

### 3 Libraries' Modern Mission

The **London Borough of Tower Hamlets** council wants to create a new kind of library: the Idea Store. The authority embarked on the radical overhaul after it found only 15% of Tower Hamlets residents were regular users of its libraries. Yet the unmet need for lifelong learning was huge: 24% of residents needed help with basic skills.

The first Idea Store opened in 2002. It is open 7 days a week for 71 hours. In the foyer people can study, read or have lunch in a large café. Across the hall a bank of internet computers is in constant use. Staff at the library are drawn from adult education and libraries: they form a single, integrated team and wear the same T-shirts. The first, prototype Idea Store is partly a refurbished library, which is a century old. But the bright colours and modern furniture give the place the feel of a record shop or internet café. Visitor figures have trebled, and issues are up by 65% and rising.

Idea Stores are a modern reinterpretation of what a library can be. Around the core stock of books and information, the staff are helping people to learn, search for jobs, access public services or simply to enjoy themselves. In the course of the next few years the Idea Stores brand will be rolled out across the whole authority in a network of purpose-built buildings, in time replacing all the current library building stock.



Prototype Idea Store at Bow. Courtesy of London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

3.1 Idea Stores is just one example of how libraries are renewing themselves around a new image, service and sense of purpose. There are numerous others. Hampshire is planning to create Discovery Centres, which will combine libraries with museums, health facilities, leisure activities and e-government services. The idea is that through visiting libraries people should discover unexpected links that draw them into new activities. Liverpool Libraries and Information Services offers Libraries Plus, in which all libraries offer a link to additional services whether sport, health, education or business support.

3.2 But library renewal does not have to involve re-branding. Staffordshire is a good example of renewal from within a traditional library service. The Best Value Review: Library Vision, final report in January 2001, called for services to be reshaped around a clear understanding of the needs of modern users and delivered through partnerships with other services. A major countywide library refurbishment programme has been launched. Mobile library routes were redrawn to meet shifts in population. New collection and drop off points are being opened. Online membership, requests and a 24-hour telephone renewal service were introduced. Most libraries are open on Saturday afternoons and Sundays.

### How libraries renew

3.3 Several key messages stand out from these and other examples of how library authorities are attempting to renew themselves:

- There is no single vision for the future image and branding of libraries. These need to be devised and tailored to local circumstances

- Having a vision of the service is indispensable to animate staff, connect with customers, attract partners and draw in funding
- The vision has to start from a well thought through understanding of the modern needs of users and non-users, based on research and direct engagement with them
- The modern services libraries should offer increasingly depend on partnerships with education, learning, leisure, health and e-government. Thriving libraries are invariably co-located with other services and increasingly employ teams comprising people from different services
- Libraries are places: their tangible look and feel still matters hugely to people. Libraries need to be conveniently located, in buildings which are well appointed and which open when people need them, including weekends and evenings
- Successful library services communicate their mission to users through their look, feel, image and outreach work. Libraries need to be seen as open, welcoming places, which is why the presence of cafés, toilets, areas for families and young children are so vital
- Even the most radical new ideas for libraries are evolutionary: they build on the historic strengths of libraries. New brands such as Idea Stores and Discovery Centres reinterpret the role of libraries in a modern setting
- Successful libraries not standalone services. They thrive when they play a clear role within local authority strategies to promote learning and social cohesion. The more libraries can show they contribute to wider social objectives, the more likely they are to attract support.

3.4 Libraries thrive best with a sense of mission. The future success of libraries depends on their continually renewing and communicating that sense of mission for a very different society. This is a society in which people have access to a much wider range of sources for pleasure, entertainment, information and learning but in which there are social inequalities, particularly of access to and of capability in reading, learning and using digital services.

3.5 As a consequence, the modern mission for libraries should be based on four main factors:

**1) Evolution**

Libraries have to build upon their distinctive and long-standing capabilities in promoting reading, informal learning and self-help. Libraries' new roles and services should emerge from their traditional core skills.

**2) Public value**

Libraries should focus on areas where public intervention will deliver large spin-off benefits for the rest of society, such as promoting adult literacy and pre-school learning.

**3) Distinctiveness**

Libraries should build upon their open, neutral and self-help culture. They should not duplicate the efforts of other public and private sector providers. Libraries need to play to their distinctive strengths but invariably in partnership with others who have different skills.

**4) Local interpretations of national programmes**

National programmes must be developed that will attract national partners and funding and thereby raise the profile of the library service as a partner to other public services and among the population at large. These

national offers must be flexible enough to be adapted to local needs, styles and priorities. The People's Network is a good example of how a national programme to provide people with public access to the internet and digital skills, has been taken up in many different ways locally. Libraries need to devise and deliver more programmes of this kind.

3.6 Three main areas fit these four criteria that should guide the libraries in developing their modern mission:

- The promotion of reading and informal learning
- Access to digital skills and services including e-government
- Measures to tackle social exclusion, build community identity and develop citizenship.

3.7 These three themes will be at the heart of the library's modern mission.

Prototype Idea Store at Bow. Courtesy of London Borough of Tower Hamlets.



## 4 Books, Reading and Learning

---

### Quality book stock

4.1 Libraries and books are synonymous in the minds of most library users. A library cannot claim to be successful unless it has a good range of books carefully selected to meet the needs of its community. Many libraries can be justifiably proud of the quality of the book stock, its range and comprehensiveness and their ability to respond quickly to demand. The best libraries are in tune with readers' needs, anticipating demand so that sufficient copies of popular books are available when they are needed and works, which form part of our literary heritage can always be found. However, the Audit Commission report, *Building Better Library Services*, also pointed to some disappointing findings. Only 59% of users find the book they came to the library to borrow or use. Analysis of the book stock suggests under supply of books, which appeal to a younger audience and a shortage of twentieth-century classics. Spending on books has fallen from 15% to 10% of overall budgets over the past decade and at the same time the report notes that one-third of library authorities could manage stock more effectively including getting stocks on shelves more quickly.

### The importance of reading

- 4.2 In modern life reading is becoming more important than ever. Reading stimulates the imagination and develops creativity. It helps develop independence in learning. Reading draws the reader into a continual journey linking related interests.
- 4.3 The rise of the internet has not displaced reading. Most web pages are text based. It has encouraged more people to read.

According to consumer surveys the amount of time spent reading has risen. Fifty-two per cent of adults read books to relax or relieve stress, 27% as a form of escapism and 24% as a chance to use the imagination. Two-thirds of adults and over a half of children read books to find things out.

- 4.4 The value of reading, however, stretches far beyond the benefits to the individual. It brings social benefits. It is hard for people to be active citizens unless they can read newspapers and government publications. It is hard for people to be informed consumers, unless they can read guarantees, warranties and small print. It is hard for people to enter into contracts and trade unless they can read legal documents. Most cultural activities are enhanced by reading, from visiting the theatre to reading a CD sleeve or a football programme. Reading gives people access to shared conversations and communities and it promotes family bonding. The phrase "Did you read...?" is one of our most commonplace conversational openings.
- 4.5 Being unable to read cuts people off: from their own potential and the society around them. Being unable to read in an increasingly text rich culture can lead to social exclusion, with profound consequences socially and economically. More than seven million adults in England are estimated to have literacy problems. Innovative library authorities are integrating reading and learning strategies recognising that the informal self-motivated learning they promote is central to creating the learning habit in society.
- 4.6 Thus public libraries' mission to promote the skills, and even more importantly, the appetite, for reading is vital.

Bookstart, launched by Booktrust through private sponsorship, was first piloted in Birmingham in 1992 on the principle that it is never too early to introduce children to books. Simple packs were put together to be distributed by health visitors when they make their 7 – 9 month check on a baby's health. They include a free picture book, a place mat with nursery rhymes, book lists for babies and an invitation to join the local library.

Ten years from its launch, Bookstart has developed into a national programme and academic research shows that Bookstart babies are more confident readers when they start school. Families that had a Bookstart pack are far more likely to take their children to the library, name reading as one of their most enjoyable activities and finish a book once it has been started. At the age of five Bookstart children are far more likely to join in with stories, ask questions about them and relate a story to their own lives.



Mayor of Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead with parents and babies at Bookstart launch. Courtesy of Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Library Service.

## How libraries are making a unique contribution to the reading nation

4.7 Libraries do not just provide a store of books: they help people experience and enjoy the pleasure of reading. In recent years there has been an important shift in how libraries view and plan their work with reading. As well as its importance as a tool for learning, they have recognised its creative, imaginative role in people's lives. Reader development strategies have become far more widespread, encouraging people to start reading, whether young or old; helping emerging readers to find more interesting material, whether that be teenagers or adult first time readers; connecting people with similar interests to one another through book groups and

reading events. Increasingly libraries are developing outreach strategies reaching out to disaffected groups and demonstrating the motivational power of reading.



Promoting reading for pleasure. Courtesy of London Borough of Sutton Library, Heritage and Registration Services.

All prisons managed by HM Prison Service offer a library service provided by the public library authority. Even the most progressive regimes leave prisoners with a large amount of unoccupied time. As a consequence, reading can be an important leisure activity in prison, especially so when there is an adequate library service to support that need. **The Big Book Share** is a partnership between **Nottingham City Libraries and Information Service**, The Reading Agency, HM Prison Nottingham, Marks & Spencer plc's Community Division, East Midlands Arts and 23 children's publishers. Librarians run fortnightly sessions at the prison to help prisoners choose books and support children reading. Prisoners develop reading skills as they read with their children on visits or record a tape of stories for their children to listen to at home.

4.8 Libraries' approach to reader development is becoming increasingly sophisticated. Library authorities are working together to create new structures enabling programmes to be delivered both regionally and nationally. The Summer Reading Challenge is one example. Until four years ago each library authority developed its own summer reading programme. This is now a national programme, co-ordinated through The Reading Agency (TRA), creating economies of scale and allowing libraries to market their services far more effectively. Another good example occurred in 2002 when The Reading

Agency co-ordinated the library contribution to Splash Extra, a government programme of diversionary summer activities for young people at risk of offending. TRA worked with ten English library authorities to deliver its Splash Extra programme, in partnership with local Youth Offending Teams and youth services, which consisted of a varied and largely successful programme of reading-related multimedia arts activities throughout the summer. These reached 2,500 young people within the designated target groups, the majority of whom have never previously set foot in a library, and for whom the world of words, books and reading was unknown, alien or hostile territory.

In 2001 **Northamptonshire Libraries and Information Service** ran a Bookstart programme for babies; a summer reading challenge to encourage school age children to read six books over the holidays; a summer bookbus to visit play schemes and literacy schools; a story festival which involved 7,000 children; online workshops for budding writers; new internet based tools people can use to find new books that might interest them and a variety of local reading clubs.

4.9 Increasingly ICT is being used to support reader development. Whichbook.net, launched by Opening the Book, allows readers to select works of fiction tailored to their particular interests and preferences. New training programmes are developing. Branching Out, a collaboration between library authorities and Regional Arts Boards, provides regional programmes of activity to promote literature development. Their Reading Futures, a pilot programme funded through the DCMS/Wolfson programme has created a quality framework for planning young people's reading services. In addition, libraries are investing in research to understand better the needs of readers and the impact their reading is having on future attainment.

**Chatterbooks** is a national network of reading groups for 4-12 year olds, sponsored by Orange, in partnership with the public library network and was brokered by independent library development agency Launchpad. Chatterbooks aims to inspire young people to read more adventurously and develop confidence in talking about and choosing books. Orange has funded the work needed to create the network, for staff training, as well as a best practice handbook. Orange also funds the provision of high quality reading materials for all children participating in the scheme. Seventy library authorities now participate in Chatterbooks. Orange's feedback on the scheme is highly favourable. It combines corporate profile at the highest level with grassroots activity in all kinds of communities, including some very deprived ones. It also offers Orange staff the chance to get involved as volunteers.

4.10 The case studies in this section illustrate just some of the different approaches libraries are taking to promote reading to new audiences. Development agencies – such as The Reading Agency and Opening the Book – have already played a critical role in changing the way that libraries think and in promoting reader development. Promoting reading in a society is not the job of libraries alone. Best selling authors including the Children's Laureates have done much to make reading accessible and exciting in the past few years. Literary prizes – Booker, Whitbread, Orange, Carnegie – promote reading powerfully.

**Liverpool Libraries and Information Services** have worked with excluded black youngsters in Edge Hill and housebound readers to provide them with more choice. It is one of thirty-three authorities involved in the Branching Out project that brings together libraries with publishers and booksellers to promote new literature. It is one of the authorities that took part in promotions organised around the Orange prize.

The **Novel Route** is a scheme involving American Express, **West Sussex** and **Brighton Libraries**. Arts & Business South East was a crucial partner in the early stages of this project, brokering the arrangement between American Express and the library services. The project has been developed as part of the rollout of Books & Business into the South East, looking at how library/business partnerships could develop in a regional setting, with a focus on creative reading.

A reader development worker leads the lunchtime reading sessions for staff at AMEX's offices in Burgess Hill and Brighton and the local libraries supply the books. The involvement of a reader development worker has meant that groups at both offices can share experiences and also raise the profile of the library. Library staff are involved and develop new skills needed to work in a non-library environment. American Express has provided support, through office space and allowing staff time to attend. The company also intend to fund an end of project event that will bring together employees, librarians and local teachers to celebrate the project and provide a chance to discuss, in convivial surroundings, potential opportunities for future working.

## Public libraries and learning

4.11 Public libraries provide a learning network that runs parallel with formal education but also extends far beyond it. Public libraries complement and reinforce formal learning, helping to make formal education more effective.

4.12 The central activity of libraries in promoting reading is a key element of their role in supporting learning. Reading and literacy are inextricably linked and the motivation and enjoyment that reading provides is essential in creating lifelong learners. The kind of informal, self-motivated learning libraries promote is central to the creation of a deeper learning culture in the UK, in which people expect and want to learn,

pursue their hobbies and interests, develop their information literacy skills, be creative and gain inspiration, develop vocational and non-vocational skills, well after they have left formal education.

4.13 Public libraries are part of a broader community of library provision for learners in schools, colleges, universities and in school library services, all of which have clearly identified roles in supporting education. Libraries in businesses and voluntary agencies are also discovering their role in supporting learning. Partnerships between libraries can strengthen the support for the learner who will move from institution to institution in increasingly flexible learning patterns.



## Learning culture

Learning has to become a habit and a culture, rather than an obligation and imposition.

Learning has to start before and extend well beyond school and college.

Learners have to be able to access learning in manageable, flexible packages, suited to their needs as well as being able to enrol on terms and courses.

People with poor experience of formal education need extra encouragement and small steps to get back on the ladder of learning.

## Libraries' role

Libraries provide an unthreatening environment for self-motivated learning, in which people can pursue their hobbies and interests without necessarily engaging in formal courses. Libraries promote learning as exploration and self-development.

Libraries are one of the few places where young and old, school children, college students and adult learners can all participate in learning.

Libraries allow informal, individual learning, clubs and communities for learning (such as local history) as well as providing a range of short evening and daytime courses.

Libraries are "learning start up" organisations, they should excel at helping people get started with learning, whether those are children or adults returning to learn. Libraries should provide the foundations for a learning culture.

In **Cambridgeshire**, March library is not a college of further education: but it offers a wide range of courses, the local college has integrated its learning opportunities in March with the **learndirect** centre of the library. Nor is it a school: but children use it for out of hours study. March library also works closely with tutors working with children excluded from school to provide them with a place to work. The redesigned library is an example of how learning can be made an integral yet informal part of a library service. The new library, opened two years ago, makes this offer to local people: "whatever you want to learn and however you want to learn, whether at home or in a group, we can make it happen for you".

Anyone who wants to learn, no matter what the subject, can talk to a personal learning adviser who will recommend the best approach. Learners can study on their own at a bank of computers, go on a course, sign up for distance learning or simply take away a book. The library runs accredited courses from British Computer Society (ECDL) and OCR (New CLAIT) in addition to **learndirect**.



Learners at March Library. Courtesy of Cambridgeshire County Council Libraries and Information Service.

4.14 Libraries are an important network for lifelong, curiosity driven learning. Extensive consultation suggests the public library service should focus its activities on three main areas:

- Supporting early learning
- Supporting pupils and students
- Supporting older students.

### Supporting early learning

4.15 Research has demonstrated the importance of early learning activities in supporting early cognitive development. Increasingly the role of libraries is being acknowledged and addressed in early years service provision. The Sure Start programme which provides co-ordinated and integrated support to young children and their families in disadvantaged areas is encouraging closer links with public libraries. Sure Start has included a target for each project, which aims to “increase the use of libraries with parents by young children in Sure Start areas”. Involvement in Sure Start has enabled libraries to increase their early years provision – in the past two years over one hundred and thirty early years library posts have been created.

**Peterlee Sure Start is working with libraries to improve educational attainments with its “Read and Play Club”. Peterlee Sure Start’s research found that only 6.9% of the pre-school children in the district were gaining access to library services (i.e. having borrowed in the last twelve months). “Fun” learning materials such as books, videos and toys are provided in the Sure Start Read and Play Clubs. Each child in a Sure Start area has a personalised “Book Worm” library card. The Sure Start Programme works in tandem with the County Library Service. In six weeks they increased active library membership in children of 0-4 by 100%.**

4.16 The challenge to libraries is to make this a core activity clearly identifying it as an element of the national early years strategy.

### Supporting pupils and students

**Stockton on Tees’ community libraries all house a dedicated homework resource collection, including PCs offering access to the internet and CDs. Homework help sessions are run by trained staff.**

4.17 Many library services are developing closer relationships with school age children to support and complement the work of schools. Hertfordshire library service was one of the first in the country to create homework clubs, which have been running for five years. Page Moss Library in Huyton works with social services to create services for children excluded from school to encourage them to learn in informal ways.

4.18 Libraries are currently discovering the key role they have to play in delivering Connexions, the Government’s new support service for all young people aged 13-19 in England. The programme offers support to young people delivered through access to information and through the personal support offered by a trained personal adviser. Libraries are recognising their role in both of these functions.

**Birmingham Central Library now hosts a Connexions information point. This is the centre of a strong local library strategy for supporting Connexions, which will establish a Connexions team within the library and work closely with Behavioural Support Services who will use referral to the library as an educational extension of their service provision.**

**Bedfordshire Libraries' Homework Centres** are open two evenings a week and are staffed by a Homework Centre Organiser, supported by library staff. The target age group for the Centres' users is 8 – 13 year olds, although any child needing help with homework is welcome. Each centre is in a library and has a dedicated study area, offers access to stock and a bank of PCs linked to the internet, CDs, word processing and other packages. The Homework Centre staff encourage children to use the most effective resources – whether books or ICT or helping each other. The first two Homework Centres, launched in 2001, have proved so successful that they are now funded permanently. Two more Homework Centres have opened recently.

4.19 School Library Services support learning for around three-quarters of school children in England. These services are frequently managed by the public library service and act as a crucial bridging agent between schools and public libraries. Their knowledge of the curriculum can enrich libraries' homework support provision. Frequently they forge partnerships to enable public libraries to work more effectively in supporting literacy and developing reading and increasingly they are providing links at local level between public library ICT learning networks and school ICT provision.

4.20 Libraries can provide a vital alternative but complementary learning service to support school age children. In the next decade this should involve the library service in:

- Working with local schools in conjunction with Schools Library Services and the School Library Association to provide a planned programme of reader development to enrich and enhance the curriculum
- Forging stronger partnerships with schools in the poorest areas to encourage children from these schools to use libraries
- Creating a national network of homework clubs with every library authority offering

a service of some kind to every secondary school in their area. This could take the form of a physical club or access through the library to online resources such as Channel 4's Homework High service

- Using the national Summer Reading Challenge to help children to continue to learn in the long school holidays and so help minimise the "summer learning dip" which means that the first weeks of autumn term are often taken up with remedial work. This might initially focus on the transition from primary to secondary school. Every child leaving primary school could be invited to the library Summer Reading Challenge
- Developing a national programme for working with children in care and young offenders institutions.

4.21 Taken together these initiatives could provide a powerful entitlement for school children, which will serve to enhance and support formal educational provision.

**Boox on the Move**, a partnership between **Leeds Library and Information Services** and **Barnardo's**, supports the information needs of young people in care. Aimed at 13-16 year olds the scheme is about creating a positive reading culture. Originally aimed at meeting sexual health information needs the project has been broadened to cover all aspects of a young person's life.

### Supporting older students

4.22 One of the most far-reaching strategies to put libraries at the heart of learning has been pursued by a partnership between the public, college and university library services of Sunderland. These libraries have joined forces to create The Libraries Access Sunderland Scheme (LASH). LASH links public, college and university libraries, which gives users access to all facilities. The public libraries now offer one hundred and thirty drop in courses run in conjunction with the City of Sunderland College. Libraries across the city play an important role in delivering outreach work and promoting learning.

4.23 As participation rates in further and higher education climb so will the demand from students for study space and support materials. Public libraries could play a critical role as study centres for people engaged in distance learning programmes, for example those run by learndirect. The success of the LASH initiative suggests it should be learned from and adapted to other cities developing learning strategies.

### Adult basic skills

**Sunderland's library service** plays a critical role in the city's strategy for developing adult basic learning. About 43,000 of Sunderland's population of 289,500 are estimated to have literacy levels below the national average. Hendon library was one of the first in the country to create a short intensive basic skills course for adults, ran in partnership with the City of Sunderland College. In Hetton, an area hit by mining closures, a multi-purpose centre will open in 2003: it will comprise a library, Electronic Village Hall, Learning Centre, GP surgeries, housing offices, home care services, sports facilities, Job Linkage, community rooms and café, multi-purpose rooms for social and training opportunities and an Information service.

4.24 The Government's Skills for Life strategy aims to improve the literacy, language and numeracy skills of 1.5 million adults by 2007. Libraries have demonstrated that they can play a vital role in this programme of adult literacy in a range of ways. They are ideally placed to recognise people who might benefit from tuition and encourage them to find out more, they can incorporate tuition into other services, and the library provides an informal environment for courses.

4.25 DCMS and DfES working with Resource and the National Learning and Skills Council and the National Literacy Trust, will continue to explore ways in which libraries can support adult basic skills provision.



Supporting Lifelong Learning.  
Courtesy of London Borough of Barnet Library Service.

## Conclusions

4.26 Initiatives like these should be at the heart of libraries' "reading and learning offer" to the nation over the next decade. This offer would combine both national programmes and local reader development and learning projects. There is a need for both approaches. While libraries have to be able to deploy reading strategies to meet particular needs within the local community, there is also the need for national library based programmes such as Bookstart which have the potential to impact on national patterns of learning and literacy. CILIP's "Start with the Child" report has identified Bookstart, the Summer Reading Challenge and out of school hours study support as three activities, which ought to form part of every library service's core provision.

## 5 Digital Citizenship

**Leeds Library and Information Services** is helping people to create community websites, organised around communities of interest and language as well as geographical communities. Users of the websites can create their own web pages, which both increases democratic engagement and builds ICT skills. Council proposals and decisions are posted on local issues such as planning and schools, and web based feedback and discussion follows. The sites also contain useful information on local services, activities and history.

5.1 Public libraries were created 140 years before the internet became a popular activity. Yet in a sign of their ability to adapt, public libraries are at the forefront of devising ways to use digital technologies to promote community and learning. Many people see the internet as a tool of consumerism, to allow people to create more personalised services. Yet it is also a powerful tool for promoting collaboration, sharing and peer-to-peer services. It is in this area, the massive social potential of the internet, that libraries are playing a leading role.

5.2 The investment in The People's Network has been the first significant step along the way to allowing libraries to fulfil their potential in the digital age. Lottery investment, funded through the New Opportunities Fund, has enabled almost all public libraries in England to establish UK online learning centres by the end of December 2002, as well as providing library staff with computer literacy and learner support skills. A related £50 million programme is creating online content.

Open Technology and UK online Centre, Stockton Central Library. Courtesy Stockton on Tees Borough Council, photographer Peter Mernagh Film & Photography.



5.3 Trends in internet use point to a potential digital divide. People who are unemployed, who lack access to the internet at work and older people are amongst those currently less inclined to experience the opportunities and benefits offered by online services. The library service has a vital role to play in delivering the Government's commitment to universal access to the internet and the provision of e-government services.

5.4 Through The People's Network libraries are using information technology to:

- **Provide access to government services:** by 2005 all government services should be accessible online. Libraries will be at the forefront of creating universal access to e-government services. The 3,000 library based UK online centres in England will ensure that everyone has access to the ICT equipment and support they need

In the **London Borough of Sutton**, developments in ICT have made it possible for an extensive computerised community information database to be available not only through PCs in every library but also from home via library service web pages. These web pages also provide links through a '24 hour reference library' to a wealth of regional and national information, including newspapers and media, government information, health and social welfare, legal and consumer advice, and education and lifelong learning. It links residents with council departments enabling them to ask for information or make comments or complaints about services and it gives them a choice of the way in which they can receive a reply.

- **Create new links to local services:** libraries are doing far more than deliver access to existing services. The most innovative are creating new services

**Derbyshire libraries** have offered internet access since 1998. All forty-five libraries are equipped with broadband links, and an award-winning wireless network enables three large mobile libraries to take the internet to twenty-one isolated and disadvantaged communities. A fully web-enabled system enables library users to access the catalogue and conduct transactions online. The library service has a successful record of partnership with private and public sector agencies to create new services, and is central to the local authority's plans to modernise service delivery. Libraries have made great strides in providing ICT and information services to older users, and this has resulted in a range of new initiatives in partnership with the council's social services department. Libraries will become the primary source of information on a wide range of services for older people.

- **Online information services:** libraries are using the internet to deliver their own existing services in new ways. As a result they are creating new online communities and activities

**Leeds Library and Information Services** have created **Enquiry Express**, a free telephone, fax and e-mail service to allow any library user to ask

questions about homework, general knowledge, current affairs or legislation, 24 hours a day, six days a week. They are guaranteed to get a reply within a maximum of 24 hours. **Gateshead Borough Council Library Service** has just introduced a fully online **Ask a Librarian** service, which answers queries about local history, services and culture.

- **Content creation:** libraries are using funding from The People's Network to help create content relevant to the local community and providing the opportunity for community groups to create their own content and discussion groups. There is enormous scope for libraries and archives to work together to provide virtual access to their collections of local and family history and in so doing help to shape community identity.

In **Knowsley**, library staff have created an intranet site available to local schools, which looks at Knowsley in the second world war and the Victorian age. This links the school history curriculum with local history and geography, and with oral history. This developed from an idea proposed by the schools library manager, and has involved the library working with local museums and schools.

5.5 Resource has hosted wide-ranging discussions with library authorities on how The People's Network should develop. Ideas emerging that could form the basis for programmes with national reach include:

- **Hosting communities online:** public libraries could offer to create, host and manage websites for local community groups, building on the Leeds example. This would position libraries as the hub for local communities online
- **Culture Online:** the recently launched Culture Online programme will create exciting new online content and interactive services. Libraries have a role to play in providing access to services and in generating new content
- **National content:** Resource could act as a central agent brokering national online content agreements on behalf of the public library service. Westminster's partnership with an online music company is an example of the kinds of new online services libraries could be providing. Users at Westminster libraries can now download, listen to and explore play lists for about 10,000 classical recordings
- **Alliances with broadcasters:** the library service and broadcasters could explore areas of common interest in informal, home-based learning. Libraries could be an important physical point of contact for people learning through broadcasters' online services
- **Information:** Resource will consider the scope for a national service to answer queries online that are often asked at libraries, building on local services such as Leeds' Enquiry Express and Gateshead's Ask a Librarian which allows enquirers to pose questions to librarians at any time and aims for a rapid response to all enquiries



- **Online learning:** Resource will explore new opportunities for online learning such as the work currently in progress with **learndirect** to develop specially designed new learning services to be delivered through The People's Network.

**Online@Malvern** is situated in a prime spot very near to the main entrance of Malvern Library enabling visitors to have easy access to the lending library or the learning centre. The learning centre was set up in partnership between **Worcestershire County Council Library Services** and Worcester College of Technology. All the staff are employed by the College and cover other Online centres in the area. There is always at least one learner support adviser present when the centre is open. All advisers can offer some ICT support and other specialist support is drawn in as needed.

The centre offers the use of eighteen PCs and there is plenty of free parking and cafés nearby. The centre opens five days per week including late evening and Saturday opening. Learners range from 18–90 years of age and Introduction to Computers, Word and the internet are the most popular courses.

The centre has very good links with a number of local organisations including the Fire Service, which currently has twenty learners enrolled on **learndirect** courses; the Job Centre, which recommends **learndirect** to staff and clients and the local Christian bookshop, which promotes courses to staff and members and also allows its high street premises to be used for learning promotions.

## Conclusions

- 5.6 The £120 million investment from the New Opportunities Fund to create a People's Network of UK online and ICT learning centres in libraries puts libraries in a strong position to play a full role as centres for digital learning, community activity and creativity.
- 5.7 With that infrastructure now in place and many library staff trained to use the internet and support other users, Resource has turned its attention to developing a strategy for creating content, services and activities online.
- 5.8 This strategy will focus on content, learning, services and community building online. Library authorities must be able to tailor local services to local needs. But the public library service as a whole must also be able to deliver access to national content, databases and material.

## 6 Community and Civic Values

Sunderland's £1.3 million Millennium Centre at Concord, Washington, is in an area of deep social deprivation. The new centre replaced an old library building and was the product of extensive community consultation. It was built through a partnership between the City Council, the Millennium Commission and the National Playing Fields Association. At the centre's heart is a library and an online centre called an Electronic Village Hall. In the first year 140,000 people visited the centre and 80,000 used the library. The youngest registered user is 4 months old; the oldest is 84. Around the centre is a floodlit multi-user sports area, an online centre specially designed for young people, an arts studio, crèche, café and disco area. The centre has sixty registered community user groups. It hosts careers services and job fairs, healthy living programmes and crime reduction schemes.

- 6.1 Community is an elusive, intangible quality that all too often is valued only once it has been lost. Libraries help to give the idea life. Libraries need to be accessible as buildings, but the library service needs to extend beyond the building. Many library services have long traditions of outreach work, from Bristol libraries' work in the St Paul's district of the city, through Walsall's innovative online learning bus which travels around local housing estates, to Cambridgeshire's and Suffolk's different programmes to deliver services to isolated rural communities. Libraries have a long tradition of offering services to people who are housebound and those in residential care.
- 6.2 Libraries are public anchors for neighbourhoods and for communities. They provide a sense of stability. For the majority of the population, libraries are acknowledged as safe, welcoming neutral spaces open to all in the community. They attract users from across the social spectrum.
- 6.3 However libraries face a number of pressing challenges: renewing the building stock and reaching non-users while at the same time maintaining and developing current usage. Inspiring new library buildings in Peckham, Bournemouth and Norwich, as well as successful existing libraries such as Chesterfield, exemplify the spin-off benefits from a successful library in a town centre. Successful libraries attract people to a centre and so contribute to economic activity, while also providing people with a neutral personal space that is an alternative to shopping and commercial entertainment.

**Blackburn with Darwen's Central Library** is an example of how services can be radically improved within an existing building and budgets. The library, which serves more than a million users a year is about to be transformed through a £1million refurbishment financed through its role in delivering the local authority's Public Service Agreement. The library will host a massive increase in online learning for basic skills and services for young people, including a café and young person's drop-in centre. The library's second floor will become a learning zone. A self-service system for issuing and returning books will be installed, designed to allow staff to spend more time serving users.



Peckham Library. Photographer: Len Cross 2000.  
Courtesy of London Borough of Southwark Libraries and Museums Service.

6.4 There are valuable lessons to be learned from these initiatives that have unlocked new sources of funding for library buildings. DCMS and Resource propose to work together to gather, promote and spread these examples of how library services have financed and planned modernisation programmes.

#### **Suffolk Libraries and Heritage Service**

**Library Links** is a pilot scheme to develop new ways of serving rural communities. Each Link is a 'mini library' with a collection of frequently exchanged books. There is also a networked PC providing access to the full range of items in all Suffolk's libraries. These Library Links are located mainly in village shops and post offices. Library Link rent provides a valuable subsidy to businesses. The project reinforces Suffolk County Council's policy to sustain village facilities.

6.5 Libraries need to redouble their efforts to reach lapsed and non-users and also to maintain their current user base. The Audit Commission report noted demands even among library users for more flexible and weekend opening; for better marketing of services delivered in pleasant surroundings. Two-thirds of inspections concluded that Best Value reviews have not fundamentally challenged what the service is for and why it is needed. One half of inspections found consultation for users and non-users was inadequate.

6.6 People who find reading difficult and groups in the community most at risk of social exclusion may find libraries distant or even intimidating places rather than seeing them as symbols of community.

Extending services to all areas of the local community.  
Courtesy of North Yorkshire County Council.

