months. We found a damaging lack of understanding about what libraries really offer, a perception of a declining, fragmented service that is

difficult to work with because so many organisations are involved. This is a huge challenge of advocacy. F4F offers a new departure point to get our act together and show how libraries deliver.

Loads of work is going on to get the arguments and evidence sorted. As part of this, TRA is carrying out policy audits to develop the right linkages and arguments, funding research on relevance and impact, and training library staff. We regularly contact civil servants, major national organisations (e.g the Learning & Skills Council, the Local Government Association, Connexions) and we are forming partnerships. I will focus on just two examples.

One critical thing about libraries' work is its emphasis on the sheer pleasure of reading. This is politically important. There's a growing realisation in government that enjoyment of reading is important to key strategies like Skills for Life and the National Literacy Strategy. There's also a growing emphasis on the creativity of reading, linked to creativity in learning. There is a strong new emphasis on this in speeches by Charles Clarke, Secretary of State at the DfES (Department for Education & Skills).

There is also a bank of evidence on the importance of this pleasure principle to young people's life chances. One crucial bit is the Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development's 2002 study, Reading for Change. It found that love of reading is more important for educational success than family wealth or class. Children from deprived backgrounds do better in tests than those from more affluent homes if they enjoy reading books, newspapers and comics in their spare time.

Libraries need to show exactly how they contribute to this. Now, with F4F-funded research on the impact of the children's Summer Reading Challenge, we can (an account of this was published in the last issue of The Campaigner). The results are

extremely powerful. For creativity/inspiration/enjoyment: 96 per cent of participating children enjoyed reading the books, 98 per cent liked choosing books for themselves and 95 per cent want to read lots more. For skills/confidence: 75 per cent felt they were 'better readers' after the challenge, four in 10 'a lot better'.

It's a landmark national piece of research that all libraries can draw on to make their case. We hope to repeat it in 2006. It certainly clinched things with the DfES, which this year for the first time has invested money from its Curriculum Division in the Summer Reading Challenge. This is highly significant, and we must build on it.

Partnerships also play a critical role in an advocacy strategy. They can convince other people of libraries' value and get them to speak on their behalf.

TRA's work with publishers is one example. We did a review of reading-based national partnerships. A key issue identified by both librarians and readers is the relationship with publishers. Librarians want to get resources from publishers to help them market reading better and connect to the current book scene, creating a vibrant reading scene in libraries.

Using a small chunk of F4F money we've been able to push this forward, building on years of hard slog collecting evidence of the link between borrowing and buying, and on publishers' concern to grow the market for reading.

A new initiative, Reading Partners, involves five publishers in a two-year pilot scheme that aims for permanent change. It will build core systems: better information exchange, so libraries are built into publishers' campaigns as a matter of course, big national promotions and skills exchanges. It will also explore ways to reach the outer edges of the market – people working to improve their own basic literacy skills.

This is a good example of an F4F outcome that has clear local benefits for all libraries' work with readers – and also builds national networks of influence and clout for libraries.

Along the way there are advocacy benefits, as important people work out for themselves the power of libraries' work – the unique selling points. On a trip we arranged to Derbyshire libraries, publishing professionals were struck by the creativity of the library sector in 'marketing' reading, its closeness to its market and the quality of the staff. One publisher said: 'Librarians are like the best rep you've got, but with direct contact with readers added in. They are passionate, committed and totally uncynical.'

Libraries need friends in high places. These were senior industry figures, hugely influential. They will take those messages out and create a better climate.

Clarity

In any organisation, unless you can communicate what you're there for, you don't stand a hope of getting support or funding, of marketing yourself or of motivating your workforce. We've been part of an F4F group led by the Society of Chief Librarians, working to get a national understanding among librarians of what libraries' work with readers is trying to achieve – and why it matters. We wanted a shared clarity of purpose and direction, a shared language and a common basis for national planning.

The project involved 11 regional consultation sessions: 400 people, 70 chiefs. They covered: a motivating vision statement; definitions of reading and reader development; why reading is important; and why libraries' work with readers is important – unique selling points, aims and strategies.

I was very heartened by these sessions. Library discussions can sometimes

degenerate into negativity, but this was great stuff – real engagement and commitment. People were rising to the challenge, really glad of this unprecedented chance to debate together, face to face, the big issues, knowing that all the other regions were having the same discussions, reacting to a shared document.

And there was a great deal of agreement. The draft has been presented to the SCL, and is now being fed into other areas of F4F work. We plan to have another round of regional sessions and a conference, to keep this vision fresh.

National offers

F4F challenges libraries to provide 'national services available in every library but adaptable to local needs and circumstances'. TRA agrees with this approach – it is a basis for transformation.

But it is another big challenge. There has been a ferment of activity and thinking in the first months of the F4F action plan. Some clarity is now emerging in the books and learning area.

The MLA (Museums, Libraries & Archives Council) will develop national offers, using building blocks already in place, for five key audiences: early years; out of school reading and learning for children; teenagers; mainstream adult readers; adult (basic skills) learners.

One example is TRA's work on the national offers for teenagers /young people. Here the policy scene is rapidly shifting. The DfES Every Child Matters green paper challenges local authorities to work in quite different ways, and the ODPM (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) Learning to Listen action plan challenges all public services to involve young people in shaping services.

Against this background, we have done work to review and redefine the relationship that libraries have with young people aged 11-19. It was led by a small library strategy group – a brilliant, brave team of people saying: 'Come on, we've got to do something – stop endlessly talking about it.'

We set out to envision what the service might look like. This included forecasting, a policy audit, advocacy and debate with policy makers (DCMS/ DfES/ Home Office/ Local Government Association/ Connexions); consultation (with young people and librarians); developing a quality framework; and writing a two-year development plan. The aim is an agreed set of principles and offers to young people – and then tools and support mechanisms, to help services to make the offer a reality.

The five main offers will be: a welcoming library space (virtual and physical); a chance for young people to get involved in the community; a chance for young people to get involved in planning their library service (e.g. staff recruitment and training, library design and planning, stock); creative reading and events; and a neutral place to get information and study support.

The next stage of the work, in year two, will develop the quality framework with three levels – minimum, medium and advanced. The minimum will be the outcome that all libraries will strive to achieve (the national offer). It will be a progression framework, so services can see where they should aim once they achieve the minimum. The tools will include a methodology for measuring impact – to show how all this helps to deliver on the 'shared priorities' agreed between central and local government.

We must all work together, accept the need for change and get the right balance between national development work and local autonomy and flexibility. We will never get the clout we need if we continue to work in a fragmented way.

So... are libraries rising to the challenge of F4F? I've discussed only three areas, and only part of the work within them. There is masses more. It's going to need some tough-minded leadership to tackle it all.

Significant momentum has already built up, with the emphasis on reading. But the next two years are going to be crucial. The library world must not lose its focus on

The find out more about TRA, go to: www.readingagency.co.uk

The find out more about *Framework for the Future*, go to: www.mla.gov.uk/action/framework/framework.asp

reading as the basis for transforming the service – it has powerful potential as the basis for developing national offers, raising our profile and getting the staffing right.

In the first year of the action plan TRA worked with an enormous range of library staff. We find that they're hungry for change, hungry to clarify what libraries exist for, hungry to see libraries stop spreading themselves so thinly and to focus on what they're best at, keen for library leaders to take a more radical approach.

Many say that putting reading back at the heart of libraries' mission clarifies their purpose and gets back to the reason they became librarians in the first place. They feel it goes where the energy and innovation is, and fits with what users want.

If staff are clear that their work is in the inspiring and creative field of reading and learning, it will solve the problems of recruitment and motivation: 'Wanted: book lover who likes people – to work in a busy, demanding frontline role. You will be a creative person, helping people to find a read they love and encouraging people to enjoy reading...'

All this is linked to a modernising agenda. In *The Rise of the Creative Class* (Basic Books, 2004), Richard Florida argues that people in creative jobs are now the ones regenerating neighbourhoods. Scientists, architects, writers are the ones building community spirit and attracting new investment.

We need to get library staff on that list – to have young people queuing up to work for libraries because they're vibrant, contemporary, socially powerful places... community champions of reading, creating social capital by using reading to help people learn, get involved in the arts, feel better about themselves.

Philip Pullman talks about 'the greatest achievement of human culture, the democracy of reading'. The people we want should feel clear and proud that their work is all about connecting people to this greatest achievement. F4F gives us the chance to provide a new focus and energy for the work, and TRA is proud and excited to be able to work in this great endeavour.

This is an edited version of a talk given by Miranda at the Library + information Show, London, April 2004.

The Libri wars

Laura Swaffield sums up the big debate on public libraries that began in April – and still rumbles on.

Public libraries could die out by 2020! With a dramatic message like that – and the enduring affection of the public for its libraries, whether or not they ever use them – it's not surprising that the report by Tim Coates got massive press cover when it came out in April 2004.

A similar message – adapt or die! – had a similar effect in May 2002, when the Audit Commission published *Building Better Library Services* (covered in *The Campaigner* no 64, summer 2002).

Tim's 2004 report, *Who's in Charge?* was published by a charity called Libri. Unfortunately it was based on much the same figures as the 2002 report. So library services were hurt and angered, because the more recent figures showed visits and loans not declining but increasing, for the first time in years.

This had had a lot to do with the fact that a bit

of money was being spent on public libraries, again for the first time in years. So libraries were also angered by Tim's assertion that libraries don't need any more money at all. They just need to spend better what they have got. An assertion like this can be guaranteed to go down very well with politicians, both local and national.

Tim is an experienced bookseller, who rose to a high position in Waterstone's. He's convinced this experience could show librarians how to be far more efficient and more focused on users' needs. Dozens of backroom jobs could go. Libraries could concentrate on three things dear to most users' hearts: more and better books; longer opening hours; sprucing up the buildings. This argument has earned him many fans among users.

As the year ends, the battle continues. In another mini-report, Libri has looked deeply at some more recent statistics on public

Libraries in crisis?

The Libri/Tim Coates report gave a damning verdict on UK public libraries. Is the service the inefficient, dilapidated operation that the author portrays? Here's a librarian's view, from Ayub Khan

The publication of the Libri report by Tim Coates, *Who's in Charge?* presents a picture of the public library in terminal decline. This is not the public library I recognise.

This report fails to define its terms: what is a public library and what is its purpose? The publication takes a narrow view of the role and function of a modern library service and compares it to a high street bookshop. But these are different animals.

Bookshops only carry multiple copies of what is currently in print. Libraries provide a much wider range of services (including access to ICT). They carry a large number of out-of-print works as well, which is an enormous challenge and one which bookshops do not face.

Also borrowing (and physical visits) is not a full indication of library use. No mention is made of the role of libraries in dealing with enquiries, the virtual services that libraries offer or libraries as a community resource. The notion that libraries only exist to lend books is out of date.

One of the main flaws of this report is that it

bases its assumptions on one public library authority – Hampshire. How can conclusions be drawn about statistics relating to public libraries in general – such as 'backroom staff' and cost of getting books on to the shelves – based in a single case study? The author classes community librarians and outreach staff as 'non frontline' – this is totally unacceptable, as they play an important part in delivering and promoting frontline services.

The report opens by citing increased use of museums and archives and a decrease in public library use in recent years. However, increased museum use may in part be explained by the dropping of entrance charges to national museums – this is not mentioned.

I agree that this report raises some important points about delivering a modern and vibrant public library for the future, which need to be debated. Also, more critically, it discusses how the public library should provide the public with what they want: more books, longer opening hours and a customer-friendly environment.

However, this cannot be done by increased

libraries, and picked out some undoubtedly bad ones.

Tim is giving evidence (as is the Library Campaign) to the Commons select committee. He is also polishing up his second report on the Hampshire library service (which provided much of his material for *Who's in Charge?* – although the service itself thought his statistics were unfairly manipulated). He reckons that Hampshire could lose 193 jobs! Details of how have not yet been revealed, but will doubtless cause ructions when they are.

Tim's message, if anything, has been further simplified. Libraries, he says, should never have 'diversified'. (However, he shies away from actually saying that libraries should throw out their popular computers, stop doing outreach work and close any extra facilities they are providing for the community.)

Here, he is out of step with the whole argument that (library organisations hope) will save libraries from the slow death-by-a-thousand-cuts that has done so much harm over the past 20-plus years, especially under

Thatcherism. That, after all, is why the Library Campaign was set up in the first place, in 1984.

The new argument is that libraries are not just for lending books. Books are more important than ever, actually, but the fact remains that books are also far cheaper than they used to be, and not only booksellers but charity shops are doing a vast trade.

Meanwhile, libraries do a lot more than bookshops do. They help local and national government fulfil loads of their overall targets – crime prevention, social inclusion, health improvement, education for every age group. And so on. They are, this argument runs, a bargain as an investment of public funds.

The opposing argument is, perhaps, that libraries should stick to the basics, and get them right. Books are crucial. It doesn't matter how 'inclusive' a library is, if it can't learn the lessons that every retailer has had to learn about being inviting and accessible, about not wasting money on admin, about getting the new stuff on the shelves quickly. And so on.

Tim also argues that library managers are

hidebound, reluctant to modernise their systems, tied up in an esoteric 'professional world' that is no longer focused on what users want. Councillors should take charge and shake them up.

Tim's broadsides have concentrated minds wonderfully. I think he has yet to make his case that libraries can transform themselves without a penny extra funding. I'd love it to be true, but the evidence isn't yet there. On the other hand, I'm sure many of us have experience of hidebound, inward-looking library services, staff who don't seem to value books, slow, clumsy systems – and more.

I also think many libraries are doing exciting, innovative things that interest me (an avid bookworm) – and, usually, that they do it by making bricks without straw.

I think both sides of the debate have a point. Perhaps 2005 will see a less polarised, angry debate that has positive effects on libraries – and on the interests of users.

To read the material produced by Tim Coates and Libri, visit www.rwevans.co.uk/libri

efficiency savings alone, as public libraries have suffered from years of under-investment.

The report notes that a disproportionate amount of the funds available are spent 'on the pursuit of minorities', to the neglect of the majority. This demonstrates that the author has no understanding of the origins of the public library service, or its future role in the knowledge economy.

Let's throw out what does not stand up to scrutiny in this report and debate what needs to be put right with the service. There are certainly things we can learn from the retail approach, such as marketing, customer care and ensuring that new books are available much sooner to the public.

However I don't think the answer lies in the simplistic retail model the report offers.

As someone who has been involved in planning a new library for 2010, I would refute the suggestion that public libraries have had their day. Britain can boast some fine examples of new libraries such as Bow in Tower Hamlets and Bournemouth in Dorset, both of which have seen unprecedented demand and increase in library use as a result of this investment. Let's debate the modern mission of libraries and how this can be funded.

The government set out in *Framework for the Future* a library service that engages with communities, gives access to digital resources,

links with learning and promotes books and reading.

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) in its latest report, which is based on information received from 99% of the UK's local authorities, highlights significant changes taking place in libraries.

With total investment at an all-time high of £1 billion, UK public libraries are moving with the times and drawing in new visitors with cutting-edge technology and longer opening hours. The reports collated by CIPFA showed that public libraries bought more books than ever before, and that more money is being spent on audio-visual materials.

Public libraries also generated an increase in the number of visits made to them for the first time since the early 1990s. And book loans are on the increase. Is this a service in decline? I don't think so. Tim is right in that we must not be complacent about the library service. Let's hope the encouraging signs I have outlined are not just a 'blip' but a continual and sustainable rise in usage of the service.

Most of the public debate about his report has centred around the profession and the media. The voice and views of library users have largely been ignored. Friends groups should be a part of this debate, as both library managers and users want the same thing – a better public library service that adds real value for local communities.



Ayub Khan is Core Services – Quality & Operations Manager with Warwickshire Library & Information Services and a CLIP Councillor. Until recently he was the lead officer in planning for Birmingham's (potential) future new Central Library.

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