Northern Ireland Assembly

Research and Information Service
Research Paper

16 April 2012

Dr Dan Hull

An analysis and summary of Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries

NIAR 623-11

This paper presents a summary and brief analysis of the Northern Ireland public libraries policy framework, Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries.

Key issues for consideration

- Across the UK, the total number of book loans from libraries has fallen from around 650 million a year in the 1980s to fewer than half this number in the past four years, with an average annual decline of 3.4%.

- A recently published survey of public library authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) has concluded that over 2,000 staff posts have been removed and 3,000 opening hours a week cut from public library services in the financial year 2011/12 .

- The current policy framework covering the provision of public libraries in Northern Ireland is *Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries*. This was published in 2006 during a period of direct rule and prior to the creation of the libraries body, Libraries NI.

- Since the publication of *Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries*, Libraries NI has launched three consultations resulting in the closure of ten libraries in Greater Belfast, two outside Belfast, and the reduction of opening times overall by 238 hours per week.

- A number of the partnerships and case studies cited in *Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries* were current in 2006, but may now no longer be of relevance.

- It is not clear to what extent the Public Library Standards are still appropriate in their current form. Indeed, DCMS Public Library Standards, issued for public libraries in 2006, 2007 and 2008, have since been abolished in England.

- It is not clear whether performance assessment is still being carried out in the manner originally specified in *Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries*.

- A number of developments which are cited in the document as forthcoming have now occurred. For example, Libraries NI was created in 2009; to what extent has the creation of a single library authority created a need for a different set of library standards?

- *Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries* states that the creation of this body 'will provide the opportunity to achieve a strategic approach' to a number of issues. However, it is not clear what the strategic approach now is to issues such as the unified planning of capital expenditure, staff development, or research into user requirements.

- Stages one (in 2010) and two (in 2011) of a public libraries review resulted in the closure of 12 libraries in all. Although these two previous consultations made reference to *Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries*, a number of additional documents and factors were also cited as influential and relevant, including the Libraries NI corporate plan, the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland, the Libraries NI vision, as well as the 'evolving political, social and economic landscape'.

- Comparisons with other jurisdictions reveal significant pressure on resources elsewhere, particularly in England and Wales. Estimates of the number of local libraries closing in England range between 400 and 1000.

Executive Summary

This paper presents a summary and brief analysis of the Northern Ireland public libraries policy framework, *Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries*.

Across the UK, the total number of book loans from libraries has fallen steadily from around 650 million a year in the 1980s to fewer than half this number in the past four years, with an average annual decline of 3.4%.

A smaller proportion of the population holds a library card, and there are fewer public libraries, than four years ago. In 2007, there were 111 libraries in Northern Ireland with 49% registered as a member, compared with 101 libraries and a 37% registration level in 2011[1]. However, recent research has shown that the social contact, events and wider services offered by libraries are valued highly by users, especially those from vulnerable groups and disadvantaged communities. Use of libraries by children is particularly high.

Northern Ireland spends below the UK average on its library provision, and has a markedly lower proportion of active borrowers than England, Scotland or Wales. It also has fewer libraries per person than anywhere else in the UK. However, it is not necessarily the case that a low number of libraries results directly from less spending, which in turn leads to low levels of use. Wales spends the least per head in the UK and yet achieves the greatest levels of provision and use. However, the proportion of the population visiting a library has risen steadily in Northern Ireland between 2008/09 and 2010/11.

A number of issues arise from this brief research paper. *Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries*, though this was published in 2006 during a period of direct rule, prior to the creation of the central libraries body Libraries NI, and prior to the Libraries Act (Northern Ireland) 2008. The policy framework sets out 'principles and priorities for the development of public libraries in Northern Ireland', and states DCAL's vision as being 'a flexible and responsive library service which provides a dynamic focal point in the community and assists people to fulfil their potential'. Three priorities for action are outlined: a customer focus, targeted support, and innovation and efficiencies.

Finally, the policy framework presents a set of ten Public Library Standards, to 'help identify problem areas for immediate action', 'help indicate priorities for the library service', and 'ensure value for money is provided'. It is stated that 'performance will be assessed against the standards every year and a report placed on the DCAL website'. However, it is not clear at the present time whether such assessments are available for recent years.

Of the ten Public Library Standards, the research which is available permits a partial assessment of their current success. For example, for PLS2, a NI Assembly research paper suggests that coverage of static and mobile libraries falls slightly short of the

---

[1] The number of libraries has since been reduced to 99.

85% target. For PLS6, it would seem that a target to provide six workstations per 10,000 population has been comfortably achieved with availability at around 7.2.

Since the publication of *Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries*, Libraries NI has launched three consultations, resulting in the closure of ten libraries in Greater Belfast, two outside Belfast, and the reduction of opening times overall by 238 hours per week. These consultations have considered a number of other documents and factors beyond *Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries*, including the Libraries NI corporate strategy, the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland, the Libraries NI vision, and the 'evolving political, social and economic landscape'.

In the light of these developments, it is not clear to what extent the Northern Ireland Public Library Standards are still appropriate in their current form. Indeed, the DCMS Public Library Standards, issued for public libraries in 2006, 2007 and 2008, have since been abolished in England.

Comparisons with other jurisdictions reveal significant pressure on resources elsewhere, particularly in England. Some of the options being considered in the Future Libraries Programme in England include shared services, merged functions, staffing across authorities, support from volunteers and use of other community buildings. Estimates of the number of local libraries closing in England range between 400 and 1000.

Contents

1 Context: Overall use of libraries

Across the UK, the total number of book loans from libraries has fallen steadily from around 650 million a year in the 1980s to fewer than half this number in the past four years, with an average annual decline of 3.4%[2].

A smaller proportion of the population holds a library card, and there are fewer public libraries, than four years ago. In 2007, there were 111 libraries in Northern Ireland with 49% registered as a member, compared with 101 libraries and a 37% registration level in 2011[3]. However, recent research has shown that the social contact, events and wider services offered by libraries are valued highly by users, especially those from vulnerable groups and disadvantaged communities. Use of libraries by children is particularly high[4].

Northern Ireland spends below the UK average on its library provision, and has a markedly lower proportion of active borrowers than England, Scotland or Wales. It also has fewer libraries per person than anywhere else in the UK[5]. It is not necessarily the case though that a low number of libraries results directly from less spending, which in turn leads to low levels of use. Wales spends the least per head in the UK and yet achieves the greatest levels of provision and use. Indeed in recent years Welsh public libraries have seen a bigger percentage increase in visitors and book issues than in any other UK jurisdiction[6]. In 2008/09 there were 13.96 million visits to Welsh libraries, an increase of 3.7% on the previous year. This compares with a year-on-year decrease in England of 1.4%, a decrease of 4.1% in Northern Ireland and an increase of only 0.4% in Scotland for the same period. However, the proportion of the population visiting a library has risen steadily in Northern Ireland between 2008/09 and 2010/11[7].

	Active borrowers	Active borrowers per 1000 population	Revenue spending per capita	Population per public library
Northern Ireland	296,597	169	£16.28	17,414
England	10,619,110	208	£17.03	15,458
Scotland	1,053,683	205	£22.18	9,509
Wales	638,344	214	£15.55	9,312
UK	12,607,734	207	£17.37	14,289

Table 1: Profile of library use and expenditure[8]

---

2   Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) public library statistics; cited in Cooper, Gill & Cooper, Genevieve. 2011. *Public Library Closures*. House of Commons Library Standard Note SN/HA/5875.

3   The number of libraries has since been reduced to 99.

4   Boughey, A. & Cooper, M. 2010. 'Public libraries: Political vision versus public demand', *Aslib Proceedings: New Information Perspectives*. Vol 62(2) p189.

5   This calculation was made in March 2011, and does not reflect recent library closures in, for example, NI and England.

6   Welsh Assembly Government. 2.6.10. 'Wales leads the way in public library usage': http://goo.gl/8Qp7G

7   Information from Continuous Household Surveys: the proportion of respondents who said they had visited a library in the last 12 months has risen from 26% in 2008/09 to 29% in 2009/10 and 32% in 2010/11.

8   These figures derive from CIPFA public library statistics, and were compiled in March 2011 – they do not reflect recent library closures in, for example, England and Northern Ireland.

2 Libraries NI

2.1 Overview and functions

The Northern Ireland Library Authority (or Libraries NI) is the public library service for Northern Ireland. It is an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body, established under the Libraries Act (Northern Ireland) 2008. Libraries NI began operating in 2009/10, replacing the previous structure whereby libraries were managed through five Education and Library Boards. Libraries NI is overseen by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, and currently operates 97 branch libraries in Northern Ireland, two specialist libraries, and 28 mobile libraries.

Libraries NI aims to 'provide and promote a range of high quality library and information services for everyone in Northern Ireland'[9].

2.2 Budget

Libraries NI is the largest of DCAL's nine arms-length bodies in terms of budget.

In its initial proposal for budget reductions, presented to the CAL Committee in January 2011, DCAL outlined a reduction to the Libraries NI allocation of £2.99m over the next four years. Libraries NI stated of this proposal that when capital and current budgets are combined and inflationary pressures taken into account, the proposed reduction represented cumulative efficiencies of £13.82m. Libraries NI stated in their submission to the CAL Committee in January 2011 that on the basis of this proposed budget reduction, plans were submitted to DCAL which outlined savings measures in four broad areas of expenditure, as follows:

Savings Plans	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	Total
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Closure of libraries	0.086	0.179	0.252	0.265	**0.782**
Reduced opening hours	0.362 (net of potential redundancies)	0.732	0.763	0.796	**1.929**
Recruitment freeze	0.390	1.028	1.750	2.532	**5.700**
Reduction in stock budget	0.427	0.979	2.595	1.407	**5.408**
Total savings	0.541	2.918	5.360	5.000	**13.819**

Table 2: Savings plans proposed by Libraries NI in response to the draft budget, January 2011[10].

However, in the final budget allocation, DCAL stated that Libraries NI has been allocated an additional £2m of additional resource, an uplift of £880,000 to their

---

9   Libraries NI website. http://www.librariesni.org.uk Accessed 13.9.10.
10   Libraries NI. 7.1.11. Submission to Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee on the implications of Draft Budget 2010: presented to the CAL Committee 13.1.11.

allocation in 2013/14 via internal reallocation, an additional £2m of capital across the four years, a further £500,000 to 'cover existing commitments' in 2011/12, and £4.25m of Invest to Save funding for the ELFNI replacement[11]. Their final DCAL allocation for the four year budget period, as compared with 2010/11, is as follows:

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Current expenditure	30.52	31.56	30.11	31.02	30.57
Capital expenditure	13.00	2.30	4.17	2.59	2.70

Table 3: Final budget allocations for Libraries NI[12]

Libraries NI has stated that as a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review it has to make cumulative savings in the region of £10.3 million by 2015[13]. DCAL awarded an additional allocation of £2.39 million to Libraries NI for the period 2012/13 'to ease budget pressures'[14].

2.3 Legislation

The legislation which is of primary relevance to libraries in Northern Ireland is the Libraries Act (Northern Ireland) 2008. This Act has two primary purposes. Firstly, it transfers functions from the Education and Library Boards to Libraries NI, and secondly it sets out the duties of the new library authority. These duties are specified as follows:

Duty of Authority to provide library service

2.–(1) It shall be the duty of the Authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient public library service for persons living, working or studying in Northern Ireland.

(2) In carrying out its duty under subsection (1), the Authority shall–

(a) secure that facilities are available for the borrowing of, or reference to, library materials sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements of adults and children (whether by keeping adequate stocks, by arrangements with other bodies concerned with library services or by any other appropriate means);

(b) have regard to the desirability of–

(i) encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service;

---

[11]   DCAL. 25.5.11. *Final budget allocations and consultation responses (Table D)*: written submission to the CAL Committee for meeting on 2.6.11.

[12]   DCAL. 25.5.11. *Final budget allocations and consultation responses (Table D)*: written submission to the CAL Committee for meeting on 2.6.11; the *actual* allocations will differ slightly from these outline figures for various reasons: for example, the DCAL Minister announced additional resources for Libraries NI in January 2012. There are also likely to be a number of in-year allocations which will mean that the end-of-year budget will differ from the initial allocation.

[13]   Libraries NI. March 2012. *Opening Hours Review: Final Report*: http://nia1.me/u6 p15

[14]   *Ibid*: p12

(ii) providing advice as to the use of the library service and making available such bibliographical and other information as may be required by persons using the service;

(iii) promoting literacy and lifelong learning;

(iv) maintaining a collection of library materials relevant to the cultural heritage of Northern Ireland;

(v) making library premises available for cultural and community activities; and

(vi) meeting any special requirements of adults and children by any appropriate means.

As is outlined in further detail below, the 'duty of the Authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient public library service' is similar to the wording used in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 which applies elsewhere in the UK. This wording has been the subject of legal challenge in England in the context of proposed library closures.

3   Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries

Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries was published by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in 2006. It sets out 'principles and priorities for the development of public libraries in Northern Ireland'[15].

Section one of the document describes the evolution of libraries policy in Northern Ireland up until 2006. A DCAL review of the public library service was published in 2002, and in 2005 a consultation paper, *Northern Ireland's Libraries: A Framework for Change*, was released. This consultation closed in January 2006, and *Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries* was then published later the same year.

Section 2 references a number of previous UK-wide studies of public libraries and highlights their changing role in society, with lower levels of book borrowing and stronger demand for electronic information provision.

The document sets out DCAL's vision for the public library services in Northern Ireland as being:

A flexible and responsive library service which provides a dynamic focal point in the community and assists people to fulfil their potential[16].

It is also stated that the 'value of libraries arises from their staff, the stock, the buildings, and the activities developed from them', and three priorities for action are

---

[15]   Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. 2006. *Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries: Principles and priorities for the development of public libraries in Northern Ireland*: http://nia1.me/gp

[16]   *Ibid*: p9.

outlined: a customer focus, targeted support, and innovation and efficiencies. Among the statements made under each of these headings are the following:

3.1   Customer focus

The document identifies a need for 'culture change' so that libraries and their staff are more outward-looking. It is also recognised that reaching out to particular groups may require specific skill sets such as youth work and early years education. In terms of providing sufficient access to library services, the document states that,

> *While recognising that there are resource constraints, it is important to ensure that the library service is available in the places, at the times, and in the ways that enable as many people as possible to use it.*

It is recognised that 'new library buildings should be located where they are most easily accessed by the communities they serve, and that co-location with services such as health centres and education provision should be considered. Mobile library stops should be 'strategically located' with the duration and frequency of stops tailored to local needs. A number of comments are also made on the subject of library opening hours, with opening hours extending beyond the normal working day as far as possible, and 'the views of the community, users and non-users alike' sought in determining opening patterns in each area. The state and currency of stock is cited as an important issue, with a target of £3.00 stock expenditure per head by 2008/09. The subject matter covered should also 'reflect community interests or requirements', including ethnic minority needs or local history.

3.2   Targeted support

The first point made within this section is that 'libraries are well placed to make a particularly effective contribution to those citizens who are, or are at risk of becoming, socially excluded'. It is noted, for example, that libraries can support policies – in a cost effective way – that are conceived elsewhere within government towards such issues as 'educational inequalities, disaffected young people, the needs of rundown housing estates, disadvantaged communities and the particular needs of rural communities'.

The following groups are highlighted as particular priorities for targeted support:

- Young adults;
- Children who need school or homework support;
- Literacy support for those lacking basic skills;
- Non-native speakers, those for whom English is a second language, and other support for ethnic minorities.

3.3 Innovation and efficiencies

This section notes the potential efficiencies to be gained from collaborating with other organisations such as the BBC. Examples of successful partnerships are cited, though it is not clear to what extent such examples are now current, or relevant, in 2012.

Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries states that the creation of Libraries NI 'will provide the opportunity to achieve a strategic approach' to a number of issues. However, it is not clear what the strategic approach now is to a range of issues, such as the unified planning of capital expenditure (with a single oversight body rather than five education and library boards), staff development, or research into user requirements.

Marketing is noted as an area of particular weakness and *Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries* states that a 'developed marketing strategy is required'.

4 Library standards

4.1 Summary of public library standards

The final section of *Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries* presents a set of ten Public Library Standards, the monitoring of which will, it is stated, 'help identify problem areas for immediate action', 'help indicate priorities for the library service', and 'ensure value for money is provided'.

It is stated in section four that 'performance will be assessed against the standards every year and a report placed on the DCAL website', and that 'the standards will be reviewed every three years'. However, the department has confirmed that such reports have not been produced in recent years, and that 'due to work pressures in other areas the Department has been unable to review the standards since they were published'[17].

A summary of all ten public library standards is provided in Annex 1 of this paper. In brief, these ten standards could be described as follows:

	Summary of Public Library Standard	Relevant research or analysis (where available)
1	Ensure that at least 95% of users report that staff are knowledgeable and helpful.	
2	85% of households should have access to a library service within 2 miles.	A NI Assembly Research and Information Service project has established that library services which conform to the criteria set out in *Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries* currently cover 84% of households[18]. However, if an analysis of Northern Ireland excluding Belfast is conducted, this coverage falls to 74%.

---

[17]   DCAL response to Assembly information request, 11.4.12.

[18]   Boyle, L & Hull, D. 2012. *Analysis of Public Library Standard Two (PLS2).* Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service Briefing Paper NIAR 622-11.

3	All static libraries should be open for a minimum of seven hours weekly outside 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.	A recent consultation on the reduction of opening hours has closed, with a total reduction in opening hours of 238.25 across all libraries. However, Libraries NI has proposed that 'the pattern of opening hours in each library should be determined in consultation with users'[19].
4	Annual stock budget per head should be at £2.50 by 2009.	Stock expenditure for recent years has been as follows: • 2009/10 – £1.90 per capita • 2010/11 – £1.93 per capita • 2011/12 – £2.20 per capita[20] • 2012/13 – £1.51 per capita (initial figure budgeted)[21]
5	It should take 8.5 years to replenish the lending stock.	
6	At least six public access workstations per 10,000 population.	Figures released in 2012 indicate that there are 1323 public workstations[22] which, on the basis of current population estimates, would suggest that there are 7.35 work stations per 10,000 population.
7	50% of requests for books met within 7 days, 85% within 30 days.	
8	Increase the percentage of library users to 45% of population by 2008.	The findings of the 2010/11 Continuous Household Survey indicate that 32% of respondents said they visit a library at least once a year[23].
9	Increase by 1% per annum the number of hours public access computers are in use.	
10	Ensure that at least 95% of users view their library service as very good or good.	

Table 4: Summary of Public Library Standards in Northern Ireland

5   Recent developments

5.1   Strategic review of libraries

Libraries NI is part-way through a three stage consultation process as part of a review: *Meeting the Demands of a Modern Public Library Service*. Stage one resulted in the closure of ten libraries in the Greater Belfast area, a decision on ten libraries outside Belfast was made in October 2011 and resulted in the closure of Moy and Moneymore libraries. A third stage on mobile library provision is yet to commence.

A number of criteria and documents were used to assess the future of libraries in stages one and two. In addition to *Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries*, the following factors were also highlighted as influential:

---

[19]   Libraries NI. March 2012. *Opening Hours Review: Final Report*. http://nia1.me/u6 p52
[20]   From LNI – may be subject to amendment (information provided by DCAL in response to an Assembly information request 11.4.12).
[21]   Planned – as set out in draft LNI Business Plan 2012-13
[22]   Libraries NI. (no date). 'Public access terminals (PATs) in libraries': http://nia1.me/u3
[23]   Experience of Library Usage in Northern Ireland: Findings from the Continuous Household Survey. DCAL Research Findings 2/2012: http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/libraries_chs_201011_bulletin_.pdf

- Themes deriving from the Libraries NI corporate plan, including: 'customers come first; nurturing staff; innovating and improving; decisiveness; accountability'.

- The Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2008-2018, particularly regarding the 'modernisation of libraries in our cities and key towns'.

- A Libraries NI vision 'of being a flexible and responsive library service which provides a dynamic focal point in the community and assists people to fulfil their potential'.

- 'In order to ensure that the public library service delivers on this vision the service needs to be reviewed taking into account the changing and evolving political, social and economic landscape today. The pressures of economy, efficiency and service effectiveness are key and equally important drivers in delivering even better public services and deriving more value from the public purse. Furthermore the image of libraries as purely book borrowing centres needs to be addressed to take account of customers' expectations and the trends in library use across the UK as well as the vision articulated in the DCAL paper *Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries*'[24].

5.2   Review of Opening Hours

In March 2012, Libraries NI announced its final decisions on reductions in library opening hours. A total of 51 public libraries here will have their hours reduced, 34 will stay the same, and 11 will increase. In total, the number of library opening hours will reduce by 238.25 hours, with libraries on average losing around 2.5 hours per branch. Some, such as Holywood and Colin Glen, will lose 13.5 hours per week. Libraries NI has stated that the specific distribution of the new hours should be decided on a branch-by-branch basis by each library in consultation with users[25].

5.3   Investment in libraries

Through the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland (2008/09-2018/19), DCAL 'has made a major investment to modernise library buildings'[26].

Over the past five years DCAL has funded a number of new libraries at Ballymena, Bangor, Cookstown, Finaghy, Grove Well Being Centre, Irvinestown, Lisburn, Magherafelt, Newtownstewart and Strabane. Refurbishment was also carried out at Armagh library. A new library was also opened in Antrim in 2010. The following works have also taken place:

- Belfast Central: Work on the stonework was completed February 2011.
- Carrickfergus: Refurbishment work completed re-opened March 2011.
- Dungannon: Refurbishment work has commenced.

---

[24]   Libraries NI. *Meeting the Demands of a Modern Public Library Service within Northern Ireland – Stage 2*: http://goo.gl/uK5ro p3.

[25]   Libraries NI. March 2012. *Opening Hours Review: Final Report*: http://nia1.me/u6 p52

[26]   DCAL website. 'Future building projects': http://nia1.me/u2 Accessed 3.4.12.

- Dungiven: new library official opening took place 25 February 2011.

- Falls: Refurbishment work completed May 2011.

- Keady: New refurbished library opened to the public in May 2010.

- Newry: Refurbishment work completed March 2011.

- Ormeau: Refurbishment work has commenced.

- Shankill: Refurbishment work completed May 2011

- Whitehead: Refurbishment work finished on the Library in March 2010.

- Whiterock: Refurbishment work completed March 2011.

5.4   Programme for Government and Investment Strategy commitments

There are no explicit priorities set within the Programme for Government regarding libraries. However, one of the 'building blocks' under Priority 5: Delivering High Quality and Efficient Public Services is 'Modernisation of Public Library Service'[27].

The draft Investment Strategy states that there will be £12m invested in libraries during the period 2011/12 to 2014/15, and a further £70m between 2015/16 and 2020/21[28]. For the period 2011/12 to 2014/15, it is stated that the libraries operating system will be replaced, and that four new mobile libraries will be created[29].

The strategy also states that[30],

> *Libraries play an important role in helping to improve literacy, particularly in the most disadvantaged areas. The internet has brought about massive changes to the way that society chooses to learn and access information and this is opening up opportunities to expand public access through the use of technology.*

6   Other jurisdictions

A previous Assembly research briefing paper sets out the different ways in which public library services are organised across the UK and Ireland[31]. The following comparison focuses particularly on England, as the region that has experienced perhaps the greatest changes to library provision in recent months.

6.1   Recent developments

A recently published survey of public library authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) has

---

[27]   Northern Ireland Executive. 2012. *Programme for Government 2011–2015*: www.northernireland.gov.uk/pfg
[28]   Northern Ireland Executive. 2011. *Draft Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2012–2021*: http://goo.gl/ZKsxY
[29]   *Ibid*: p25.
[30]   *Ibid*: p22.
[31]   Assembly Research and Information Service Briefing Paper. 10.6.11. *Background briefing: Northern Ireland Library Authority (Libraries NI)*. NIAR 259-11: http://nia1.me/ua

concluded that over 2,000 staff posts have been removed and 3,000 opening hours a week cut from public library services in the financial year 2011/12[32].

CILIP estimates that this financial year 2,159 posts will be deleted from a total of 20,924 staff, a 10% cut in staffing. Twenty-five per cent of the lost posts are at a professional level.

The survey reveals large differences between local authorities in spending on staff and stock, ways they are considering delivering services and opening hours. CILIP concludes that there is a risk that the quality of service may increasingly depend on where people live.

While the average revenue expenditure cut was 7.5% the range of cuts was extremely wide – from 1% to 35%. The range of cuts to materials budgets (including books) ranged from 0.2% to 90%. Over two-thirds of local authorities are actively considering alternative ways to run libraries and deliver services, such as community managed libraries, trusts and partnership working.

Some commentators have cautioned that there is a danger of disconnect between the aspirations of government policy regarding libraries and the real demands of library users (and non-users)[33]. One example given is that users do indeed want ICT to be a focus for libraries, but perhaps not in precisely the way envisaged or provided by libraries policy-makers[34].

6.2   England

In England, public libraries are funded and run through local authorities. The scale of coverage in each case can vary markedly, with some operating at a large scale (such as Cornwall Council, with 35 libraries), and some much smaller (such as Peterborough City Council, with eight).

Support and good practice for libraries was previously co-ordinated by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. However, MLA has recently been abolished, with functions transferring to Arts Council England in 2012.

This change in support infrastructure has coincided with widespread changes associated with a reduction in budgets through the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review. Local authorities are in many cases seeking to adapt their library services in the context of a real terms reduction in funding of 26%. This is a fast-moving issue and estimates of the number of public libraries under threat have varied. However,

---

[32]   Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals. 2012. *The eye of the storm? A survey of public library authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland 2011/12*: http://nia1.me/u5

[33]   Boughey, A. & Cooper, M. 2010. 'Public libraries: Political vision versus public demand', *Aslib Proceedings: New Information Perspectives*. Vol 62(2) pp196-197.

[34]   *Ibid*: p197; also Museums, Libraries and Archives. 2010. *What do the public want from libraries? User and non-user research: full research report*: http://nia1.me/u4

estimates have varied between 400 and 1000 libraries under threat of closure[35]. The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals has estimated that between 4,000 and 6,000 full time equivalent jobs may be removed[36].

A number of high-profile campaigns to keep local libraries open have commenced in England, currently totalling 48 individual campaigns[37]. Some campaigns have involved, and continue in some cases to involve, legal challenges. A degree of precedent for such challenges was set by the Wirral Inquiry, where the then Secretary of State for Culture chose to exercise his power under section 10(1) of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, examining the duty of Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council to 'provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof'[38].

The Inquiry, which was conducted by Sue Charteris, found that the local council's decision to close 11 of its 24 libraries to be in breach of its statutory duties and the Inquiry report made a number of influential recommendations about how such decisions should be made in the future. For example, the Inquiry concluded that there would be strong case for retaining a library service in the following circumstances[39]:

Where libraries:

- Were located in an area of significant deprivation
- Had inter-dependent links with schools and/or children's centres

And where the Council had:

- Changed its decision on which libraries to close
- Identified an area of need but 'subsequently chose to ignore this information'
- Failed to meet its own standards in terms of a reasonable distance to travel.

The report also considered that:

> *It would be reasonable for [the Secretary of State] to expect that within the meaning of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, any reasonable library authority, before embarking on major change proposals, should undertake a needs assessment of the changing needs of its population for Library Services, taking into account relevant local factors. Indeed s.7(2) of the Act places a mandatory requirement upon library authorities to have regard to the desirability of securing that the needs of local adults and children are met (in respect of the provision of library resources) when*

[35]   Cooper, Gill & Cooper, Genevieve. 2011. *Public Library Closures.* House of Commons Library Standard Note SN/HA/5875.

[36]   CILIP Press Release. 2011. 'Public libraries being failed by lack of leadership from Westminster'.

[37]   Voices of the Library. 'Campaigns': http://www.voicesforthelibrary.org.uk/wordpress/?page_id=265 Accessed 5.4.12.

[38]   Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/75

[39]   Department for Culture, Media and Sport. 2010. *A local Inquiry into the public library service provided by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council: Led by Sue Charteris*; cited in Cooper, Gill & Cooper, Genevieve. 2011. *Public Library Closures.* House of Commons Library Standard Note SN/HA/5875: p12.

> *discharging its duties to provide a comprehensive and efficient service
> under the Act…*

Subsequent legal challenges in other local authority areas in England have had mixed results. In April 2012, campaigners successfully challenged Surrey County Council's decision to have ten libraries staffed entirely by volunteers[40]. However, a High Court bid to save six libraries in north-west London failed in October 2011[41]. A High Court ruled in November 2011 that a Gloucestershire County Council decision to close 10 of its libraries was unlawful, and an announcement of a revised library strategy by the Council is expected soon[42].

The House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into 'library closures and what constitutes a comprehensive and efficient library service for the 21st century'[43].

---

[40]   The Telegraph. 3.4.12. 'Judge rules against council plan to staff libraries with volunteers':
       http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/9184218/Judge-rules-against-council-plan-to-staff-libraries-with-volunteers.html
[41]   BBC News. 14.10.12. 'Brent library campaigners lose court bid against closures': http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-15285836
[42]   This is Gloucestershire. 16.11.11. 'Victory for Gloucestershire library campaigners': http://goo.gl/P5Hp3
[43]   Committee for Culture, Media and Sport: http://goo.gl/VSlZo

Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries: Summary of Public Library Standards

		Standard	Target
1		Percentage of users reporting (a) staff knowledge and expertise and (b) staff helpfulness as very good or good.	95% of adults (over 16) and 95% of children (16 and under) who are surveyed each year.
2		Percentage of households living within a specified distance of a static library or a scheduled mobile stop offering a range of library services open to the general public.	85% of households should have access to a library within 2 miles.
3		Opening hours outside working day.	Larger libraries serving significant population centres should be open at least two evenings per week to at least 8pm, and all day Saturday. Smaller libraries should be open at least one evening per week up to at least 8pm, and at least part of Saturday. All static libraries should be open for a minimum of seven hours weekly outside 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.
4		Annual stock budget per head of population.	2006/07: £1.50 2007/08: £2.00 2008/09: £2.50
5		Time taken to replenish the lending stock on open access or available on loan.	8.5 years.
6		The total number of electronic workstations with access to the Internet, including the libraries catalogue (including both static and mobile provision) available for users per 10,000 population.	At least six public access workstations per 10,000 population.
7		Requested items will be supplied in a timely manner.	(i) 50% of requests for books met within 7 days (ii) 70% of requests for books met within 15 days (iii) 85% of requests for books met within 30 days.
8		Increasing number of actual visits per 1,000 population.	- Increase by 1% per annum the numbers of visits to libraries - Increase by 1% per annum the numbers of active borrowers - Increase percentage of library users to 45% of population by 2008.
9		Increasing the use of public access computers.	Increase by 1% per annum the aggregate number of hours the public access computers are in use.
10		Percentage of library users (children and adults) who view their library service as very good or good.	95% of adults (over 16) and 95% of children (16 and under) who are surveyed each year.