

Developing a Needs Based Library Service

John Pateman

The language of needs has become a dominant concept in the contemporary discourse on public services. For example, *Framework for the Future* (DCMS, 2003), the government's ten year strategy for public libraries, has many references to meeting community needs:

"Some are vital agents of change in their communities, reaching out to the people who need them most whether they are long standing users or not. Others are much more passive - they lend books and they respond to the demands of their regular public... So I think we need to define libraries' modern mission. The future success of libraries depends on their renewing and communicating a sense of mission which is relevant to the needs of society today... What individual library authorities do must reflect the needs of their local communities".

"What they offer needs to be what people want, at a time and place that is useful to them, and in a way that makes them want to come back again and again. They are ideally placed to become again central points in local communities. But they can only take back this role if they consult local people and put them in the driving seat. Not just once, but as a continuous dialogue. The best libraries do this. They involve, engage and inspire their customers. We want the others to follow suit. There will be leadership training for all library services. There will also be additional work on helping libraries better understand the needs of local people, so that they can provide what is important to people locally."

"The proposals are presented as a framework to encourage imaginative innovation and greater operational effectiveness and efficiency, adapted to local need and circumstance. I firmly believe that if we focus on this vision we will deliver a public library service able to respond to the needs of society at the beginning of the 21st century".

A Needs Based Library Service is predicated on the assumption that everyone has needs and everyone has different needs. Therefore a Needs Based Library Service is a universal concept which can be applied to any library service in any circumstances at any time.

A Needs Based Library Service has the appropriate strategy, structure, systems and culture which enable it to identify, prioritise and meet community needs.

A Needs Based Library Service involves and engages the whole of the local community in the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of library services. This approach is evident in other sectors. For example, *Sexual exclusion – homophobia and health inequalities* (UK Gay Men's Health Network, 2004) recommends that "Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual people should be actively

encouraged to become involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of health and education services". And *Youth Matters* (The Stationery Office, 2005), the Green Paper on provision for teenagers, makes suggestions on "How to engage more young people in positive activities and empower them to shape the services they receive".

A Needs Based Library Service does not have customers, but stakeholders, who own a stake in the library service because they pay for it through their taxes, and they have a say in its control and management via their locally elected representative.

A Needs Based Library Service is both democratic and accountable. Stakeholders include staff, partners, suppliers, service users, lapsed users and non users.

A Needs Based Library Service is a new way of thinking and a new way of working. It is about hearts and minds, attitudes and behaviours, as well as policies and services. It is a framework and infrastructure which enables and facilitates organisational change. It is a whole service approach to meeting needs, a holistic transformation, a revolution.

A Needs Based Library Service can be summed up in the phrase "From each according to their ability (staff), to each according to their needs (community)." In other words, a Needs Based Library Service gets the most out of its staff (through workforce development); and takes positive action to meet the greatest needs (through community development) in the community.

Developing a Needs Based Library Service is not a new concept. It is part of a historical tradition and continuum which started in the mid nineteenth century. Public libraries were founded to educate the poor and disadvantaged. They were not established for the rich or the middle class. They were not intended to be neutral, universal or open to all. They were targeted, focused and pro poor. They were an early form of positive action (not discrimination). Developing a Needs Based Library Service is a return to this tradition and these values of self help and self improvement for those who need us the most but use us the least.

Developing a Needs Based Library Service is not a return to Victorian values in the sense that public libraries were established primarily as a means of social control – to control the leisure time and reading habits of the poor; to keep them away from pubs, gin houses and penny dreadfuls; to stop them reading and discussing "seditious literature". Social change and improvement was a secondary consideration. Developing a Needs Based Library Service is primarily about social change – enabling, facilitating and empowering individuals and communities; giving them the information they need and helping to level the economic, social and political playing fields of life.

Developing a Needs Based Library Service is about transformation rather than modernisation. It is a revolutionary process which requires a clear strategic vision. The first fundamental question which must be addressed is, what are libraries for?

There are two schools of thought that are currently dominating the media and professional debate about the future of public libraries in the UK. One school says that libraries should go back to basics and focus on core services (particularly book borrowing) and making library buildings fit for purpose. This is about the modernisation of the traditional library service. The other school of thought says that there should be less emphasis on books and buildings (as evidenced by the fall in issues and visits) and more focus on meeting community needs through community development. This is about the transformation of libraries into needs based services.

These two schools of thought were reflected in the Government's response to the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee Report on Public Libraries (2005). In his introduction to this response David Lammy, the Minister for Culture, talked about the need to refocus on core library services, books, buildings and opening hours:

"Books remain at the core of libraries' work, and we must ensure that libraries continue to provide a high quality stock, and that access to special collections and back catalogues is essential. Over the last ten years, book lending and the number of visits has been falling. Libraries need to occupy buildings which are well maintained, attractive and welcoming to local people, open at times that match local demand, for example in the evening or on Sunday"

David Lammy also referred to the community development role that public libraries can play, through outreach activities and positive engagement with disadvantaged communities:

"Libraries reach out to communities in many ways. The make up of communities is changing, and libraries must make sure they keep up with those changes, with new needs and expectations. Libraries play or have the potential to play an important role in local communities for everyone, but in particular for those who are most vulnerable in deprived areas and elsewhere. We must ensure that libraries can deliver what these people need and want. I would like to see library services engaging with communities much more."

The debate has become polarised between Reads and Needs. Local authorities are left to decide where they place their efforts, priorities and resources on this spectrum. Getting a balance between the two is essential, as Mark Hepworth, the Director of Local Futures, observed in his introduction to *The Libraries Impact Project* (Laser Foundation, 2005):

"In this day and age we should not look at libraries exclusively as free book shops, or book warehouses or as promoters of book reading. Books are not everything, and book borrowing indicators should not be used as the prime measure of how libraries contribute to local and national priorities. More complex measures and methodologies are needed to properly capture the social benefits of library services."

Users, Lapsed Users and Non Users

Research indicates that public libraries are only actively used by up to 30 per cent of the UK population. The much touted figure of 60 per cent is a myth. Up to two thirds of the population may own a library ticket, but only half that number use the library on a regular basis. Those who do actively use libraries are fairly homogenous in terms of race, class, age and gender. They tend to be white, middle-class, middle-aged and female. This has been described as the “dominant” reader – a person whom many library staff identify with in terms of language, culture, attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviour.

Active library users make regular and full use of library services. They comprise up to 30 per cent of our communities. They are the core of everything we do. They are the focus of all or most of our efforts. We are always asking users what they like about the service (the Public Library User Survey, for example) and what else they would like. Their typical response is to ask for more of the same, which tends to reinforce the status quo. These are people who use public libraries the most but need them the least.

Passive library users make occasional and limited use of library services. They comprise up to 30 per cent of our communities. They include lapsed users and those who are “easy to reach”. They might have a library ticket but do not use it very often. Or they may have used the service in the past but stopped doing so when it no longer met their needs or when they could get their needs met elsewhere – by buying books or accessing the internet at home, for example. This group can be easily reached with some minimum effort on our behalf (via some effective and targeted marketing, for example). These are people who make some use of the public library and who have some needs. There is another category of lapsed users – those who visited a library once, but were treated so badly by the staff that they never go back!

Non-users have never used libraries (for generations) and never will, unless we reach out to them, engage with them, identify their needs and involve them in the planning, design, delivery and monitoring of our services. They comprise up to 40 per cent of our communities. They include the “hard-to-reach” and the “unreachable.” These are people that need libraries the most but use them the least. There are also those non users who, following on from the 1980s/1990s, believe that they can just buy everything they need, and therefore don’t want free lending services.

We need to know more about our active, lapsed and non users. A simple count of visitors does not go far enough. We need to know who these visitors are, where they live, their ethnicity, class, occupation, gender, age, why they use the service, what they use it for, etc. Many library authorities do not capture all of this data. Staff are reluctant, and regard it as intrusive, to ask library users too many “personal” questions even though most people don’t think twice about giving their most intimate details (including income) to supermarkets, insurance companies, etc.

We need to adopt and adapt this private sector, market research approach so that we know exactly who is (and who is not) using our services. We can then target our resources more accurately to meet the needs of those who already

use us (the minority) and start to make efforts to reach out to those who do not use us (the majority).

Public libraries were established 150 years ago to meet the needs of “the deserving poor”. They have, to different degrees and at different times in history, met some of those needs. But what they have never succeeded in doing is to meet the needs of “the undeserving poor” – in modern language, the homeless, the unemployed, travellers, asylum-seekers, refugees, migrant workers and ethnic minorities.

When forced to consider the needs of those who do not make up the core 30 per cent of library users, public libraries focus their attention on the “easy-to-reach”. So, for example, when *Framework for the Future* encouraged libraries to become more socially inclusive, some libraries started to tentatively reach out to lapsed users and those that could be easily persuaded to use them. Some of these people have been attracted back into libraries by the People’s Network, for example.

But at that point many efforts stop. Most libraries do not engage with the 40 per cent of non-users who are labelled as “hard to reach”. Some non users are being tempted into library buildings by the Peoples Network, but they are still not making full use of the range of services which they provide. The People’s Network is not being managed to target and meet their needs. And there is an increasing and disturbing tendency to charge for People’s Network access, to meet income targets rather than to meet needs. This is creating a two-tier People’s Network for the haves and have nots – which is the exact opposite of what was intended by government and the New Opportunities Fund.

As *Framework for the Future* suggests, the first task is to transform library services so that they have the capacity to deliver lifelong learning, e-government and social inclusion. As part of this transformation, libraries must cease to put all their efforts into existing users and start to focus on the needs of lapsed and non-users. It is possible to develop new services for socially excluded people without at the same time alienating the core user group on whom the current performance depends. To do so it is necessary to include current users in the change process. They must understand that, within constrained resources, it is necessary to target and redirect budgets and services to meet the wide range of needs within our communities.

Core users are generally able to understand concepts such as equity and social justice. As well as these altruistic motives, there is also an element of self-interest – the included know that there will be a price for them to pay (both financially and in terms of crime, etc) if social exclusion is not tackled. An inclusive library service does not only benefit the previously excluded – it benefits the already included as well. A service that is more closely tailored to meet the needs of its communities is likely to provide better services, stock, premises, staff and opening hours to all of its users, old and new.

The four pillars of a needs based library service are strategy, structure, systems and culture. UK public libraries now have a clear strategic direction (set by *Framework for the Future*). The next step is to develop new staffing and service structures to deliver this strategy. Long hierarchies need to be replaced by

flatter matrix structures, and there should be a greater emphasis on outreach working and community development. All existing systems, procedures and processes should be reviewed to ensure that they are consistent with a needs based approach to service delivery. Finally, and most importantly, there needs to be a cultural revolution with regard to old habits, ways of working, attitudes, behaviours and values. I will give two examples of the kind of changes that are required to develop a needs based library service.

The first change is a shift from customer orientation to customer care. Customer orientation comprises a range of techniques for dealing with customers – this can include giving a welcoming smile, wearing a name badge or picking the phone up within three rings. Customer care is about going the extra mile (or kilometre) and having the skills to understand and assess the needs of library users. It is about recognising that customers are not all equal in their life experiences and chances; so we should not treat all of our customers equally, but in a way that meets their individual needs. This challenges some deeply held professional library paradigms around issues such as equality, fairness and neutrality.

The second example is a shift from libraries that are based in communities to community based libraries. Many libraries are based in the community, but not all libraries are community based. There should be a positive and dynamic relationship between the library and the people who live in the neighbourhood. In community based libraries there is a clear organic connection between the work of the library and the needs of the local community. Everyone in a community based library is needs focused and working to tackle social exclusion and disadvantage in the local area.

Strategy

The first stage in the transformation process must be the development of a robust strategy and a clear vision which all stakeholders can sign up to. This strategy will help to prevent the service from being blown off course and will provide a common platform and language for everyone involved to work from. This strategy should form part of the overall objectives of the service. Depending on a variety of factors, including local politics and circumstances, a Needs Based Library Service can be based on a social exclusion, social inclusion or social cohesion strategy. It is also possible to combine elements from each of these three approaches.

A social exclusion strategy puts the focus firmly on the socially excluded themselves, who they are, where they live and what their needs are. Social inclusion policies locate social exclusion in a wider context. The advocates of social inclusion point out that it is not only the socially excluded who suffer from the outcomes of exclusion; so does the rest of the community. This can take the form of a moral concern by the socially included for the plight of those who are socially excluded and a wish to ensure that something is done about it. It can also manifest itself as a fear, on the part of socially included people, that they might suffer the consequences of others exclusion: an example is the fear that crime will spill over from socially excluded areas.

Social inclusion policies are also concerned to reduce the economic impact of social exclusion on mainstream society. The advocates of social inclusion policies would point out that, were it not being used to deal with the consequences of exclusion, the public service budget – and therefore general taxation – could be reduced or the savings reinvested into improved services for all. In other words, the socially included stand to gain financially, or through improved services, if social exclusion can be tackled successfully. Social inclusion therefore puts as much emphasis on providing benefits to the included as it does on helping the excluded

The proponents of social cohesion reach conclusions that are similar to, but broader than, those of social inclusion. Social cohesion focuses on whole communities, on participation and governance, as well as on the needs of those who are excluded. It sees the development and maintenance of social capital as a fundamental building block, alongside employment, services and a sustainable living environment. By social capital is meant those networks of interactions that we have with one another, that bind us together and act as a primary means of exchanging the information, skills and help that anyone needs in their day to day life.

People who are socially excluded have their access to networks greatly reduced. This leads to social isolation, and a lack of the usual forms of social support that others can take for granted, for people who are already living in difficult circumstances. That is why a lack of social capital has been shown to have a direct effect in undermining the health of socially excluded people. Social capital is therefore not only a basic component of civil society but also a necessity in tackling social exclusion.

Social exclusion, inclusion and cohesion are not separate, but overlapping points of view that may best be viewed as an additive policy continuum. Each move across the continuum makes further links between the benefits gained by those who are excluded and the benefits gained by those who are not. At the exclusion end, the focus is on alleviating and eliminating the exclusion. Social inclusion adds to the exclusion focus and the need both to satisfy the moral concerns of the rest of the population that people should not be excluded, and to ensure that the included do not suffer the spill over effects that can come from some aspects of exclusion such as crime or the costs of tackling exclusion. Finally, social cohesion adds to the aims of tackling exclusion and promoting inclusion the wish to do so within the context of a civil society whose cohesion is based on mutual links between people, that is, social capital.

It is highly likely that, in any one local area, there will be at least some activity taking place at each point on the continuum. The strategic question is therefore not, on which part of the continuum should one's efforts be focussed, but what should be the balance of efforts and connections between the different elements. For example, should further effort be focused on social exclusion? In the end, it can be argued, it is the socially excluded who are suffering the most and so focussing solely on their needs might at least ensure that something gets done. On the other hand, if it was felt that there would be resistance to focusing resources on the socially excluded, then social inclusion might be a more viable focus. Such concerns could be dealt with by explaining the benefits to socially included people or appealing to their moral sensitivities. Social cohesion would

be a natural focus for people who are concerned to unify the work of tackling social exclusion into wider agendas such as democratic renewal and the development of sustainable communities and environments. In the end, deciding where to focus on the continuum will involve a balance between pay offs, feasibility, legitimacy and the possibility of making links with other policy agendas.

Structure

The next stage in the process of developing a needs based library service is to remodel the staffing and service structures to enable them to deliver the strategy. It is likely that significant changes to the existing structures will be required. For example, if a library is in the wrong place or too small to deliver the strategy, it might be necessary to redirect these resources into a different part of the service – one which can deliver the strategy. Similarly, if the staffing structure cannot deliver the strategy, it also needs to be changed. The staffing structure must be fit for the purpose. It must contain the right number of posts, with the right job titles, job descriptions, person specifications and competencies to deliver the strategy. Some jobs may need to be completely redesigned to reflect the new service direction and the skills required to deliver them.

Changing the structure will also help to change the organisational culture. All cultures are based on language and so, by changing the language we use, we also start to change the culture. For example, many traditional library structures are based on the old professionalisms of children's, lending and reference work. Staff within each of these areas were regarded as specialists and had little, if any, involvement in other service areas. Thinking of libraries in these ways is no longer relevant or helpful. It is more likely that the new strategy will be based on themes such as Inclusion, Learning and Regeneration. If so, then these terms should appear in the staffing structure and job titles.

But one set of specialisms should not be replaced with another. So, although a member of staff's lead responsibility might be Inclusion, they should also have secondary responsibilities for Learning and Regeneration. This will encourage multi-skilling and will produce a more flexible workforce. It will also increase the portfolio of transferable skills that each member of staff has and should improve their job satisfaction, employability and progression. If the service is targeting the socially excluded, all staff should have community development in their job descriptions. This will make it clear that community development is the job of all staff and not just those in "Special Services" or "Equal Access". The aim is to make community development a normal part of activities. There are a number of ways to achieve this.

A good starting point is job titles, job descriptions, person specifications and competencies. If community development is not built into the design of a post then the post holder can turn around and say that "community development is not my job". Community development should appear in everybody's job description from Library Assistant to Head of Libraries. It should be clear from a person's job title and job description exactly what it is that they do – and what can be expected from them. It's like a UK TV commercial for varnish – "It does exactly what it says on the tin". Job descriptions should not be long lists of duties – but a focussed description of the key responsibilities and tasks of the

post. And these should be public documents for users and non users to see. In that way library staff become accountable to the communities they serve, as well as to their employers.

John Vincent (SEMLAC, 2005) provides a very good overview of libraries and community cohesion. Since the 1970s (at least), there have been publications identifying the role that public libraries could play in tackling social exclusion – then often called “disadvantage” or “deprivation”. A major response was via “community librarianship” which, whilst establishing new ways of working, was, as Dave Muddiman describes it, “an inconclusive and incomplete revolution”. From the late 1990s onwards, there have been a number of key reports looking at the role of the public library in tackling social exclusion.

What might be called the ‘modern generation’ of reports started in 1998 with one by Patrick Roach and Marlene Morrison, which focused on the “social distance ... between the public library and ethnic minority communities”, the “lack of clear vision and leadership on ethnic diversity and racial equality matters”, and the lack of account by public libraries for their “progress in respect of race equality whilst current performance systems are largely colour-blind.” Amongst their recommendations were calls for: a clear strategic plan for public libraries; greater integration and partnership between the public library service and related service providers and a review of the ongoing training and professional development needs of public library staff in the light of changing demographic and social circumstances. Morrison and Roach also published a set of guidelines for good practice, which some library authorities used to reassess their service provision.

In 1999, a Government working group published *Libraries for all*, a consultation document which identified the role that public libraries could take in tackling social exclusion (with case studies). This also included a set of assessment criteria, six steps which can be used to assess where a library service has reached. These are: identify the people who are socially excluded and their distribution; engage with them and establish their needs; assess and review current practice; develop strategic objectives and prioritise resources; develop the services, and train the library staff to provide them; implement the services and publicise them; evaluate success, review and improve. The final results of the consultation were published in 2001 as *Libraries, Museums, Galleries and Archives for All* which emphasised the need for a joined up approach to tackling social exclusion.

In 2000 a landmark report was published, *Open to all? The Public Library and Social Exclusion*. The most significant part of this title was the question mark because this report challenged the widely held assumption that libraries really are open to all and should be everything for everybody rather than taking a more focused and targeted approach. This research project had three main elements: a set of Working Papers, a survey of all public library authorities in the UK (to which there was a 63% return rate); and 8 case studies.

The report concluded “that UK libraries have adopted only weak, voluntary and ‘take it or leave it’ approaches to social inclusion. The core rationale of the public library movement continues to be based on the idea of developing universal access to a service which essentially reflects mainstream middle class, white and

English values." Key consequences of this approach include: "a continuing underutilisation of public libraries by working class people and other excluded social groups; a lack of knowledge in the public library world about the needs and views of excluded 'non users' ; the development in many public libraries of organisational, cultural and environmental barriers which effectively exclude many disadvantaged people."

The survey of UK public libraries found that: only one-sixth of public library authorities approximated to a comprehensive model of good practice for social inclusion; most authorities (60%) had no comprehensive strategy and had uneven and intermittent activity; one quarter of authorities had little apparent strategy and service development; only about one third of authorities comprehensively targeted disadvantaged neighbourhoods and social groups; most authorities had no consistent resource focused on exclusion, and this was sometimes very marginal; many of the UK's most marginal and excluded people were not considered to be priorities in library strategy, service delivery and staffing. These included refugees, homeless people and Travellers.

These findings were supported by the eight case studies (carried out across the UK), which found that there were: "some successes in addressing social exclusion, most frequently linked to targeted initiatives employing community development, partnerships, and other proactive ways of working; problems in developing an overall, service wide, policy framework with exclusion issues 'mainstreamed' only exceptionally; a reluctance to adopt resourcing models that consistently prioritise excluded communities or social groups; limits on the ability of library staff to work with excluded people because of a lack of skills and training and sometimes negative attitudes; a tendency to suggest that any 'community' activity automatically addresses exclusion and a tendency to consult with communities and excluded groups only sporadically; a preoccupation with libraries as a 'passive' service which prioritises 'access' rather than with proactive and interventionist ways of working."

The report's final conclusion was that public libraries need to be transformed "to become much more proactive, interventionist and educative institutions, with a concern for social justice at their core." The specific strategies for such a transformation were identified as: "the mainstreaming of provision for socially excluded groups and communities and the establishment of standards of service and their monitoring; the adoption of resourcing strategies which prioritise the needs of excluded people and communities; a recasting of the role of library staff to encompass a more socially responsive and educative approach; staffing policies and practices which address exclusion, discrimination and prejudice; targeting of excluded social groups and communities; the development of community-based approaches to library provision, which incorporate consultation with and partnership with local communities; ICT and networking developments which actively focus on the needs of excluded people; a recasting of the image and identity of the public library to link it more closely with the cultures of excluded communities and social groups."

The report also concluded that there are a number of "prescriptions for action" for tackling social exclusion, which include empowering local communities; targeting resources and services; tackling consumerism and the managerial culture; a re-examination of equality of opportunity; and the need to establish

an information policy. A small number of library authorities, (e.g. Kensington & Chelsea; the South Eastern Education & Library Board in Northern Ireland; Lincolnshire) are using the findings of *Open to all?* to inform and assess their work in tackling social exclusion.

Systems

The third stage in developing a needs based library service is to assess all existing policies, procedures and processes to ensure that they are consistent with the strategy, service and staffing structures. Many traditional library systems have created barriers which deter non users from accessing services. Membership and joining requirements, for example, are often quite onerous and bureaucratic. New members are asked for proof of both address and identity. Tickets are only posted to known addresses. For those who are unable (Eg Travellers) or unwilling (Eg refugees) to give their personal details to the authorities (often for good reason) this can be a problem. It was widely reported at the time that the Poll Tax was introduced that library records would be forcibly accessed to provide evidence in court against defaulters. Old systems need to be replaced with new ways of working such as self issue and partnership working.

John Vincent (SEMLAC, 2005) gives evidence from a number of reports, surveys and research projects into the role or potential role that libraries can play in community cohesion initiatives. A survey carried out by Resource (the Council for Museums, Libraries and Archives) in 2001 showed that, whilst 83% of public libraries' equal opportunity policies mention disabled people, only 27% had, at that stage, a disability action plan, 45% provided disability training to all staff, and 53% consulted with user groups. A report by the Central London Learning & Skills Council, *Young People's Attitude to Learning* (2002), makes it clear that young people do not necessarily see libraries as a source of information about further courses of study and career options.

In 2002, Resource published a report on the role that libraries, archives and museums could play in neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion. Whilst the report found "clear evidence that the sector is actively involved with projects focusing on neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion" (and a number of other positive benefits created by the sector), it also showed that: there was a lack of knowledge on the part of organisations as to what the sector could offer; there was a lack of effective, comprehensive evaluation methods to measure the sector's impact on neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion; there was limited evidence of the sector's working in "inter-domain or pan-sectoral collaborative partnerships"

A survey of public libraries' provision for refugees and asylum-seekers by The Network in 2002 (Ryder and Vincent, 2002) found that some library authorities were providing excellent levels of service, whilst some were barely providing a service at all. For example, several library authorities knew they had refugees and asylum-seekers within their authority, but did not know what languages they spoke.

The IDeA report, *Cultural connections* (2004) includes examples of where libraries have contributed to the Shared Priorities between Local and National Government. These include: Barnet and Bournemouth's community learning centres; Blackburn with Darwen's Asian women's reading group; Stockton-on-Tees's ICT provision; Liverpool's "Surfzone" and "Kids.com" provision; Lancashire's SMILE centre; Leeds's job-seekers' support work.

The Youth Libraries Group publication, *Bright young things* (2004), gives examples of the range of work that public and school library services are undertaking to support learning by children and young people, including young people who may be socially excluded (e.g. in Homework Centres, "Big Book Share").

The DCMS report *Bringing communities together through sport and culture* (2004), highlights the role that public libraries can play in tackling social exclusion.

A report by the Local Government Association on *Extending the Role of libraries* (2004) provided an insight into partnership working, funding, targeting user groups, the role of library staff and national and local support networks

These reports indicate that there is some evidence to show that public libraries can provide a focus for civic engagement, but there are many issues arising from this, including: the clash between the "old" and the "new" in terms of the sometimes conflicting needs of existing and new service users; the homogeneity of users may deter others; and expectations of appropriate behaviour. As Anne Goulding has said "The very success of democratic public space lies in its embrace of conflict and plurality and libraries need to consider how to address any tensions inherent in their use and access whilst still ensuring that their capacity to help promote social capital is maintained."

From the work that has been developed particularly over the last five years or so, it is clear that the major strengths of public libraries in the UK in relation to working with socially excluded groups are:

- Services are targeted towards specific needy groups and individuals
- Services are provided in partnership with local communities
- Staff are given thorough and on-going support and training
- Services are sustainable
- Socially excluded groups have a separate service

Culture

The final stage in developing a needs based library service is to develop an organisational culture which can support the strategy, service and staffing structures, and systems. Culture change can make many years to achieve, depending on how long the current culture has been embedded. This could take 3-5 or even 10-15 years to change. But the process of cultural change can be accelerated through a combination of service action planning, performance management and workforce development.

This long term approach to culture change is linked to another important factor, sustainability. Work with ethnic minorities and other excluded groups needs to be bought in from the margins (funded by short-term grants and staffed by project workers) and put at the centre of what libraries do (mainstream funded and delivered by permanent staff). It is no good raising expectations in the community and starting the process of meeting those expectations, only to stop when the money runs out and committed staff move on. We need to be working in excluded communities for the duration and be setting targets for the next five, 10 or 15 years, in the same way that the government has set a 20-year target for eradicating child poverty.

Social exclusion objectives and targets should appear in the Library Service Action Plan and individual Library Development Plans. These should then be translated into team and staff objectives. Targets should be set and performance reviewed as part of the appraisal process.

Libraries need to measure the impacts and outcomes of their needs based approach and collect evidence which proves that they are improving the quality of life of the communities they serve. These success criteria and performance measures are best developed in consultation with those who the services are targeted at and who should be fully involved in the planning, design, delivery and monitoring of library services.

Targets could be set, for example, to increase active membership, particularly among target communities (young people, men, ethnic minorities). Targets for increased issues (to arrest the decline of the last ten years) and visits (in line with Public Library Service Standards) could also be set.

The Libraries Impact Project (Laser Foundation, 2005) recommended a range of impact measures, based on four of the shared priorities between central and local government:

- Education: the impact on adults (post 16 population) of library services supporting adult education; the impact of libraries on pupils attending summer reading schemes or homework clubs / study support based in libraries
- Children: the impact of library activities supporting children and families
- Health: the impact of widening access to health information
- Older people: the impact on older people of receiving library services in the home; the impact of libraries on older people accessing information on entitlements to benefits and services.

These performance indicators are designed to augment the *Public Library Impact Measures* which have been developed by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (2005). All UK public libraries are required to collect data on the following Impact Measures from April 2005:

- Raising standards across schools: number of Bookstart (a national early years free book scheme) packs delivered to children aged 0-9 months, 18-30 months, 36-48 months; number of new library members aged 0-4 years; number of young people who take part in the Summer Reading Challenge (national summer reading scheme)

- Improving quality of life for children, young people, families at risk and older people: number of people receiving a Home Library Service (a service to someone unable to visit the library due to infirmity, physical or mental disability)
- Promoting healthier communities and narrowing health inequalities: provision and take up of health related stock
- Creating safer and stronger communities: access to, and take up of, ICT based services including The People's Network (free internet access)
- Promoting the economic vitality of communities: access to ICT based learning sessions

Another requirement of the Public Library Impact Measures is that every library authority should develop community profiles: "A community profile is essential to identify the community need for library services and will inform planning, target setting and performance measurement. Guidelines are provided to suggest the minimum level of information authorities should include". This minimum information includes: population, age profile, live births, ethnic groups, religion, health and caring, economic status, households, tenure, car ownership, travel to work, and deprivation indicators.

In 2004 the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) commissioned the New Directions in Social Policy program. Within this program MLA has contracted consultants Burns Owens Partnership (BOP) to develop and pilot library outcome measures to document the impact of the sector in three main areas: healthy communities, social capital and community identity and cohesion. These outcome measures (known as Generic Social Outcomes or GSOs) will feed into the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) framework which is the main vehicle used by the government to measure the performance of local councils. The CPA framework is being made more rigorous via a new regime known as *Comprehensive Performance Assessment – the Harder Test* (Audit Commission, 2005). The key areas for assessment will be sustainable communities, safer and stronger communities, healthier communities, older people and children and young people. CPA assessments will look for evidence of user focus, diversity, value for money and community leadership.

Public Library Standards have been replaced by a new single performance indicator which forms part of the 198 measures used by central government to monitor the performance of local services. Comprehensive Performance Assessment is being replaced by Comprehensive Area Assessment, which will be linked to Local Area Agreements, Local Public Service Agreements and Community Strategies.

Research in the UK has indicated that the greatest weakness and the biggest challenge facing library services which want to tackle social exclusion is how to change the role of the librarian. Most public library staff in the UK are not able to design and deliver services for excluded groups. They require new skills and a different type of education and training. When a library service is transformed from a passive, traditional, provider-driven service to a proactive, needs-based, community-driven service, it is essential to provide a significant level of staff training, support and workforce development. Staff must be provided with the skills they need to work in new ways. McArthur and Nicholson (2005) note that, "In an ever changing environment, training and support is required for frontline

staff to help them deal effectively with situations that will arise. Library services are often failing their people by not providing adequate training to equip their teams with the knowledge and skills required for the future of the service.”

Within the library service there is a huge need for the development of interpersonal skills and ‘people skills’. There are a number of approaches to this: awareness training – what social exclusion is and how it can be tackled; cultural awareness training; training which helps staff to work with specific groups – courses on reaching out to looked after children and Travellers; operational training – how to draw up a community profile, how to identify community needs, how to manage successful partnerships, how to make funding bids, consultation, marketing; leadership and management training – which reflect social responsibility issues; joint working – this involves short term project working and longer term integrated service planning, delivery and monitoring with other services, agencies and organisations. In the process of working with other professionals, it is possible for library staff to learn new skills.

In each case, staff training and development must be linked to job descriptions, competencies, service objectives and appraisal. With these frameworks in place it is clear what is expected of existing staff with regard to skills and competencies. It is also clear what we are looking for when we recruit new staff. We are no longer just looking for staff with technical library skills. We are also looking for staff with skills which can enable them to identify and meet community needs via outreach work, partnership working and funding bids. There needs to be a total mind shift from being task focused to being community focused. By having a community focused mindset, staff will be more aware of what is going on around them, enabling them to be proactive in dealing with service users and anticipating their needs. A community focused mindset encourages a ‘can do’ attitude which means that everyone within the library service appreciates the need to take responsibility for service delivery and the way in which the community perceives the library.

Staff attitudes and perceptions also play a vital role in the effectiveness of public libraries contribution to social inclusion policy and objectives. Questions to be considered include whether or not the ethnicity and social and cultural background of staff can be a key driver in maintaining a positive attitude towards community librarianship. It is necessary to test the theory that an inclusive organisation facilitates an inclusive public service, and that the ability to empathise through personal experience motivates the pro active and successful community librarian.

This will require an assessment of the relationships between staffs own ethnicity, social, cultural and professional background and their capacity to make an effective, empathic contribution to social inclusion objectives. This assessment should be based on the following data: staff demographics in terms of ethnicity, age, gender, social background, educational attainment, professional status, length of time in service; awareness of national social inclusion policy; perceptions of the community role for the public library; perceptions of socially excluded groups in the locality; perceptions of the extent to which these groups are being included; brief coverage of the ways in which exclusion is being addressed; attitudes towards professional roles and responsibilities in addressing exclusion; the extent of staff participation (including willingness to become

involved) in social inclusion policy implementation; the effects of internal politics, including communication, training and professional inclusion upon attitudes towards social inclusion policy; the perceived impact of national government social inclusion policy and agenda on current practice; which excluded groups staff feel that the library service particularly targets and how; which groups staff feel that the library service excludes and how; future plans for social inclusion at a local level

Sarah McNichol (2004) identified some barriers to library use: the perception of library staff as “officious and not particularly helpful”; “the staff seem to be absorbed in their work and I felt I was intruding”; “I grew up thinking that libraries were for use by those who were better educated than me”; “Libraries and their employees have not changed much in the past three or four decades, they are now using computers but they never in my opinion come out into the world at large.”

Michelle McArthur and Keith Nicholson (2005) made some similar observations. They noted, for example, “how front line team members became so focused on the task they were carrying out, e.g. shelving, that they became unaware of the customers and failed to observe what was happening around them. Having spent 20 plus years in the ‘people business’, it was particularly disturbing to feel like an intruder when entering many of the libraries we visited. Customers are often made to wait until the staff member has completed a task before they are acknowledged as being there and waiting for assistance.” There are three major hurdles that need to be overcome

- fear of change – everyone deals with change in their own way, but for many the fear of the unknown, or lack of certainty in the future, impacts upon their ability to deliver great service as they become distracted by the emotional barriers of fear
- attitude – in order to meet needs it is vital that everyone within the organisation has a community focused ‘can do’ attitude. Sometimes it is the staff closest to the community who have the best attitude, and the problems tend to arise at the supervisory / middle management level. Staff will only maintain their community focus if they have the total support and commitment of their line managers
- policy and procedures – many library services tend to rely on historical policies and procedures to take the service forward. Library services often recruit staff who have an interest in the products, and are process / task orientated individuals, who are not always comfortable dealing with the public, especially in difficult situations. Recruitment policies must change so that staff are recruited from ‘people business’ backgrounds, and have the necessary community skills.

As Annette De Faveri (2005) has said:

“At the heart of every positive story about the library is a personal experience with a library staff member. Staff develop and sustain the relationships that embody and define library services. However well-conceived the service model, without the people to humanize it, a service model is simply a set of instructions. Breaking barriers to library use is about building relationships. Building relationships is about taking time, and it requires staff who are trained,

knowledgeable, and understanding of the community's needs and the library's role in meeting those needs. As we build relationships we build communities. When we build communities we sustain lifelong learning for all community members."

A National Consumer Council Survey (2005) asked the question "What marks out the best public services - what is that factor that differentiates them?" In many ways the answer to this question is the essence of a needs based library service: "People speak about empathy, compassion, warmth, the human touch, respect - taking the time to listen and respond to individual circumstances, and focusing help on people who need it most."

Emerging research (2007) shows that there is a significant empathy gap in public libraries between the homogenous nature of the staff and the increasingly diverse make up of communities. Most library staff are female, older, white and with good educational backgrounds (indicating a middle class bias). This compromises their ability to empathise with men and boys, younger people, ethnic minorities and working class people. All of these groups are under represented when their proportion of the general population is compared to their percentage of library users. The dominant staff member prefers to meet the needs of the dominant library user.

When tested, some staff can categorise 'worthy' and 'unworthy' library users, which is resonant of the Victorian attitude towards the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. Within this typology the homebound and deserving but the homeless are not. The least deserving of all are those communities on the fringes of society – asylum seekers, refugees, migrant workers and Travellers. Research by Stonewall shows that these groups face high levels of public prejudice, driven by the media and the law.

The research also shows that many library staff are not aware of social exclusion policy in the context of public libraries; they blame this on management's failure to communicate with them. Another reason could be that they do not want to engage with this agenda and so they claim no knowledge of it. Some library workers – particular older staff – have expressed open hostility to social exclusion, which they describe as political correctness.

Staff training and development can go some way to enable staff to deal with social exclusion issues, but it cannot completely close the empathy gap. Similarly, working with other agencies, partners and volunteers can also help to raise awareness and understanding, but it cannot fully close the empathy gap. At the end of the day white, older, female, middle class staff cannot fully understand what it is like to be black, young, male or working class. Until we have a diverse workforce which reflects our diverse communities we will not be able to develop fully inclusive and needs based library services.

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