

Cultural Commissions Consultation– Phase 2
Interim submission from Library Sector Group following meeting on 17th December
2004

Rights, Entitlements and Responsibilities

The existing “cultural right” could be viewed as being enshrined in the current base library legislation including the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003, which places a duty on local authorities to deliver free public library services. If this right was to be reaffirmed by the Commission, further definition of entitlements will be required.

For library services the key elements of entitlement would be:

- Information
- Reading, language and literacy
- Learning
- Access and community

These cut across information and library work in other sectors and the development of an enabling framework, which is inclusive and encourages partnership working to allow the citizen seamless access to information and services 24/7.

- The group believes that until cultural entitlements have been clearly defined, existing structures are still valid, but responsibilities of the national agencies may require realignment.
- When developing cultural entitlements the role of libraries in underpinning engagement in democracy should be recognised and reflected at the forefront of local council delivery. Libraries are community hubs; levels of library use are high with over 50% of the population using the range of services on offer. However the current levels of funding for libraries do not reflect this heavy use. There is a view that without the introduction of a ring-fenced funding model, libraries services, as currently provided, will continue to decline. Whilst some local authorities could be criticised for a lack of investment, the group viewed that there is significant value in local political input and ownership and that users would benefit from its continuance, combined with a standards, evaluation and inspection framework.
- The uptake by the public to exercise their “cultural rights” once defined, or their awareness of entitlements, will continue to be low without investment in marketing and advocacy. The reality is that most stakeholders do not recognise the principle of cultural rights and therefore have no expectation on which to base demand. For many citizens, visiting a library is the only cultural activity they participate in or have access to, but their motivation for using the service is not necessarily a cultural one.

Cultural Leadership

- For libraries, leadership is focused around SLIC as the advisory body and the National Library of Scotland for its curatorial and collections expertise.
- There may be issues for the broader cultural sector in terms of advocacy and furthering international work. It may be useful to look at the formalization of strategic grouping of cultural agencies with Ministerial leadership. However, for libraries, the most significant challenge is marketing and promoting services rather than leadership.

Funding arrangements

- The group recognises that funding will always be an issue for the sector and it is crucial that funding is linked to quality service provision. There is a view that the current library network is not sustainable with current funding provision and it would be possible to run better services with fewer services points. However this needs to be set against the fact that the library may be the sole community facility and there will be political and local sensitivities around closure programmes.

- Government is currently looking at Efficiency programmes and it is key that any cultural efficiencies are re-vested in the cultural sector and not elsewhere.
- The value of the library service as a community asset is often underestimated. Quality library services are essential for building a healthy community culture and that there should be standards agreed to ensure that appropriate investment is made.
- Capital funding to improve library and other cultural venues will improve the quality of the built environment. Programmes carried out by Communities Scotland and other divisions and agencies could usefully support this.
- Within the public library sector £8m reduction from resource funds since local government reorganization. If some or all this funding can be regained, the most efficient use would be to establish a strategic excellence fund. Funding should be linked to national programmes or pan sectoral projects delivered locally but planned regionally or nationally. This approach has been shown with People's Network Project and Reader Development to deliver broadly equitable levels of service across Scotland.
- Despite 3 year settlements, local authorities continue to have an annual pressure to look for cuts and savings. This model makes long term planning difficult. The group would encourage moving towards longer planning cycles linked to performance, quality and innovation and focusing on nationally agreed priorities. Funding, a combination of government or lottery, to support these on an outcome basis would strengthen the sector.

Standards and Evaluation

- Services which are not inspected are not taken seriously in the currently local government context. The establishment of HMIE for Cultural Services would raise both the local and national political profile of libraries and other cultural partnerships.
- Successful library service provision requires a delicate balance of national service equity against local needs. The Scottish Library and Information Council has been asked by the Scottish Executive to develop third generation public library standards which will set a benchmark for library services for all users, linking public demand with appropriate provision. This third set of standards, in conjunction with the cultural entitlements, has the potential to improve provision. Mechanisms of compliance and reward for meeting cultural delivery objectives will need to be developed and implemented in tandem with this.
- Financial investment, standards and self evaluation alone do not guarantee to improvements. A compliance mechanism such as inspection framework has a greater chance of delivering quality services for example the gradual improvements in community learning and the community development sectors since HMIE inspections.
- Standards, inspection and reporting mechanism, whatever the lead agency, will require regular review. This process would not need to be carried out annually but in a period of between 3 and 5 years, thus minimizing the administrative burden.

Operations and administration

- Libraries are better placed than other cultural services to offer a citizen-centered approach to library resources and collections. Over 80% of library resources held in Scotland will be searchable using one search strategy by March 2005. This has been achieved through the leadership and support of the national agencies and project funding.
- Libraries have developed a distributed model which works; there are flaws in over-centralization as seen in other cultural models. Further extension of this to a single national system, like that of Norway, would require detailed exploration, funding and the co-operation to establish a Public Information Network. Potential savings need to be weighed against central costs and potential service improvement.
- It may be useful to further explore national collaboration in procurement of ICT, services and books across the library sectors.

- Co-location with other services cannot be thought of too narrowly. A matrix of provision needs to be broadened and suit public needs best, whether it is a school in a rural community or a leisure centre in an urban environment. It is crucial that policy and decision making is directly through community planning and not because funding is available.
- PPP, whilst attractive, is planning school campuses which support existing class room based curriculum. Combined with developed school management it may not be flexible enough to meet the wider community needs.
- Co-location in schools may present security issues in terms of access. For example, the rights of excluded pupils to use co-located libraries need to be considered in the light of human rights legislation, local byelaws and library policy.

Local Authorities and Regional Bodies

- Local authorities have a legal responsibility to deliver library services. If this were removed to regional or national models, there may be dangers that losing local political support and funding.
- Regional groupings, both organisational and professional, have evolved from the imperatives of cost effectiveness, opportunities for project funding, shared training initiatives and exchange of ideas and best practice. Formalization of regional structures for services may distance local political control and ownership and even conflict with the community planning processes.
- Local influence is essential to the successful delivery of culture to citizens. Any governance structure has to ensure local accountability continues but more crucially have a sharp focus on service delivery. If funding and national programmes are linked to innovation and excellence this could be the mechanism to allow national agencies to engage and encourage regional networks to bid for grants linked to performance.
- There are other models to deliver library services, however caution needs to be used as the context in which they operate is entirely different. E.g. New Zealand has a high rate of library membership, but they do not consider social exclusion as an issue they need to address. However the model in Canada to support indigenous publishing may be usefully explored.

Ian

From: Karen
Sent: 17 January 2005 09:44
To: info
Subject: FW: Library Thinking Group[Scanned]
Importance: High

-----Original Message-----

From: Elaine Fulton [mailto:e.fulton@slainte.org.uk]
Sent: 14 January 2005 14:50
To: James Boyle; James
Cc: Richard
Subject: Library Thinking Group[Scanned]
Importance: High

James,

Please find attached comments from the group as a result of the meeting on 17th December. I will be sending 2 more submissions one from CILIP in Scotland – the professional body and another from SLIC itself – bet you can't wait. If you have any queries please get back to me

Best wishes

Elaine

Elaine Fulton
Director
Scottish Library and Information Council/CILIP in Scotland
1st Floor, Building C
Brandon Gate, Leechlee Road
Hamilton, ML3 6AU
Tel: 01698 458888
Fax: 01698 283170
[Http://www.slainte.org.uk](http://www.slainte.org.uk)

07/04/2005