NEW MEASURES FOR THE NEW LIBRARY

A Social Audit of Public Libraries
by Rebecca Linley & Bob Usherwood

Centre for the Public Library
In The Information Society
Department of Information Studies
The University of Sheffield

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Any opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the British Library
‘The library is [a] remarkable transformer of energy for the "fuel" which goes into it, in the form of books and journals not only gives out a steady flow of power through all its readers, many of whom produce further books themselves; it remains itself intact, preserving its energy undiminished. This is the unique property of organized and recorded knowledge.

...And as a result homes are made more attractive, careers are made more effective, committees are made more productive, time is more meaningfully spent, the oceans and generations are bridged, and the mind of civilization, triumphing over space, time, and matter, becomes ever more articulate and purposive.’

(Meredith, P (1961) Learning, remembering and knowing. EUP)

I think the libraries can play a great part, as they have done in the past. I lived in Scotswood once, and the school was .. just opposite the library....The children used to go there to do their homework, because they had no facilities at home, and the children were taught to use the libraries. Now [one child] was taught to go to the library, used the books and taught to use the books he should use and how to read the books and [he] is now a don at Oxford, and that’s through the Scotswood Library and the two teachers.

(Newcastle respondent 1997)

‘The next two or three decades could be decades for us in Britain where we either become more insular [with] more tension in our society, or by a conscious act, in an approach in which lots of people have to join in, we say “there are opportunities here for people to enrich their lives and focus themselves on the cultural, the recreational, the educational, in a way that their time around can be full and vigorous and enlightening.” I hope it’s the latter course that people will pursue, and I think the library service will be central to that.’

(Somerset respondent. 1997)
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Abstract

This report describes the use of a ‘social process audit’ to evaluate the social impact of libraries in the City of Newcastle upon Tyne and the County of Somerset. It compares the perceptions of the library service held by elected members, library staff and focus groups of local residents, library users and non-users. The project initially focused on the impact of the library service in particular geographical areas within the two authorities. It was subsequently extended to evaluate the impact of business information and local studies services. The data show that the recognised and established functions of the public library in terms of education, information, culture and leisure remain important. At the same time social and caring roles have been identified. It is shown that public library services promote social cohesion and community confidence by fostering connections between groups and communities. Public libraries are seen as community landmarks that reinforce community identity. The library can help individuals, especially older people, overcome the problems of social isolation and loneliness. The economic impact of the library is discussed in the terms of the assistance reference libraries give to local businesses, and those seeking jobs and training opportunities. In some cases, notably in smaller towns in Somerset, it is argued that the presence of a library can support the vitality of a town by encouraging people to use their local centre. The library is perceived as being an equitably provided service by most older people, those with disabilities and people from ethnic minorities. This is felt less strongly by young people and lone parents. It is argued that the extent to which the public library service fulfils its social objectives is influenced by the way the service and the local authority are managed, and also on some other factors outside the immediate control of library staff. Factors identified as helping or hindering the attainment of social objectives include resources, marketing and awareness of the service, library rules and culture, structure, staff attitudes and the location of the library. The report concludes that qualitative data, properly gathered, are valid evidence and should be used as such by policy makers and professionals. The report concludes with a framework for understanding the social impact of the library. This can be used as a practical tool by managers to identify the factors that can help and hinder the library achieve its social objectives.
Acknowledgements

The input of Andrew Seaman, the original research assistant on this project, is gratefully acknowledged. The findings from the Newcastle focus groups owe a great deal to the work of Elaine Robson and we would like to thank her and her colleagues in the Chief Executive’s Department, Newcastle upon Tyne City Council, for their contribution to this project.

We would like to thank our partners in this research in Newcastle Library and Information Service and Somerset County Library Service. The nature of this research also necessitated extensive co-operation with a wide range of groups and individuals outside the library service. The assistance of all these individuals, too many to mention individually, is greatly appreciated. Thanks are also due to Rotherham Library and Information Service for their co-operation in running the pilot study.

An early draft of this report was subject to the deliberations of a workshop, and we would like to thank everyone who contributed to the debate. We would also like to thank Michael Messenger for his detailed comments on an early draft of this report and David Spiller for his written advice. Several references were supplied by Hazel Lee, formerly a researcher at Sheffield - our thanks to her.

Our steering group made a considerable commitment and input to this research, which is greatly appreciated.

Our greatest thanks, however, must be to all the respondents in Newcastle and Somerset. It is their perceptions and beliefs that are at the heart of this research.
Introduction

The objectives of public libraries are notoriously vague but official statements issued by national and local governments have often included phrases that imply both economic and social objectives. The activities of public libraries have been assumed to have merit but relatively little is known about the actual impact of such services on individuals or local communities. Making use of a form of social audit, this project evaluates library services in a new way. Rather than relying on outputs, such as the number of books issued, it examines the outcomes, the impact and value of public libraries.

In the public sector ‘measurement’ is never a simple statistical exercise. It is all too easy to count the obvious and fail to see what is significant. As the Report, Borrowed Time? (1993) reminded us, figures regarding the number of books issued, the hours that libraries are open, the number of visitors, and how much is spent are only part of the story. Comedia have revisited this argument in their latest work, Beyond book issues (Matarasso, 1997). In an earlier text, Libraries in a world of cultural change, they suggested that the library community should initiate research on the economic and social impact of the public library. (Greenhalgh et al, 1995). Such research had also been proposed several years earlier (Usherwood, 1989). The fact that this research has received support is perhaps indicative of the changes in research priorities since that time.

In our present project we have sought to increase the information available to decision makers and library professionals responsible for planning and evaluating public library services. We have attempted to demonstrate how far ideas about libraries have been reflected in practice, and to ascertain the degree to which aspirations are translated into achievements. In so doing we have advanced a framework for understanding the social and economic impact of public library organisations.

The research had three objectives.

1. To develop a tool for measuring the social impact of library activities in relation to objectives
2. To investigate the social and economic impact of public libraries.
3. To investigate how far a library's activities, in practice, contribute towards the achievement of its social objectives

The basic research premise was to use a 'social process audit' (as described by Blake et al, 1976) to evaluate the social impact of libraries. The research therefore sought to analyse the goals (aims), inputs (resources), outputs (the programme or service) and outcomes (actual experience) of the public library and information service.

It has been carried out via two separate but related projects in the City of Newcastle upon Tyne and the County of Somerset. The two authorities offer considerable
contrasts in terms of geography, demography, politics and the local economy. The methodology has therefore been tested in both rural and inner city areas.

After consultation with the two authorities, it was originally agreed to look at the impact of the whole library service in particular locations, rather than a specific part of the service over the whole authority. The locations of the research were four Inner City wards in Newcastle, and two districts of Somerset (Taunton Deane and West Somerset). Subsequently, the British Library granted an extension to the project to enable us to evaluate specific services (business information and local studies).

The ‘starting point for any social audit process is to identify and clarify the values against which the activities of the business or other type of organisation are to be judged.’ (Zadek and Evans, 1993, p.21) In this project, this starting point was the stated social objectives of the two authorities.

Our basic approach has been to cross-check the views and perceptions of selected stakeholders to ascertain how far these objectives have been achieved. The key stakeholders for this study were:-

- elected members;
- library staff;
- groups of library users and non-users.

The authorities’ social objectives

As we have used the social audit technique to evaluate the role of the public library in meeting the objectives of two local authorities, it is necessary to briefly outline the objectives of Newcastle City Council and Somerset County Council. These are set out in full in the documents attached at Appendices B and C.

Newcastle Libraries and Information Service (NLIS) is part of the Community and Leisure Directorate, through which it is linked into an authority-wide business planning process. NLIS’s objectives are therefore oriented towards the City Council’s key priorities, which encompass a wide range of social concerns. (See Appendix B) These objectives are reflected in the NLIS 'Vision for the Development of Newcastle Libraries and Information Service, 1996-2001' which asserts that: ‘Libraries have always been seen as focal points within their communities, providing a range of services to support and enhance the economic, educational, recreational, cultural and social life of those communities. This role can also be seen as that of a gateway - to information, to technology, and a wide range of services and facilities.’ The aim of NLIS is to develop this role at the centre of community life. It is envisaged that the library can become a ‘first point contact’ to a ‘wide range of council and other agency services.’ To enable NLIS to achieve these aims, all libraries are seeking to 'define their communities more closely' so they can meet ‘the needs and aspirations of people within these communities, whether current library users or not.’ A central part of NLIS’ vision is to ‘assist in the reduction of disadvantage, poverty and inequality.’ This includes identifying ‘the service needs and aspirations’ of certain disadvantaged groups in the community: ‘including children and young people, ethnic minorities, elderly people, women, the low paid and people with disabilities.’
The literature produced by Somerset County Council did not include any detailed statements of social objectives, and the library service itself has not formulated any such objectives. The authority’s core principles do, however, contain broad social aspirations, for instance in the areas of community participation, equitable access to services and a concern with ‘disadvantage.’ The library service’s objectives are very much a statement of established ‘library roles,’ as compared with the ‘community’ emphasis in Newcastle. Various ‘goals’ relate to each of the objectives in Somerset’s mission statement. These sub-goals are not directly linked to the County Council’s core principles. There is, equally, little in the objectives that directly contradicts the core principles. One of the goals (listed under culture), in particular, is suggestive of the Council’s policy aim of equitable access. This seeks: ‘To ensure that every library building, vehicle and service is equally accessible by all potential users and perceived as a “community resource” by all.’ (Somerset County Library Service, 1997)

There is, in fact, much common ground between Somerset and Newcastle’s objectives at an authority-wide level, albeit with differences in emphasis. For instance both refer to ‘disadvantage’ but the Newcastle priorities come closer to advocating targeting of services. Unlike the Newcastle priorities, the Somerset core principles do not refer to crime or unemployment. These are nonetheless relevant questions in Somerset as a Council review of local services suggested that, with the environment, these are issues about which local people are most concerned. (Somerset CC, 1996, p.5.)

Differences were found, as noted above, in the approaches of the two library services, with Newcastle’s conformity with the Council’s overall priorities contrasting with a less integrated approach in Somerset.

Data obtained from interviews and focus groups undertaken in the two authorities are discussed on a thematic basis. Each themed section considers our data in the context of previous research and the more general literature of the subject. The methodological approach to obtaining these data is discussed at some length in Chapter Two. It is our intention that the Social Audit be used by librarians as a practical tool to evaluate their own services. A framework for this activity is included in our final chapter.

The social impact programme

Our social audit project was funded, by the British Library, as a standalone study, but it subsequently contributed to a composite programme of research and related activities, intended to promote understanding of the role public libraries play in communities. (Harris and Green, 1997) Part of the rationale for the social impact programme was to address the difficulty of ‘measuring’ the intangible benefits of the library. Amongst the issues considered by the programme was the need ‘to demonstrate in measurable terms that public libraries offer value for money.’ (Harris and Green, 1997) A significant strand of the programme was a literature review and bibliography (Kerslake and Kinnell, 1997). In our thematic arrangement we have, where appropriate, drawn on this and other elements of the composite study.
2. Research methods and work undertaken

Measuring against objectives

Previous research on the organisational effectiveness of libraries has of course sought to assess the library’s performance against goals or objectives. (Van House and Childers, 1994; Cullen and Calvert, 1993) The emphasis of such research was, however, on developing indicators of what Carter et al (1992) describe as administrative effectiveness, that is of process. This differs from policy effectiveness which is concerned with the ‘the extent to which policy impacts meet policy aims.’ Policy effectiveness is ‘normally measured by the relationship between outputs and outcomes.’ (Carter et al, 1992, p.38) Outcome is defined by Smith (1996) as the values placed by society on an activity. He goes on to suggest that, in practice, there is a continuum between pure measures of process (e.g. numbers of pupils taught) and more refined measures of quality (such as the ‘value added’ by schools).

At the same time it is ‘necessary to disentangle the causes of variations in outcome.’ These may involve:-
(I) the treatment of joint inputs and outputs (e.g. several agencies might co-operate to prevent juvenile crime);
(ii) variations in organisational environments (e.g. client base);
(iii) the treatment of long-term issues (i.e. benefits that may only accrue over time);
(iv) random variability in outcome measures (which may be likely in health care outcomes for relatively rare events);
(v) the incorporation of equity considerations.
(After Smith, 1996, p. 13)

The first three of these variables definitely apply to libraries, the fourth is perhaps a less significant factor. The last, as will be seen, is a relevant consideration in the two authorities that were the subject of our study.

Social auditing

The social audit has been proposed as a means of enabling ‘sensible measurement’ of the complex public sector outcomes indicated above. Several writers (Boden and Corden, 1996; Percy-Smith 1992) make a distinction between social audits in the private sector - which they describe as social accounting - and those which address the effect of public policy on people. They argue that whilst businesses may be concerned with social responsibility, their principal objective remains to generate income for shareholders. This may be a very fine distinction in the case of some ‘ethical’ businesses. For example, as the New Economic Foundation’s social audit of Traidcraft plc indicates, that company’s mission statement focuses on fair trade principles, and this might be the principal objective of the company, over and above the profit motive. (Zadek and Evans, 1993, p. 21) Perhaps the distinctive feature of the public sector, compared to the private sector, is that it exists to meet needs as argued, for instance, by
Percy-Smith. (1992, p.29). We should perhaps acknowledge here the division of needs into existing, latent or perceived. (cf. Totterdell & Bird, 1976)

**Literature search and document analysis**

The literature search examined work in the library and information science field and the broader social science literature dealing with outcomes in the not-for-profit sector. As indicated above we were also aware of several other projects related to the social impact of libraries. In addition policy statements and local authority information about the case study areas were examined to inform the design of research instruments.

**Locations, initial visits and community profiling**

Following a meeting with library and local authority research staff in Newcastle, it was agreed that in addition to the three wards which ‘wrap around’ the city centre (Moorside, Sandyford, West City), a further ward, Byker, would be studied. At a meeting with library staff in Somerset, two areas for the study (the districts of West Somerset and Taunton Deane) were identified. Short descriptions of the case study wards are attached as appendices D and E.

Before undertaking the fieldwork the project worker visited the two authorities, where accompanied visits to the case study areas were made. This offered the opportunity to profile the areas using more informal observational techniques. Following this, profiles describing the nature of the areas, were written, using data from observation visits and material supplied by the two authorities. (Newcastle City Council, 1993a; Somerset County Council 1995).

**Identification of stakeholders**

Social auditing has been described as a ‘means of assessing the social impact ... of an organisation in relation to its aims and those of its stakeholders.’ (Zadek, 1994) The identification of stakeholders is therefore an integral part of the technique. Stakeholders are defined as including ‘all individuals and groups who are affected by, or who can affect, the organisation.’ (Zadek, 1994) In using the method in Somerset and Newcastle, our approach was to cross-check the views and perceptions of different stakeholders in order to obtain a full a view as possible of the social aspects of public library activity. With hindsight and increased resources we would widen the range of stakeholders in any future work.
There were also steering group meetings throughout the course of the project.
Steering group

Many of the concerns of this study involved public policy and, from the outset, we recognised that such matters can raise difficulties of bias and objectivity. We were fully aware of the problems in assessing evidence and decided from the beginning to work with a steering group that reflected a wide range of professional views and opinions. This Steering Group met five times in the course of the project. The group included representatives from the Audit Commission and the New Economics Foundation (NEF). The NEF has carried out social audits for a number of organisations. Together the members of the group brought a range of perspectives to our research.

Pilot

A small pilot study was undertaken in November 1996. This was carried out in Rotherham, in South Yorkshire, and was used to test and refine the interview schedule prior to its use in Newcastle. For obvious reasons a slightly different version was used to reflect the differing social objectives of Rotherham Council.

The data from the pilot were used, together with the literature, to inform the design of interview schedule for the main research. The key amendment made to the interview schedule, as a result of the pilot, was the inclusion of a question on the impact of the closure of a library. This was suggested when references to the ‘intangible’ benefits of the library, caused one respondent to suggest that a community would only appreciate the true value of a library if a service was withdrawn.

Interviews with stakeholders

The interview schedule for elected members and library staff was developed with reference to the objectives of the respective authorities and to the published literature. For local politicians and library staff, a semi-structured interview schedule, with prompts, was used to obtain the relevant qualitative data. This allowed the freedom for ‘open-ended’ responses to questions and for the interviewer to explore these responses. (McCracken, 1988)

In Newcastle, interviewees included the Vice-Chair of the Leisure Services Committee, all but one of the elected members in the selected wards, and an opposition member of the Leisure Services Committee. Interviewing local politicians from outside the case study wards helped bring a City-wide perspective to the research whilst also drawing on the perceived needs of local communities. Gaining the viewpoint of an opposition politician was also regarded as important, in terms of balance, because the case study wards were all represented by the same political party, whereas the City as a whole had a quite substantial opposition group.
A cross-section of library staff was also interviewed. This included staff based in the four branch libraries in the selected wards, professional staff whose responsibilities covered these wards and staff based in the City Library. Additional interviews were also carried out with the Community Co-ordinators for the wards in the study. This added dimension was suggested during an interview by one of the elected members, and proved valuable in complementing the data gathered from elected members and library staff. The interviews were semi-structured in nature, although some flexibility had to be built in to reflect individual factors such as library staff having responsibilities covering more than one ward. A ‘City-wide’ adaptation of the interview schedule was used for the two Leisure Services Committee members who represented wards from outside the case study area.

A similar approach was subsequently taken in Somerset. There, all but two of elected members for County Council divisions in the districts of West Somerset and Taunton Deane were interviewed. Interviews were also carried out with the Leader of the Council and the Chair of the Libraries, Museums and Records Committee. Eighteen Somerset staff were interviewed, including three mobile library staff. The relatively large number of interviews reflected the size of the case study area. All the interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed.

**Focus groups**

Following the completion of the interviews with elected members and library staff, and analysis of the data collected, focus groups were carried out with users and non-users of library services. Again, the interview guides were designed with reference to the authorities’ objectives and themes to be found in the literature. Holding group interviews allowed data to be obtained from a larger number of respondents and for people to develop their original responses after they heard other people’s views. (Patton, 1990, p.335)

In Newcastle, the recruitment of the focus groups was undertaken by the research section of the Chief Executive’s Department. These focus groups included both library users and non-users. Names of potential participants were collected from outside local housing offices in each ward. Whether individuals used libraries or not determined which focus group they were invited to, with groups held for both users and non users in each ward. In addition to these ‘general’ focus groups, a specific group was identified in each ward, with reference to Newcastle City Profiles. The groups chosen were in line with Newcastle Library and Information Service's vision statement and therefore involved ethnic minorities (Moorside ward), elderly people (Sandyford Ward), young people (West City Ward) and parents (Byker Ward).

In Somerset, there were not the same kind of readily accessible research and community infrastructures, and the groups were therefore recruited in different ways:-

- Three were recruited through staff in Somerset County Council Information Points and community schools in West Somerset. An attempt was made to make these groups ‘representative’ of the age and employment profiles of the local community.
• A further group was recruited through a Community Education Office. Unlike the participants recruited through community schools, most of this group were undertaking some form of continuing education and were all library users.

The research in Somerset also involved:-
• An older people’s discussion group.
• A parents’ support group.
• A group drawn from a detached youth project.
• A group of disabled people and carers, recruited with the help of a voluntary worker. Unlike all the other groups which were based on specific locations (although often large geographical areas), this group came from across the case study areas.

The focus group discussions like the interviews were recorded, and subsequently transcribed. All participants, other than the discussion club in Somerset, were paid expenses for taking part.

In Newcastle, 90 people attended 14 groups, with library users being keener to take part than non-users. In Somerset, a similar number attended just eight groups. The relatively poor attendance in Newcastle may reflect a degree of cynicism or apathy in communities which may feel they have been ‘over-researched.’

Workshop

An integral part of the research was to discuss and review our findings with library professionals and politicians. To this end, we produced a preliminary report which provided the basis of a workshop held with invited politicians and practitioners. All participants were given a copy of the preliminary report. Delegates were divided into small groups to discuss the major themes arising from the research. Comments from the day’s discussions were used to inform further consideration of the data. Our final report takes account of the views expressed at the workshop session.

Workshop participants also identified issues that were felt to require further consideration. These were:-
• a need to involve other partners who influence library objectives, for instance, in the field of economic development, TECs and Chambers of Commerce;
• a concern to include more stakeholders in a wider sense, notably voluntary and community groups;
• a need to evaluate the impact of large central libraries as well as the smaller, community libraries, which were emphasised in the interim report;
• the economic benefit of libraries.

Extension to project

An extension to the project was designed to address further these issues. The time was used to evaluate specific services across a wider geographical area. The choice of the two services investigated, business information service and local studies, was largely informed by the workshop discussion. Business information was chosen to gather more
data on the economic impact of the library. Studying this area also presented an opportunity to involve partner organisations in the economic development field. Evaluating local studies services allowed us to obtain the views of those involved in voluntary groups such as local history societies. Therefore, the input of additional stakeholders was incorporated into the research. In addition, both services mainly centred on larger libraries.

In Newcastle, focus group discussions were held with three local history groups. For the business information strand, it proved difficult to organise focus groups with business organisations, but a discussion was held with an individual member of Business Link staff. Focus groups were held at a Job Club and with a training group for people seeking to improve their IT skills. Considering the viewpoints of those seeking work and receiving training was considered particularly relevant in Newcastle given the authority’s emphasis on skills and employment.

In Somerset, one local history focus group was held. A written response was provided by another local history society, with whom it was not possible to arrange an interview. One business information focus group was held, with a defence contractors’ group. This was supplemented by interviews with business link staff.

**Data analysis**

In practice, the data collection, analysis and writing blended into one another (Mellon, 1990, p.89). The diagrammatic representation of the research design (fig 1.) is therefore in a sense, artificial, but it does give an overview of the work undertaken. Initial findings were noted whilst the fieldwork was still being carried out, and these were presented to the Steering Group. All the steering group meetings were used to develop ideas and refine our findings.

The Newcastle focus group data were written up by the City Council’s research services department and the themes described therein were also used to inform the data analysis. (Research Services, 1997) Initially, the Newcastle and Somerset material was written as two separate case studies. This was reflected in the interim report, presented at the workshop, which reported the two sets of finding and then drew out some over-arching themes. The workshop discussed both the interim report, and four short papers which aimed to draw out discussion of particular issues (a summary of the contents of the papers is attached at Appendix J). Notes of the four group discussions and the plenary session were used to further inform the data analysis, and, as noted above, were instrumental in the application for funding for additional research.

The raw data were coded into key categories which were then developed into an outline. The outline has been used as a guide to arrange and present the data. (Mellon, 1992, p.91-92)

The final steering group meeting was used to discuss the themes emerging, before detailed conclusions were reached
Validity of the findings

In case study research, variation of method is used to improve the validity of the data - for instance, using the differing data collection methods, talking to staff as well as managers and using multiple cases. (Clayton, 1995) In our study data were collected from a variety of sources, using different techniques: one-to-one interviews and focus groups, and from pre-existing written material. Para-professional and professional staff were interviewed. As has already been noted, two case studies locations were used. The interviews were carried out by the project researcher. Focus groups were facilitated by her, and members of Newcastle City Council’s research services department, who also carried out an initial analysis of the Newcastle focus group data. (Newcastle upon Tyne City Council, 1997.) At the same time, the Steering Group brought additional perspectives to the research process.

In our final report we have used quotations to illustrate the key findings. We have kept the words of actual respondents and therefore these may not always be entirely grammatical. Although this is largely a qualitative project, we have, on occasion, indicated whether an opinion is widely held, or represents a majority or minority view. Where we have made such observations, it has been done solely to indicate the relative strength or weighting of a particular point, within the terms of the research. This kind of weighting can be executed with the most confidence in the case of data from the local politicians, because we interviewed a very high proportion of the elected members in the chosen case study areas (92% in Newcastle and 82% in Somerset.)

Generalising from the findings

Generalising from qualitative findings is an ‘impossibility.’ (Patton, 1987, p.167) Our findings reflect what was found in two specific locations. However, it is suggested that reasonable ‘extrapolation’ is possible. (Cronbach, in Patton, 1987, p.168) Extrapolations are described as ‘modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions.’ (Patton, 1987, p.168) It is in this sense that we seek to relate our findings to the existing body of research.

As with a financial audit, so with a social audit one has to trust the auditors, and the use they make of the data. In conducting this social audit we have made use of largely qualitative data and used it in a way that honestly reflects the situations we found. Illustrative quotations have been chosen on that basis. They have been used to exemplify and illuminate our findings. Throughout this procedure we maintained transparency, though for reasons of confidentiality, individual transcripts cannot be released.

In addition, we believe that the methods used in this study can be used by staff in public libraries to help assess the impact of the services they provide. However, it should be noted that social auditing, as developed by the NEF, does include an external verification process. (Zadek, 1994) In this project the researchers were from outside the two services being audited, and, moreover, the research was overseen by an independent steering group. If public library services were to use this technique to
evaluate the impact of their own services, it might be decided that some means of external verification is required.
3. Established functions

Introduction

Over the years the public library service has performed a series of major functions. These have been legitimised by a number of modern statements of public library purpose such as the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (in Aslib, 1995) and the national Mission Statement for the public library (in OAL, 1991). In this section, using data obtained from the study, we consider the impact of the ‘established’ roles of the library i.e. education, literacy, information, leisure and culture. The data show that these established roles are still recognised as important functions *per se*, but the interviews and focus groups also indicate that the way these roles are organised, managed and conceptualised can help or hinder the delivery of the local authority’s social and economic objectives. Although these established roles are discussed individually, the interview material sometimes reflects a blurring of boundaries between them, for example between culture and leisure.

Culture

Culture is used here in a very broad sense - that is in terms of enriching or enhancing the quality of life, or extending its possibilities. One local politician provided an example of how the library achieved this is, albeit in an indirect way. He said:-

*You encounter people in life whose whole approach and experiences are enriched by the people who can stimulate their interest and awareness... I was with a group of people... in one of the libraries... and there was this bloke who was amongst the team and he was drooling with joy at this great stack of atlases... and he said ‘I just love looking at all these maps and the charting and all that.’ And by placing these opportunities in front of people - otherwise life can be a very dull round of people working themselves to death just to feed their families with no breadth of experience to their lives. So I think that libraries are very important here.*

[Elected member, Somerset]

This concern with the ‘breadth of experience’ of people’s lives has parallels with Newcastle City Council’s priority on cultural regeneration. The City Council’s priority document refers to libraries supporting and encouraging participation in local cultural activities. (See Appendix B) Several elected members and library staff emphasised the relevance of libraries to the City’s cultural regeneration strategy. For instance, one Newcastle politician saw:-

*...libraries as a vehicle to enable a better interchange of ideas, and an ongoing representation of our culture. And in that respect I don’t see a distinction between the services that the library provides and the museums service provides, the theatre provides.*

[Elected member, Newcastle]

However, for another local politician, this was more of a potential than an actual role for the library service. The reasons for this were clearly related to resources:-
[The library] could ... be more of a cultural centre. There’s no reason why we can’t exploit [it] putting on little exhibitions, work - it doesn’t matter what the work is, whether it’s art, sculpture or poetry or whatever...I think that we neglect the cultural aspects of our provision to our charge payers... It’s very difficult of course to convince a lot of our colleagues, who are currently having to deal with two million cut off this and two million cut off that.

[Elected member, Newcastle]

In Somerset, one member of library staff, who had been involved in promoting local cultural events (including the science fiction festival referred to here), argued that their impact needed to be assessed by individual feedback as well as simply on the basis of the number of people attending. He said that:

*We get feedback obviously from participation in the various festivals that we’ve done, the children’s book festivals, the space age festivals... When you’ve got ... a hundred people in this library for example listening to Terry Pratchett then you can quantify it, but that message goes out that the people have got something from that talk.*

[Library staff, Somerset]

There was a feeling that the library could and should do more. A member of staff talked about the use of the library’s display window by local groups and societies:

*I think we’re gradually getting more coming in, the youth theatre puts on a display to promote the plays and things... I would like to get in touch with more [community groups] and tell them that the window’s there and if they want to show people what they are doing then why not come along and use it... It would be nice to get a bit closer to some of them.*

[Library staff, Somerset]

Similar activities also tended to be mentioned, and welcomed, by the most committed of library users. A good example of this was one group in Newcastle who thought that the library service should do more to promote the work of community artists. They also felt that the library should co-operate with regional arts organisations to promote events and activities. Like the elected member cited earlier one participant attributed the lack of cultural events to resource restrictions:

*In the library last year I saw a little poster - photography classes, free - which I think they held in here, but ... it’s once in a blue moon. It must be down to money.*

[Focus group, Newcastle]

The accuracy of this impression was confirmed by library staff in Newcastle, who referred to the financial constraints on providing a number of cultural or artistic activities, ranging from craft sessions to writers’ workshops. The later investigation of local studies services did, however, demonstrate that the library service, in both authorities, provided vital support to local societies. The impact of these services is considered more fully in a later chapter.

**Education**

Educational achievement and raising standards is the first objective of Newcastle City Council. Individual local politicians also placed a very high priority on education. A
typical expression of this, from one senior local politician, was that:

*My priorities as a politician are the improvement of the educational system, because we have very low educational achievement in the city...*

[Elected member, Newcastle]

In Newcastle, elected members generally saw the library as supporting the work of schools. All the Newcastle library staff made extensive references to class visits and user education with local schools, and to schools’ use of library resources. However this kind of work didn’t always seem to be ‘visible’ to local politicians. One elected member said:

*I’m a School Governor and I don’t see the evidence of close enough links between the library service and the schools. ... I would want to see from a very young age, the encouragement of visits to libraries to be part of the curriculum, if that’s possible, and I don’t see the evidence of that.*

[Elected member, Newcastle]

Focus group respondents, in both locations, also gave examples of ways in which parents and carers used the library service to support their children’s educational needs. One instance of this was a respondent, in Somerset, who was educating her children at home and who made it clear that this option would not have been feasible without the resources of the library.

In both authorities library staff emphasised their efforts to reach out to all children and parents. As an example, one member of library staff stated that:

*The children’s co-ordinators do make a special effort to go out to venues. ...last year it was about 18,000 children who were contacted through specific activities - going out to playgroups or having discussion evenings or having a story time... So it doesn’t help those kids to get into a library necessarily but ... it is awareness raising, fostering the whole notion about books and reading being something that you’re motivated to do something about.*

[Library staff, Somerset]

There was also evidence of close links between individual libraries and community schools. Another member of staff said:

*When they get to the middle school, then the children themselves come in and we work very closely with both schools, but particularly with the middle school so that we can look ahead and prepare for the books that they’re going to need.*

[Library staff, Somerset]

In Somerset, the library’s support of the community education service was frequently mentioned by staff, and by some other respondents. One member of staff said:

*We work quite a lot with the community education people on their arts courses, when they do courses ... we display stuff that they’ve done, we help advertise ...whatever it is that’s on. They give us cultural information on what ... they’re doing, they’ll give us the leaflets and the posters and things and we’ll send them round to the village and other branches.... Very often they’ll actually use us for various bits of information.*

[Library staff, Somerset]

There was a recognition in the focus groups of the library’s use as a homework centre.
However, participants in both locations felt that limited evening opening hours restricted this activity. In Somerset, the distances to travel to the library further reduced the scope of this role. There was also criticism of the lack of study space and reference materials in many libraries. Users felt that:

*It would help if there were more books and also there are only two tables and not much space for the children or adult learners to work in.*

[Focus group, Somerset]

Another respondent in this group:

*...would like an encyclopaedia on CD-ROM and more computers. This would help to free up the space.*

[Focus group, Somerset]

It should be emphasised that the new library in Taunton was not subject to this kind of criticism.

At the same time, there was a recognition that public libraries could help offset the effects of funding cuts in other sectors. The point made by this local politician (who worked in the education sector) was also expressed by other respondents. He thought that:

*... most students at the two FE colleges use the public library to supplement the information that isn’t at their colleges, so it has a vital role for students who are studying in all sorts of ways because there isn’t the money being put into the education service.*

[Elected member, Somerset]

As with other aspects of this research, it is unwise to make generalisations about the contribution of the library to a child’s, or an adult’s, educational attainment. Even for children in similar situations, the individual impact of the library can be completely different. One respondent said that:

*I’ve got two lads, two teenage boys, and one is an avid user of the library, he’s been a bookworm since he’s been a few months old. The other one has never used the library, and yet their education - they are achieving parallel. It’s essential for one, but not for the other. It’s ironic that it’s essential for ... the one who is academically the more brainy, whereas the one who’s not using it is still achieving results and has had to work at it, but doesn’t use the library. ... Your question is ‘is it essential for education?’ and .... one, he found it absolutely essential, and the other, he doesn’t use it at all and he’s still doing as well.*

[Focus group, Somerset]

This example raises other questions, such as would the child ‘still achieving results’ do even better if he used the library, although the respondent herself clearly saw it in terms of her two children having different ‘learning styles.’

Of course, the quality of the library experience can depend on other factors. An older student gave an example. She had been able to find the materials she had needed for her part-time course, but a fellow student, using the same library, had not been able to do so, because she did not possess the skills to find the material on her own or the confidence to approach library staff. For some people:-
...who haven’t used a library before it can be a bit daunting. People don’t know what’s available and it can be a bit frightening, especially for adults. If something is not on a shelf then I think people are scared of making themselves look stupid by having to ask. I can’t think of what the library could do to help...

[Focus group, Somerset]

In most cases, however, older students in both locations seemed to have had a positive experience of the library. This example is from a Newcastle focus group participant:-

I’m using [the library] at the present time. I’m a mature student, I go to Northumbria University, I’m doing a degree course. Because half my study work is on a computer and I can’t afford one myself I spend a couple of hours in the library.

[Focus group, Newcastle]

It is perhaps worth adding that the County of Somerset does not contain (other than the Open University) any higher education providers and, as noted above, just two further education providers in Taunton and Yeovil. So, whereas in Newcastle adult learners in focus groups often had ready access to an academic library, this was often not the case in Somerset, so increasing the relative importance of public library provision. Certainly, the theme of the importance of the library in supporting adult educational provision was more prominent in Somerset than in Newcastle, at least in the responses of library staff and focus group participants. There is a partial parallel with the findings of the Sheffield strike research which found that ‘there is a greater dependency on public libraries as an educational provider in communities where people may be expected to have less access to other sources of educational materials and generally less contact with higher education.’ (Proctor et al, p.24) In the Sheffield example this conclusion was rooted in a comparison of different levels of educational attainment in library catchment areas, whereas ours is based on physical access. However, underpinning both sets of finding is the importance of the availability of access to other provision.

We found some evidence that libraries through their educational role can help improve people’s life chances in terms of educational achievement and consequent social mobility. A dramatic example of this was provided by an elected member who said:-

I think the libraries can play a great part, as they have done in the past. I lived in Scotswood once, and the school was ... just opposite the library.... The children used to go there to do their homework, because they had no facilities at home, and the children were taught to use the libraries. Now [one child] was taught to go to the library, used the books and taught to use the books he should use and how to read the books, and [he] now is a don at Oxford, and that’s through the Scotswood Library and the two teachers....

[Elected member, Newcastle]

Some would argue that it may be significant that this example dated from several years ago, while others dismiss as ‘fantasy’ the idea of libraries ever being ‘the haunt of the grammar school child and the deserving artisan thirsting after enlightenment.’ (Black and Muddiman, 1997b.) That said, for some of our respondents that ‘fantasy’ appeared to be very real indeed.

The above description of the library’s impact on an individual’s life chances provides
an example of the complex relationship between intermediate and final outcomes. Certainly, in this particular case, it would be difficult to disentangle the joint inputs of the school and the library. The respondent also referred to a number of other factors influencing this individual’s life chances, such as his own ability and even her own personal role, as a respected member of the local community, in persuading his family to allow him to stay on at school.

In the area of educational impact, as with many other themes, the data illuminate and illustrate rather than represent the role of the library. We can, however, say that public libraries provided some support to some adult and young learners and have some beneficial effects in some circumstances. (cf. Berelson’s (1948) famous comment on the impact of other communication organisations). The impact of the library service was, however, restricted by factors such as inadequate workspace, lack of reference materials and PCs and limited opening hours and, in some instances, the cost of reservations.

**Reading and literacy**

The personal experiences of parents and carers in the focus groups suggest that libraries help develop the reading ability of young children, including (in Newcastle) English language skills in children whose parents first language is not English.

*Storytelling at Cruddas Park Library (West City Ward, Newcastle)*

Storytimes were particularly valued by library users, one of whom suggested that their
value could be measured by looking at improvements in reading: -
I mean the nursery’s just beginning now, they’ve had a couple of sessions. [The
teacher’s] just got them in to take them up, for their storytime, instead of having it in
the nursery library, to take them up to the library itself and to get them used to going
up...- that’s three year-olds. So that now it’s beginning that it’s earlier ages that the
children are beginning to be introduced to the library - which should show on the stats
results... because of the age that they’re reading at.
[Somerset Focus Group]

This ‘user’ view reflects the beliefs of many library staff that :-
it helps that children can come in... I know a couple of children who weren’t very keen
on reading and their end of year report wasn’t very good, but they did start coming in
and coming in regularly and they’re enjoying books. ... if they had to go and buy books
they wouldn’t... We get to know the children and we can encourage them and they’ll
tell you if they liked the book or not.
[Library staff, Somerset]

The potential role of the library in promoting reading emerged particularly strongly in
some parts of Newcastle. There, elected members and community co-ordinators were
concerned about low levels of literacy and numeracy and their effect on employment.
One local politician said that:-
We’ve got parts of this area, the Inner West [an area including two of the case study
wards], when [a company] were opening a big superstore, and some of the literacy
skills, of some of the kids, were actually shocking - it debarred them from getting a job,
and although [the company] actually targeted the local community, because ... the kids
couldn’t read and write they couldn’t get the jobs.
[Elected member, Newcastle]

Data obtained from Newcastle focus groups also indicated that ‘there's loads of people
[that] cannot even read and write.’ Mark Fisher, the Minister responsible for libraries,
indicated at the Library Association’s UmbrelLA Conference (27-29 June, 1997) that a
forthcoming research report would identify important links between literacy,
socialisation and crime. Both the interviews and focus groups in Newcastle suggested
that the public library could be an appropriate and non-stigmatised environment for
specific initiatives on literacy.

Leisure

The ASLIB Report (1995, p.7) demonstrates that leisure reading is the most popular use
of the library. Our research supports this finding and confirms the enduring popularity
and value of leisure reading. The pleasures of reading were described by all the
stakeholder groups. The data reveal benefits far beyond those of a simple leisure
activity. Some of these benefits, notably in relation to alleviating social isolation and
health and well-being, are discussed elsewhere. (See p.33 and p.46 .)

The data show that individuals put a personal value on reading. Further, many referred
to the importance of the library as a source of free materials. Focus group participants
referred to reading as an irreplaceable leisure activity and would disagree with the
Adam Smith Institute’s assertion that libraries simply supply ‘free fiction and other light reading ... to people who could afford to buy books but choose not to do so.’ (Adam Smith Institute, 1986, p.2) For example, in Somerset, where there had been media speculation about the closure of libraries, one respondent referred to the potential effect of the withdrawal of library services. She said:-

_Wiveliscombe has just been under threat and some older couples have been taking out between eight and twenty books a week, what would they do?

[Focus group, Somerset]

In other words, the benefits of reading would not be available to those who could not afford to buy books. Cost was also a factor often mentioned by borrowers of CDs and videos. The issue emerged particularly strongly for young and / or unemployed people, especially in Newcastle where there are policies designed to minimise the cost of these services to certain individuals and communities. These include providing free audio-visual loans in a designated priority area and, for all those on low incomes, reductions in fees and charges through a priority card. (see Appendix B.) One respondent, who used the free audio-visual loans available in his local library, spoke for others in the same circumstances:-

_People like us that’s unemployed, I mean some of these CDs ... there’s no way you can afford [to buy them]. But you can just go and get them out of there._

[Focus group, Newcastle]

This participant felt that being able to borrow such items allowed those on very low incomes to join in activities that others in society take for granted. Such provision can help people feel just a little less marginalised. This issue will be examined further in subsequent chapters, but the outcome is one which reflects the social objectives of Newcastle Council relating as they do to the social regeneration of individual communities (see Appendix B).

**Information**

In Newcastle, the information role is linked into the City’s priorities. In Somerset the library’s mission statement refers to bringing to the individual or group, ‘accurate information quickly and in depth, particularly on topics of current concern.’ (See Appendix C) They include business information services which are discussed later under the theme of economic impact.

One of the library service’s aims in Newcastle is to provide public information services on benefits and homelessness so as to contribute to Council objectives on poverty and unemployment. (See Appendix B) Respondents pointed out that there were several other potential sources of information which people might use in preference to the library, for instance in relation to housing and benefits. One local politician said that:-

_Newcastle’s fortunate because we’ve got neighbourhood housing offices... So in each area, you’ve got a neighbourhood office, you’ve got the library and other facilities. As well as the library, we’ve got the Byker Advice Resource Centre, which is a good drop-in for people if they’ve got any problems with benefits, so they can get direct access to the people who can give them some assistance._

[Elected member, Newcastle]
The Newcastle focus groups tended to confirm this view. The most widely cited ‘information’ use of the library was for enquiries on careers and employers (for job applications and interviews); the City Library, rather than local libraries, was most often used for this purpose. Nonetheless, some library users cited a ‘contingency’ value to the library - that it was there if you needed it to look at, say, a planning application, or if you were looking for a job. (cf. Aslib, p.155). One library user for instance, said:-

*It affects everybody. I mean it even affects people that don’t use the library, even though they don’t realise it... They know it’s there and they know they can go in any time they want.*

[Focus groups, Newcastle]

In Somerset, where there were, in most places, rather fewer alternative sources of information, a different, but not very clear, picture emerged. In the locations which had a Council Information Point as well as a library, focus group participants suggested these were their first point of call for local authority and other official information. The following responses, which suggest that the library was not greatly used for this kind of information, came from library staff in areas that did not have council information offices:-

*I don’t think this library is used in that kind of way, as far as I’m aware no one’s looked at anything like that. I’m sorry to have to say it, because I would like to think that it did, but the only one that was really used, a sort of plan or whatever, was the plan for the marina which ... local people were very interested in that and they did come in here and it was used a lot.*

The community information system ... is not used very much. *I think a lot of the problem is that although we have a lot of information there, people expect to find it somewhere else.*

[Library staff, Somerset]

A different view was expressed by other library staff, with another respondent saying:-

*We do have people who come in and look at the planning lists and want to check where places are, they look up the statistics to see how many people are in the village and ... people who are moving into the area want to know where the nearest schools are, ...where other facilities are and we do have quite a few people who do come in and ask for that sort of information. We can usually help them...*

[Library staff, Somerset]

It also emerged that the public library is a trusted institution. As one respondent indicated:-

*We get people asking all sorts of quite personal questions... I think they’ve come to find that they can trust us and word has got round that if you go to the library they’ll help... A lot of them they don’t know where else to turn and we happen to be here in the village so they’ll come in and ask for leaflets or advice. Even if they know that there’s a benefits van that stops somewhere, they don’t know where it stops so they come and ask us. ... They’ll bring in very personal things to be photocopied ... they won’t go anywhere else...*

[Library staff, Somerset]

Trust was mentioned by other staff in Somerset. One Newcastle member of staff also mentioned that she was ‘trusted’ to help individuals, with poor literacy skills, to
complete benefits forms. These examples suggest, then, that even when information is available from other sources, the library is somewhere that individuals feel comfortable in approaching.

Although there was a division of opinion about the extent to which the library was used for the kinds of more formal information (for instance, as described by these library staff, on planning consultations or benefits) there was, in Somerset, agreement that it was a notice board for local groups and organisations including the community education service.

The importance of the library as an information source for newcomers to an area was mentioned by elected members, library staff and focus group respondents:-

"New people, people who move into the village, they’re always pleased to find a library here, and ... they want information on the village, local history, bus timetables. And they come in here, and they go away not just with their library membership but a sort of pack... Any information about the school, all the evening classes. So when you’ve just moved in and you don’t know anything ... it’s useful then.

[Library staff, Somerset]"

"It helps [parents] to get access to information about benefits and services. I used it when I first moved into the area to find schools, doctors, dentists and so on.

[Focus Group, Somerset]"

The Somerset focus groups also indicated other information uses of the library, for instance for consumer reports and medical information. Participants in one group agreed that:-

"You can get ... telephone books, post code books, encyclopaedias and Which magazines, and all sorts of things like that.

Yes, also the medical books are helpful.

[Focus group, Somerset]"

The most extensive discussion of the library’s information role occurred in the focus group of disabled people and their carers. Taunton Library in particular was identified as a key information resource, especially for benefits information. One participant pointed out that where she lived, the Citizens’ Advice Bureau was not accessible for wheelchair users, so she had to use the library for information. The practical importance of such provision was highlighted by members of one focus group who suggested that:-

"... a lot of people would lose money, they would lose the disability information and information about benefits. Some of the people who are happy to go into the library for that kind of information wouldn’t set foot inside a Council building.

[Focus group, Somerset]"

The respondents also refer to the reluctance to use some other information providers. This suggests that, even if information is available elsewhere, people may be more likely to take up information provided by the library. Similar points emerged in another focus group’s discussion about increasing links with the local Job Centre, with more careers information and vacancy listings. Participants said that:-

27
With someone older they might not necessarily want to go into the Job Centre all the time, whereas you can freely go into a library...
There’s no stigma.
Nobody knows what you’re doing.
[Focus group, Somerset]

This affirms Comedia’s observation that anyone can use the library to browse ‘unharassed’ and have little contact with the ‘mechanics of the institution.’ (Greenhalgh et al, 1995, p. 52) The library is, for some people, easier to approach than organisations with more obvious associations with welfare.

Summary

In both authorities the library’s established roles continuing to be relevant.

There was support, from all categories of respondent, for the library as a centre of cultural life, and, in Newcastle, many politicians saw the library service as a vehicle for cultural regeneration. This support, however, was largely expressed as a general perception of the value of local promotion of, and participation in, cultural activities, and of the library as an appropriate centre for these activities. Further, many of those respondents who identified the cultural significance of the library, also felt that its impact was lessened by financial restrictions.

We have detailed various ways in which both the library services support both adults’ and children’s education needs. These are largely joint impacts with educational providers, and it is suggested that the library might be more important in an area where there are fewer educational resources. The educational impact of the library service in both locations was, moreover, restricted by factors such as inadequate workspace, lack of reference materials and PCs and limited opening hours and, in some instances, the cost of reservations.

The responses of both parents and library staff suggested that using the library helped develop children’s reading ability. In Newcastle, where concern about literacy levels was expressed in both Council statements and by people in focus groups, it was felt that the library was a suitable ‘non-stigmatised’ place for adult literacy classes but not that it already provided this.

Focus groups suggested the enduring popularity of leisure reading. The library remains important as a source of free reading material. These benefits were especially seen by and for economically inactive people, who were seen as having both lower incomes and more leisure time. In Newcastle, these cost related benefits were also seen in terms of audio-visual items, which people could not otherwise afford to buy or rent.

As with the educational impact of the library, the effect of its information provision was influenced by the availability and accessibility of other provision. In Newcastle, other information providers, like neighbourhood housing centres, had a key role in local information provision, although the importance of the City Library for career and employment information was frequently referred to. In Somerset, there was evidence
that many libraries acted as a general noticeboard and information point for the local community. In both areas, many respondents saw a ‘contingency’ value to the library.
4. Social and caring roles

Introduction

Public library activities have been described as potentially, and sometimes actually, ‘stretching from an information to a caring role.’ (Landry, 1993, p.11) Having considered the information role, we now discuss our findings in relation to the ‘caring’ side of this spectrum. In Newcastle, where the library service aims to ‘have a presence at the heart of local communities’ there is a clear expectation that the library will have an impact by carrying out a social or caring role. (See Appendix B) In Somerset, although the emphasis is more on the established roles, the library service’s mission statement does contain a sub-goal relating to the library being a ‘community resource.’ (Somerset County Library Service, 1997)

Despite the fact that the social aims of the library service are more explicitly stated in Newcastle, the data from both authorities indicate that the library is of social value to the individual and the wider community. The social impact of the library comprises a number of elements. In considering these we make use of some of the broad themes identified by Comedia in their work on the social impact of the arts. These are:-

- **Personal development** This covers aspects of individual change such as education, skills, confidence and social networks. (This theme obviously overlaps with the above discussion of the educational impacts)
- **Social cohesion.** This concerns issues such as connections between people and groups, intercultural and intergenerational understanding and fear of crime.
- **Community empowerment and self-determination** which addresses organisational capacity building, consultation and involvement in democratic processes and support for community-led initiatives.
- **Local image and identity** which deals with sense of place and belonging, local distinctiveness and the image of public bodies.
- **Health and well-being.**
  (From Matarasso, 1997, p.4)

The second, third and fourth of these themes relate to communities and social groups (Matarasso, 1997, p.3) Although the meaning of ‘community’ has been described as ‘contested and vague’ it is often conceptualised in two ways, that is ‘communities of interest’ and ‘spatial communities.’ (INSINC, 1997, p.17; see also Black and Muddiman, 1997a, pp.-8 for a discussion of various definitions of community.) In this section, our findings relate, in the main, to local or territorial communities. There are also some conclusions about the social impact of the library on individuals, notably in the discussion of health and well-being, and communities of interest (notably elderly people). It should also be noted that these four themes are used in a loose and general sense, so as to help draw out particular findings, not to impose an artificial structure on the data gathered. This is particularly the case with the ensuing discussion of social cohesion, a theme which is interpreted broadly to include the impact of the library in overcoming isolation, covering individual as well as community aspects.


**Personal development**

The sub-theme of personal development overlaps with the earlier discussion of the educational role of the library. Here, our focus is on the development of skills, confidence and social networks. (Matarasso, 1997, p.4) There is evidence to suggest that once services are taken up, libraries can be important in developing confidence in individuals. Support for this view is provided by the experience of a focus group respondent.

*I know the library helped me a lot when I went to college... I never went to school when I was a kid, but I went to college ... and I just learned a hell of a lot at the library. At one time I wouldn't talk to you like this because I couldn't, but with using the library as much as ... I did, it just brought me out you know and that's a good thing as well.*

[Focus group, Newcastle]

In this case the individual’s confidence had been developed by using the library. Another respondent’s appreciation of the library had increased after she had been elected to the Council and became more involved with the community:-

*I ... at first had to get over this feeling of the library being something that I didn’t really ought to meddle with and I’ve ... undergone a personal change and have become fiercely loyal to the library.*

[Elected member, Somerset]

In both Newcastle and Somerset there were examples of how the local studies service, in particular, had helped individuals develop new skills through supporting people’s interest in local history. A member of local studies staff described the way in which using the local studies library had helped develop people’s confidence, saying:-

*I’ve seen a lot of people who aren’t educated, who would never dream of doing ...academic research, and have taught themselves. I can think of a lot of regular customers, who you couldn’t even imagine using the library in a regular way, who have not only found their way round Local Studies, but then found their way to the Archives Service and, you know, ended up doing research, that’s improved information about a particular aspect of Newcastle, or whatever.*

[Library staff, Newcastle]

She went on to characterise such personal development not just as an increase in skills, but also increased confidence. She could:-

*... think of a few people who’ve went on to have the confidence to use the library and the catalogue and to go on to use something like Tyne and Wear Archives, which is quite daunting.*

[Library staff, Newcastle]

In this context, it was also mentioned that the public library was seen as more welcoming than other services relevant to the local history domain.

*A lot of the regular customers will say ‘it’s so much nicer here than the atmosphere at the Archives.’ I think there’s this feeling that certainly, public libraries are more approachable than [places] where you need to be a bit more academic.*

[Library staff, Newcastle]
In other words, the library is a more accessible resource for those who may still be building up their confidence in approaching ‘official’ institutions. At a somewhat wider level, it was also seen that staff working in the local studies field could foster networks of interested people:-

*Quite a few people who are doing local studies work meet here and quite a few friendships have been formed that way. I’ve linked people who are doing research into [local] history... It’s quite a good sort of meeting place of interest ... people who would otherwise never meet... There’s a community of personal interest.*

[Library staff, Somerset]

The key part played by the local studies librarian in supporting such networks was emphasised by focus group respondents:-

*I think it helps to have librarians who know about the area really well. Like [local librarian] he knows who’s interested in what, and he puts you in touch with people who share an interest in the same places, so there’s a lot of information that gets passed around that way.*

[Focus group, Somerset]

This group went on to give several individual examples of such networking both within and outside the local area. Another member of the group said ‘in a way, we use [the librarian] as the focus for any research because he’ll know anyone else who can help any enquiry, and he’ll pass on that enquiry.’

**Social cohesion**

Despite the obvious contrasts in social setting the library is an important component in the formation of community cohesion in both Somerset and Newcastle. Newcastle’s library service aims to contribute to the regeneration of communities. (Appendix B) Elected members felt that it:

*is certainly part of the cement in the social fabric. It’s a way that people come together, meet, interact, share common interests and expand those interests and go on ... to other things. ... it’s part of the things that hold a community together.*

[Elected member, Newcastle]

Library staff confirmed that the library provided the sort of community drop-in role stated in the service’s objectives. At one Newcastle library in particular, it was suggested that many people used the library primarily as a social centre:-

*A lot of people come through the doors, they don’t actually borrow books, the issues aren’t very high, but an awful lot of people come in, read the newspapers, have a cup of coffee, maybe look at some of the books, not necessarily to borrow them. But it is very much a social place where they do come and meet each other.*

[Library staff, Newcastle]

Users also indicated that the library was used in this way, commenting on its ‘nice, easy atmosphere.’ Their comments suggested that the presence of the library helped maintain a sense of community:-

*Well, the library is the heart of the community, really, isn’t it?*
You take the library, that’s your area in common.
[Focus group, Newcastle]

This group felt that a particular aspect of this inclusive quality was the way in which ‘somebody ... living on their own ... can sit as long as they like; you’re not ... hassled.’

Overcoming social isolation

In both case study locations, most elected members, the vast majority of library staff and focus group respondents felt the library helped people overcome social isolation. In looking at this particular aspect of the library’s social impact, there is an overlap between the wider community benefits of the social connections fostered by the library and the effect of the service on individuals. Some of the impacts felt at a more individual level could be considered separately, for instance under the sub-theme of ‘health and well-being.’ (see p.41) However, because of the extent to which these personal and community benefits are interconnected, we consider them together.

The effect of library services in combating social isolation was especially important for elderly people. It was suggested that elderly people intentionally used the library more often because of the social interaction that it provided:-
*I think the major benefit here is that people can be very lonely without it. They do come in and have a chat with friends. Well, it’s not even just that ... it’s something to organise for that day ... because a lot of them, especially the elderly ladies, will come in and only take two books, or even one, and they’ll come back two days later because they like the trip out.*
[Library staff, Somerset]

Focus group participants made similar points about the importance of this kind of activity. For instance, one respondent said:-
*I know definitely ... a lot of the elderly people and any disabled people in the tall flats ... [library staff] know them by name, they rely on them, they really do.*
[Focus group, Newcastle]

Some politicians recognised the library’s value in this respect. In one Newcastle ward, elected members had supported the provision of a minibus service to take elderly people to the library. In the words of one local politician:-
*It’s an opportunity for a social gathering as well as using the library resource. ... So it helps relieve the isolation.*
[Elected member, Newcastle]

One of the focus group participants, who used this service, confirmed this view, saying that she preferred to visit the library (rather than use the housebound readers’ service) because it provided the opportunity to meet other people. She said:-
*I like to go for the change; my books and, not only that, we see one another on the bus, what we don’t see for a fortnight, and have a little bit talk and the girls [library staff] there are very good and we have a little bit of a natter and that, you know. I would miss it if I didn't go to the library.*
[Focus group, Newcastle]
In addition, Newcastle’s housebound service itself was described as helping foster connections between people. Where respondents were aware of the housebound service, it was often described as a ‘lifeline’ for elderly and disabled people. This was not only stated by library staff but also by many elected members. One felt that the:

...service operates very effectively as an early warning system because the officers who run that are also dealing with other aspects of what other officers do. So there’s a lot of links there [with]... other bits of the service. [Elected member, Newcastle]

Newcastle's Housebound Readers Service

Its significance was confirmed by one of the Community Co-ordinators, whose knowledge of the service was derived from her background in housing. She said that:

The housebound readers’ service ... links in to the isolated elderly people. I used to work for the Housing Department ... I visited people [whose] lifeline was the housebound readers’ service call ... they were more like a social service as opposed to a library service. ... So many people especially in the multi-storey blocks ... are frightened to come out. Some of their only contact was through books. [Community Co-ordinator, Newcastle]

In Somerset too, books were seen as something which could increase social contact. Reading can serve a social purpose as well as an individual interest. A member of staff observed:-
We have a lot of reading circles which seem to have been springing up a lot recently in which they will get hold of as many copies of a particular title as possible, read it and then discuss it and obviously there’s no way they’re going to have that sort of availability except by coming in and requesting through the library service. And we also have talks from authors, visits by authors etc.

[Library staff, Somerset]

The mobile library service was also seen as a facilitator of social contact. An elected member described how:-

*mobile library bus draws up within 100 yards of here every fortnight and really is quite a social event. There are people who look forward to that and meet there and discuss much more than just their books and the library. ... It’s an opportunity to meet other people, and who might not meet otherwise.*

[Electsed member, Somerset]

The value of mobile library services was also mentioned in the interviews with library staff and focus groups in Somerset. The general perception was that there was value in both the provision of materials and the social interaction with library staff and other users. In the words of a local politician:-

*Where elderly people are concerned and not so elderly people - we do get a lot of housebound mums who are confined to their villages because they’ve only got one car and the husband is usually using the car to get to work - the library service does provide an opportunity to meet a couple of other people from the village, to get enough books to keep them going for a fortnight.*

[Electsed member, Somerset]

Focus group respondents agreed that:-

*The travelling library ... is a lifeline and is much used by the elderly and those stuck at home with young children.*

[Focus group, Somerset]

Further evidence of the library’s role in sustaining social connections was provided by our investigation into the impact of local studies groups. For example, at the local librarian’s suggestion one local studies group:-

*have a local historian in residence ...once a month in the lobby of the library ... and for two years solid they’ve been doing that, and it’s actually brought them a few new members. ...The society still continues, and two years ago it looked like, after 40 years, the society was going to fold. Well, it seems to be healthy at the moment.*

[Library staff, Somerset]

In Newcastle, this kind of impact was achieved in a rather more formal way, with library staff often acting as secretaries of local history societies. Similarly, the library service had been instrumental in establishing and supporting the West Newcastle Local History Group, discussed later.

An interest in local history was often mentioned as something which helped people dealing with life changes, notably retirement, as recounted by this volunteer at the West Newcastle Local History Group:-
I retired in 1983, and because I didn’t have anything to do after working all my life, I came down to the library and found out what was going on … When I came here there was a lot of women who used to do the same sort of thing as I’m doing now, which is writing the cards on the back of the pictures, saying where it is and who, if there’s any people on, who they are.

[Focus group, Newcastle]

It was also noticeable from the focus groups with members of local history societies that these were often made up of a mixture of local people and incomers. This correlates with the finding, drawn from a review of individual library projects, that involvement with such projects was important in finding ‘a way into community life.’ (Matarasso, 1997, p.17) One of our respondents mentioned that local history represented a ‘common interest’ and was:-

…a way that the locals and the incomers can meet, especially where there is enough interest to form a local history society. And if there’s a library with the resources to support that society, because obviously a society setting up from scratch isn’t going to have a library of any worth… That would be a nucleus and a place for them to meet.

[Library staff, Somerset]

This assessment was confirmed by the focus groups. One respondent felt that:-

People just like to understand where they are because we get a lot of new people moving into the village who tell me ‘I’ve just been to Yeovil Library to see if there’s anything about my house or my village.’

[Focus group, Somerset]

This need for people to ‘understand where they are’ also has links with the sub-theme of local image and identity. (see p.37)

Intercultural understanding

Tackling the harassment of people from ethnic minorities was identified as an important local issue by elected members and Community Co-ordinators in Newcastle. Their responses reflected a high priority, given by the City Council, to confronting racist attitudes. Community Co-ordinators:-

... very much focus on raising the issues of racial equality ... challenging particularly young people’s attitudes to race and culture, and the respect for those.

[Community Co-ordinator, Newcastle]

Library staff shared local politicians’ and community co-ordinators’ concern with tackling racism and:-

... always bear [issues of racism] in mind in the book selection that we do, and ... any management committees that we sit on, or things that we attend, we make sure that people are aware of the Council’s policies, and aware of the laws on equality.

[Library staff, Newcastle]

It was also pointed out, by staff, that libraries were often seen as safe place for formal meetings of groups recruited from Newcastle’s ethnic minority communities. One example of this, from the case study area, was the weekly meetings of a Bosnian refugees’ group at Heaton Library. There were other similar examples from elsewhere in the City.
Newcastle’s elected members felt that the library promoted intercultural understanding in its day-to-day services rather than through specific initiatives and programmes. An elected member representing an area with a relatively high ethnic minority population felt that:

... what it may have done ... is to promote more racial harmony in the sense that there are people from different ethnic backgrounds that use the library, and different languages on display in the libraries... So that in itself is bringing people closer together.

[Elected member, Newcastle]

The focus group drawn from Newcastle’s ethnic minority communities confirmed this view, and thought that materials from or about different cultures helped foster intercultural understanding. When people:

... read different books on different cultures they obviously will have some [knowledge of] other cultures. They will have some acceptance of their cultures also. Libraries can play a great role in a community like this [with] exhibitions and different books.

[Focus group, Newcastle]

Interestingly, given the views of elected members and Community Co-ordinators, many participants in the other Newcastle focus groups, did not think that their communities suffered from problems of racial harassment. Even where racism was recognised as a problem, it was thought that the library could do little to alleviate it. A fairly typical view was that:

It’s what you make up in your own mind, really, the library cannot [change that].

[Focus group, Newcastle]

In summary, then, there were somewhat mixed messages about whether the library service did or did not have an impact in promoting understanding between people from different cultural backgrounds. Nonetheless, it is significant that the focus group drawn from the ethnic minority communities felt that library materials and exhibitions created greater understanding between different cultural groups.

Fear of crime

A mixed picture was seen in relation to Newcastle’s Council’s policy on tackling crime and the fear of crime. Newcastle library service aims to support the corporate policy on community safety by ‘providing public information services on crime prevention and victim support agencies.’ Local politicians tended not to see libraries as making a strong contribution in this area. This is summed up in the view of one respondent who said ‘I can’t really see that they have [addressed crime issues] in a tangible way, other than being there as a resource in its loosest terms.’ Library staff stated that they publicised meetings of local community safety groups and had information available. One member of staff pointed out that the success of anti-crime initiatives was often not within the control of the library, saying that:

A few years ago ... the library was used by the police as a sort of informal contact point, where they could contact a beat officer. But, in practice, there was never a policeman available at the sessions ... so ... they could have co-operated better.

[Library staff, Newcastle]
Many of the focus group participants also had difficulty in seeing what the library could do to address crime issues. The groups tended to support the relatively low emphasis which libraries put on this area. In Somerset, there was not a core principle relating to community safety, but a County-wide survey had indicated that crime is a matter of concern to residents. (Somerset CC, 1996, p.5) Although concerns about petty crime did arise in some interviews with elected members and focus groups, the provision of community safety information was not a high priority for either group. Whilst it was felt that such information might be helpful, Somerset focus groups were conscious of the financial pressures involved in providing existing services.

**Community empowerment**

Community empowerment has been defined as a process that:-
‘Makes it possible for people who are disempowered to exercise power and have more control over their lives’. This means having a greater voice in institutions, agencies and situations which affect them.’

(Department of the Environment, 1995, p.245)

The idea of community empowerment is suggested in the objectives of the two authorities. It can be identified in Somerset’s encouragement of ‘active citizenship’ and Newcastle’s priority on the regeneration of communities (see Appendices B and C). Newcastle’s elected members referred to the need to build skills and confidence in local residents. In the words of one Newcastle politician, ‘the first priority is to try and develop a functioning community in the main area of the ward.’ The relevance of the library service to these kind of objectives was noted in a number of interviews. One respondent, for example, observed:-
... how the library has potential to assist the whole process of community development in trying to help people who are disadvantaged, to make the most of what’s available to them.

[Elected member, Somerset]

An example of this was provided by a community development project, where:-
The library’s probably played a part ... in the sense of being a provider of information for different community groups. .... The library was ... where notices of where meetings was held, it was actually held next door in the school. So, in that sense, it’s a place where people go and find out what’s happened.

[Elected member, Newcastle]

This respondent mentioned (as did the relevant member of library staff) an example of community development work which had involved the library. Links had been developed between the library and a project supporting parents:-
There’s an initiative to try and get some computers into the library... We’re hoping to link that in with ... a project for disadvantaged lone parents, mainly, who are taking up adult education opportunities, and to have access to a PC would extend their learning ability quite a lot... They’re looking forward to that.

[Elected member, Somerset]
Despite such examples, local politicians in Newcastle felt that there could and should be a more dynamic interaction between libraries and communities. One member recommended that libraries could be more proactive and questioning:—

Library staff don’t sit there and say ‘these are the issues.’ … if you go to, say, a public meeting to discuss a planning issue … up on the stage are ‘the experts’ and the … people down there are not. But if they could find out themselves, then say ‘… you talk about environmental impact assessments - well, have you done one?’ Information that is clearly presented and structured is useful to people. … People who are well-informed are then empowered.

[Elected member, Newcastle]

This link between information and empowerment was not always perceived by respondents. In both Newcastle and Somerset the focus group evidence suggested that participants did not see libraries as directly empowering local people. It had not occurred to one participant that:—

… a library could possibly improve the environment. I see that as a political thing that’s down to the Government and the local Council. I really don’t see the libraries as any kind of power source.

[Focus group, Newcastle]

In Somerset, the County Council aims to improve access to services through decentralisation, especially in rural areas. In one location, a Council Information Point had recently been established in a library, but it was too early to assess the impact of this. In Newcastle, area working through Community Sub-Committees is a means of decentralisation which aims to make local government more accountable and closer to local communities. Some elected members indicated ways in which the library service supported these ways of working. One said:—

[The library has played] a very, very big part a) in giving us a place to meet and b) in attending all those meetings and circulating the rules and keeping the people in touch with what the Council is doing or what the Council is neglecting to do.

[Elected member, Newcastle]

The authority’s Community Co-ordinators are at the forefront of this way of working, and seek to address local politicians’ priority of developing community skills and confidence. They felt that:—

Libraries are one of the better sections of the local authority in terms of attending the community sub-committees [where] you get everything discussed…unemployment, crime, issues of children and young people… Nine times out of ten there is someone there from the libraries who can either give us information [on what] they are doing, or at least carry back information that they can promote through the local library.

[Community Co-ordinator, Newcastle]

Another Community Co-ordinator added that this also applied to meetings of voluntary and community groups as well as the local authority’s community sub-committees. Community Co-ordinators went on to say, however, that the impact of library staff’s participation might not be as great as it could be because of the existing perception of libraries:—

Library staff have a good record of trying to go to community meetings as well, not just sub committee. But they won't probably be involved in policy … and that may not be
The interviews with library staff in Newcastle confirmed that they did all they could to be involved with community groups. Although it was often difficult to isolate the particular impact of the library service, when there were several agencies involved, the following example provides a clear-cut instance of how a librarian can be a catalyst for change at a local level. This initiative was also mentioned by an elected member and a Community Co-ordinator. The member of staff said:-

[Establishing the toy library] was done by a voluntary group of which we were part. Eventually, over the years, the toy library itself developed into more of a support role for parents and carers, rather than just a toy loan service ... and was reformed into the East End Toddler Forum, which still runs and their brief now is to establish a family centre ... which they're realising now - they've got lottery money...

[Library staff, Newcastle]

The initiative first started by the local librarian had helped articulate a local need for family support which is now being met. In other instances, the role of the library was less central but significant nonetheless, for instance in publicising community meetings and events. Similar comments were made about the suitability of the library as a place for Councillors’ and MPs’ surgeries, which happened in some of the Newcastle wards. In both Newcastle and Somerset, several community groups used meeting rooms at the library. In one of the Somerset libraries the display window was available for groups and individuals to bring issues to the attention of the community. Two young focus group participants had, for example, used this for a display on the environment. There was a long waiting list of groups and individuals wanting to use this space, indicating that people felt that the library was an effective place for the community to express its interests and concerns.

To summarise, the library service in both Newcastle and Somerset supported community groups and activities. Because of the number of other agencies involved, it was frequently difficult to identify the particular part played by the library in the eventual outcomes of these activities. While it may be an exaggeration to say that the library directly promoted ‘active citizenship,’ there was much evidence to suggest that it built confidence in individuals which might then have an effect on the wider community.

Local image and identity

The importance of the library in sustaining local identity was observed in both case study areas.

In Newcastle, elected members often referred to the symbolic value of still having a library in communities that had lost other facilities such as swimming pools, clinics and local shops. The continuing presence of a library was seen to convey a message about the local authority’s commitment to what one local politician called ‘communities under stress.’ Without a library, the community:
... would lose one of two remaining community facilities that the Council provides for a population of 8,000 people stranded on a dead housing estate in the inner city. So we’d lose quite a lot, not only in terms of the facility ... but in terms of what that would say to people about how much we thought about that area, about how willing we were to try and protect it and bring it back from the brink.

Libraries are still held in some esteem, in the public mind, as places, as repositories of knowledge and information. ... It’s a bit like closing a Church in some respects. It’s difficult to identify exactly why, but it would be. It’s just a perception, you know - ‘they’re closing libraries now, where will these people stop?’

[Elected members, Newcastle]

Many library staff expressed similar views. One respondent said:-
[The community has] lost so much, that I think that it would really go towards losing its identity. It lost its shopping centre and that wasn’t replaced ... I think there would [be] a hole left in the fabric of the community.
[Library staff, Newcastle]

At least one of the Newcastle libraries had, because of housing redevelopment, become more distant from the community it was meant to serve. Library staff explained that:-
It’s been in the wrong place since Byker was redeveloped. But the library was never considered as part of the redevelopment, and it’s been left out on a limb really.
[Library staff, Newcastle]

However, even in this area, the library was still seen, by users at least, as a significant part of the community. The importance of the library was reinforced by the lack of other facilities. A focus group respondent said that:-
This was a wonderful community when it first started off ... and now this community’s neglected very sadly ... If they take [the library] away they’ve took everything from us.’
[Focus group, Newcastle]

In Somerset, it has already been noted that libraries served as a general meeting point and community notice board. As in Newcastle, some local politicians saw the local library as having a symbolic value, which was perceived by non-users as well as users. It was said that:

People see [the library] as a really important local landmark whether they use it or not, and I think if it was withdrawn it would have a terrible effect on people’s morale... The impact of it is that it’s ... the only thing that people can point to and say that’s the County Council which isn’t a school ... and in that sense I think it’s an important presence of the Council.
[Elected member, Somerset]

Library staff and focus group participants tended to agree with these views. As in Newcastle, the library often seemed particularly important because of the lack of other community facilities. In Somerset there was the additional issue of geography and the distance to other centres, as these respondents explained:-
You’ve got to travel so far for anything... I think we do without a lot of things down
here and that is why everyone is so defensive to hang on to what we’ve got.
[Library staff, Somerset]

[Closing the library] would be akin to closing the Post Office, it would take the heart out of the community.
We have few enough facilities as it is in Wellington - there just wouldn’t be anything constructive for the children to do here if the library closed.
[Focus groups, Somerset]

In both locations, there were specific indications of ‘ownership.’ In Somerset, for instance, local parents run their own story time session at one library. In Newcastle, a sense of ownership can be seen in the apparent ‘respect’ for Moorside Library. A respect that did not seem to apply to the adjoining school:-
One of the sad things with the community school is parts of it were vandalised - not the library, oddly enough... You don’t see many bricks going through the window there.
[Elected member, Newcastle]

The accuracy of this local politician’s observation was subsequently confirmed by library staff.

In at least one of the Newcastle wards many respondents saw the library as the most positive thing about living in the area. They said that the area had a ‘bad’ reputation in the City but the library helped to counteract this negative image:-
[People think] all the kids are tearaways. But you go in the library when they’re having one of them storytelling things and... it’s one of the few times when you really do feel like you’re part of the community, the kids are all enjoying themselves ... people that live outside of the area, they don’t know what it’s like. If they came to the library ... they’d have their eyes opened.
[Focus group, Newcastle]

This perception of the library as one of the ‘positive aspects’ of community life reflected the findings described by Greenhalgh et al. (1995, p.96) They found, on one estate in Middlesborough, that most public agencies addressed the ‘negative aspects of community life’ - such as unemployment, family break-up and drug problems - whereas ‘the library was the only building not marked out as a symbol of welfare, compensation and deprivation.’

The library’s contribution to community self-esteem was seen in a slightly different way in some of the geographically isolated rural communities in Somerset. These were served by small static libraries. In one of these it was strongly argued that the library contributes to:-
... the self esteem of the town. It has been highlighted by two closure threats... I think not only is the library important and popular from a recreational point of view but from the sense of having a proper town.
[Library staff, Somerset]

Members of the community felt that the presence of a library:-
...makes it more a town for people that actually live here because ... it is very much a tourist town, very much a seasonal town, and a lot of the shops are for tourists. So
having a library is a bit for the local community, for the people who live there, not just for the people who come in from outside on holiday.

[Focus group, Somerset]

This last example refers to the effect of opening a new library and there were other indications that the opening of a new library is a source of community pride. In Taunton, for instance:

There were many complimentary comments made about the new library. Just recently I walked past a lady, I suppose she must have been talking to somebody who didn’t live in Taunton, and I heard her say ‘have you seen our new library? You must go and see our new library!’

[Elected member, Somerset]

The new Taunton Library

In both small and larger communities the public library contributed to a sense of local identity. Further, the library’s importance in sustaining local identity was as significant in Somerset as it was in Newcastle despite the differences in Council priorities. Newcastle’s library service was working towards relevant objectives in this area (i.e. the library being seen as the heart of the community), whereas in Somerset there were no stated objectives of this kind, although the importance of the library in the life of a community was noted by local politicians:

The role of the library in some of the rural towns in Somerset is quite a big thing... physically and in terms of the activity there. .... It would be bordering on - not the same volume of people as travelling through the local Tesco or the local Sainsbury - but as a community activity, in proportion to the town, it’s quite a big thing.

[Elected member, Somerset]
In fact, the role of the library in sustaining a local identity appeared to be particularly significant in some of the smaller communities. Indeed the libraries in the smaller communities seemed to have an impact out of proportion to their size. It has been argued that economies of scale favour larger libraries in that they are used, on average, more times a year (Aslib, 1995, p.128); a different judgement might be made if the various social impacts described above are taken into account. The above quotation is, in its direct comparison with retailing, also suggestive of the economic impact which a library may have on a community. A topic which is explored in the next chapter.

Our investigation of local studies services also yielded a great deal of data relevant to the theme of local image and identity. In this context, it is interesting to note that some commentators have been critical of the ‘heritage turn’ of some public library services. (Black and Muddiman, 1997, p.116). However, our research has shown that the impact of local studies services was ‘more than just nostalgia.’ (Hall, 1987, p.3) There is now, in the words of one respondent, a ‘cultural shift’ in which:-

...there’s an interest now in ... conservation, and a regeneration within that conservation ...and finding out what [cities] were used for before, and seeing if they can be brought back to that use or whatever.

[Elected member, Newcastle]

The library service is relevant to these kinds of processes in that:-
Newcastle is a very old historical town ... and it’s been the library service which has primarily held information about its historical documents and so on. I think having libraries has provided people a view of what things were like before, and how they operated before...[Elected member, Newcastle]

Clearly there are overlaps here with the economic impact of the library in terms of regeneration (see p.47). The sense of Newcastle’s historic significance, referred to by the local politician quoted above was reiterated by focus group respondents. They argued that because Newcastle was an historically important place, having this sense ‘of what things were like before’ was especially important to them. Commentators on local studies have noted that people have an inherent interest in local history, particularly ‘when the pace of change is so fast that people cannot help but notice their past disappearing before their eyes.’ (Hall, 1997, p.5) This was particularly the case in Newcastle, following the decline in traditional industries. As one respondent said:-
The traditional employment and the pride in that, you know, has been lost... and you talk to people who live here, and they’ve all got families that have worked in pits or shipyards, or whatever. So the books about the river, and the photographs about the ships and the history of shipbuilding... I think it’s that local identity that’s really important. I don’t know about other parts of the country, but it’s really important to people here.

[Library staff, Newcastle]

The focus group discussions held with local history groups supported this view. One respondent felt that:-
People are extremely interested in their roots and in their area and in their history. People are interested in just the industries of the area... People’s lives have been woven in and out of these industries, families have risen and fallen by them...

[Focus group, Newcastle]
With the West Newcastle Local History Group (described overleaf), these links with the past were doubly important because of the massive post-war reconstruction of the area. The group’s photographic collection, based at Benwell Library, represented a history of an area, documented by local people with the support of the library service. One volunteer at the group enjoyed working with the Group’s collection because:

... a lot of people, like my own family, they can come in and they can have a look and see the street where I was born which is [knocked] down now.

[Focus group, Newcastle]

Similarly positive views were found from the community focus groups recruited by Harris (1997). He concluded that:

- ‘what was being talked about was more than just “local history” - community identity might be a better term;
- the library might be the key contributor to initiatives in this area; and
- such initiatives can add greatly to the sense of coherence and integration of a community.’

(Harris, 1997, p. 12)
I retired from the City Libraries as Area Librarian for West Newcastle in 1984. Round about 1960 I’d been working in the Elswick area, and I met Jimmy Forsyth who’s one of the group here, who used to come from Scotswood Road up to Elswick Library and ask questions about the local history of the area. I moved round various libraries after 1960 and I ended up as Area Librarian for West Newcastle. Jimmy came up to see me to show me the photographs he’d been taking in 1960 and finally he said ‘would you look after the black and white negatives that I’ve got collected together, that I’ve took of the Elswick and Scotswood area, when the area was originally, then was being pulled down and then was being rebuilt.’ So, Jimmy because he’d lived there from the 1950s, was keeping a photographic record by going out practically every day and taking all of these photographs of an area that originally had about nearly half the population of Newcastle in 1900... So, because of all these houses being built for such a big population, they found that they had to pull them down because they’d been neglected for a while. They pulled them down and built flats. Jimmy...decided he’d start taking photographs of the area as it was and he kept on doing this through all the changes. So, we had this collection of material about West Newcastle ...when I retired in 1984, and the City librarian said ‘when you retire, we’d like you to get together with a community worker and form a new sort of organisation called West Newcastle Local Studies.’ So, these photographs are kept in - it was in Elswick Library. These photographs are there, available for the people in the area, particularly a group called Elswick Local History Group that were already obtaining oral history from taping their reminiscences. We published a few books through this Elswick Local History Group*... So this was sort of the beginning and ...we moved to the Benwell Library here... We gradually - there was another little organisation formed itself called Benwell Local Group, at Benwell Library as well. So, as well as being West Newcastle Local History, they had this local group. So that people who are more-or-less running the Benwell Local History Group are the same people that we have on a Monday morning... We decided that we had thousands of photographs and we started off by classifying them under suburb... ...We’ve gradually evolved this system, which has grown and grown because it’s about 15,000 prints, with negatives if possible.

*for instance Forsyth, 1986
Health and well-being

The value of libraries in fostering social connections and overcoming isolation has already been discussed. There are also indications that the library can directly promote the welfare of isolated and vulnerable elderly people. A member of staff working in one of the smaller and more isolated communities, with a particularly high proportion of elderly people living alone, said that:

*I have readers who come in almost the same time every week and ... when I've missed someone ... I have phoned to see if they are all right... We have a vast number of ladies living by themselves and I think it’s that extra eye being kept on them.*

[Library staff, Somerset]

More generally, there is evidence of the library improving the quality of people’s lives:

*My own mother in law... has her books delivered to her by the mobile library service and she says to me that books are as important as food. Books feed her mind and keep her alive.*

*My mother is profoundly deaf ... and she’s an avid reader ... and if she couldn’t have all the library books that I take for her, I think [her] life would be pretty miserable.*

[Elected members, Somerset]

Some focus group participants gave some specific and personal examples of the benefits gained from reading. This particular respondent said that the library had helped her come to terms with bereavement:

*I lost my dad and I couldn’t get over it and the doctor told me to go and get ... a certain book to help us get over it from the library. So that was a great help... [because] I’d never ever heard of, and never thought, anybody felt like that ...*

[Focus group, Newcastle]

Coping with bereavement was also mentioned in the context of local studies services. This member of staff described the value of the service to:

*People who’ve perhaps been bereaved recently and have got a lot of time on their hands. One particular gentleman... his partner died and he said the library really has filled a gap for him because he didn’t really have that many other interests... It’s opened a new world to him. It’s filled a big void... and there are other examples like that.*

[Library staff, Somerset]

Focus group participants in physically isolated communities saw particular value in reading. One respondent said:

*In this area especially, because we’re a rural community and it isn’t that easy to get anywhere, I think that reading is a really good leisure activity ... because it gives you the chance to use your imagination and think about other places and things like that as well, when you’re sort of maybe a bit stuck in Dulverton sometimes. I mean I find it a really nice way to sort of get away from it for a bit.*

[Focus group, Somerset]

Similarly, a Newcastle library user found that:

*S sometimes at night-time it’s nice to be quiet and go into another world and read a book.*

[Focus group, Newcastle]
In another focus group, participants saw reading fiction as a means of helping overcome the monotony and limitations felt by a lone parent living on benefit:—

*We’re not being feminist saying that women get books out more than men ... you’ve got nought else to do. Well, I mean, when your bairn goes to bed at night [you] sit and read a book.*

[Focus group, Newcastle]

The data from both Newcastle and Somerset confirm O’Rourke’s findings in Cleveland that ‘escapist’ fiction ‘allows people to enter worlds of their imagination, to detach themselves from daily privations and disappointments’ and that fiction can provide an insight into ‘culture and experiences that might not otherwise be directly encountered.’

(O’Rourke, in Greenhalgh et al, 1995, p.134)

**Summary**

The library’s impact on personal development can be seen by individuals’ gaining new skills and confidence. Library staff were also instrumental in developing ‘communities of personal interest.’

The library also had a more general impact as a place where people meet and share interests. As such it was described as ‘part of the cement in the social fabric.’

The focus group drawn from the ethnic minority communities felt that library materials and exhibitions created greater understanding between different cultural groups.

The library service in both Newcastle and Somerset supported community groups and activities and there is evidence to suggest that it built confidence in individuals which might then have an effect on the wider community.

The importance of the library in sustaining local identity was observed in both case study areas. The presence of the library was seen as important in maintaining community self esteem, especially in areas which lacked other local facilities and resources.

There was much evidence of the library’s benefits in terms of psychological health and well-being, especially for isolated and vulnerable elderly and disabled people.
5. Economic impact

Introduction

Economic issues featured in the documentation provided by both of our case study authorities.

Newcastle City Council’s corporate policy priorities placed a particular emphasis on employment and economic regeneration. The library service also aims to have an economic impact at a City-wide and at local community level. (see Appendix B.)

Somerset County Council does not list specific economic objectives within its core principles. (see Appendix C). However, the library service have a goal of delivering ‘efficient and self-financing information services to local businesses in partnership with Business Link.’ (Somerset County Library Service, 1997, p.3.)

The initial audits, in both authorities, tended to yield very general statements about the economic impacts of libraries, especially in relation to business services. In Newcastle, elected members and library staff referred to the importance of services provided through the City Library’s business section and via the specialist Patents Advice Centre. Although not able to give specific examples, several local politicians felt that these City-wide services had helped work towards the aim of increasing local employment opportunities. This was one local politician’s view: -

The Central Library service has ... geared themselves up through things like the small business service, local history and quite a good research section, to be a facility that local people could use to develop businesses, and that has employment spin-offs.

[Elected member, Newcastle]

In Somerset, several elected members felt that the library’s business information service had a considerable impact. They thought that:-

A key role that the library plays [is] in ... terms of the economy ... for local businesses and so on. The library is a source of information whether it’s to do with exporting or currencies or whatever.

[Elected member, Somerset]

These general perceptions were examined further in the investigation of business information services, undertaken as part of the second phase of the project. This concentrated on services provided by the business and science library in Newcastle, and the reference library in Bridgwater. The additional work on local studies services also yielded further material on the way the library service contributes to the local economy.

Business information

In Newcastle the library service aims to increase local employment opportunities through the economic regeneration strategy (Appendix B). A specific contribution to
this cause came from the local studies library (see insert overleaf), but more generally, the library service supported the aim of economic regeneration through providing business and employment information.

The library staff identified four key categories of use of the business library - that is by businesses, job seekers, students and consumers of companies’ products and services. One respondent found:

… the enquiries from business people the most interesting ...because you have a feeling of immediate value. If they go away saying ‘thank you very much, it’s just what I wanted’ or words to that effect, you know you’ve contributed. It’s the one time you get positive feedback, even if it’s feedback in advance of the event.

[Library staff, Newcastle]

This perception of ‘immediate value’ was not generally felt with other categories of use of the business library but our research did identify individual examples of the value of information to individual businesses. One such example related to farmers and:

...this peculiar form they have for Set Aside... They wanted to know who to contact and where to get their maps ...They’d never thought of libraries at all, it was through people like National Farmers Union, or the people they met at the markets... And then someone said the libraries have got all these maps, they’ve got all the information you need, and then we had queues of people after that.

[Library staff, Somerset]

Clearly this example raises questions about people’s awareness of the service, and these are discussed later. Another facet of this case is that a cash price or value could be ascribed to this particular information, in that before it was widely known that this information was freely available from the library, farmers were prepared to pay solicitors who ‘used to come in [the library] and use it and charge them …whereas the farmers could have come in and done it virtually free.’ [Library staff, Somerset]

Another example of the value of information routinely held by a public library was given in Newcastle. Here the business librarian was contacted by someone who was:

... obviously one of the plant engineers in a hospital ...and he had a boiler that was busted and the only thing that he had to go on was the name of this little brass plate on the side ...He only had the trade number and I found it for him. It was in Compass list of trade names, it couldn’t have been easier and I gave him the address.

[Library staff, Newcastle]

Again, in this case, the library was only contacted after the enquirer spent an afternoon contacting other possible information sources. This example could be seen more positively as an instance of the ‘contingency value’ of the library.

One of the most clear-cut areas of economic benefit to businesses was in the area of British Standards and Euro Norms. Through using the library, one respondent, was saved the cost of buying British Standards. He told us:

there’s no way I’m going to buy hundreds of standards, as a small, tiny business. The only way I find out is by going to Bridgwater and ... the moment you try and access British standards other than by going to Bridgwater ... you’re into very serious money
[and] often you only wanted to buy the standard to read it to know that you didn’t need it.
[Focus group, Somerset]

The Business Service at Bridgewater Library

In both authorities, there was evidence of co-operation with other business information and advice providers to help prevent duplication of services. In Newcastle, two part-time Business Link staff were based in the City Library and the Network co-operative scheme provides and updates ‘co-operative lists of holdings and standards [and] international directories.’ [Library staff, Newcastle] In Somerset, there was co-operation with Somerset Business Link through ‘Infolink.’ From the interviews held with public library and business link staff, it appeared that this arrangement reduced duplication and improve the usage of the library’s business sources (see insert below.)

INFOLINK, SOMERSET

What Infolink has done is to take advantage of the extensive range of information that’s available within the County library service, and I believe augment it by access to databases from the DTI stream of information, so that there’s quite a voluminous amount of information at the disposal of the business community, which can be pursued, either by helping them to go into the library and use the conventional look-up service, or by enabling them to make specific enquiries, some of which Infolink will pursue free, and some of which they pursue on a paid basis.
[Business Link, Somerset]
In both authorities, there was evidence that the library service brought particular benefits to new and small businesses which were less likely to have access to the resources provided by membership-based organisations like Chambers of Commerce. One such example was of a library user who was:-

* … starting her own business, from what she’s said she’s an environmental assessor with particular skill in assessing toxicology in chemical discharges. She’s currently sitting there, identifying potential companies to write off a ‘can you use my services?’ letter. [Library staff, Newcastle]*

As the member of staff said, in this instance ‘we’ll never know whether she got that information.’ In the case of the start-up training provided in Bridgwater Library in Somerset, the feedback received suggested that there had been demonstrable benefits to particular businesses. (see insert below)

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**START-UP TRAINING, SOMERSET**

When I was doing start-up training, a firm element of that was to bring people who wanted to start their own business to a library, so that they could see the reference services available. It was a very popular part of the start-up course, because it opened a lot of people’s eyes to the range of information and services that were available, and in particular the access to CD-ROMs, there’s a whole database of company information there on ROM and most people hadn’t come across it. ... I hadn’t previously realised the range of market research reports and specialist surveys that were available on business sectors. ...the Bridgwater business reference section is very substantial and very helpful.

Certainly three or four of them on each course, who were working up research for their business plan, they found a whole lot of access to a whole load of new sources for them and that covered all sorts of things that people wanted to do, marketing various products. A whole range of people were able to tap into resources that they hadn’t really appreciated were available.

[Business Link, Somerset]

We do a guided tour, I’ve had a sort of morning tour to start-up people through Business Link. That means that we target them through Business Link preparing the ground ... and we’ve had several groups come in from all round the County. And that’s quite good, because actually that does mean that they know specifically what we’ve got, I’ll explain about British Standards, trade directories, CD-ROM, Key British Industries all the rest ... and it works very well. In fact, we’ve had quite a few start-up people come back saying well, I was on that course the other day, can I have a look further at this and that. Or they’ve rung and said could you provide this?

[Library staff, Somerset]

There were also examples, from both authorities of the local businesses and organisations using the information and materials held by local studies departments. Businesses will use the library. There’s a firm of local architects, I think they are, who research using the old maps. So periodically, they’ll come in and if they want the history of the site to redevelop it, so they look at old maps and often photographs as well. The redevelopment of Benwell ... the architects came in here and had a look at our photographic collection, I think so they could get a feel for what it used to be like -
not reproduce it, but something in keeping with people’s memories of that area. The big lottery bid for the Baltic Flour Mill on the Gateshead side of the river, they used our photographs. [Library staff, Newcastle]

Job-seeking and training opportunities

In both authorities, staff told us that there was a greater number of enquiries from job-seekers than from businesses themselves. Library staff felt that there were beneficial outcomes from this work indicating that the reference library helped:-
... those who are seeking jobs because we take things like Opportunities and daily newspapers and journals which advertise. ... We also help people who are going for jobs, both in the application by providing books on CVs and so on, or directing them to people within the town who specialise in producing a CV... We also provide them with information for the interview, by looking up company details. If we haven’t got them getting Bridgwater to fax them through. ...
[Library staff, Somerset]

Staff recognised that it was not possible to unequivocally prove that individuals benefited from using these services because:—
One person, once only, has come back to me and said ‘by the way, I was in last week, I’m in now, I’m working, I got the job, thank you very much.’
[Library staff, Newcastle]

However, in Somerset at least, it was felt that the library service was becoming increasingly important for job-seekers because:-
now with Careers and Job Club and everything else, they’ve cut down or they’re charging, careers obviously because it’s now no longer County Council, it’s this sort of private concern, they charge ... Whereas here they can come in and get a lot of the stuff for free, whether they ask us or they just wander about and look for it.
[Library staff, Somerset]

In Somerset the focus groups undertaken with job seekers and trainees confirmed the value of the library to them:
It carries Compass and Kelly’s and all the big reference manuals [the Job Club] couldn’t possibly afford.
It’s an information base for all the companies... Where else would you access it? One job club just couldn’t carry those resources. [Focus group, Newcastle]

This group also referred to the particular importance of the library service for people who needed more specialist material to help with their job-seeking. For example, one participant used ‘music company directories … which [the Job Club] couldn’t carry because there’s such a small demand.’ [Focus group, Newcastle]

Libraries and economic vitality

Newcastle’s library service seeks to contribute to the economic regeneration of local communities, but the extent to which this had been achieved was difficult to establish.
In the wards studied, only one of the four branch libraries was situated close to the main local shopping area. In this one ward, the library had been refurbished as part of a redevelopment of the shopping centre. Respondents suggested that this contributed to the physical regeneration of the area and that the library service had been active partner in this process. One observed that:

*The library service in general ... have been involved in all the discussion [on the redevelopment].... A multi-agency panel within the area following the refurbishment of the library ... will have the libraries in partnership ... to develop... a focus on every aspect of regeneration.*

[Community Co-ordinator, Newcastle]

It would require further investigation to ascertain whether, or not, these improvements to the library and its surroundings had had a beneficial impact on the retail outlets in the centre. However, the comments made in the focus group discussions did, at the least, suggest that a library might provide a focus that would attract people to the local centre and so add to the economic vitality of the area. For example, one focus group in the ward said that:-

*It’s the nicest bit [of the shopping centre redevelopment] that they’ve done, the library. Yes, the library [was] well worth it...*  
[Focus group, Newcastle]

In two of the remaining Newcastle wards, the library was some distance from the main shopping area (in the last ward there was no significant area of local shopping). In one of these two wards, some focus group participants thought that relocating the library to the main shopping area might help support local shops. One respondent said that:-

*There are shops closing down ... I think that if a library was actually built [in the main area] ... it could have a greater impact on bringing a community into a focal [point] - a nucleus.*  
[Focus group, Newcastle]

It was felt that the library would have a greater impact if it was situated in the main area of local shopping. Other respondents thought that if the library was better located or more attractively presented, it would be more likely to have an impact. These sort of considerations also applied to the main City Library. For some, Newcastle’s central library seemed to lack ‘visibility;’ this local politician spoke for many respondents when he said:-

*[The City Library’s] a bit hidden away unfortunately, its location’s not the best. It’s [an] ugly building*  
[Elected member, Newcastle]

A Comedia (1991) study on urban vitality, examined the role of town centres as a focal point for local civic culture, retailing, entertainment, night life and transport interchanges. In this, the library was identified as a key institution in town centres, with the authors commenting that ‘it was used by a wider cross-section of the local population than almost any other public, commercial or retail institution in the town centre.’ (Comedia, 1993, p.1)

This may be true in the case of Newcastle in terms of the library’s wide use. However, we found that focus group participants did not see the City Library as a facility which
exerted a gravitational pull towards the city centre. In the words of one respondent, ‘if I’m going into town shopping, I go to the [City Library].’ There was no corresponding suggestion that people used the city centre shops because they were visiting the library. The City Library was not regarded as an attractive place to visit. Rather, several focus group participants, including regular library users, described the City Library as ‘grotty’ and ‘miserable.’

In Somerset, by contrast, the data suggest that the library has a discernible economic impact in supporting local shopping. It has already been shown that the library plays a significant part in the life of small towns. Some users and library staff thought that there was a positive relationship between the library and local shopping activity. They felt that:-

*People come down here, particularly the ones who live in the rural areas, to change their books and go to the shops in the town.*
[Library staff, Somerset]

*I often combine my trips to the library with shopping and I’m sure that some people only come with the intention of using the library and then end up shopping as well as vice versa.*
[Focus group, Somerset]

In one particular area, the parish council’s support for one library, perceived as being threatened with closure, was mentioned in an economic context. It had:-

*... considerable support from the parish council ... because if they lose the library those people who are mobile and are especially determined to borrow books will go [to libraries in other towns] and also probably do their shopping there. So this was a particular concern to the parish council and the local traders.*
[Library staff, Somerset]

In the same location, a Household Survey found that the library was the most used leisure facility in the area (in Somerset County Library Service, 1997). Such evidence supports the conclusion that in some of the Somerset locations, the usage of the library did translate into a positive economic impact in relation to local retailing. People did not just combine shopping trips with visiting the library, but the library was an important factor in deciding where to shop.

This finding can be seen as a confirmation of earlier research investigating the role of libraries in town centres and shopping complexes, which also showed that libraries have an impact on the surrounding retail economy. For example, research carried out in Hounslow Central Library showed that over half the people using the library were combining library use with a shopping trip. A survey of retailers in Weymouth and Hartlepool, where libraries had been located to central shopping areas concluded that some shops had noted significant increases in turnover following the opening of the libraries. (Greenhalgh et al, 1995). In our research, the strongest evidence for this symbiotic relationship between local shops and libraries was found in the some of the small Somerset towns, where it was seen that the presence of the library significantly contributed to the attractiveness of a local centre.
This reflected the findings of the Sheffield strike research that the library's impact on local shops situated close to, or on users' routes to, the library was correspondingly greater than it was on town centres. (Proctor et al., 1996, p. 29)

**Tourism**

The data also suggest that the library service supports the local tourist infrastructure in Somerset. This was seen not just with the Tourist Information Centre in Taunton Library, but also in places which had some tourist activity but did not have a dedicated centre. As one member of staff said:-

*There isn’t a tourist information office here so we are in fact doing their work for them which is working quite well, we get through quite a lot of leaflets and information. [The] Library is on a prime site and people who park in the car park have got to come past it, visitors have got to come past it so they come in to find out tourist information.*

[Library staff, Somerset]

This respondent’s comment that the library is on a ‘prime site’ could be applied to most of the Somerset libraries. Focus group participants, who were obviously local people rather than tourists, also confirmed that the library was used in the way described above. They found the library:-

*useful too for the tourist information, where to go and take the kids in the holidays, I’ve lived here for a long time, but I don’t know of all the places to visit and the library is very up to date on this.*

[Focus Group, Somerset]

Such examples suggest the support the library service can give to the tourist and leisure sector at a local level. There were fewer examples of focus group participants using the library for this kind of recreational information in Newcastle, although one user did comment that ‘they’ve got stuff on walks, they’ve got stuff on activities, you know, local wildlife centres.’

The investigation of local studies services suggested other ways in which the library service brought indirect benefits to the local leisure economy. One member of local studies staff said that:-

*A lot of people use Local Studies as a resource. We’ve always had good relation with colleagues at the art gallery and the museum and, again, a lot of our photographs, a lot of information - when they’ve had exhibitions, it’s from our collection.*

[Library staff, Newcastle]

This contribution was perhaps especially important in Newcastle because of the unique value of parts of the collection. In this example the local studies library had provided material used by a major local attraction, which would not have been available elsewhere:-

*Beamish Museum did some research here when they were developing another area of their museum, and the director wrote a letter saying …[the engravings used] were absolutely of world-wide significance as far as the development of the railways were concerned, because the engravings were of railways.*

[Library staff, Newcastle]
Other local authority departments

Business library staff identified the importance of their resources to local authority colleagues. In the case of British Standards, at least, this could be translated into a cost saving:-

Trading Standards make huge use of our Standards. … We often get the Chief Executive’s Office on the line wanting particular very specific pieces of information, very often addresses or contacts. Or recent news items - ‘can you find this article, can you find that article and send it off to me?’ It may be something coming up, that he might have to talk about. [Library staff, Newcastle]

Trading Standards use us, Economic Development … [the] Solicitor’s Department use us. … They haven’t got British Standards, they need them, if we didn’t have them, they’d have to buy them and they cost a fortune. Plus … they want just books and articles from journals, information. [Library staff, Somerset]

Although in the following examples the economic impacts tend not to be so clear-cut as with, say, trading standards departments’ use of British Standards, they do provide instances where it is reasonable to assume that use of local studies resources produced some cash savings, notably for
…people doing research for other parts of the authority, people from planning departments. …the Tyne and Wear Specialist Conservation Team, they use Local Studies an awful lot, use the maps and other materials. [Library staff, Newcastle]

A comparable example in Somerset related to the local district council, where:-
…there is someone in the planning department locally… a historic buildings advisor or consultant, and he’s quite regularly in here looking or ringing up, or advising people to see me here. [Library staff, Somerset]

Other economic impacts

In assessing the economic impact of the library services our findings are tentative and somewhat inconclusive. There are, of course, further levels of economic impact that are not within the scope of this study, for instance libraries’ financial support of ‘private sector organisations such as publishers, computer suppliers and suppliers of security systems.’ (Pritchard and Usherwood, 1989, p. 123) Investigating the diverse economic impacts of the public library, at a local and national level, would therefore appear to be a worthwhile direction for future work.

Summary

Individual examples of the impact of business information were seen in both authorities, although it was often difficult to quantify the difference these made.
There was evidence that the library brought particular benefits to new start-ups and other small businesses, especially when the library service co-operated with partner organisations in orienting services to the needs of these groups (notably at Bridgwater Library in Somerset).

The investigation of local studies showed that local businesses made use of the resources of the local studies library,

People seeking jobs and training represented a major group of reference library users. Our focus groups suggested the significance of the library for these groups.

In Somerset in particular, our findings pointed to the library’s role in supporting the economic vitality of local town and village centres, by acting as a magnet which encouraged people to use local shops and services, rather than travelling further afield.

Other broad economic impacts identified included support of the local tourist infrastructure and savings resulting from the use of library resources by other local authority departments.
6. Equity

Introduction

Most modern statements of library purpose suggest that it is the role of the public library to provide equality of access to the wealth of information, ideas and works of imagination. For example the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto states that:-
‘The services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status.’

This statement goes on to suggest that to provide equality of access:-
‘Specific services and materials must be provided for those users who cannot, for whatever reason, use the regular services and materials, for example linguistic minorities, people with disabilities or people in hospital or prison.’
(UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, 1994, in Aslib 1995)

A concern with equity underpins the social objectives of both the local authorities involved in our research. Newcastle City Council has a specific anti-poverty objective relating to the needs of disadvantaged groups in the community. Somerset County Council has a stated objective relating to equitable access to services irrespective of ‘social, economic or other disadvantage.’ In this respect, the two authorities are typical of many parts of the public sector in that they ‘have some concept of equity as a central concern.’ In such circumstances the ‘equity goal therefore becomes another dimension along which outcome must be measured.’ (Smith, 1996, p.14). Commentators have pointed out that the concept of equity can be defined narrowly as, ‘due process or administrative justice’ or more widely, for instance, in terms of ‘neutrality and fairness between different groups’ or ‘positive discrimination in favour of disadvantaged groups.’ (Carter et al, 1992, p.40) As the data will show, the concept of equity is interpreted differently in the two authorities participating in this study.

The various dimensions of the equity theme are discussed using the perceptions of different groups of respondents. These are placed in the context of the literature on equality. A distinction is made between equality of opportunity and equality of condition. Equality of opportunity relates to universal access to social institutions. The related concept of equality of condition encompasses the idea that individuals may be disadvantaged by circumstance, so ‘for equal opportunity to have any significant content it is essential to guarantee equality of condition, that is, all competitors in the race should start at the same point with appropriate handicaps.’ Finally, there is equality of result or outcome, in which the aim is to achieve, through political programmes in favour of disadvantaged groups, ‘a meaningful equality of opportunity.’ (Turner, 1986, p.36). These concepts of widening dimensions of equality have helped inform our categorisation of the data between equity of access (i.e. broadly corresponding to equality of opportunity) and equity between groups (i.e. corresponding to equality of condition and outcome). Before examining this, we briefly consider data that relate to the narrowest definition of equity, that is, as administrative justice.
Equity as administrative justice

If equity is narrowly defined as due process or administrative justice (Carter et al, 1992, p.40), the data show that library services, in both authorities, are delivered in a fair or equitable way. One particular aspect of service delivery did, however, raise issues of equity in terms of administrative justice. A member of Somerset library staff said that there was intentional discrimination against homeless people:-

*It’s the homeless that we discriminate against. Unfortunately experience has taught us that we have to.... We do have a way round this for homeless people in that if they can get someone who can provide proof of address to guarantee their membership then they can borrow books... But it is extremely difficult to get people to do that because they have to have it explained to them exactly what that implies ... that if the books go missing they will agree to pay for them.*

[Library staff, Somerset]

One focus group participant said that the policy was not implemented fairly, as she had been able to ‘guarantee’ her membership in the way described, but had still not been able to join the library. Her experience had been that:-

*I couldn’t join the library because I didn’t have an address ... Social Services actually backed me and said if I couldn’t return the book they’d pay the cost, and they still wouldn’t let me join the library.*

[Focus Group, Somerset]

This example of the effect of library rules on homeless people is an isolated one. Indeed it was one of the very few examples where focus group participants suggested that existing rules had been interpreted unfairly. This is separate from the wider issue of whether the rules themselves are fair and equitable, which is considered later in this section.

The particular example of homeless people can also be interpreted as an illustration of trade-offs that are made between equity and efficiency in trying to deliver an effective service. (Jackson and Palmer, 1989) In the example of Somerset’s rules on homeless people, the policy implementation falls on the side of efficiency. A contrasting example, dating from the height of the era of community librarianship, suggests the effect of considering the equitable take-up of services, at the expense of effectiveness criteria:-

*Most of us wanted to make libraries as successful as possible to everyone in the community, and particularly to people who would not come into libraries... To an extent we achieved it. But some of the things we did had consequences that we did not think of at the time, such as losing control of stock and allowing people to join without proof of identity. People came to see libraries and librarians as an easy touch.*

[Librarian, quoted in Black and Muddiman, 1997a, p124]

Equity of access

In Somerset, the emphasis of the authority’s core principles is on equitable access to service delivery. One member made explicit reference to the authority-wide objective
of equity of access. He saw this in terms of removing barriers to the take-up of services:-

*We’ve established a number of core principles for the County Council … it’s a political decision but its been adopted corporately - and equal access is a very, very strong feature in that and whether it’s geography, or disability, a hearing impairment, whatever it might be, we do want to remove those barriers.*

[Elected member, Somerset]

This local politician mentions two aspects referred to by many Somerset respondents - geography and disability (both discussed below). Issues around access to services are also implicit within Newcastle Council’s objectives, notably within the long-term objective of the ‘Accessible City,’ a programme which aims to:

‘remove the physical, cultural, social and economic barriers which will restrict the full use of the facilities of the city by all sections of the community.’

(Newcastle City Council, 1995)

There are, as this statement suggests, a number of constraints on effective access which can work against the equity concept. These include physical, geographical and economic barriers.

*Physical Access*

In Newcastle, many local politicians voiced criticism of the facilities for physical access to library buildings. Wheelchair access was mentioned by many elected members, perhaps because this was seen as being difficult at the City Library, the most widely known library building. This concern is reflected in this typical view:-

*I think we don’t do very well for disabled people, although we do provide things like large print books... A number of the buildings are not very accessible.*

[Elected member]

Although the nature of wheelchair access varied in individual libraries, Newcastle staff tended to agree that ‘people in wheelchairs obviously have difficulty using the libraries.’ These views were confirmed by one focus group in particular which echoed politicians’ criticisms of the difficult wheelchair access to and within the City Library. One participant said:-

*A lot of ‘them’ think, because we’ve put a concrete ramp and a steel rail alongside that, it’s good enough.*

[Focus group, Newcastle]

In terms of physical access for the disabled and frail elderly, there were more positive views about the ‘housebound readers’ service and the minibus to Heaton Library as mentioned earlier.

In Somerset, elected members and library staff repeatedly referred to the improvements to disabled access at many of the libraries. They acknowledged that access was still difficult at a limited number of libraries, where the cost of alterations was prohibitive. However, there was a consensus amongst local politicians and staff that great advances had been made in terms of the physical access to libraries. This view was summed up by one politician who felt that:-
We are addressing [physical access] as best we can. I think we’re doing pretty well, all the new mobiles have got chair lifts and where possible there is access.

[Elected member, Somerset]

The mobile library service in Somerset

The focus group discussion with people with disabilities and carers confirmed that there were obvious and immediate impacts following such improvements. For instance, one focus group participant described the new Taunton Library as ‘two hundred times’ better for disabled people than the old one. The impact in this case extended beyond the access to core library services. The library’s meeting room was, for instance, described by the group as the most suitable meeting facility, for disabled people, in the area.

This focus group’s greatest concern was, however, about lack of consultation on access issues. Some of the participants were involved with what were said to be the main disability advocacy groups in the area, but none of these groups had been consulted on a recently produced access guide (although it had been sent to one group). One participant took the following lesson from this experience:

I think this is where everybody can learn - the best people to ask is the people they’re trying to serve. And once they’ve learned that, they’ll go a long way to improving everything.

[Focus Group, Somerset]

In fairness to the library service, it should be noted that these criticisms applied equally to all of Somerset’s services and the group felt that there should be a County access officer in post to ensure disabled people’s concerns were taken on board. This comment from one senior politician (again talking about the generality of local authority services) suggested some common ground with these concerns:-
We renewed our efforts recently to try and see access issues from the point of view of the user, because it is quite easy for even the most committed person to think they've resolved access issues when they ... don't always take the trouble to look at it through the user’s eyes... But there have been some gaffes by professionals who try very hard to do things right but the consultation hasn’t been quite with the right people or quite in the right circumstances.

[Elected member, Somerset]

Further, participants in the focus group of people with disabilities felt that many of the issues that affected them extended beyond physical access.

It has already been noted that in both Newcastle and Somerset, respondents gave individual examples of the benefit of library materials such as large print and spoken word collections on people with sensory disabilities. In this context, some older users, in particular, pointed out that large print books were only available from the library.

Geographical barriers

In Somerset, a core principle of the local authority is to use decentralisation to improve access to services, especially in rural areas. This is in addition to the objective of equitable access to services. The geographical penetration of the library service itself was seen as a particular strength by local politicians across the political divide. Elected members from the majority and main opposition parties felt that:-

The service is augmented by the use of mobiles to get the service out to the community and again that’s really quite impressive, that every nook and cranny gets visited and that’s obviously very important.

It stops at two other places even in one village so that people haven’t got to go far, they haven’t got to have a car and they don’t have to get in to any public transport. It’s practically where they can walk to...

[Elected members, Somerset]

Of all the Somerset local politicians interviewed, only one explicitly disagreed with the view that the provision of a comprehensive mobile service was important in terms of geographical access. He thought that:-

If you are ever going to cut something then you could cut the mobile service, because most people nowadays have got access to a car, provided that you’ve got your library service strategically placed throughout the whole of the county.

[Elected member, Somerset]

This respondent apart, there was general support for the value of mobile services and this was confirmed by focus group participants. They also mentioned the limitations of public transport. A focus group in one of the more isolated communities agreed that:-

The mobile library’s obviously popular... If you haven’t got a car ... to come to the library ... you may have a three hour wait between [buses] ... Of course, it goes out into the country, to farms.

Yes, I have a friend who lives on a farm ... and I know they really appreciate the travelling library.

[Focus group, Somerset]
In Somerset, one opposition politician saw reductions in the frequency of the mobile library service as working against the authority’s stated aim of equitable access. He commented that:

One of the most extraordinarily unfortunate things that is happening is that we are cutting down the number of [mobile library] visits to rural areas... Although the policy of the County Council may be to try and make these things available to everybody, the fact is that what they have been doing in order to save money ... is making [the service] less accessible and I find that upsetting and unnecessary.

[Elected member, Somerset]

At the time the field work was carried out it was too early to assess the impact of these changes. However, as the above respondent also said, such decisions are an example of how broad policy objectives ‘can be translated in different ways and can be understood in different ways.’

A further example of this was the perspective of another elected member. Talking about reference services, he argued that there was too much geographical dispersal of services:-

... in what are quite small towns compared to other places, we try to provide a full local service, and ... I do wonder whether we ought to be considering even more specialism than is going on now. I’m not sure whether the business community should be entitled to expect quite the range of reference in every library, that is available.

[Elected member, Somerset]

In Somerset the main reference services are divided between the four largest libraries and clearly, the library service would argue that by dispersing the service in this way, rather than from just one centre, it was delivering a more equitable service to the County’s geographically dispersed population. Again, with the local studies service, there was a conscious attempt to address the issue of local access, as in the long-standing policy of producing packs of material, relating to each parish, in local libraries. (See insert below)

**Parish Packs: the Somerset approach**

Local studies packs for individual parishes, or whatever else we may choose to call them, are designed to devolve information to the level of the smallest branch libraries, as close as possible to the places they describe and to people who live there and want to study them...

Up to six copies have been produced for each of the 500 or so parishes in the county. Three have been placed in the School Library Resource Centre, and the remainder in the public library or libraries serving the parish concerned...

There are parts of Somerset which are fifty miles from the county town, with no effective public transport links to it... Serious students will require something more, and can be expected to travel, but primary school-children with projects, secondary school pupils with GCSE course work, and the more casual adult enquirers, are all entitled to look for service in their own libraries, and this an attempt to provide it. (Bromwich, 1987, p.16-17)
Generally, then, it can be concluded that, by delivering a service that reached the smallest and most isolated communities (to the extent of the mobile service going to individual farms), Somerset’s library service was, in relation to geography, supporting the authority’s objective of providing equitable access to services.

**Economic barriers**

In Somerset, a factor connected with the distance between the main centres was the cost of getting to the library. For participants in the disabled people’s focus group, there were further ‘hidden costs’ in visiting the library as disabled people often had to use taxis or the, equally expensive, community transport. Library users in other focus groups also saw the provision of local services as having an equity dimension, because of the cost of getting to the larger centres. One participant’s view was:-

*Obviously if you live in Taunton then you get better access to all facilities but for us it’s difficult because the bus fares are so expensive and sometimes we just can’t afford it.*

[Focus group, Somerset]

Other aspects of economic equity concern matters such as fines, fees and charges. In Somerset, in particular, these emerged as significant concerns for library users. In one focus group, participants agreed that the policy of fining by the week, had the perverse effect of making them from returning books less quickly than they would otherwise other done:-

*Even if you’re only a day over, you still pay the same.*

*That’s right. I was tearing about, I thought it’s Wednesday, they’re shut today. Wednesday I couldn’t take them back, so that made them Thursday and I had to pay the fine the same as I’d been a week late. So, I thought, oh, I’ll keep them another week.*

[Focus group, Somerset]

In effect, in this example, the way in which the policy operated appeared to work against the optimum turnover of stock.

In Newcastle, the situation was different in that there are already a range of concessionary schemes and policies in place. In all parts of Newcastle a City leisure card provides subsidised leisure services to those on low incomes. Library staff emphasised that the benefits of this extended beyond libraries. The Council is:-

*... encouraging people to buy the City Card to give them reductions, for authority buildings, sports centres and swimming pools as well as libraries.*

[Library staff, Newcastle]

This priority on deprived areas was also followed at a ward level. For instance, staff referred to providing activities for free because of the deprived nature of several of the communities. In addition groups, identified as a priority, also received special consideration. For example:-

*Events, activities for children in Byker, we would make them free, whereas in [a more affluent part of the City] we would charge for tickets. We’d generally be addressing issues of people on low incomes. Obviously, we target certain user groups more [like] children and parents of children.*

[Library staff, Newcastle]
The library service’s anti-poverty objective meant that there were also free reservations and audio-visual services for people living in the City Challenge area. Library staff said this had a considerable effect on the take-up of library services in the two wards which fell within that area. One member of staff said users:

... don’t pay to borrow a cassette, whereas in other libraries they would pay.... They don’t pay to reserve any item... The only thing that they do pay is fines... When we introduced this, the take-up of the service was phenomenal ... if we reintroduce these charges, the service take up will just plummet ... We really want to see each library as a gateway to the whole system and charging [for reservations] is a barrier to that.
[Library staff, Newcastle]

Data from the focus groups held in the City Challenge areas suggested that targeted initiatives like free audio-visual loans were taken up in a purposive way by existing library users. One participant who made extensive use of the free reservations and audio-visual services said:-

I get talking books, just sometimes ‘cause I enjoy this, like, it’s a change from listening to the radio. ... They’ll usually put a list out of what new books they’ve got, so... things like ‘Trainspotting’ ... as soon as it was out I had it. I mean you had to request it because everybody was going to read it. [Focus group, Newcastle]

For this individual, and other library users, such initiatives reinforced the role the library already had in these people’s lives, most notably in making ‘positive’ use of their leisure time. It was less clear whether the ‘benefits’ of these programmes, which were clearly perceived by committed library users in the City Challenge areas, had an influence beyond this immediate group.

In Somerset, the cost of fines and reservations emerged as an issue in several interviews. One member of the Libraries, Museums and Records Committee said that:-

I do worry sometimes about the level of our fines. I see people in court sometimes who’ve not paid their library fines, and we are looking at people who sometimes cannot manage their own lives effectively, and I do wonder sometimes about the business of fining inadequate people. [Elected member, Somerset]

The problem is exemplified by the staff respondent who described how:-

One lady had a real screaming fit in here the other day because her daughter had some books out which were late back and although she had had prosecution letters the mother wanted to join the library and I had to say no she couldn’t until the daughters books were back and, well, we got the books back which she did not return apart from opening the door and flinging the books inside... Those kinds of people are dissatisfied ... but what can you do? They’ve brought it in on themselves. [Library staff, Somerset]

Although the focus group participants did not refer to any confrontations of this kind, some did refer to the level of fines and also the cost of reservations. These were regarded as a barrier to access. One Somerset participant explicitly refers to the need for the type of concessionary schemes found in Newcastle:-

I certainly don’t object to paying [for reservations], but it’s 50p per book and if you want quite a few then it gets too expensive. It would be good if we could have an access
to library card, something like they have for leisure facilities, where you can reserve as many books as you like for free. [Focus group, Somerset]

Many of the library staff had adopted a flexible attitude to payment of fines, as the following comment illustrates:-
I know that people are put off by paying the fines. I have a lot of people who - getting fines out of people here is a nightmare. When they have to pay, they’ll pay you some and then say they’ll pay the rest next time they come in, which is fine but they won’t turn up again. So that’s a reader loss and again that’s a balancing act. If I really am strict on it I would lose so many readers. [Library staff, Somerset]

Here, it could be argued, staff were applying the Council’s priority on equitable access to services without perhaps actively realising they were doing so. This is also an example of how, if rules are interpreted flexibly, they do not have to deter people from future library use. However, such solutions are not necessarily equitable in that their application is essentially random, and may prevent real policy solutions being implemented.

More generally, however, it is the impact of free access to materials, especially those for education, that emerged as important in the focus groups held in both authorities. For example, focus group participants said:-
I lost my job and I decided to go to college part-time but I couldn’t afford to buy all the books. I’ve got two books that I’ve renewed ever since I started college. So it saves a lot of money that way. [Focus group, Somerset]

My son ... went to college ... and there was a couple of books that his tutor told him ... ‘if you find them in the library, get them there...’ He got them in the Central Library... If he wanted to buy them [one book] was £37.00... I couldn’t afford to get him it... So obviously if [the library] wasn’t there he would have been up the creek without a paddle. [Focus group, Newcastle]

**Equity between groups and communities**

Broader definitions of equity may, as discussed above, encompass issues of ‘neutrality and fairness between different groups.’ (Carter et al, 1992, p.40) A concern for equity, thus defined, is implicit in Newcastle’s emphasis on services directed toward, or of particular benefit or relevance to, disadvantaged or deprived groups and areas within the community. It is recognised that not all individuals within some of the authority’s target groups may be disadvantaged in terms of the take-up of library services. As an example of this, women and the elderly, although prioritised by Newcastle City Council, were disproportionately high users of library services. Nonetheless, the equitable distribution of services between different groups is a relevant one given the objectives of the local authority. Elected members summarised the Council’s priority groups in the following terms:-
The poor ... the unemployed, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities of all kinds. The sort of priority groups [are] the old, the infirm, the young, the disadvantaged... [and there is a] focus on communities where there’s a concentration of deprivation. [Elected members, Newcastle]
In Newcastle, an awareness of, and emphasis on, the groups and individual communities prioritised by the City Council was shared by library staff as well as elected members. For instance, one member of staff summed up the priority groups as ‘mainly unemployed people, elderly people, children and young people, ethnic minorities.’

In Somerset, the notion of equity between groups is implied by the reference, in the authority’s core principles, to citizens not being ‘handicapped by social, economic or other disadvantages.’ When asked how this policy translated into practice, many respondents replied primarily in relation to disabled access rather than any other form of disadvantage. As an illustration of this, these were two responses concerning equitable access given by two interviewees from the same community:-

*They can actually get in [the library] with wheelchairs, and we do have people coming in with wheelchairs...*

[Library staff, Somerset]

*There’s been a survey done of all the libraries in the county, how accessible they were to people in wheelchairs for instance. This [library] here, a person in a wheelchair ... could be helped very quickly with somebody to hold the door open. ... The County is putting money as fast as it can afford to into disabled access and ... there’s Braille books available for blind people. Of course the audio side of libraries is increasing...*

[Elected member, Somerset]

Newcastle library service’s objectives refer to deprived communities, whereas Somerset’s refer to citizens suffering from disadvantage. In Somerset, the library service’s own objectives were often interpreted in relation to individual self-development (see Appendix C). Newcastle’s local politicians reflected the priority given to particular communities:-

*People ... in the most deprived areas of the city ... live lives that are quite often devoid of economic, social or cultural qualities that a lot of people take for granted.*

[Elected member, Newcastle]

At a City-wide level, one way in which library policy supported this “community” priority was that resources were allocated on a ward basis, irrespective of usage:-

*The main way that the Council’s priorities are addressed is [that] equal amounts of resources are allocated to each ward, regardless of how much use there is. So where libraries are less well-used, say in very rundown inner city areas ... [the library service] would still put the level of resources in, as we would into a busy, well-used library in a more affluent part of the City.*

[Library staff, Newcastle]

The potential relevance of libraries to unemployed people was highlighted in many interviews in both authorities. One elected member said:-

*We’ve got people becoming unemployable or not likely to be employed from sometimes the 40s and the 50s, yet living longer and having more leisure time at their disposal.*

[Elected member, Somerset]
In Somerset, staff doubted the extent to which, despite this kind of demographic and social changes, unemployed people used the library for leisure or information. One member of staff remembered thinking:--
... when [a major employer] closed that all the newly unemployed people would surely come and read books because they had more free time but it didn’t happen really.
[Library staff, Somerset]

Generally, the focus groups tended to support this view. In Newcastle, however, where communities were coping with high long-term unemployment (Newcastle City Council, 1993a) the library was important to some individuals. One participant said:--
I love going in the library .... you can lose two hours like that. ... It’s very relaxing. As I say, before you know you look and two hours is gone, or they’re shouting, ‘we’re shutting in five minutes,’ you know.
[Focus group, Newcastle]

Others had a more cynical view about how the library could help the unemployed. The following, rather literal, response suggests that the library had not demonstrated other ways in which it could help this group:--
I mean you cannot get jobs through the Job Centre, I cannot see the library helping you get a job.
[Focus group, Newcastle]

In Somerset there was a strand of opinion which, although not expressed that widely, suggested that the library service was not as open and inclusive as many other respondents felt it was. One local politician suggested that the less well-off social groups under-used the library. She said:--
I hold a surgery monthly in my local library and the people who come in are not the people who are disadvantaged. So there tends to be a middle class usage of the libraries far outweighing the use made of it by lower income groups.
[Elected members, Somerset]

Some recent research (Roach and Morrison, 1998) also suggests that libraries need to be more responsive to the needs of citizens from ethnic minority groups. People from ethnic minorities are a priority group identified by Newcastle (there was no comparable ethnic minority community to address in Somerset). Newcastle politicians saw the libraries’ provision of materials in mother tongue languages as extending ethnic minorities’ access to Council services:--
For ethnic minorities the fact that there are still quite a number of them who can’t ... speak English well, and can’t read English ... [The library] does provide written information about what’s happening ... and services that they can avail themselves of, which they might not always be aware of, and they might be reluctant, for all sorts of cultural reasons, to come and ask someone like me... It provides another access point for them.
[Elected member, Newcastle]

The more general perception of elected members was, however, that people from ethnic minorities under-used the library. This was a fairly typical view:--
I think the library service is essentially not relevant to their needs. It’s not well-used, in my perception, by ethnic minorities. The resident ethnic minorities in the ward, I’m sure, do not use the facilities very well at all.

[Elected member, Newcastle]

Library staff, on the other hand, commented on the large numbers of children from Asian backgrounds using certain libraries. They also referred to specific attempts to respond to the needs and demands of people from ethnic minority communities. One example of this was through liaising with community groups to establish an outreach collection at an Asian Women’s Centre, which was used by women who might not go to the library itself. A focus group of people from ethnic minority communities had a generally positive view of the library. They felt that access to materials reflecting their cultural background helped Asian children maintain a sense of their cultural identity. One of the participants said:

I’m new here and I know that it’s not very easy to live remote from your culture and away from others. You can’t find many Asians living together in groups or meetings for any of them. So they come to the library, they really get something useful from books. That’s good about it.

[Focus group, Newcastle]

Participants also thought that children’s English language skills could be improved as a result of using books and videos from the library. The experience of one user was that:

Every Saturday and Friday I have taken [my daughter] to the library and read some books there for her ... and I borrow a lot of tapes and a video to get her watching and listening. ... I think without the libraries my daughter’s English can’t be improved so fast.

[Focus group, Newcastle]

This was only a small group, and it is not claimed that its participants are necessarily representative of the ethnic minority communities living in this part of Newcastle. The group discussion did, at least, suggest that the library was valuable to some people from these communities. This group was also interesting in that responses suggested that the library can help reinforce cultural identity and, at the same time, have an impact in promoting social inclusion by developing English language skills. Moreover, ‘the ethnic minority group recognised that they had different needs and welcomed the library services directed at them.’ (Research Services, 1997)

The responses of this group confirmed the view, found, in Hoggett’s (1997, p.44) research, on the equitable delivery of welfare services, that ‘different communities want different services provided in different ways.’ He goes on to say that it is ‘only by treating people differently that access to scarce public resources by many excluded communities [can] be enhanced.’ The view that different groups and communities needed different services was supported by a Newcastle focus group participant with a reading disability, who stated that the library service had provided ‘no assistance’ to him. He saw services and materials for children and adults with learning disabilities as inadequate. He had felt ‘frustrated’ in trying to use the City Library, because:-
There's very little information that’s given towards people who have reading disabilities and ... they still ... do not recognise that kind of problem. It’s almost a Victorian kind of attitude, oh he’s dyslexic so he must be thick.

[Focus group, Newcastle]

In other words, this respondent would have welcomed more services targeted at his needs. Elderly people also, from the evidence of our focus groups, tended to welcome being treated ‘differently.’

At the same time, other groups prioritised by Newcastle City Council did not welcome the idea of being identified as having special needs. A particular example of this is lone parents. In Newcastle, staff and politicians referred to the library’s relevance to lone parents, emphasising the importance of the largely free service and a non-stigmatised environment. One respondent specifically referred to the library in terms of the equality between users. He said:-

*I know a number of single, lone parents - women - who make extensive use of the library service because they’re either on low wages or on benefit, and it’s the one thing where they can have equality with other families*

[Elected member, Newcastle]

The feeling of many lone parents was that they did not wish to be identified as having particular needs. For instance, focus group participants said that they thought that the local library should provide ‘coffee mornings [and] toddlers’ groups.’ However, as one went on to say they felt that such activities should not be directed towards ‘lone parents in particular because I’m a lone parent and the library doesn’t help me.’ In a way, this anti-targeting view was picked up on by library staff. For instance, one member of staff observed that :

*Sockets, people don’t like drop-ins and things - that they’re, you know, specified for as help groups kind of thing, because they think ‘oh well, you know, we go there to the clinic or social services or whatever, it’s a criticism that we’re not bringing up our children properly.’ So there can be a stigma to some organised groups.*

[Library staff, Newcastle]

Age and perception of the library

Young people were perceived by elected members and library staff as under-using the library. There was widespread concern about a perceived ‘ageing’ of library users, with a consensus that young people did not see the library as relevant to their needs.

Although younger children used the library, there was a stage when most stopped going to the library (this stage was put at between about 12 and 16, in different interviews). One local politician said that:

*It would be quite nice if we had a problem with libraries where we were having to chase disruptive young people making a noise - and we don’t. That’s a perverse way of looking at it, but at least if young people were going in, and it was seen as a place to be, then there would be that problem - there isn’t that problem, because they don’t go.*

[Elected member, Newcastle]

Staff from Newcastle City Library felt that there was, in fact, a ‘problem’ with ‘disruptive’ young people, but that perception is perhaps of itself a contributory factor
to the image held by some young people. Elected members and library staff thought the reasons for young people’s perceived under-use of the library were, broadly, its image and the ‘easier’ alternatives for young people (notably television). The DNH Review states that there is an increased demand on the library from children over ten and amongst 16-19 year-olds, which it attributes to project working and job-hunting. (Aslib, 1995, p.119)  This last conclusion was supported by our data, where the young people we spoke to mainly used the library in this kind of ‘purposive’ way.

The DNH review goes on to say that teenage users ‘have some doubts about the value and reliability of the sources and services on offer;’ they also feel that ‘procedures are old-fashioned.’ (Aslib, 1995, p.144) Young people were heavy, but critical, users of the library. An American report on libraries and technology also reports that 18-24 year olds are the least enthusiastic of all age groups about public support for the library (Kellogg Foundation, 1996).

In both of our case study authorities, we spoke to young people from detached youth projects. In Somerset, the views of the majority of the group’s members were comparable to the DNH review. That is, if they used the library it was for education or to borrow CDs - which they were rather more enthusiastic about. They were also critical of the library’s image and associations:-  

*It’s a bit scary really... It always seems to be too quiet and you feel terrible if you make a noise. There are lots of rules and regulations and quite honestly it turns me off.*  
[Focus group, Somerset]

In this group, however, there were also one or two participants who liked the atmosphere of the library and would only stop using the library ‘if I stopped reading.’ The group felt that:  

*It really comes down to whether you’re a library kind of person. Like [another member of the group] said you like it because it’s quiet and stuff.*  
[Focus group, Somerset]

For the Newcastle group, reading was quite a significant leisure activity for many, but none of them used the library:-  
‘The young women did not use the library because they thought they were banned. A number of them had failed to return books in the past and had subsequently ignored reminders and so on. The cost of fines and paying for books they had lost or damaged was clearly a concern to the women. Indeed, that the library and library staff were seen as authoritative was implicit in the conversation.’  
(Research Services, 1997)

For this particular group there were then very strong barriers to using the library. It is not claimed that this group was necessarily a typical one - and indeed, in other focus groups, some young people were enthusiastic users of the public library - but it did suggest the difficulties that some people may have dealing with what they perceived to be an agency of authority.

There was a view, found across the broad range of our respondents that older people belonged to the ‘library generation.’ Roach and Morrison (1998) have identified a lack
of use by elderly Asian women, and our data does not enable us to comment on that. However in general terms:

*As far as the elderly are concerned, then there is a very positive link with the library.... They may not use it on a daily basis, but they are fearful of losing that resource, of losing their local library, because the library is not ours, 'it is theirs.' And that is perhaps the distinction between the age groups. The older age groups look on the local library as their library, rather than it being the council’s library, whereas, ... this younger age group, don’t have any attachment or loyalty to it.*

[Elected member, Newcastle]

Other evidence to support older age groups’ loyalty to the public library and the high value they place on it has already been identified in our discussion of its social and caring role.

**Summary**

On a narrow definition of equity as ‘administrative justice’ library services were judged to be administered fairly, with only isolated examples where equity had had to be counter-balanced with economic considerations.

In terms of equity of access to services, both library departments had policies to improve access for people with disabilities, although there was a call for a more user-focused approach in focus groups.

In Somerset, access barriers relating to rural isolation were overcome were overcome with the provision of a comprehensive network of services which covered the smallest and most isolated rural communities.

In Newcastle, economic barriers to library use were overcome through policies directed at priority groups and areas. In Somerset, there were individual examples of cost factors, for instance for reservations, deterring some people from using the library.

In terms of access between groups and communities, the data suggest that the library is perceived as providing equity for most older people, those with disabilities and people from ethnic minorities. The equity dimension is felt less strongly by lone parents and unemployed young people. In addition, some groups, especially lone parents tended not to welcome being identified as a priority group.
7. Management and other issues affecting impact

Our data suggest that the extent to which the public library service fulfils its social objectives depends, in some degree, on how the service and the local authority are managed, and also on other factors outside the immediate control of library staff. Factors which have been identified as helping or hindering the attainment of social objectives include:-

- Resources
- Marketing and awareness of the service
- Library rules and culture
- Staff attitudes
- The relationship with local politicians.
- Fear of crime
- Location.

Resources

In both of our study locations financial issues were observed to affect all aspects of the library service. Some members of the public were of the opinion that: *Quite honestly, the whole business boils down to finance. Nobody’s discussed it tonight... You want a larger library, its got to be paid for. This County is already £3.4 million over cap... It just comes back to money all the time. They can’t have new books because they’ve got no money.*

[Focus Group, Somerset]

Many of these issues have already been identified in the earlier chapters. Long-term lack of investment appeared to reduce the potential impact of two Newcastle libraries, which were due to be merged on a new site. There was a feeling that:- *everything could be solved by the resources... The staff have the skills and the willingness is there, and I mean the communities see the library as a focus to go, and I think the only thing that is lacking is the buildings themselves and the resources aren't there. The buildings were OK for a library 25 years ago, but there just hasn't been the investment to provide the kind of service the library should be providing now.*

[Library staff, Newcastle]

Members of focus groups also mentioned the consequence of cuts in opening hours especially in relation to the feasibility of using the library as a homework centre. Many other issues were ultimately related to a lack of resources. These included limited space for private study and the demand for improved IT facilities. For instance, the focus group of local business people felt that:- *There’s absolutely masses of technical information which simply isn’t, even in terms of indirect access, in a place like Yeovil Library. ... If today, I’m hoping to find a piece of technical information, I wouldn’t go to the library, I’d go on the Internet. But it’s very easy to get information off the Internet in a way that was never possible with any library that I was in, simply because of the electronic search engine. You simply type in half a dozen keywords and you’re there.*

[Focus group, Somerset]
At the same time:--
*a lot of people want to use that area of business directories that we’ve got there ...and they say ‘why have you got a ’94 one, when there’s a ’97 one out?’*

[Library staff, Somerset]

Library staff also mentioned strategies for reducing the impact of budgetary restrictions. These included, taking donated materials and, in Newcastle, seeking alternative funding for workshops and children’s activities. Another means of overcoming the problem, observed in both authorities, was simply for staff to work more hours than they were paid for. In Newcastle staff:--

*don’t have enough time behind the scenes for the day-to-day repair work and sorting and everything else, just the ordinary routines. Well, I know I shouldn’t, but I always work more than what I’m supposed to. If we didn’t come in extra, if we didn’t work extra ...we wouldn’t get the work done.*

[Library staff, Newcastle]

Similarly in Somerset:--

*We do manage it because we like the job, we’re proud of the library and we want to help people but it’s mighty difficult sometimes. I would like to have more time perhaps to have more contacts with groups and things like that, it’s being able to give people enough time ...as it is you work 26 hours but you don’t - you work 30 hours ...*

[Library staff, Somerset]

Many local library staff, in both authorities, felt that the cost of this pressure on their time was their lack of ability to forge contact with the wider community and promote the library. A member of professional staff referred to the large amount of public contact time:--

*We actually have an incredibly high public profile, so we don’t get off the counter very often to do other things we want to do. We can’t prepare so much for promotions as we would like. So things tend to be a bit ad hoc - it’s Adult Learners’ Week, we’ll quickly throw something together; it’s National Libraries Week, half way though the week and you’ve got something going such as ‘computers don’t byte’*

[Library staff, Somerset]

However, many staff felt they had insufficient time to promote the library to the wider community. In particular they felt that they did not have enough:

*hours or any time to get out and spread the word of the library... Anything else is done in your own time... I’m involved in the community ...so I tend to advertise the library through the other things that I do and I get a reaction from people that way.*

[Library staff, Somerset]

**Awareness and marketing**

Awareness, or more correctly lack of awareness, of services emerged again and again as a factor influencing the effectiveness of libraries. Some respondents were unaware of basic library facilities. One for example:--

*... didn’t know about being able to reserve books until I’d been using the library for quite a while. I would go in looking around, not find the book I wanted and come away*
again. I would go back several times before I realised that you could actually ask for books. [There were no posters] that I saw.

[Focus group, Newcastle]

This lack of knowledge of the library organisation was, for this individual, particularly significant in that, once he was aware of the reservations system, it proved very useful in providing the material he needed to advance his educational and career development.

The lack of library awareness on the part of farmers needing information about Set Aside has already been referred to. (see p.49) They were prepared to pay solicitors to find this information for them ‘because they didn’t know where else to go.’ (Library staff, Somerset) Similarly, for a hospital plant engineer needing a company address, the library was a last resort. In the words of one staff respondent:-

Finally, somebody will say ‘why don’t you try the library?’ Our public profile is not sufficiently high. If it were higher, we would be inundated.

[Library staff, Newcastle]

Some members of staff felt, that elected members were not sufficiently aware of the value of library resources. One respondent gave the example of:-

a chap who’s publishing something about Bewick, who does research, comes from London, uses all the big libraries... So he’s very knowledgeable ... He said that this is the best provincial collection in the country. [He was] combing through stuff, not the special collection... just from the catalogue ... and he said there is material in here, that is not in the British Library ...and there it is turning to dust on our shelves. I would really like to get that over to the politicians.

[Library staff, Newcastle]

On the other hand, politicians observed that the library is:-

... something no one has ever lobbied me about except a student asked me, last Saturday, why aren’t there more books in the library when we need to study because our college hasn’t got any, and that’s the first time anyone’s ever mentioned it to me. The answer to that is that I don’t think it is seen as one of the high profile services of the local authority. I bet if you asked most people they wouldn’t know who ran libraries, they probably think they’re like the British Museum or something.

[Elected member, Somerset]

There appeared to be a consensus that business information resources, in particular, were under-used, although the perspectives of staff and politicians were different:-

We are not hugely staffed ... we are all aware that we have information that we don’t think of quickly enough to exploit. ..We have journals and magazines and periodicals that we take that are not indexed and they would be an invaluable resource, if we had time to index them. Where we do, where the Marketing Advice Centre for example, index a range of our periodicals, the things like Grocer and Draper’s Record and all the things that they index for marketing-type articles, they are hugely used. Now there are other materials that we could equally well exploit, and that is one of the areas we know we can’t do. We know for example that some of the marketing report series that we take have very good articles in about companies.

[Library staff, Newcastle]
Essentially similar points about the awareness of reference services, and especially business information resources, were made in Somerset by those with an interest in the area. One local politician, for example, was:

...not sure how much marketing actually goes into libraries. But to the degree that it does, I'd be pretty sure that most of that is on the more conventional library services, and, up to a point, the more consumer kinds of things, like in some libraries now they have videos and some have got CD-ROMs. I really don’t sense a tremendous amount of effort going into letting people realise the wealth of reference that there is around. I don’t have the impression of it being ‘sold’ (in quotes) as hard as the rest of the library service.

[Elected member, Somerset]

Another respondent told us:-

I’ve just got, in Bridgwater, this mental image of a particular row of market reports (and they’re brilliant market reports, and I was thrilled to find they were there ...) but I wonder of they sit there week by week, with only one or two of them getting looked at. ...I suspect from the times I’ve been there, that there’s a whole load of stuff that if it gets looked at once a year, you know, it’s been a busy year for that particular volume.

[Business Link, Somerset]

Ours is not the first, and is unlikely to be the last, piece of research to highlight the importance of marketing for the effective delivery of library services. Since the early fifties (Elliott, 1951) books and research reports have demonstrated the need for public librarians to promote and market their service but it seems that the message still need repeating.

Library rules and culture

For some non-users, the image of the library as ‘not for them’ was a very powerful one. Their perception of library rules and culture - usually based on past, not recent experience - was a negative one, for instance in terms of the attitude of staff and concern about fines and, among parents, having to pay for books lost or damaged by children. (See p.64 above) These experiences are strikingly similar to those reported in Hillingdon Public Libraries over 20 years ago, where it was found that:-

‘The “atmosphere” of libraries was frequently mentioned unfavourably, particularly in terms of silence and problems that this gave rise to, such as trying to take young children.’ (Totterdell and Bird, 1976, p. 125) Now as then it is, in a sense, irrelevant to consider the accuracy of these public perceptions, as ‘they are always “real” to the person who holds them, at that given point in time.’ (Totterdell and Bird, 1976, p.126)

Structure

The place of the library in the local authority structure is another issue that has been the subject of debate for a long period of time. (e.g. Lomer & Rogers 1983, White 1993)
In Somerset, the overall structure of the Council was described as vertical. According to one elected member the Chief Executive has been asked to:

*undertake a review of structure because something that we are conscious about is that the structure of the County Council is very vertical. You have the education service, you have the library service, social services etcetera and ... that’s the way things tend to run. What we want to do is look at ways in which we can make it more corporate because we strongly suspect that more opportunities will open up if types of activity are gathered together.*

[Elected member, Somerset]

In this context, the potential of libraries could be further exploited because:

*If you think about that statistic that half of the population of the county belonging to the library service and using it, and taking out quite a high number of books each year, then I think a library can often be a magnet in a village or a town and a hub around which other things can operate.*

[Elected member, Somerset]

In Newcastle, the library service forms part of a larger community and leisure directorate. It was seen by elected members:

*... as the gateway to a lot of information.... It also provides the gatekeeper service as well, in that what it should be doing is enabling access to this information. There is a very great will at the highest level of the authority for this to take place... It’s the difficulty at the ground level, at the local library level, of getting that integration. I think it’s a communications, educational problem to reassure people that because they’re doing different things, it’s not a threat to their employment... The concerns are expressed by people who are at the delivery end of the service who perhaps are not included in the decisions.*

[Elected member, Newcastle]

This view was endorsed by a member of staff at the ‘delivery end.’ She thought that:

*... it would be good to sort of be more involved with other groups in the community. If I didn’t read the posters that come in, I wouldn’t really know a lot about what’s going on... (with) the wider community, voluntary groups and things like that. I know there’s like youth clubs in the area, only because I read the posters. It would be nice if the people from the youth clubs would come down and see us and what we have to offer and what we could maybe do for them.*

[Library staff, Newcastle]

Another felt that they:

*...were in a huge and diverse department ...I think [libraries] are lost within that - [elected members are] much keener on the baths because there’s a higher appreciation profile (lots of people swimming up and down), and they can see it’s hugely used in a simple way.*

[Library staff, Newcastle]

There was also some evidence that staff in other parts of the local authority were not fully aware of what was provided by the library. This had resulted in a duplication of services within the authority. One member of reference staff had identified a
duplication of environmental information between the City Library and the Members Service Library. Action could be taken to overcome this, but due to:-

...lack of time, we can’t be as proactive. I would love to have time to index and send stuff up to the Members’ Services Library, the kind of information that we have, that I feel would be useful to their Councillors.

[Library staff, Newcastle]

The relationship with local politicians

In Newcastle, elected members, as a group, saw the library as making a contribution to education, where the libraries were generally seen as supporting the work of schools. However, they generally felt that it made little contribution to the work of other Council Departments. At the same time there was a cluster of positive views about the potential of the library in the broader context of the local authority. A fairly typical view was that:-

[The library is] our neutral interface point, as opposed to the benefits office, say, the housing office - which is always negatively perceived, I think, you know, you've got a complaint about your drains being blocked or because you've got a benefits claim. Then, our interface with our charge payers tends to be negative. Libraries provide an opportunity for that exchange between local authority and charge payers to be on a much higher level and a much greater level to the benefit of both client groups.

[Elected member, Newcastle]

In Newcastle there was the paradox that although members tended to see libraries relatively low in terms of the key issues in their ward, at the same time many of them saw an enlarged possible future role:-

I’m in love with the theory - or the potential of the library service, but what is delivered in Newcastle isn’t acceptable to me and I want to see it changed, and I hope it is going to change over the next couple of years, because I think it can contribute a lot more than it does.

[Elected member, Newcastle]

Another politician felt that:-

it should more have more of a community focus, in that it is a resource, and it has space, and it has rooms, which could be accessed and used by the local community, and the local community should be encouraged to use that as a resource... It should have access to things like the Web ... where people can go in and access other information from that point. The very fact that people would be going in to that resource would then enable other facilities that the library provides to be there.

[Elected members, Newcastle]

The library staff, however, asked:-

How can you possibly sell your service and make sure it’s relevant if you don’t have the informed Councillors referring their own contacts? You would like to think the Economic Development Committee [is] saying ‘I hope you’re aware of the excellent resource you have in the Business Library in the Central Library.’ .... You can’t ever imagine, our Councillors, it regularly occurring to them that the Library, that they are responsible for, can do that sort of thing, can actually support their business. I don’t
think that they actually think that we do support their aims and objectives, automatically, all the time, every day, because of this lack of communication, this lack of awareness of their part.
[Library staff, Newcastle]

In this sense, it was possible to make a comparison between the views of politicians and those of library staff. Several elected members referred to officers’ reluctance to take on new of roles in terms of libraries becoming ‘one-stop shops’ for Council services. Library staff seemed (understandably, in the financial climate), primarily concerned with protecting services. A particular example of this was in areas of Newcastle where City Challenge funding - which covers free reservations and audio-visual items - was expect to finish in March 1997. In the event, these free services are being continued.

In Somerset the new Taunton Library was clearly seen as a major local issue:
I think that our administration over the last four years would have been seen to have failed if we hadn’t built the new library in Taunton because it was an old, cramped, unsuitable premises... There was quite a controversy when we decided to spend the money on it because ... and we had no money to spend on lots of other things and it was opportunistic to get the building when it was available, and I think if we hadn’t done it then there would have been a general perception that the county town of Somerset had one of the worst libraries in Somerset. Yeovil had a new one not that long ago and Taunton hadn’t and I think that would have been seen as a failure. I think that was a political issue and we certainly will use it in the coming election.
[Elected member, Somerset]

An even stronger indication of the impact of the library was the reaction to press speculation about closure:-
[T]he biggest uproar in my time as a councillor for that area was when a couple of months ago the newspapers suggested that the library was to be closed, and I have never known such outrage. ...it’s only equivalent to the ban on hunting as an issue.
[Elected member, Somerset]

This kind of view was repeated with mobile services, where many respondents said that there was an acceptance of, say, a reduction from a fortnightly to a three-weekly service, but adamantly opposition to total withdrawal of the service altogether.

A striking aspect of the Somerset case study was staff’s concern to be neutral. They constantly emphasised that the library service could only refer people to other services, not advise them. This contrasted with Newcastle where there was an awareness of the Council’s social objectives, and a conscious effort to deliver services to meet these priorities. One member of staff offered a particular personal slant on the neutrality issue and the effect she perceived it as having on the library service’s profile within the local authority:-

We are supposed to be neutral as a body we’re not supposed to support any particular party but I tend to think it would be nice if one of the particular parties supported us, I don’t mind which one! We always get tagged on the end of things, education always gets loads of support and we’re seen as a sideline from education and not as part of it, not that I think we should be incorporated into it, but I think people should shout a bit
more. There was a threatened closure in the recent round of cuts and local people and the local council got together and petitioned and wrote letters and this sort of thing which is nice. [Library staff, Somerset]

This was however a minority view. A much more typical view would be that the library service should not attempt to make ‘political’ capital out of its popularity with the public. One respondent felt that although:

[The library service] is the closest county department to the members of the public. ... County Council services are judged by the state of the libraries and the response of the libraries. I think we are a barometer ... I don’t think we should be in the position to make any political mileage out of it. The general public are extremely supportive and if .... there’s any danger then they will fight.
[Library staff, Somerset]

Politicians demonstrated some knowledge of this public support. Even if, it’s not a service I’ve a great deal of focus on, it is recognised as...
an invaluable resource. It’s one of those things where you don’t know what you’ve got till you haven’t got it, till it’s gone and then it’s too late. ...
[Elected member, Newcastle]

Crime as a barrier

Two issues outside the immediate control of library managers were also identified as having an effect on the impact of the library service. In one Newcastle location it was felt that:-

[The library] is a crime issue itself. The building itself, because it’s in an isolated position and a lot of my constituents, particularly women and elderly people, wouldn’t use the library in the winter, late on because it has to be accessed through a park.
[Elected member, Newcastle]

Another Newcastle library’s secluded position - where ‘people wouldn’t be able to see if you were getting attacked’ - was seen, by focus group participants as a factor affecting its use. The fear of crime in this area was revealed by one focus group discussion, where one participant said, ‘I wouldn’t come down here in the dark’, and another responded, ‘some people are frightened to come down in the daylight, never mind the dark.’ Such perceptions were confirmed by library staff. Crime, or the fear of crime, also affected what services were provided. For example although elected members agreed that there was a need for more free or low-cost IT facilities, these were not provided because past experience suggested that these would provide a target of criminals. One member of staff said:-

We did have [a photocopier], but there was a break-in and it was stolen... In this sort of area... if there's anything attractive in your building, you're more or less just inviting them to jemmy the door open, and come in and help themselves.
[Library staff, Newcastle]
Participants in Newcastle focus groups tended to agree with staff that if more IT facilities were provided, then the library would be a target for criminals:*

*I think we all agree that youngsters would be willing to learn via ... computers, but if you keep that kind of equipment [in the library] it wouldn't last a week.*

[Focus group, Newcastle]

Crime, and the fear of crime, has been identified in other work as a barrier to service effectiveness. Participants in the recent Leisure Future Search Conference, held in Sheffield, observed that the lack of community safety was a form of social exclusion and emphasised the role of the City Council in providing a safe and attractive environment. (Leisure Services Sheffield, 1997)

**Location**

It has already been noted that in some parts of Newcastle, the isolated location of some libraries meant that they were associated with crime and the fear of crime. One library in particular was seen as a victim of the redevelopment of the seventies; it had, in the words of a member of library staff, ‘been left out on a limb.’ Focus group participants pointed out that when the library was built it would have been surrounded by terraced housing. However, now, its distance from the main housing area made it impractical for older people to use. It should be added that these two particular libraries were scheduled for merger onto a more central site.

In Somerset, four of the libraries had moved to new sites in recent years, suggesting an awareness of the importance of a library’s location. This emerged, in particular, with the interviews with members of the Libraries, Museums and Records Committee. One member, for instance, emphasised the need to be opportunistic when looking for a suitable site on which to relocate a library:*

*The position of a new library, the siting, is absolutely vital and we normally have to grab at an opportunity when it comes along.*

[Elected member, Somerset]

In Somerset, factors around location as a barrier to impact appear to have been largely overcome. Focus group participants, in one of the areas where the library had been relocated commented that the new library was in a ‘more central’ location. The library’s new position was also safer as the old library had been on a dangerous road and was described as ‘a horrid place to have to walk to.’

The importance of such safety issues, also arose in a study of the impact of recent library closures in Sheffield (Reilly, 1997.) This work focused on the impact on children and the following comment, taken from a survey of parents views about the closure of a library indicates the importance of safety issues:

“The children could previously go to the library on their own - now they can’t. Using car is bad for children’s independence, health and environment and teaches them that cars are good, walking is bad! Using car does not help to teach children road safety...”

“Local libraries are better near homes, where children may walk to them on their own sometimes.” (Reilly, 1997, p.52)
This quote is illustrative of how a longer journey to the library can have a potential impact on children’s independence and self-reliance, as well as the more obvious safety implications. Again, as this particular respondent points out there are also potential environmental impacts dependent on whether a library is readily accessible by foot or regular public transport. Our findings in Newcastle and Somerset tend to confirm those of the recent report on London’s libraries that nearest is best. (Burton et al, 1996, p. 43)

We would argue that in assessing the social impact of the library that the factors indicated above must be taken into account. These management considerations form an integral part of the practical framework for understanding included in the next chapter.

**Summary**

The effect of financial restrictions underpinned all the other findings. Effects included inadequate buildings, lack of investment in appropriate IT applications and out of date materials. One consequence of the resulting pressure on staff time, identified by many staff, was that work was necessarily reactive in nature. It is therefore unsurprising that lack of public awareness of library services and policies was identified as a major factor affecting the library’s impact.

For some users, there were still significant psychological barriers to using the library, because of negative perceptions of library rules, culture and atmosphere.

In both authorities, it was felt that potential of the library service was reduced because of a lack of integration with the wider organisation. In Somerset, joint working was seen as being hindered by the vertical structure of the authority. In Newcastle, a need to engage service delivery with broader Council priorities was identified by politicians. Following from this it appeared that there was the potential for library services to have a higher profile within the authority, although closure of libraries and, in Somerset, replacement of inadequate library buildings were seen as significant local political issues.

Two specific factors affecting the impact of libraries in specific locations related to the location of the libraries, and crime and the fear of crime.
8. Conclusions

On the basis of the data presented in this report it is reasonable to claim that public libraries help individuals and communities ‘get started’ and ‘keep going’ on a wide range of activities. In addition, sometimes with the help of other agencies, public libraries help advance and maintain individual and community development. The recognised and established functions of the public library in terms of education, information, culture, and leisure, remain important. In particular respondents suggest that the public library is a significant resource for school children and adult learners and an important source of information on careers and training opportunities.

In short, libraries enrich the lives of many people. The social audit technique makes that enriching process visible. Our social audits of libraries in Newcastle and Somerset suggest that library use improves the life chances of individuals, in terms of education and job opportunities. Moreover the provision of public library services helps promote social cohesion and community confidence. Library services help foster connections between groups and communities. Respondents described them as somewhere that people meet, interact, and share common interests. In Somerset this applied to mobile as well as static libraries. In both the authorities that we investigated libraries are perceived as, ‘part of the cement in the social fabric.’

Public libraries are seen as community landmarks that reinforce community identity. In particular we found that local studies services play a significant part in sustaining community identity. For example in Newcastle, this record of community life was especially important given the decline in the industries that have traditionally help shape the local regional identity. For many people public libraries are, ‘the heart of the community.’ Our respondents, including local politicians saw the local library as having a symbolic value that was well regarded by non-users as well as users.

I think that people see [the library] as a really important local landmark whether they use it or not, and I think if it was withdrawn it would have a terrible effect on people’s morale... The impact of it is that it’s... the only thing that people can point to and say that’s the County Council which isn’t a school ... and in that sense I think it’s an important presence of the Council.
Elected member, Somerset

The importance of the library is sometimes reinforced by the lack of other facilities. A focus group respondent said that:-

This was a wonderful community when it first started off ... and now this community’s neglected very sadly ... If they take [the library] away they’ve took everything from us.’
[Focus group, Newcastle]

Libraries also have a ‘social and caring’ role. Use of the public library helps build confidence in individuals and groups. Support for this view is provided by the experience of respondent who said:-

I know the library helped me a lot when I went to college... I never went to school when I was a kid, but I went to college ... and I just learned a hell of a lot at the library.
At one time I wouldn’t talk to you like this because I couldn’t, but with using the library as much as ... I did, it just brought me out you know and that’s a good thing as well. [Focus group, Newcastle]

The library can also help individuals, especially older people, overcome the problems of social isolation and loneliness. There is also evidence, particularly from Somerset, that the presence of a library helps sustain the viability of local shopping centres.

Most modern statements of library purpose suggest that it is the role of the public library to provide equality of access to the wealth of information, ideas and works of imagination. We would argue that managing a public service is about managing social equity. Equity is also at the core of the objectives of both the local authorities in this study. Equity therefore needs to be assessed as part of the evaluation of the public library service. However in its recent report, Due for renewal (1997), the Audit Commission refused to add equity to its three Es. The Commission is still only concerned with that which is measurable and, as a result, tends to ignore a great deal of what is important. Their report, for instance, pays little attention to factors such as the ultimate value of reading, literacy, information, and knowledge.

The data from our social audit suggest that the library is perceived as providing equity for older people, those with disabilities and people from ethnic minorities. The equity impact is far less strongly felt by lone parents and unemployed young people. In addition, some groups, especially lone parents tended not to welcome being identified as a priority group.

In this report we have attempted to evaluate library services in a new way. Rather than relying on outputs, such as the number of books issued, we have examined the outcomes, the impact and value of public libraries. Many of our conclusions are based on qualitative, if you like anecdotal, evidence. This is real world data that has been obtained in a rigorous way. We make no apology for our approach, and if there is one message that we want readers to take away from our report it is that, qualitative data, properly gathered, are valid evidence and that it should be treated as such by politicians and professionals alike.

In Chapter Two we have tried to explain our methodology in some detail and would welcome comments on it. The use of participants' accounts to explain causes and consequences of actions has a long history in the social sciences. As long ago as 1928 Thomas (1928, p.572) wrote ‘if men define situations as real they are real in their consequences.’ Analysing the way 'men' define situations can help us understand the situation better. We believe that maxim can also be applied to LIS.

Today it is recognised that we need rather more sophisticated approaches to assessing the value of public libraries than simply counting book issues. We argue that the social audit technique reveals individual and community experiences in using the library service. Such statements of experience put flesh on the dry bones of statistical measures. Researchers in the social sciences often talk of the importance of looking at data and telling a story. Our respondents in Newcastle and Somerset have provided us with many stories, and we have shared many of these with the readers of this report.
Making use of the findings

For the reasons set out in Chapter Two we believe that our findings are valid and that it is possible to apply them ‘to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions.’ (Patton, 1987, p.168.) We hope that that the methods used in this study will be used by staff in public libraries, and indeed other public and voluntary sector information organisations to help assess the impact of the services they provide and to enable them to identify the reasons for their success or failure. A social audit can, help library managers monitor and guide the service, improve the way the value of the service is reported to policy makers, enable stakeholders to make a judgement on the service, and affect organisational behaviour. In short it can help improve the social performance of the public library.

We are however resistant to claim that we have developed a model for the evaluation of public library services because as Smith (1996) suggests there is a:-

‘... need for very careful modelling before drawing any conclusions on the efficacy of a particular management team or programme. In practice, it is almost always impossible to measure all the relevant variables, and it must be accepted that the analysis is both incomplete and partisan, in the sense that a particular set of stakeholders' values are being used. It is important that the limitations of an outcome measurement scheme are made explicit.’

(Smith, 1996, p. 13)

Moreover, as we stated in our original proposal, we do not believe that an objective quantification of concern or social need is possible. However it is, we believe, practical to develop a framework for an informed value judgement. The success or failure of this, in practice, will be influenced by the research culture of the organisations concerned and the available research infrastructure and experience, in for instance running focus groups.

Figure 2 (overleaf) represents our current thoughts on this framework for such an informed value judgement.

This shows how the starting point for the audit is the social objectives of the organisation, in our case those of the two local authorities. There is a two way relationship between these objectives and the needs of the community to be served. The supply of services to meet these needs has to be set in context. It will be affected by such issues as government policy, the economy, and the environment.

Library organisations have traditionally collected supply indicators, such as the number of staff and the size of the bookfund. However, the relationship between supply and output is affected by a range of management issues and the pattern of service delivery. As with supply indicators, output indicators have been regularly used by library authorities. They are not without value but we would argue that they only tell part of the public library story.
Figure 2: Framework for an informed value judgement

SOCIAL OBJECTIVES OF LOCAL AUTHORITY
  e.g. Council policy, mission statements etc.

NEEDS ANALYSIS
  e.g. Community profiles, marketing activities

CONTEXT
  e.g. Central Government Policy
  Economy
  Environment
  Organizational Culture

SUPPLY INDICATORS
  Number of staff
  Bookfund etc.

Service Patterns
  e.g. Centralised
  Decentralised

Management
  e.g. Style
  Culture
  Structure
  Quality
  Marketing

OUTPUT INDICATORS
  Book Issues
  Number of visits
  Reference Enquiries etc.

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES
  (Getting started)
  Child reads       People meet

FINAL OUTCOMES
  Community Confidence
  Child becomes employed       Social Cohesion

VARIABLES

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Data on the intermediate and final outcomes of library use are obtained by the qualitative techniques described in Chapter Two. The relationship between the two is complex and we are not claiming that the progress from (say) a child reading and becoming employed, and people meeting and social cohesion depends on the public library alone. There may be many other variables in a community, or a person’s life experience, that make a contribution to the final outcome. However what is clear from our data is that the library plays a significant part. We are not convinced that much is to be gained from turf wars, particularly between different sections of a local authority, over which department does precisely what.

Using our framework has enabled us to identify some of the matches, mismatches and differences between social objectives of local authorities, and the intermediate and final outcomes of the library services they provide. It can be seen from the discussion above that the library services do, to a very great extent, advance the basic social objectives of their two local authorities. In Newcastle, the library service carries out a range of what we have characterised as social and caring roles. These are consistent with the community orientation of the City Council’s policies. In Somerset, the library service’s own objectives focused on what we have termed the ‘established’ roles. Although the library staff showed little awareness of the County Council’s core objectives, there were still many aspects of library policy which were entirely consistent with these objectives, for instance in the widespread commitment to promoting access for people with disabilities. Moreover, individual library staff made decisions based on their own interpretations of what was ‘fair’ (notably on fines, but also, with regard to free photocopying for school children and local policies, which provided free videos for people with certain disabilities). It can be argued that such local implementation represents an unconscious application of the Council’s policy of equitable access to services. The caring role, especially in respect of older people, had a strong impact in both authorities. In Newcastle, it had, in one respondent’s words, been ‘legitimised’ by the authorities’ social objectives. It also existed in Somerset although it was not ‘legitimised’ by any formal council policy.

These findings have and will be discussed with the politicians and professionals responsible for the service and the reasons for the matches, mismatches and differences analysed in terms of the various components of the audit. In particular we believe that some of the management and other issues discussed in Chapter Seven can help and or hinder public libraries in their pursuit of social objectives. Managers, armed with this information, can then take appropriate actions to maximise the matches and minimise the mismatches. The process has also enabled us to identify differences between objectives and outcomes. That is to say there may be beneficial outcomes, which may not have been previously identified as library, or even local authority, objectives. The role of the public library in developing social cohesion and building individual and community confidence may be examples of such benefits. At the same time the technique has enabled us to identify unintended disbenefits that can sometimes result from social objectives.

Working within the constraints of the present project we have only been able to involve a limited number of stakeholders. The perceptions of a greater variety of people may well have identified additional perspectives. At the same time further social audits
Based on a particular service rather than geographical areas may have provided extra viewpoints. That said, we do feel justified in suggesting that the process we have described is one that can be used and developed by professionals and policy makers. It is not yet perfect but to quote Blake et al (1976):-

‘Waiting for perfection ... in the field ... is like ‘waiting for Godot’ .... Professional managers need and deserve pioneering and ... bold experiments if they are to confront today’s and tomorrow’s social problems and pressures with any degree of success and humaneness.’

We hope that public librarians and their policy makers will follow the lead of their colleagues in Newcastle and Somerset and participate in some more pioneering and bold experiments.
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Executive Summary

The research had three objectives.

1. To develop a tool for measuring the social impact of library activities in relation to objectives

2. To investigate the social and economic impact of public libraries.

3. To investigate how far a library's activities, in practice, contribute towards the achievement of its social objectives

The research premise used a 'social process audit' (as described by Blake et al, 1976) to evaluate the social impact of libraries. The basic approach was to cross-check the views and perceptions of selected stakeholders to ascertain how far these objectives have been achieved. The key stakeholders for this study were:-

- elected members;
- library staff;
- groups of library users and non-users.

The report evaluates library services by examining the outcomes, the impact and value of public libraries through social audits carried out in the City of Newcastle upon Tyne and the County of Somerset.

The research findings are organised around the following key themes.

1. The established functions of the library
2. The social and caring roles of the library
3. The economic impact of the library
4. The equity impact
5. Management and other issues affecting impact.

The data show that the library’s established roles (culture, education, reading and literacy, and information) have an enduring relevance. We found that:-

- The library is a centre of cultural life.
- Library services support both adults’ and children’s educational needs. These are largely joint impacts with educational providers, and it is suggested that the library might be more important in an area where there are fewer educational resources.
- The educational impact of the library service is, however, restricted by financial factors.
- The library supports the development of children’s reading skills.
- The library is a suitable ‘non-stigmatised’ place for adult literacy classes.
- The library remains important as a source of free reading material, especially for economically inactive people.
- The impact of library’s information provision is influenced by the availability and accessibility of other provision. In Newcastle, other providers have a key role in local information provision. In Somerset, many libraries act as a general noticeboard and information point for the local community.
- There is a ‘contingency’ value to the library’s information provision.
In addition to these traditional functions the library also has a social and caring role.

- From using the library individuals’ gain new skills and confidence. It can therefore play a significant part in personal development.
- The library is a place where people meet and share interests, being described as ‘part of the cement in the social fabric.’
- Library provision promotes greater understanding between different cultural groups.
- The library service supports community groups and activities and builds confidence in individuals which might then have an effect on the wider community.
- The library sustains local identity by developing and maintaining community self esteem, especially in areas which lacked other local facilities and resources.
- The library has a beneficial effect on psychological health and well-being, especially for isolated and vulnerable elderly and disabled people.

The economic impact of the library is more difficult to ‘capture’, but the data suggest that:-

- Library services are a valuable resource to new start-ups and other small businesses, especially when delivered in collaboration with partner organisations who could increase awareness of what was available.
- The library is also an important source of information for those seeking jobs and training opportunities.
- In Somerset at least, the library supports the economic vitality of town and village centres, by acting as a magnet which encouraged people to use local shops and services.

The concept of equity, the fourth E, is present in the delivery of library and information services. The data show that:-

- The library services are administered fairly. Isolated examples where equity has had to be counter-balanced with considerations of economic efficiency.
- Equity of access is provided through designated services and policies for people with disabilities, but there is some demand for a more user-focused approach.
- Equality of geographical access, an issue in Somerset, is achieved by provision which covered the smallest and most isolated rural communities.
- In Newcastle, economic equity is achieved through policies directed at priority groups and areas. In Somerset, cost factors sometimes deter use of the library.
- The library is perceived as providing equity for most older people, those with disabilities and people from ethnic minorities. A sense of equity is felt less strongly by lone parents and unemployed young people.

A number of management and other related issues, that can affect the social impact of library services, are identified.

- The effect of financial restrictions is a recurring theme which runs through all the findings.
- Lack of public awareness of library services and policies affects the nature and extent of the library’s impact.
- Take-up of library services is affected by perceptions of library rules, culture and atmosphere.
- The potential of the library service is diminished by a lack of integration with the wider local authority.
The location of library and fear of crime may also affect the impact of library services.

These findings are largely derived from qualitative, often anecdotal, evidence. The key message of this study is that qualitative data, properly gathered, are valid evidence and it should be treated as such by both politicians and professionals. The social audit technique can be used by public library staff, to assess the impact of the services they provide. The data suggest that public libraries enrich the lives of many people. The social audit technique makes that enriching process visible.
Appendix A: Steering Group

Guy Daines, Head of Professional Practice, Library Association

Rob Froud, County Librarian, Somerset

James Kennedy / Josie Dixon, Audit Commission

Charles Landry, Director, Comedia

Linda Norris, R&D Section, Newcastle upon Tyne City Council

Sanjiv Lingayah, New Economics Foundation

Isobel Thompson / Barbara Buckley, Research Analyst, British Library

Michael Young, Principal Librarian, Newcastle upon Tyne
Appendix B: City of Newcastle upon Tyne corporate policy priorities

- Educational achievement and raising standards.
- Anti-poverty: services directed toward or of particular benefit or relevance to disadvantaged or deprived groups and areas.
- Tackling youth unemployment.
- Economic social and cultural regeneration of communities.
- Increasing local employment opportunities through the economic regeneration strategy.
- Community safety: reducing crime and the fear of crime.

NEWCASTLE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICE CONTRIBUTION TO CORPORATE POLICY PRIORITIES

Contribution to all priorities
Public libraries provide gateways to public information and Council and other services. Public Libraries have a presence at the heart of local communities which is seen as important by members of those communities.

Educational achievement and raising standards
A range of library services to schools.
Homework facilities, and facilities for study and research.
Supporting higher, further and adult education opportunities through public information and providing facilities for community organisations in the adult education area.
Providing careers support and information through the Education Guidance Unit and the Virtual Careers Centre.
Contributing to literacy initiatives.
Providing a gateway to educational opportunities, both formal and informal.

Anti-poverty: Services directed toward or of particular benefit or relevance to disadvantaged or deprived groups and areas
Providing public information services on poverty related areas, e.g. benefits; homelessness.
Providing free audio-visual loans in the Inner West Area.
Reductions in fees and charges through the Priority Card.

Tackling youth unemployment
Providing public information on employment opportunities, employment rights etc.

Economic, social and cultural regeneration of local communities
Public Libraries as gateways to information, IT, cultural activities, and Council and other services.
Public Libraries as valued centres and focal points of community life - the original community drop-in centre.
Libraries provide facilities and support for local cultural activities.
Encouraging participation and awareness of cultural activities, and encountering reading and the value of books as cultural resources.
Providing resources to support cultural life of communities.

**Increasing local employment opportunities through the economic regeneration strategy**
Providing public information on employment opportunities, employment rights etc.
Providing an access and referral point to Council and other services.
Providing information and advice to small businesses and new start-ups through the Business Information Gateway, Marketing Advice Centre and Patents Advice Centre.

**Community safety: Reducing crime and the fear of crime**
Providing public information services on crime prevention and victim support agencies.
Appendix C: Somerset County Council core principles

Somerset County Council aims:

1. To make sure that decisions are made at the appropriate democratic level within the County.
2. To encourage active citizenship by keeping the public informed, consulting them on priorities and involving them in the decision making process.
3. To consider the environment in everything we do.
4. To ensure that we provide services of the highest quality.
5. To ensure that our staff are well-trained, have job satisfaction and job security, adequate reward, flexible working practices and decent working conditions.
6. To provide as far as possible equitable access to all our citizens to service delivery, so that they are not handicapped by social, economic or other disadvantages.
7. To improve access to services especially in rural areas by decentralisation: for example, through a comprehensive network of One Stop Shops and use of other delivery points, such as Village Post Offices and Libraries.

OBJECTIVES OF SOMERSET LIBRARY SERVICE

The Libraries, Museums and Records Committee has approved the following mission statement for the library service.

(i) Education - to foster and provide means of self-development of the individual or group at whatever stage of education.
(ii) Information - to bring to the individual or group, accurate information quickly and in depth, particularly on topics of current concern.
(iii) Culture - to be one of the principal centres of cultural life.
(iv) Leisure - to play a part in encouraging the positive use of leisure.

(Somerset County Library Service, 1997)
Appendix D: Case study location, Newcastle

The **West City** is the most deprived ward in the city according to indicators such as unemployment, long-term illness and school staying on rates. The ward has a high proportion of lone parents and of children.

The picture in the adjacent ward of **Moorside** is more mixed in socio-economic terms, but is still significantly more deprived than the City average in terms of health and unemployment indicators. This ward is also mixed in terms of housing stock, with a high proportion of housing association and privately rented accommodation. Compared to the other wards, and to Newcastle generally, Moorside has large ethnic minority population.

Using unemployment as a measure again, **Sandyford** is much closer to the City average than the other three wards. One significant aspect of this ward is its high proportion of older people. Like Byker, it has a high proportion of purpose built flats.

Byker acts as a contrast to the other wards in its relative uniformity - in that it represents a planned redevelopment, with a high proportion of council housing. Again it’s significantly deprived by indicators like unemployment, car ownership and long-term illness. The ward has a high proportion of lone parents.
Appendix E: Case study location, Somerset

Taunton Deane

Taunton Deane Borough includes five County Council divisions based on Taunton itself, adjoined by two further relatively geographically compact divisions to the north and east. Two divisions are based on the secondary town of Wellington to the south-west. The most dispersed, rural divisions in Taunton Deane are Upper Tone to the west of Taunton (including Wiveliscombe), Lydeard Division (based on Bishop’s Lydeard) to the north west and Pitminster, to the south, covering much of the Blackdown Hills. Somerset County Council data suggests that there are pockets of deprivation in parts of Taunton and Wellington.

In addition to Taunton itself, there are libraries at Wellington, Wiveliscombe, Bishop’s Lydeard and Priorswood, the last being on an estate to the north of Taunton. Many outlying villages are served by mobile library services.

West Somerset

West Somerset comprises of five County Divisions, as listed below. The first three divisions could be described as a coastal strip. The remaining two cover much larger geographical areas.

Williton - Williton and Watchet and surrounding villages. Somerset County Council data suggests that there are areas of relative deprivation in certain district council wards.

Minehead - This consists of the town only, which has a very high retired population.
Dunster - the area surrounding Minehead, which also includes the village of Porlock. This area is again characterised by a very high retired population.
Dulverton - the Exmoor area.

Quantock - another almost entirely rural area. There are static libraries at Minehead, Williton, Watchet, Porlock and Dulverton.

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Appendix F: Interview guide for use with elected members and library staff, Newcastle

Question 1. (For politicians) To begin with I’d like to ask you to describe Newcastle to someone visiting it for the first time.

Prompt: not only physical description, but impression, image etc.

Question 2. (For politicians) What are your priorities for the City?
(For librarians) What are your priorities for the library service in Newcastle?

Question 3. Having identified these priorities (question 2.) how have these been reflected in council policy?

Question 4. In what ways (if any) has the library service contributed to these policies?

Supplementary questions (depending on the answer): If the library service has not contributed to these policies, how might it do so?
Or:- Could it do more to contribute to these policies?

Question 5. More specifically, what role (if any) do you think the library has played in tackling individual issues, such as: (prompt)

a) unemployment?
 b) crime and community safety?
 c) racism and racial harassment?
 d) poverty?
 e) the regeneration of the inner city? (Prompt: e.g. the City’s anti-poverty strategy; improving the environment, achieving the aims of the Accessible Cities and City Challenge schemes).
(Additional prompts according to the response to question 4.)

Supplementary questions (depending on the answer): If the library service has not contributed to tackling these issues, how might it do so?
Or:- Could it do more to help tackle these issues?
(Prompt: Encourage specific examples.)

Question 6. What other benefits, if any, do you see resulting from the presence of the library service in the City?

Prompt: intangible as well as tangible benefits.

Prompt for contribution to training and education of residents and contribution to cultural and artistic life of the ward, if necessary.
Question 7. What groups has Newcastle City Council identified as being a priority?
(Check the following groups are identified)
   a) women
   b) children and young people
   c) lone parents
   d) ethnic minorities
   e) elderly people
   f) people with disabilities

Question 8. In what ways, if any, does the library benefit these groups?
Supplementary questions (depending on the answer): If the library service does not benefit a particular group or groups, how might it do so?
Or:- Could it do more to benefit these groups?
(Prompt: Encourage specific examples.)

Question 9. In the light of your previous answer, how relevant (or irrelevant) is the library service to the needs of: (prompt)
   a) women
   b) children and young people
   c) lone parents
   d) ethnic minorities
   e) elderly people
   f) people with disabilities

Prompt: - again, encourage examples.

Question 10. What (if any) are the constraints on providing the kinds of benefits that you have described above?

Question 11. What are the resource implications of the library service carrying out the kind of activities we’ve talked about? (prompt in relation to the following groups)
   a) women
   b) children and young people
   c) lone parents
   d) ethnic minorities
   e) elderly people
   f) people with disabilities

Prompt: - again, encourage examples.

Question 12. Does the existence of the local library help people make decisions on issues which affect them?
Prompt: - again, encourage examples (for instance, helping people to find out about planning or housing issues).
Supplementary questions (depending on answer): If the library does not play a role in this, how might the library contribute to this process?
Or: Could the library do more?

Question 13. How (if at all) does the work of the library service contribute to that of other council departments? (prompt: e.g. housing, social services, etc. Areas of co-operation, conflicting interests, etc.)

Question 14. How do you think the library is perceived by the various groups within the local community?
Prompt in relation to the following groups:-
   a) women
   b) children and young people
   c) lone parents
   d) ethnic minorities
   e) elderly people
   f) people with disabilities

Question 15. How have you, personally, gone about finding out how local people feel about the library and information service provided for them?
Prompt: Refer back to the groups listed above.

Question 16. Linked to this, what mechanisms are there within the local authority to find out how local people regard the library and information service?

Question 17. Have you identified any groups and individuals in the community currently not using, or underusing, the library service?

Question 18. (If any groups are mentioned) How have you responded to this?

Question 19. Have any groups or individuals in the community ever expressed dissatisfaction with the service that the library provides for them?

Question 20. (If anything is mentioned) What has the response to this been?

Question 21. What else could the library service in Newcastle do to help groups and individuals in the community? (prompt if necessary)

Question 22. What, if anything, would your ward / area lose if the local library closed?

Question 23. (For politicians) In what way, if at all, has the library service contributed to your own agenda for this ward?

(For librarians) Do you think the library service has contributed to the local political agenda?
(Additional question for librarians) Do you think Newcastle’s elected members have influenced ‘professional’ objectives?
Question 24. (For politicians) Following from the previous question, how would you describe your relationship with the library service?

(For librarians) Following from the previous question, how would you describe your relationship with the elected members?

Question 25. Finally, are there any other points or issues about the impact of the library service in your ward / area that you would like to raise which haven’t been covered so far?
Appendix G: Interview guide for use with elected members and library staff, Somerset

Question 1. (For politicians) To begin with I’d like to ask you to describe your ward to someone visiting it for the first time.

(For librarians) To begin with I’d like to ask you to describe the area, in which your library operates, to someone visiting it for the first time

Prompt: not only physical description, but impression, image etc.

Question 2. (For politicians) What are your priorities for the ward?
(For librarians) What are your priorities for the library service in this area?

Question 3. Having identified these priorities (question 2.) how have these been reflected in council policy?

Question 4. In what ways (if any) has the library service contributed to these policies?

Supplementary questions (depending on the answer): If the library service has not contributed to these policies, how might it do so?
Or:- Could it do more to contribute to these policies?

Question 5. More specifically, what role (if any) do you think the library has played in tackling individual issues, such as: (prompt)

- a) social and economic disadvantage
- b) lack of employment opportunities
- c) crime and community safety
- d) improving the environment

(Additional prompts according to the response to question 4.)

Supplementary questions (depending on the answer): If the library service has not contributed to tackling these issues, how might it do so?
Or:- Could it do more to help tackle these issues?
(Prompt: Encourage specific examples.)

Question 6. What other benefits, if any, do you see resulting from the presence of the library service in your ward / area?

Prompt: intangible as well as tangible benefits.

Prompt for contribution to training and education of residents and contribution to cultural and artistic life of the ward, if necessary.

Prompt also for improvements to access in terms of one-stop shops.
Question 7. The County Council is committed to equitable access to all citizens so they are not handicapped by social, economic or other disadvantage. How do you think this translates into library policy, if at all?

[i.e. Does the library support this aspiration in any way?]

Question 8. In what ways, if any, does the library benefit groups and individuals in the community?

Prompt for Business Community

Supplementary questions (depending on the answer): If the library service does not benefit a particular group or groups, how might it do so?
Or:- Could it do more to benefit these groups?
(Prompt: Encourage specific examples.)

Question 9. In the light of your previous answer, how relevant (or irrelevant) is the library service to the needs of groups and individuals

Prompt: - again, encourage examples.

Question 10. What (if any) are the constraints on providing the kinds of benefits that you have described above?

Question 11. What are the resource implications of the library service carrying out the kind of activities we’ve talked about? (prompt in relation to the groups mentioned)

Prompt: - again, encourage examples.

(Read) I would like to ask some more general questions about the role of the library service.

Question 12. Does the existence of the local library help people make decisions on issues which affect them?

Prompt: - again, encourage examples (for instance, helping people to find out about planning or housing issues).

Supplementary questions (depending on answer): If the library does not play a role in this, how might the library contribute to this process?
Or: Could the library do more?

Question 13. How (if at all) does the work of the library service contribute to that of other council departments? (prompt: e.g. housing, social services, etc. Areas of co-operation, conflicting interests, etc.)

Question 14. How do you think the library is perceived by the various groups within the local community?
Prompt in relation to the groups mentioned.

Question 15. How have you, personally, gone about finding out how local people feel about the library and information service provided for them? Prompt: Refer back to the groups listed above.

Question 16. Linked to this, what mechanisms are there within the local authority to find out how local people regard the library and information service?

Question 17. Have you identified any groups and individuals in the community currently not using, or underusing, the library service?

Question 18. (If any groups are mentioned) How have you responded to this?

Question 19. Have any groups or individuals in the community ever expressed dissatisfaction with the service that the library provides for them?

Question 20. (If anything is mentioned) What has the response to this been?

Question 21. What else could the library service in your ward / area do to help groups and individuals in the community? (prompt if necessary)

Question 22. What, if anything, would your ward / area lose if the local library closed?

Question 23. (For politicians) In what way, if at all, has the library service contributed to your own agenda for this ward? (For librarians) Do you think the library service has contributed to the local political agenda? (Additional question for librarians) Do you think Somerset’s elected members have influenced ‘professional’ objectives?

Question 24. (For politicians) Following from the previous question, how would you describe your relationship with the library service? (For librarians) Following from the previous question, how would you describe your relationship with the elected members for the local area?

Question 25. Finally, are there any other points or issues about the impact of the library service in your ward / area that you would like to raise which haven’t been covered so far?
Appendix H: Focus group interview guide, Newcastle

1. First of all, what does the presence of the library in [name of area] mean to you?

2. What value is the library to the local community!

3a). There are a number of problems and challenges facing communities. e.g. unemployment, crime. Do you consider that the library has any part to play in alleviating:

- unemployment
- poverty and disadvantage
- crime and feeling unsafe
- racism and racial harassment
- community regeneration

3b). Any examples from your own or other people’s experiences?

3c). Do you think the library could do more to deal with these sorts of issues?

4a). How do you think the library helps the following groups of people in the community?

- women
- lone parents
- children and young people
- elderly people
- people with disabilities
- ethnic minorities

4b). Any examples from your own or other people’s experiences?

5a). How do you think the library helps people in terms of education and training?

5b). Does the library contribute to lifelong learning? i.e. enabling people to learn after they have finished formal or full-time education?

5c). Does the library support children in doing homework?
   If YES - Do you consider that this is a valuable service that the library offers?
   If NO - Do you consider that this is a service that the library could usefully provide?
5d). Could the library do more to support the education and training of local people?
   If YES - in what way?

6a). Often we have to make decisions or find out about issues that affect us which affect us or our local community e.g. housing or planning issues, where particular
groups meet in the local area meet e.g. play groups, lunch clubs, who to vote for in elections.

How does the library help you consider these matters?

6b). Any examples from your own or other people’s experiences?

6c). Do you think the library could do more to help you in making decisions and finding out information?

7a). What most encourages, or discourages, you from using the library?

7b). What changes to the library would encourage you to use it more often?

(prompt if necessary re any problem with access)

7c). If the opening hours of the library were increased would you be more inclined to use it / use it more often?

8a). What, if anything, would you, as an individual, or the community in general, lose if the local library closed?

8b). If in order to protect the library in the local community extra funding was needed, where should this funding come from?

8c). Would you be willing to pay more Council Tax?
     If so, how much would you be prepared to pay if it was guaranteed that the extra money would go to the library service?

9). Are there any other points or issues about the library service in the area that you would like to raise which have not been covered so far?
Appendix I: Focus group interview guide, Somerset

1. First of all, what does the presence of the library in [name of area] means to you?

2. What value is the library to the local community!

3a). There are a number of problems and challenges facing communities. e.g. unemployment, crime. Do you consider that the library has any part to play in alleviating:-

- unemployment
- social and economic disadvantage
- crime and feeling unsafe
- community regeneration (including improving the environment)

3b). Any examples from your own or other people’s experiences?

3c). Do you think the library could do more to deal with these sorts of issues?

4a). The County Council is committed to equitable access to all citizens so they are not handicapped by social economic disadvantage. How do you think the library helps the following groups of people in the community?

- women
- lone parents
- children and young people
- elderly people
- people with disabilities

(Prompt for limited access transport, if necessary).

4b). Any examples from your own or other people’s experiences?

5a). How do you think the library helps people in terms of education and training?

5b). Does the library contribute to lifelong learning? i.e. enabling people to learn after they have finished formal or full-time education?

5c). Does the library support children in doing homework?
   If YES - Do you consider that this is a valuable service that the library offers?
   If NO - Do you consider that this is a service that the library could usefully provide?

5d). Could the library do more to support the education and training of local people?
   If YES - in what way?

6a). Often we have to make decisions or find out about issues that affect us which affect us or our local community e.g. housing or planning issues, where particular
groups meet in the local area meet e.g. play groups, lunch clubs, who to vote for in elections.

How does the library help you consider these matters?

6b). Any examples from your own or other people’s experiences?

6c). Do you think the library could do more to help you in making decisions and finding out information?

7a). What most encourages, or discourages, you from using the library?

7b). What changes to the library would encourage you to use it more often?

(prompt if necessary re any problem with access)

7c). If the opening hours of the library were increased would you be more inclined to use it / use it more often?

8a). What, if anything, would you, as an individual, or the community in general, lose if the local library closed?

(Prompt if necessary for economic impacts e.g. local businesses, tourism)

8b). If in order to protect the library in the local community extra funding was needed, where should this funding come from?

8c). Would you be willing to pay more Council Tax? If so, how much would you be prepared to pay if it was guaranteed that the extra money would go to the library service?

9). Are there any other points or issues about the library service in the area that you would like to raise which have not been covered so far?
Appendix J: Workshop papers

Papers reflecting four key aspects of the provisional findings were discussed at a workshop held on 2 June. Abbreviated versions of these are given below.

Measuring the unmeasurable

- Desirable outcomes for public library organisations.
- Are there differences between intermediate and final outcomes?
- The concept of need as an indicator of how far objectives have been met.
- The variables affecting public library performance.
- The ‘value added’ by public libraries.
- The ‘intangible’ benefits of public libraries.
- Suitable indicators / methods for evaluating the above.

Meeting political objectives

- Should library services contribute to the political objectives of local councils?
- How library services contribute to the political objectives of local councils?
- The implications of this for the ‘neutrality’ of libraries and their staff.
- The relationship between professional and political objectives.
- The indicators that can be used for evaluating political objectives.

Group perceptions

- Do politicians have different perceptions of different groups in the community?
- Do library staff have different perceptions of different groups in the community?
- Do different groups in the community have different perceptions of the library service?
- Are perceptions different because of age, class, gender, ethnicity or other reasons?
- What are the implications for the public library service?

Equity

The equitable provision of services has been referred to as the real ‘bottom line’ in public sector organisations.

- What equity means in practice for public library and information services?
- Does equity imply targeting of services to disadvantaged groups - or is this, in itself, unfair?
- If disadvantaged groups are targeted, what are the possible implications for the overall effectiveness of a service?
- How equity can be measured?