



Evaluation of the Framework for the Future Action Plan 2003-06

**Findings of the evaluation research on improvement
and development in library services and the
contribution of the Framework action plan activities**

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Executive summary

This evaluation

S1 This final report of the evaluation of the **Framework for the Future** action plan 2003-06 presents the findings of the evaluation research on improvement and development in library services and the contribution of the Framework action plan activities. Evaluation activities included qualitative fieldwork, data feedback workshops, and a national survey of library services.

Change and development in library services

S2 Library services are managing to change, improve and innovate, despite limited freedom and resources. National and regional support – whether as overall policy development, challenge and review, or practical support for the development of staff and of service offers – has made a consistent contribution to the ability of individual library services to improve.

S3 Participation by individual library services in Framework action plan activities has led to improvements in services, partnership working, culture and efficiency.

97% of respondents to a national survey reported that involvement in Framework action plan activities had led to service improvements in their library service

S4 The greatest impact of Framework is through the existence of the Framework vision itself, it is this public vision which has given direction, made sense of circumstances, and created a new legitimacy for individual library service change and development.

“[Framework] has led to a fundamental re-evaluation of the service giving a clear focus and sense of direction.”

Head of library service

S5 Besides the Framework vision itself, three other strands of the action plan have had particularly significant effects on library change and development: peer review, leadership training, and the various reading initiatives.

S6 Framework itself and the associated action plan, has led to improvements in the strategic management, the organisation, the services, the partnerships, the culture and the efficiency of individual library services. This has all been achieved on a limited budget.

Building capacity

S7 Framework’s main impact is on the organisation of service delivery, rather than directly on services themselves. Framework promotes library service improvement and management development. It also directly enhances the service offer in some areas (such as reading) and the development of service models, and these in turn provide demonstrations to stakeholders of the effectiveness of innovations.

S8 Increasing management capacity is, in our view, the key mechanism for the renewal of the sector. Framework peer review and leadership training activities have demonstrated both the value of increasing management capacity and how much it is needed.

87% of respondents to a national survey reported that Framework leadership training had made a strong or very strong contribution to developing management in their library service.

S9 Public library standards have also encouraged local authorities to make library service changes, as have, to a limited extent, Framework action plan marketing and advocacy work.

Reading and learning

S10 Much of the development of service offers under the Framework action plan has focused on reading and learning, and, within this, on reader development. These approaches relate well to the government's Skills for Life policy (though much more could be done on learning *per se*); and have provided opportunities for library staff to explore new ways of thinking, being and providing services to the public. As such, while being highly practical in terms of concrete service offers, they have also been highly developmental for some library services in regard to reader development.

92% of respondents to a national survey reported that they considered their involvement in reading projects supported by Framework had helped their library service to develop better quality customer services.

S11 Involvement in reading projects supported by the Framework action plan helped library services to develop better quality customer services.

S12 National reading or learning activities have also in the view of library services enabled them to make a strong contribution to shared, local public policy priorities. This activity – together with the leadership development work and alongside service redesign activities, marks a shift to more proactive if not yet fully reflexive working with communities.

“library initiatives contributed to the local authority gaining Beacon Status for culture and sport for hard to reach groups.”

Head of library service

Community and civic values

S13 Good community engagement has always been a hallmark of excellent library services and community development has been central to improvement efforts in many library services. Most report that the Framework action plan has made a contribution to this. However specific community development elements of the action plan have been underdeveloped so far in terms of on-the-ground impacts, though many heads of library services anticipate that the Community Engagement Toolkit will make a significant contribution to the way they deliver services in their community.

Digital citizenship

S14 Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) introduced through the People's Network (PN) initiative was central to the last recent wave of change and improvement in public library services. However as yet we are not seeing clear additional impact from the digital services developed under the Framework action plan. Activities have been siloed rather than cross cutting, and opportunities to integrate the use of ICT across all aspects of service such as supporting reading and learning have been missed. Digital citizenship' is still very much a work in progress and requires additional urgent and joint attention from the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and the Society of Chief Librarians (SCL) if the legacy of PN is not to be lost: there is a visible contribution to the eGovernment agenda, but the challenge remains to exploit new ICT infrastructures as a platform for delivering core library services.

The contribution to change in the public library system as a whole

S15 Together, all the individual local authority library services comprise a national public library system. The public library system is, and has to be, self organising. Regional and national bodies such as SCL and MLA have an important role to play in helping the sector coordinate itself. The challenge of increasing management capacity in individual library services and the challenge of the self organisation of the transformation of the library system is the same challenge, for it involves the same people and many of the same activities. Thus Framework has had to address practical improvement and development in individual library services and the transformation of the public library system as a whole. It has done so, but there is much more work to do in the coming years.

"it is very helpful that Framework is there as a national framework and support structure which is enabling a greater degree of joined up working and networking that ever before."

Head of library service

Conclusions and recommendations: reframing and rebalancing the Framework action plan

S16 The strategic work begun by the action plan 2003-06 will need to be continued and financially supported for the foreseeable future, particularly in a context where large investments are being made (as happened with Peoples' Network and is about to happen with Community Libraries).

S17 Looking to the future, all elements of the Framework action plan need to be critically appraised through two lenses: one, how exactly do we imagine they contribute to the development of individual library services? And, two, to what extent do they directly contribute to the mobilisation and self-organisation of the sector around the Framework vision?

S18 The overall action plan budget is not of a size where shifting or concentrating resources in itself will have real impact. This is a dilemma which can only be managed not resolved. Nevertheless while it is difficult to make all the necessarily disparate elements of the action plan into a coherent whole, it

is possible to think through all these elements as part of a coherent whole. The more thematic structure of the recently agreed Framework for the Future: Action Plan 2006-08 augers well in this regard.

1. Introduction: this evaluation

Overview of this report

1.1 This final report of the evaluation of the Framework for the Future action plan 2003-06 presents the findings of the evaluation research on improvement and development in library services and the contribution of the Framework action plan activities. The report is organised into eight sections: this section (which outlines the evaluation approach); change and development in individual library services and the contribution of Framework and the action plan to that (section 2); the contribution of the action plan to building capacity (section 3); to reading and learning (section 4); to developing community and civic values (section 5); to digital citizenship (section 6); to change in the public library system as a whole (section 7); and conclusions and recommendations regarding reframing and rebalancing the action plan (section 8).

Overview of Framework for the Future and the Action Plan 2003-06

1.2 Framework for the Future is a 60 page report setting out a ten year vision for library services around three core themes: books, reading and learning; digital citizenship; and community and civic values. There is an emphasis on local solutions to local problems within loose structure provided by Framework. There is also an emphasis on partnership working. Libraries have a key role to play in helping to deliver the Shared Priorities of central and local government and in tackling significant social issues. Capacity needs to be built within the sector in order to do this. Framework provides a broad set of aims for library services rather than a blueprint of how to achieve them.

1.3 The Framework action plan 2003-06 put flesh on the bones of Framework, turning broad strategy into specific objectives and related tasks. The Plan contained more than 150 items which were translated into activities and deliverables and were organised in four Work Packages which reflected the three core themes of Framework and the task of building capacity in the sector. Work Packages were broken down into objectives, which were loosely related to the Shared Priorities of central and local government.

1.4 There has been a lot of activity across most areas of the Action Plan. According to the MLA's own management system, most tasks are on track or have made progress. Deliverables within each Work Package and objectives were highly variable in nature and include: undertaking assessments; initiating dialogues; preparing advocacy materials; preparing resources such as website material; undertaking reviews; developing strategies; publishing national strategy documents, reports, or think-pieces; commissioning research and training programmes. The programme has been rolled out successfully at a national level, laying a solid foundation for the next stages of implementation. However, the action plan was pitched at the national rather than the local level, and activity was focussed around gearing up and facilitating the building of the library sector to deliver Framework policy.

Evaluation methodology

1.5 The Tavistock Institute was commissioned to evaluate the impact of the Framework for the Future action plan 2003-06 on library services and the public library system, in support of the further improvement and development of the Framework action plan from 2006 onwards. A steering committee composed of representatives of SCL, DCMS and MLA was formed to advise and direct the evaluation.

1.6 The evaluation has consisted of a review of all available documentation; in-depth fieldwork, including, interviews with stakeholders, interviews with deliverers, and a small set of case studies in individual library services; a small workshop with deliverers; and a larger event with a broad cross section of senior library managers.¹ The findings produced were highly consistent; with data from documentary review, case studies and workshops with library managers and other actors tending to confirm each other. These qualitative findings were then confirmed and reinforced by the results of a national survey of library services.

1.7 The survey instrument consisted of 29 closed ended, sliding scale and multiple choice questions, with space for additional open ended comments. The questions tested a range of significant propositions and hypotheses about the impact and influence of the F4F action plan on library service change and improvement derived from the qualitative fieldwork. There were some additional questions concerning impact on wider change in the public library system, and on impact on end users/patterns of use – though these latter questions were limited for reasons of programme scale and difficulties of establishing direct causality. The questions covered a range of themes and topics, which were derived from the main findings of the qualitative research, augmented by further questions developed in discussion with the Evaluation Steering Committee members. The survey itself took place in June 2006, with analysis in July.² A copy of the survey instrument and a full survey report can be found in Appendix 1.

¹ The original aim of the evaluation of the Framework action plan was to marshal the existing evidence base in order to assess the impact of the action plan on library services and to provide support for the further focusing and development of the action plan. However, the documentary evidence base does not currently contain much impact data. What data there is largely relates to outputs and process activity. This has prompted a reformulation of the evaluation task. The evaluation has therefore proceeded by concentrating on those areas of the Action Plan where there has been most activity, namely those of: books, reading and learning; and the improvement activities (mainly, peer review, leadership training, and the development of impact measures), while still situating these strands in the overall context of action plan activity. In addition to conducting an expert review of books, reading and learning activities, the evaluation team has carried out primary research on both improvement and (to a lesser extent) BRL. As noted in the main text, a number of case studies of local library service improvement have been conducted, together with a programme of interviews and workshops/events to generate primary data on the impact of Framework, followed by a national survey.

² The quantitative analysis of the closed questions was undertaken using a statistical analysis package, SPSS; whilst the qualitative analysis of the open ended question was undertaken using a computer based qualitative analysis system, Nvivo.

2. Change and development in library services

Improvement in individual library services

2.1 Individual library services are managing to change and innovate, despite limited freedom and resources, through, for example: 'cutting to grow'; accessing regeneration funds; and finding new strategic roles within local authority corporate strategies and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP's).

2.2 There is a growing awareness in library services of the importance of basic management routines/structures, particularly; people management; information feedback; and organisation and work design. Increasingly library services are being organised around services and user groups rather than around functions and facilities. Engagement with users, citizens, local authority colleagues, and external partners is beginning to drive continuous adjustment, innovation and improvement in services.

2.3 The key to individual library service improvement is establishing positive feedback loops between different elements of change, for example:

- From staff management to service quality to positive user feedback to enhanced staff motivation and confidence.
- Between innovative service strategies, new external partnerships, and the development of new facilities.
- From visions to clear priorities to new forms of work organisation.

The drivers of improvement in individual library services

2.4 The basis of successful change and development is.³

- People management: at present mainly in the form of basic performance management but with elements of management-by-agreed-objectives too.
- Management development: whether internal to the home local authority or supported by the Framework action plan.
- Information feedback and continuous adjustment: from and to users, citizens, local authority colleagues, and external partners.
- Organisation and work design: reflecting new service orientations, getting closer to the user, and the need to innovate.

2.5 Typically change is kick started or made possible by:

³ The findings reported in this section are based on the results of our case study and workshop activities as part of the evaluation.

- Internal or external challenge: including changes in senior management, performance reviews, and peer reviews supported by the Framework action plan.
- Leadership and clear strategy: from the head of service and their senior management team (though developing the senior management team is usually the first and key challenge for heads of services).
- Member or director level support: both is delightful but having one or the other is vital.
- Change in staff composition and skills: as much by hiring in skills from outside the library profession (e.g. from the worlds of the arts, education or community development) as by training and development for librarians.
- Seed capital or new sources of revenue funding: indeed any 'little pot of money' that allows managers to kick start innovative activities.

2.6 Actual successful change processes themselves is characterised by some or all of the following elements:

- Alignment with corporate/LSP strategies: this is key to becoming relevant, gaining cooperation, and attracting internal attention and resources.
- External partnerships (including partnerships which leverage new resources, such as regeneration partnerships).
- Bootstrapping ('cutting to grow'/deploying resources to privilege innovation).
- New buildings (which are both a cause and a consequence of change).
- New services which increase footfall (such as the People's Network but also new reader services).
- Outreach and local marketing (including local alliances with arts organisations and the local press).
- Internal and external advocacy (particularly with own staff, senior local authority officers, and Members, as well as with potential partners).
- Staff training and development (which is necessary to underpin and exploit all of the above).

2.7 Such change processes if they are to be successful also require:

- managerial focus and choices – which are often difficult, painful, even scary.
- change management skills – particular as regards whole systems thinking and the sequencing of change.
- organisational development – building capability by moving staff customer orientation from being reactive to being reflexive.

The contribution of external factors to improvement in individual library services

2.8 National and regional support – whether as overall policy development, challenge and review, or practical support for the development of staff and of service offers – has made a consistent contribution to the ability of individual library services to improve:

- The Framework vision has helped give services direction and make sense of their role in a changing society. The vision has also provided a new language and a new legitimacy for change and development efforts in services both with library staff and with local authority senior officers and members.
- Challenge and review via CPA assessments and peer reviews has helped services identify weaknesses and strengths and focus change efforts.
- Library specific external staff training and development offers have complimented more generic internal local authority training provision.

The specific contribution of Framework for the Future to improvement in individual library services

2.9 Generally we have found that participation by individual library services in Framework action plan activities has led to improvements in services, partnership working, culture and efficiency. For instance:

- Almost all respondents to our survey – 97% – reported that involvement in Framework action plan activities had led to service improvements in their library service. Only 3% reported that it had not.
- The great majority – 76% – reported that involvement in Framework activities had led to new partnerships in their library service. 24% reported that it had not.
- The great majority – 75% – also reported that involvement in Framework activities had led to cultural change in their library service. 24% reported that it had not.

- Just over half of respondents – 51% – reported that involvement in Framework activities had led to efficiency gains in their library service. However, just under half – 48% – reported that it had not.

Impact of the Framework vision

2.10 However the greatest impact of Framework is clearly through the existence of the Framework vision itself; it is this public vision which has given direction, made sense of circumstances, and created a new legitimacy for individual library service change and development.

2.11 Our survey results bear this out. The vast majority of respondents – 78% – considered the level of positive contribution that the Framework vision has made to helping them inspire change and improvement in their public library service as strong or very strong. Key impacts included those on service redesign and planning; and on influencing elected members and the wider local authority

2.12 A theme which is frequently mentioned in relation to the impact of the Framework vision is how library services have used Framework as a tool to aid the planning of service structure and delivery. For some, it has contributed to a radical redesign of the service as a whole or of certain elements of the service:

“[Framework] has led to a fundamental re-evaluation of the service, giving a clear focus and sense of direction.”⁴

“[We] re-modeled our staffing structure on Framework – [it] provided a framework and made it easier to argue why it needed to be done.”

“[Framework] contributed to a major review of service provision, alignment and culture change programme.”

2.13 Others describe the use of Framework in less dramatic terms, but its potential for use both as an organising structure and as a resource to aid strategic decision-making is clearly recognized. For example:

“The vision has been central to our prioritisation of aims and objectives and [the] development of our work plan.”

“[Framework] has provided a focus for service planning.”

“[Framework] provided a setting for local strategy planning.”

“[We] used [Framework] as a basis for library action plans, targets etc.”

⁴ All the illustrative quotes in this sub-section are drawn from survey respondents.

“Our strategy is based on the F4F vision which involved a redefinition of the library service and changes in emphasis/ service which ultimately released funding for investment in the service.”

2.14 Framework has also been helpful in that it provides heads of library services with a clear 'vision' of libraries and a vocabulary which they can use as an advocacy tool to change the perceptions of libraries held by members and officers in the wider local authority setting. It serves to support arguments that position libraries as services which can and do deliver local priorities and agendas:

“[Framework is a] useful advocacy tool with members and senior colleagues.”

“[Framework has made a contribution] by having a simple easy to communicate set of priorities that I have been able to use in many different forums. This has meant that I can keep the message simple and ensure politicians [and] colleagues across the council understand what we are about.”

“It has helped the members understand the scope of a modern public library service.”

“[Framework contributes] by providing a strong and consistent message of the vision for libraries; by providing ongoing support materials and relevant campaigns; by... securing value for money... All this enables me... to deliver a clear message to staff and Members of the value and relevance of our libraries to our communities.”

2.15 And this advocacy has affected the ability of some services to promote change and secure investment from within the authority:

“[Framework] provided a real push to politicians to determine the right shape and size of the service and an investment programme”

“The library modernisation plan has received Cabinet approval. This is a three year plan for the full refurbishment of the service, including some new builds, some relocations and everywhere refurbished. This is due in part to the realisation of the value and impact of the service on the life of the individual and local community – as promoted by Framework.”

The impact of Framework action plan activities

2.16 Besides the Framework vision itself, three other particularly significant effects on library change and development are also discernable: peer review, leadership training, and the various reading initiatives:

- Peer review (both as a challenge and as management development) has had a major impact on both the library services which have been reviewed and on the library managers who have undertaken the reviews - though the numbers involved as a proportion of the national total are still very small.
- Leadership training (as well as other training) has had a wider impact and has been widely appreciated by participants – though there is considerable scope to expand the impact of leadership training through follow on mentoring and action learning set activities.
- The various reading initiatives (as well as to a lesser extent other learning initiatives) have allowed services to offer and experiment with new services and new service approaches in a fairly easy and economical fashion.

Overall impact

2.17 Overall then we can say that Framework itself and the associated action plan, on a limited budget, has clearly led to improvements in the strategic management, the organisation, the services, the partnerships, the culture and the efficiency of individual library services.

2.18 Subsequent sections on Building Capacity, Reading and Learning, Community and Civic Values, and Digital Citizenship look at this in further detail.

3. Building capacity

Overview: the nature of the contribution

3.1 The contribution of the Framework action plan to improved customer services is indirect. Framework's main impact is on the organisation of the delivery of services, rather than directly on services themselves. Framework promotes library service improvement and management development. However it does directly enhance the service offer in some areas (such as reading) and the development of service models, and these in turn provide demonstrations to the various stakeholders of the effectiveness of innovations.

3.2 The sheer variety of activities under the action plan has provided a wide palate for individual library services to choose from, though they might also be seen as an incomplete patchwork. However all of the action plan's contributions have tended to have a differential impact on individual library service change and development depending on where the library service is at and what they need at this time.

Leadership development

3.3 As has been noted in the previous section, broad based leadership capabilities are important for library system improvement. The leadership development programme is subject to its own separate evaluation and we have not examined it in any great depth however it is clear that most participants in the programme have valued it highly, though there has been some scepticism about the content from some participants.

3.4 Results clearly indicate that a very significant majority: 81% (51) of Heads of Library service considered that Framework leadership training had made a strong contribution to helping develop management in their library service. And 6% (4) stated that Framework leadership training had made a very strong contribution in helping to develop management. Only 10% (6) of respondents reported that Framework leadership training had made a weak contribution and 2% reported that it had made a very weak contribution.

3.5 In summary, almost all survey respondents reported that Framework leadership training had made a very positive contribution to helping develop management in their library. No respondents reported Framework leadership training had *not* made a contribution to helping develop management in their library service.

3.6 We would note, and endorse from broad experience elsewhere, the observation made by the providers of the leadership programme that such development experiences are most likely to have impact when accompanied by follow on activities such as mentoring and support for ongoing learner networks.

3.7 In the survey we asked whether the impact of leadership training on your library service could be enhanced by follow-on activities such as: Mentoring; Action Learning Sets; Top-up training days; One-to-One Coaching; Diversity and Positive Action Training; Master Classes on a specific service; Involvement in Programme Steering Groups at regional or national level.

3.8 76% of respondents indicated that the impact of leadership training could be enhanced by top up training days as a follow-on activity. 57% of respondents indicated that the impact of leadership training could be enhanced by mentoring as a follow-on activity. Approximately half or 51% of respondents indicated that the impact of leadership training could be enhanced by action learning sets as a follow-on activity. 48% of respondents indicated that the impact of leadership training could be enhanced by Involvement in programme steering groups at regional or national level as a follow-on activity. 44% of respondents indicated that the impact of leadership training could be enhanced by master classes on a specific service as a follow-on activity. 37% of respondents indicated that the impact of leadership training could be enhanced by one-to-one coaching as a follow-on activity. Finally, only 18% of respondents indicated that the impact of leadership training could be enhanced by diversity and positive action training as a follow-on activity. Some respondents commented more generally that, as cultural change is so difficult to achieve, coverage of the training would need to be increased and follow-up training and support made available, if library services were to see a significant impact.

3.9 So, overall leadership training seems (pending the results of its own evaluation) to be a success, but to maximise its impact on the development of the capacity of the sector it needs to be expanded to at least allow for some follow on mentoring and action learning sets for the participants after the training itself is over (particularly in relationship to the 'Future Leaders').

The peer review process

3.10 According to our qualitative research (our case study research included several library services who had experienced peer reviews), the peer review process though resource intensive on all sides, has been found to be highly developmental for both the library managers undertaking the reviews and those under review, and is leading to a more sophisticated and subtle discourse around library service improvement.

3.11 As one would expect given the small total number of peer reviews, only a handful of survey participants reported participating in a peer review, these all reported a high or very high impact but the sample size is too small for this result to be meaningful in itself. However although there were also a large proportion of survey respondents who had not acted as a peer reviewer and there were considerable levels of non-response to this question on this topic, the results indicate that for those small number of individuals who had acted as a peer reviewer this had a significant, positive impact on their library service.

3.12 The peer reviews themselves have been described variously by the recipients as very helpful and very painful. Peer reviews have impacted on directors and Members as well as library service managers. Some library services have valued the follow on financial support post-peer review as much or more than the peer review itself.

3.13 However peer reviews are not a panacea, some horses have been brought to water and have failed to drink. More work may be needed on identifying the preconditions for peer review success. More importantly, alternative interventions will be need to be developed for poorly performing library services which are not likely to benefit from peer review or who prove not to benefit from peer review. This has to be a joint task for MLA and SCL.

3.14 Peer review has been particularly potent as a management development mechanism not only for the library services involved but for all those involved including the peer reviewers themselves. The great difficulty with peer review is its resource intensity (both in terms of the action plan budget and in terms of participants' time). Ideally peer review would now be used a more widely and be available as far as possible where there were opportunities for it to make a significant contribution to library service development.

3.15 However Peer Review is resource intensive and not the only means to promote improvement. The issue here is as follows: increasing management capacity in the sector is vital. Leadership development in itself is not enough. But nor is a limited number of peer reviews targeted at poorly performing authorities. Less resource intensive organisational development approaches such as facilitation of, and out-of-pocket-expenses budgets for, action learning sets or other 'parallel processes' (such as self organising working parties) at a national or regional level could also make an important contribution. Among the less resource intensive approaches, different kinds of peer activities are likely to be particularly valuable– mentoring schemes, Master Classes, the IDeA cultural services peer reviews.

Increasing management capability generally

3.16 Increasing management capability is probably the key mechanism for the renewal of the sector. Framework action plan activities – peer review and leadership training – have demonstrated both the value of increasing management capability and how it is needed.

3.17 But the key point here is that it is increasing management capability that is crucial to the developing the sector, not any particular manifestation, however successful, whether it be peer review, leadership training or something else.

Standards and measures

3.18 Many heads of library services with whom we have discussed the matter see standards and measures as important for driving improvement and highlighting the need for change for a wider local authority constituency, and

believe that library services have not had hitherto any meaningful, appropriate standards and measures.

3.19 We were able to ask survey participants whether the public library standards encouraged their local authority to make library service changes: the majority, 65% of survey respondents, reported that public library standards had encouraged their local authority to make library service changes in terms of **longer opening hours.**; 67% of survey respondents reported that public library standards had encouraged their local authority to make library service changes in terms of **more investment in stock.** A minority, 14% of survey respondents, reported that public library standards had encouraged their local authority to make library service changes in terms of *number of service access points.*

3.20 Some respondents to the survey elaborated on these responses, one saying, for example, that:

“We would have wanted to implement these changes anyway, but the PLSS have helped us argue the case”.

“The standards have brought into sharp focus the need for continual change and development in order to deliver improved customer focused services. Awareness of service performance has been increased by staff at all levels. Attention on performance has been noticeable at Directorate and Corporate level .”

3.21 Respondents were also requested to state whether the public library standards encouraged their local authority to make other unspecified library service changes. Of those 51% of survey respondents who wrote a response the three most frequently mentioned service changes were:

- Additional PCs or sustainability of public access to ICT.
- Refurbishment (ranging from modest to significant) or new building stock.
- An emphasis on customer service and customer service training.

3.22 In summary, the survey results indicate that for the majority of survey respondents, the public library standards have encouraged their local authority to make library service changes in terms of both longer opening hours and more investment in stock. However, the majority of respondents also reported that public library standards had *not* encouraged their local authority to make library service changes in terms of the number of service points. Overall, and in line with the findings from our qualitative work, those survey respondents who commented on public library standards largely agreed that the introduction of standards was welcome, but that work still needs to be done to improve their effectiveness both in terms of refining the standards themselves and of giving standards 'teeth', possibly through the use of sanctions if standards are not met.

3.23 We understand that work is now being undertaken to review the public library standards to concentrate on those which have proved most useful and meaningful.

Marketing and advocacy

3.24 Unlike, say, the new reader services funded under the Framework action plan, the considerable marketing development efforts made under the action plan have not had anything like the same impact on the individual library services nor on end user services (i.e. in terms of an impact on increased usage).

3.25 The marketing initiatives that did happen do appear to have also been of some value, not least for internal marketing within local authorities, but national marketing and advocacy efforts have not yet got to the point of dovetailing with local marketing and advocacy.

3.26 This mixed message was reinforced by comments in relation to marketing by our survey respondents: some respondents praised the marketing and advocacy activities, for example:

“links with national media have been particularly beneficial”; or ‘the Little Book of Public Libraries is a brilliant advocacy tool’.

While others criticised it, for example:

“[we are] not impressed with [the] marketing tools - where is the image bank we were promised? ‘; ‘marketing has been ineffective – [it] lacks focus and visibility’.

3.27 On the face of it, and in our opinion, this does not appear to have been the fault of the marketing strategy *per se* but rather is the lack of delivery to date. It would seem again to be a case of getting the dialogue between all the actors around the action plan right as the guide to practical action. At this stage in roll out of the action plan the question that remains unanswered is: how can marketing support and excite local and regional advocacy strategies?

4. Reading and learning

Overview

4.1 Naturally, being libraries, much of the development of service offers under the Framework action plan has focused on reading and learning, and, within this, particularly on reader development.

Achievements

4.2 There have been very real achievements in the area of books, reading and learning under the Framework action plan, including:

- The actions and activities around the action plan are making a significant contribution to new approaches to librarianship in the public library service. They display a sophistication of thinking and understanding that goes well beyond current levels of understanding of most library staff about their practice, and challenge existing assumptions and ways of thinking in many areas of library service.
- Books, reading and learning activities have created a knowledge infrastructure to inform library service planning and development and in particular to strengthen its negotiations and positioning within the local authorities.
- Books, reading and learning activities have helped to build a partnership infrastructure that has the potential for delivering long term value for the public library sector.
- The cumulative effect of books, reading and learning strategic actions in building a knowledge and partnership infrastructure is potentially one of broad cultural change in how the public library perceives itself. It is about a shift towards being an actor and agent in shaping the future, rather than supplicant or re-actor. It is about having the competence and confidence to assume an assertive, proactive role in diverse national, regional and local arenas.
- Framework has had a significant influence on how libraries view and plan their work with reading. As well as its importance as a tool for learning, libraries have re-embraced its creative role in people's lives. Libraries are bringing together reading and learning strategies, recognising that the informal, self-motivated learning they promote should be central to creation of a deeper learning culture.
- Books, reading and learning activities are very helpful to the library service sector where resources are always tight, and the system is not inherently innovative:
 - templates, resources, briefing packs
 - marketing materials

- databases eg. pool of specialist artists and other creative personnel.
- The 'national offers' that have been developed so far provide a framework for continuous improvement in specific areas of service development eg. reading groups, improvement model for young people's services. The shift away from the notion of 'standard' level of service to one based on aspiration and continuous improvement is itself a significant cultural change within the public library service. The challenge, as several of the reports have clearly stated, is to recognise the holistic nature of the changes required and to find ways of configuring these together.

Impact

4.3 In our survey almost the entire sample – 97% of respondents – reported that they had specific plans and strategies to promote reading and 92% - again, almost all respondents – reported that they considered that their involvement in reading projects supported by the Framework action plan had helped their library to develop better quality customer services.

4.4 Likewise almost the entire sample – 94%, of respondents – stated that they did have specific plans and strategies to promote learning in their library service and the great majority of respondents – 73% – considered that their involvement in learning projects supported by the Framework action plan has helped their library to develop better quality customer services. However a minority, – 21% of respondents -considered that their involvement in learning projects under Framework had not helped them to develop better quality customer services.

4.5 Further a significant majority of respondents - 76% - considered that the national reading or learning activities they had been involved in had enabled their library service to make a strong or very strong contribution to shared, local public policy priorities. Specific examples of this contribution included:

- Summer Reading Challenge
- RAW
- Vital Link
- Bookstart
- Adult learning programmes / Learn Direct / learning centres / family learning events
- Link-in
- Reading groups

4.6 These activities were considered to impact on local priorities around:

- Education

“Supported adult achievement of accredited and non-accredited learning goals and improved infrastructure for learning. The Summer

Reading Challenge has allowed us to strongly contribute to the raising standards in the schools agenda, through a Libraries LPSA target”⁵

- of children, both at school and outside of school through family learning

“Introduction of dedicated Children’s Mobile Library serving 18 primary schools which were giving the Council some cause for concern”

- of adults, both concerning the basic skills agenda and lifelong learning

“We have a specialist post to deliver the basic skills agenda for the service resulting in basic skills readers groups. These have enabled us to demonstrate our contribution to ‘Sustainable development and regeneration’ a key strand in our Community Strategy”

- Employment and economic vitality (via adult education but also through more directly relevant projects)

“RAW and Link in - both [are] getting high levels of participation and [there is] evidence of people making progression into employment.”

- Health

“Vital link” work with recovering drug users has contributed towards local health and community priorities through reader development. ”

- Stronger communities

“Both the summer reading challenge and Book Start programmes have been recognised as contributing to the Every Child Matters agenda, particularly the Enjoy and Achieve theme.”

- Culture

“Some library initiatives contributed to authority gaining Beacon Status for Culture & Sport for hard to reach groups. ”

4.7 But perhaps not always as much as they should:

“Programmes such as the Summer Reading Challenge, Vital Link etc certainly contribute to shared priorities but it is sometimes difficult to get that contribution recognised and reflected in wider plans.”

⁵ All the illustrative quotes in this sub-section are drawn from survey respondents

4.8 While only a minority – 32% of respondents – considered that national books, reading and learning programmes have provided savings to their library service, the vast majority, 81% of respondents considered that national books, reading and learning programmes have provided added value to their library service. Common examples of both savings and added value offered by survey respondents include:

- providing savings in staff time as planning activities have been undertaken, and promotional materials have been created, elsewhere
- providing savings in printing costs
- enabling events to be scaled-up, both in terms of size and duration
- providing better quality 'professional' materials' and marketing which have created a nationally recognised brand
- providing training for front-line staff which lead to increased 'product knowledge' and confidence.

4.9 Several caveats were attached (to positive statements) concerning the cost of promotional materials: one respondent felt that, although the programmes added value, there had not been cost savings as some of the promotions are quite costly and that the material is not necessarily packaged in the way they wanted it to be; another respondent stated that promotion materials are increasingly having to be purchased. (These latter comments of course raise interesting issues about actors' perceptions as to who is responsible for and who should take ownership of sustainability).

4.10 Finally, some respondents also commented that they considered that the Framework Action Plan had not directly contributed to service improvement in the area of reading or learning activities, and that initiatives had been being developed prior to Framework and would have continued to be developed had Framework never been published. However, these respondents reported that Framework has provided an organisational framework and context for these initiatives that is proving valuable:

A note on books

4.11 Available stock is central to the reader offer. The quality and quantity of new stock has been the Achilles' heel of library services for many years and devoting new resources to anything other than stock a source of considerable controversy in the public press. Local authorities are responsible for stock budgets and the MLA, SCL and DCMS have limited influence on their decisions. As we have seen in Section 3, public library standards have encouraged library authorities to make some more investment in stock though clearly most would agree that is still not adequate.

4.12 Additionally the Framework action plan has made its own contribution to addressing the stock crisis. Steps have been undertaken including both policy research - a recent report commissioned by the MLA suggests that major savings in stock procurement costs, releasing more resources for buying additional stock, could be made with more inter-library service cooperation⁶ – and practical – developing on-line subscriptions and national licensing agreements.

4.13 As regards on-line subscriptions and national licensing agreements: almost half of the total number of respondents to our survey – 49% – reported that as a result of new online subscriptions they had been able to make small financial savings on stock procurement, and another 27% reported that they had been able to make considerable savings. Similarly, the majority of respondents – 64% – considered that the national licensing agreement with major commercial suppliers (the ‘Reference Online’ initiative) had provided savings to their library service; and the vast majority of respondents – 83% – considered that the national licensing agreement had added value to their library service.

4.14 Several respondents added that national initiatives had enabled them to add value by providing services that otherwise would not have been possible:

“national agreements have allowed us to provide services previously unattainable”.

In particular, promotional materials and joint procurement services were mentioned as having a positive impact:

“the national brokering of electronic subscriptions is brilliant. More please! It has enabled us to provide a range of resources that we would not otherwise have had sufficient budget to be able to provide.”

One respondent, however, stated that their regional stock purchasing consortium was managing to provide more cost effective services than Reference Online.

Overall

4.15 The reading and learning aspect of framework are a mixture of different projects centred around reading and a socially embedded, motivational philosophy of learning which emphasise the pleasurable, creative, and social aspects of reading (from book clubs to the children’s Summer Reading Challenge). These approaches relates well to the government’s Skills for Life approach if not always to the government’s broader educational philosophies.

4.16 The various projects have provided opportunities for library services and their staff to explore new ways of thinking, being and providing services to the

⁶ PricewaterhouseCoopers ‘Better stock, better libraries; transforming library stock procurement, phase 2 final report’, MLA, London, August 2006

public. As such, while being highly practical in terms of concrete service offers, they have also been highly developmental for some library services.

4.17 The variety of reading projects (and underlying philosophies) within the Framework action plan has been its great strength. Again it may be tempting to imagine that there would 'of course' be scope to rationalise/integrate/concentrate the various diverse, even competing, R&L activities but again this would be a mistake. The range of existing R&L activities already only approximates to the 'requisite variety' of different types of offers which we might expect a vibrant informal learning sector to display/develop and to cut off or overly favour any wellspring of innovation may be dangerous.

4.18 Nevertheless criticism can be made of the limitations to the models of learning, of **sustainability**, and of **diffusion** implicit in the current action plan. The connection (read across) between F4F's strategic objectives for R&L and the set of activities is not readily apparent nor is the strategy for diffusion and sustainability. The specific current limitations to the R&L strategy which we would highlight are (see further below for detail):

- there is a need to think more critically about the real difference between reading and *learning* and to have more sophisticated models for supporting that transition.
- there is a need to further develop and ensure effective models of *sustainability* which fund projects through to (or require projects to work through to) embeddedness.
- there is a need for more use of models of *diffusion* beyond the current often rather limited and ineffective notions of 'demonstration of good practice' to the establishment of actual change processes.

4.19 Even without any significant additional funding there is the opportunity and the necessity to have the (ongoing) conversation about local, regional and national R&L strategies and offers, their effectiveness and their limitations, and their mutual relatedness. It is vital that individual library services and their local authorities, and national partners (Arts Council, LSC/DfES, LGA) alike have a clear sense of how the Framework reading and learning strategy maps onto their preoccupations and on to specific activities funded under the action plan.

4.20 This is a national conversation but it may also be a particularly pertinent example of how regional MLA's in dialogue with regional SCL's might make a strategic contribution to emergent thinking and practice. The strategic sense that MLA/SCL can make of the Community Library concept via the Framework discourse could be critical here.

The *Framework* approach to books, reading and learning

4.21 Framework emphasised several themes for this core area of library service:

- The importance of reading for enjoyment, creativity, and as a tool for learning
- Reading as an individual and a social activity, with potential benefits of a personal, civic, social and cultural kind
- The importance of quality book stock
- The role of the public library in supporting learning:
 - creating a deeper learning culture in which people expect and want to learn
 - complementing the role of formal education providers and other agencies through partnerships
 - promoting learning as exploration and self-discovery, whether of individuals or communities of interest
- Focusing the library's activities in lifelong learning on three main areas:
 - supporting early learning
 - supporting pupils and students
 - supporting older students
- Developing mutually beneficial relationships with the business community such as working with publishers, booksellers, authors and private sponsors to support reading promotion.

4.22 Framework advocated the development of a 'reading and learning offer', combining both national programmes and local reader development and learning projects. It identified Bookstart, the Summer Reading Challenge and out of school hours study support as three examples of activities which ought to form part of every library service's core provision. In our case studies we also saw how library services were targeting particularly needy, important or hard-to-reach groups for their services; whether particularly deprived localities (often linked to regeneration schemes) or particular demographics (for example, youth) or particular educationally disadvantaged groups (such as white working class boys or women of Bangladeshi origin in certain locations).

National context

4.23 Overall these activities can be seen as being aimed at least in intention at helping libraries develop the capability to contribute towards shared public policy priorities such as: raising standards in schools; improving quality of life for all demographics; creating stronger communities; and promoting economic vitality (including improving adult skills). In practice, individual library services, the national actors part funded under the action plan (such as The Reading Agency and Opening the Book), and key partners such as the Arts Council, are still struggling to effect an effective juncture with the national and local schools system. They have though created many successful initiatives for children and young people by themselves and have managed to work more with post-compulsory education and through initiatives such as 'Vital Link'.

Strategic approach

4.24 The strategic objective expressed in the Framework action plan for books, reading and learning is 'to transform library services and support the marketing strategy through the development of national offers to key client groups'. More realistically, we are really talking here about pump-priming/kick-starting the beginnings of this hoped for transformation – after all,

the action plan basically comprises a number of bounded, term-limited projects with relatively small budgets, involving multiple partners in the design, development and roll-out of deliverables or outputs, and the action plan provides no coherent framework for bringing these disparate elements together – the emergent Framework strategy is expected to provide that.

4.25 One emergent strategy in the Action Plan, for example, aims at ensuring that national initiatives (offers, pilots, models) are interpreted and implemented locally, and is built around consultation of end users and consensus-seeking and ownership-building among a cross-section of library staff. The development of an ‘early years offer’, for example, involved audience research, an audit of existing provision, and various modes of consultation with the profession and other sectors to establish the features of a family friendly service.

4.26 The national leadership provided by TRA for key strands of books, reading and learning highlights the importance of strategic vision, dynamism, capacity to deliver, and enjoying the confidence of public libraries themselves. It is arguably the TRA which is providing the most coherence for this area at this time, bringing together the many different strands of work supported by different agencies, rather than the action plan *per se* or the community of library service managers. However TRA carries its own particular philosophy of books, reading and learning, not one shared by the whole community (eg. not least OTB who offer a different and equally important perspective), and valuable and vital though this contribution is, it is not enough to allow the community’s strategies to be set by default.

4.27 Currently the most common diffusion strategy in the public library sector is to showcase innovative or best practice projects and pilots through presentations at seminars and conferences, or mounted on the web or in print form. However experience in other sectors suggests that this can be a weak tool for dissemination and diffusion (being too downstream, voluntaristic, non-participatory, ‘not-invented here’.) Naturally being the library sector there is an enormous reliance on the printed word. There are lots of well written, high quality reports and they are widely disseminated, but it is not clear how successful the following through to take-up and implementation has been. The substance of the learning needs to be **worked through** by the community and all its partners – work shopped not presented.

4.28 The challenge now for reading and learning – as it is for all aspects of the Framework action plan - is to develop national and local strategies which address:

- The diffusion and effective take-up of pilots and models.
- Sustainability of service innovations.
- The relationship between national, regional and local – top down and/or bottom-up, and the role of mediating bodies.

- The levers for effective implementation and change at library service level.
- Models of partnership (cross-public sector, mixed public and private).
- Inclusion of demand and supply led approaches.
- Coherence and rationalisation between the many different agencies, programmes and initiatives in this area.
- Joint (cross-authority) workforce development strategies.
- Audit of key national policy agendas of government relevant to this area and strategies for positioning public libraries centrally within them.
- National 'off the peg' promotions that library services can market locally.
- Strategic alignment with programmes of other agencies which build on bodies of knowledge, expertise, and partnership 'capital' established through earlier programmes and initiatives.

5. Community and civic values

5.1 Good community engagement has always been a hallmark of excellent library services and community development has been central to improvement efforts in many library services. Most library services report that the Framework action plan has made a contribution to this: these activities have been both about using community engagement techniques to develop and deliver services such as reading and learning and about undertaking community engagement and development *per se*. However specific community development elements of the action plan have been relatively underdeveloped so far in terms of on-the-ground impacts. Nevertheless many heads of library services anticipate that the Community Engagement Toolkit will make a significant positive contribution to the way they deliver services in their community.

Community development activities

5.2 Community development has been central to improvement efforts in many of the library services where we have undertaken case study work, and this has been largely borne out by survey findings where the vast majority of respondents consider that the Framework action plan has made some significant positive contribution to the way their library service engages with the community. A significant minority – 24% of all survey respondents – reported that the Framework action plan had made a strong or very strong contribution towards the way their library service engages with their community; and most respondents – another 51% – reported at least a weak contribution.

5.3 In some cases particular elements of the community, such as young people or particularly deprived sub-populations, have been targeted as part of broader local authority social inclusion strategies. Library involvement in projects which link social inclusion, regeneration, and the development of new multi-purpose facilities of a cultural, educational or health and welfare nature have all been pioneered, providing a reservoir of good practice to draw upon. Again from an action plan perspective, and as we have seen in the previous section, this raises questions for the actors: how can community development activities, as with ICT developments, support and dovetail with other activities such as reading and learning strategies, and particularly, for example, the evolution from reading to learning?

Specific community development activities in the action plan

5.4 Specific community development elements of the action plan have been relatively underdeveloped so far in terms of on-the-ground impacts – however, as we have seen above and in the previous section, community development is central to many perhaps most activities of library services.

5.5 The 'Designing Libraries' website and the 'Disability Web Resources' have provided resources to support library authorities in making their services more available to communities but our survey respondents clearly report that the former has not added value while reports on the latter are more ambiguous.

5.6 We were also able to explore in the survey to what extent survey participants ‘anticipated’ a positive contribution from the new Community Engagement Toolkit. The majority of respondents – 56% – anticipate that the Community Engagement Toolkit will make a significant positive contribution to the way they deliver services in their community. Although a number of respondents stated that they did not know what the level of contribution would be for the anticipated toolkit, only a very small number reported that they did *not* anticipate that the toolkit would make any contribution.

5.7 Nevertheless, based on our qualitative research, and in particular on our review of documentary evidence and on discussions with MLA staff, we would tend to agree – at least to date – with the survey respondent who observed that:

“with the exception of [the] Community Engagement Toolkit, this is the weakest strand of Framework for the Future.”

5.8 However we would stress here again that this is not to say that other library developments are not currently making an important contribution to community development, they are – as will be seen, for example, in the following section on Digital Citizenship.

Looking forward

5.9 Looking forward the picture also looks quite different: in the new Framework for the Future: Action Plan 2006-08

“people and communities [are] put at the heart of library service development and involved in decision making with £80m Big Lottery investment in libraries a catalyst for cultural change”.

An initiative on this scale promises to have an impact reminiscent of the People’s Network on public library services. However that is beyond the scope of this report.

6. Digital citizenship

6.1 Information and Communications Technologies introduced through the People's Network initiative was central to the last recent wave of change and improvement in public library services. However as yet we are not seeing clear additional impact from the digital services developed under the Framework action plan. Activities have been siloed rather than cross cutting, and opportunities to integrate the use of ICT across all aspects of service (such as supporting reading and learning) have been missed. There is a visible contribution to the e-government agenda but the challenge remains to exploit new ICT infrastructures as a platform for delivering core library services. 'Digital citizenship' is still very much a work in progress and requires additional urgent and joint attention from the MLA and the SCL if the legacy of PN is not to be lost.

ICT developments

6.2 Information and Communications Technologies introduced through the People's Network initiative were central to the last recent wave of change and improvement in public library services. Today many library staff interviewed in case studies undertaken as part of this evaluation still mention PN first when asked what they consider to have been the major recent changes in their library service, and indeed PN has been the basis of increased footfall and changes in the profile of library users in most library services.⁷

6.3 In our survey, 76% of respondents considered that the People's Network services they had been involved in had enabled their library service to make a very significant positive contribution to shared, local public policy priorities. Further and additionally 84% of respondents to our survey also reported that in their local authority there is corporate recognition of the role of People's Network for delivering e-Government services. Specific examples included:

- e-government (including access to local services) and digital citizenship

*"[The] corporate e-services officer is well aware of our digital citizenship role and has worked with us to assess demand for or pilot various services e.g. web services for older users, e-citizen national pilot"*⁸

"Higher visitor numbers to libraries as a result of PN availability which has strengthened our position locally. Other council services can develop their own e-services more confidently knowing that every resident has theoretical access to the internet via libraries"

- social inclusion (of older people, BME communities, immigrant communities, and families without ICT at home)

⁷ Sommerlad, E, Child, C, Ramsden, C and Kelleher, J, 'Books and bytes: new service paradigms for the 21st Century library' Big Lottery Fund, London, 2004

⁸ Again, all illustrative quotes in this sub-section are drawn from survey respondents.

“Silver surfer type activities have led to greater social inclusion amongst the elderly .”

“We know that the profile of PN users includes a wide range of BME communities [and] those without IT access at home.”

- community/adult learning/ lifelong learning

“It gave us the opportunity to bid for a LearnDirect contract to run from the libraries. It has formed the basis for our skills/ knowledge in social inclusion issues relating to IT. ”

“[PN] and other ICT resources have enabled the service and partners to deliver over 600 structured learning events each year (leading to accreditation, up-skilling and skills for life). ”

- sustainable development and regeneration

“[Our] on-line enquiry service gained national recognition for high standard of service. This was seen as a major contribution to 'sustainable development and regeneration.’”

“PN itself has raised the profile of the library service to the extent that colleagues across the council are clamoring for us to promote access to their service areas through local libraries because of the contribution we make to social inclusion; improved customer access and service. ”

Framework action plan digital resources

6.4 The general case for national resources is well made by one survey participant, who says:

“Developing these services nationally improves and enhances the 'offer' that we can provide to our customers via the library's website. This contributes to social inclusion, lifelong learning and active citizenship. It demonstrates that the library service is meeting customers' expectations for an evolving and exciting service.”

6.5 Elements of the Framework action plan have been aimed at exploiting the new PN infrastructure through the development of new digital resources, including: 'The People's Network Enquire Service'; the 'People's Network Discover Service'; and the 'People's Network Read Service'.

6.6 However these resource developments have not been closely aligned with the reading and learning elements of the action plan (though the reading projects do have their own web based support elements). This raises interesting questions concerning whether digital developments should just be

a thing in themselves, closely linked perhaps to the e-government agenda; or provide a wider cross cutting support and exploitation for other activities.

6.7 The results of the survey on the digital resources developed under the action plan were indeterminate. With the exception of the 'People's Network Enquire Service' which was clearly reported as having added value, reports on whether the other digital resources provide added value to library services were more ambiguous. More light might be thrown on this issue through a proper analysis of usage and user statistics but this is beyond the scope of the work of this evaluation.

'Digital citizenship'

6.8 Several respondents to our survey considered that initiatives within the area of digital citizenship are having a significant impact on library services:

"This has to be the single biggest contributor to improving public libraries in the past five years. A library success story!"; "People's Network [is the] biggest single factor, other than opening hours extensions, in getting new users into libraries."

Others consider that more needed to be done and suggested that virtual services be included in the public library service standards, and that resources be better targeted.

6.9 Again, Framework activity in this area was seen by some as raising the profile of library services. A number of respondents also expressed the view that libraries are leading the way with regard to e-services:

"[digital citizenship activities have] helped to raise the profile of the library service in the borough as we led the way with the number of e-enabled services for some time. The value of facilitated access to e-services is also recognised by some of our colleagues".

At least one respondent however – confirming findings of previous case studies on the use of PN⁹ – stated that, while the People's Network infrastructure had an impact at the corporate level within their authority, the new services have had in fact little impact on the public in terms of their engagement with e-government: the public use the service for their own purposes, for email and internet access.

6.10 In short, for the public library system – as for local government, government as a whole, and the broader public sphere – 'digital citizenship' is very much a work in progress. What it can mean and could mean is emergent and dependant on continuing innovation and experimentation.

⁹ Sommerlad, E, Child, C, Ramsden, C and Kelleher, J, 'Books and bytes: new service paradigms for the 21st Century library' Big Lottery Fund, London, 2004

7. The contribution to change in the public library system as a whole

Conceptualising change in the public library system

7.1 The Framework for the Future action plan with limited resources is tasked with making a major contribution to achieving the ambitious Framework vision. The challenge for the action plan is to achieve maximum leverage on sector change within tight budgets. Under this circumstance, having an adequate conceptualisation of how change can be enabled in the public library system as a whole, and how the Framework action plan can contribute to this, is vital.

7.2 Together, all the individual local authority library services comprise a national public library system. This public library system is a statutory service and costs many hundreds of millions of pounds to run each year, not to speak of the sunk capital cost of premises. It is a long established system and still to some extent runs on its historical inertia.

7.3 While each library service has its own head of service, these heads are (with a few higher level exceptions) middle managers within their own local authorities. However there is no apex to the public library system, there is no national hierarchy. Nor is there necessarily a local apex: though heads of library services do sit within local authority hierarchies, nevertheless heads of service often have considerable autonomy within their budgets (if only by virtue of neglect).

7.4 Thus the public library system is, and has to be, self organising. Regional and national bodies such as SCL and MLA have an important role to play in helping this self organisation, helping the sector coordinate itself. Change and improvement within the sector has to be both implemented and led by the 'middle managers' who are also, simultaneously, the sector's senior managers, the leadership cadre.

7.5 There are two linked implications here for conceptualising how change can be enabled in the public library sector with the help of the Framework action plan:

1. The challenge of management development in individual library services and the challenge of the self organisation of the transformation of the library system is the same challenge, for it involves the same people and many of the same activities, and thus
2. Framework has had to address practical improvement and development in individual library services and the transformation of the public library system as a whole.

7.6 So, to give just one example, peer reviews have had a direct practical impact on library services reviewed and an impact – via 'the process' of peer

reviewing – on the collective discourse among heads of services about how to improve library services.

The commitment to change in the public library system

7.7 94% of our survey participants agreed or strongly agreed, and none disagreed, with the following statement:

“Given the national public library system is, and has to be, self organising; national bodies such as SCL and MLA must work closely together to help the sector”.

7.8 Among the survey respondents who wrote a response to this question – 35% – there was considerable consensus that it is important for key actors in the library system to share the same focus, act in a joined-up manner, and speak with one voice. A number of respondents also mentioned that there are other key 'players' who are important in the system: DCMS, DCLG, DfES, the Audit Commission, LGA and local authorities are all suggested as having a significant role and as needing to be incorporated into the 'one voice'. Also in this context, several respondents expressed the view that there were currently too many organisations with overlapping responsibilities in the sector. Only one respondent questioned whether or not there really existed a national library system. The following selection of quotes gives a flavour of those responses:

“It is vital that national bodies advocate the service with national and local government, and that they do so in unity.”

“There may be benefit derived from SCL/MLA collaboration but there are other equally and possibly more important players who should be active players. the power[ful] players are local authorities/ LGA/ and various departments of government.”

“We need a national voice to support our local visibility and influence. There is also a coordination role in sharing good practice to support more rapid development.”

“[There are] too many overlapping organisations [which] dilute impact and divert resource away from frontline services.”

7.9 Further, most respondents felt that to secure the future development of their library services the role of regional bodies – regional MLAs, regional SCL, etc. – as change agents and champions will be critical. Those survey respondents who added some elaboration to this – 48% - made a range of, often contrasting, related observations. Roles that the regional bodies could usefully play included in their views:

- Influencing resource allocation
- Regional offers to secure added-value/ enhanced services
- Validators / challengers
- Champions

- Improving CPA performance.

7.10 Several respondents stated that, in order for regional bodies to be influential, they need to be credible and adequately resourced. And several respondents stated that local agendas were far more important than regional ones. To give a flavor of those responses:

“The regional agenda is crucial to the development of libraries. Regional agencies need to have the capacity to support this development.”

“National government is increasingly looking for regional developments for services such as libraries.”

“The role of [the local] consortium is also becoming important, especially as it now represents a sizeable proportion of SCL [in the region].”

“As external validators / challengers of what is happening. However they need to ensure they have the appropriate credibility to be able to do this effectively.”

“Library authorities are independent and it is essentially down to my local political and professional leadership, not a regional body.”

“Whilst appreciating the support of regional groups it is difficult to envisage their actions securing the future development of the library service locally.”

“Regional grouping is a mismatch of size and responsibilities. [It] depends on the strength of the regional group and how they work together.”

7.11 One practical test of the self organising capability of the public library system will be the future ability of library leaders to collectively address difficult, contentious issues. We give two examples here – procurement and challenging poor performance:

- New forms of procurement that separate ‘back office’ and ‘front office’ functions in libraries may have the potential to achieve major cost savings and allow significant redeployment of resources into new stock and services. Taking the first steps towards this ‘reengineering’ of library services will not just require cooperation between library services but considerable mutual moral support and practical exchange between heads of services in the inevitable political and organisational battles which will have to be fought to achieve substantive results.¹⁰ Achieving such a change will require significant cultural change – a

¹⁰ PricewaterhouseCoopers ‘Better stock, better libraries; transforming library stock procurement, phase 2 final report’, MLA, London, August 2006

higher and more committed level of partnership – involving national library system wide collaboration and development.

- Challenging poor performance is even trickier. It is widely acknowledged¹¹ that a significant minority of library services could do much better with quite modest reforms, but equally that the interest among Members and Officers in those local authorities simply is not there. Meaningful performance measures, robust peer challenge, and a commitment by the sector to taking responsibility for its own improvement as a sector (in line with the latest LGA/IDeA proposals on a new improvement policy framework for local government as a whole¹²) will be needed therefore for real improvement to happen. But it will first require a much greater sense of common understanding and purpose across the whole public library community, engendered by active dialogue around the how's, what's and why's of service improvement.

7.12 Our informants in our qualitative work and the participants kept repeatedly coming back to the point that *Framework* has succeeded in providing a much needed focus for library services which has aided planning and local advocacy. However, some of them felt that even more focus is necessary and that the initiatives in the Action Plan need to be refined if they are to function as a coherent whole. Further a desire for *Framework* to have more 'teeth' has also been expressed by a number of people:

"It is very helpful that F4F is there as a national framework and support structure which is enabling a greater degree of joined up working and networking than ever before."

"It has been useful when dealing with partners and other sectors. But it has 'no teeth'. It has consolidated what was already happening with the best of current practice."

"The PLSS tie up to CPA is crucial – when Council performance can be affected by its library service performance, then politicians notice and resourcing in times of leanness can follow. As a consequence, giving the Framework Action Plan increased power as part of any statutory framework will be helpful"

"In the year before publication of F4F this library authority had carried out a fundamental review of its purposes, articulated a new vision for its future, and implemented a new structure and planning process to deliver it. It was gratifying to find the following year that this vision...very closely reflected the vision and priorities set out in

¹¹ This point was made and generally acknowledged in all the three events we have run with library managers this year as part of this evaluation.

¹² LGA/IDeA 'Driving improvement: a new performance framework for localities', London, February 2006.

F4F...Influence of F4F and its associated Action Plan would obviously be greater in authorities where this necessary re-focussing of mission and priorities was as yet underdeveloped .”

7.13 Though others in the community are inherently questioning of any 'national' attempts to determine the activities of local library services.

8. Conclusions and recommendations: reframing and rebalancing the Framework action plan

Conclusions

8.1 Generally we have found that participation by individual library services in Framework action plan activities has led to improvements in services, partnership working, culture and efficiency.

8.2 However the greatest impact of Framework is clearly through the existence of the Framework vision itself, it is this public vision which has given direction, made sense of circumstances, and created a new legitimacy for individual library service change and development.

8.3 Overall Framework itself and the associated action plan, on a limited budget, has clearly led to improvements in the strategic management, the organisation, the services, the partnerships, the culture and the efficiency of individual library services.

8.4 Increasing management capacity is the key mechanism for the renewal of the sector. Framework action plan activities – peer review and leadership training – have demonstrated both the value of increasing management capacity and how much it is needed. Public library standards have also encouraged local authorities to make library service changes, as have, to a limited extent, Framework action plan marketing and advocacy work.

8.5 Much of the development of service offers under the Framework action plan has focused on reading and learning, and, within this, particularly on reader development. Involvement in reading projects supported by the Framework action plan had helped library services to develop better quality customer services. The national reading or learning activities have also in their view enabled them to make a strong contribution to shared, local public policy priorities.

8.6 Reader development activities – together with the leadership development work and alongside service redesign activities – marks a shift to more proactive if not yet fully reflexive working with communities.

8.7 Good community engagement has always been a hallmark of excellent library services and community development has been central to improvement efforts in many library services and most report that the Framework action plan has made a contribution to this. However specific community development elements of the action plan have been relatively underdeveloped so far in terms of on-the-ground impacts.

8.8 Information and Communications Technologies introduced through the People's Network initiative were central to the last recent wave of change and improvement in public library services. However as yet we are not seeing clear additional impact from the digital services developed under the

Framework action plan. 'Digital citizenship' is still very much a work in progress and requires additional urgent and joint attention from the MLA and the SCL if the legacy of PN is not to be lost.

8.9 Together, all the individual local authority library services comprise a national public library system. Thus Framework has had to address practical improvement and development in individual library services and the transformation of the public library system as a whole. It has done so, but there is much more work to do in the coming years.

Discussion: sustaining the vision

8.10 It seems to us that when it comes to the Framework action plan the devil is not in the detail – it is in the big picture. It is conventional to say that with limited resources you need to concentrate them to have impact. However, the overall action plan budget is simply too small for shifting or concentrating resources in itself to have real impact. This is a real dilemma which can only be managed not resolved. Based on our findings to date, we would suggest that as the action plan is the only funding the sector has other than specific big ticket initiatives funded by the Big Lottery Fund, the aim has to be to continue to try to seed activity and model new ways of acting across a broad front to maintain some ferment of acting and thinking in new ways

8.11 The single most significant finding of the evaluation was on the importance of the existence of the F4F vision in itself to change in library services. In our feedback workshop at the British Library on 16 January 2006 with the participation of people from SCL, MLA and other organisations there were hints of how powerful ongoing collective reflection on, renewal of and just restating of the vision could be to promoting change in the public library system. Central to this change is the self organisation of leadership groups in the public library system intra-SCL and inter SCL, MLA and other national and regional organisations. There is a need for ongoing discussions between and within MLA and SCL at national and regional level to ensure that the (necessarily) disparate trends of the F4F AP and other initiatives get joined up and pulling in the same direction. (This is of course also, once again, management development and the development of the self organisational capability of the public library system itself by other means.)

8.12 We would note here too the opportunity this offers to mobilise the regional MLA's as change agents and champions of Framework, perhaps by as simple a mechanism as convening all the national and regional implicated parties with MLA on a regular basis to reflect and exchange on the Framework 'project' (ie. vision and action plan) – particularly as regards management development, reader and learner development, the development of the public library system itself nationally and regionally, and new national offers.

8.13 Other activities with the action plan are probably more usefully understood/thought of in relationship to how they support the three key dimensions just mentioned (management development, reader and learner

development, and the development of the public library system itself), for example:

- How can impact measures support and excite management development?
- How can marketing support and excite local and regional advocacy strategies?
- How can community development and ICT developments support and dovetail with R&L strategies, particularly the evolution from reading to learning?

8.14 All elements of the Framework action plan need to be critically appraised through two lenses: one, how exactly do we imagine they contribute to the development of individual library services? And, two, to what extent do they directly contribute to the mobilisation and self-organisation of the sector around the Framework vision?

Overall conclusion – ‘it’s not what you do, it’s the way that you do it’

8.15 While it is difficult to ‘make’ all the necessarily disparate elements of the action plan into a coherent whole, it is possible to ‘think through’ all these elements as part of a coherent whole and such thinking through together can have an important development effect on the sector in itself quite apart from the practical benefits that flow. The more thematic structure of the recently agreed Framework for the Future: Action Plan 2006-08 augers well in this regard.

8.16 In doing so it will be important to bear in mind some of the substantive conclusions of the evaluation so far, namely:

- The action plan has a small budget. Concentration of resources has benefits but dispersal has more benefits, so while there is a need to streamline some activities this should not be excessive.
- There is considerable evidence of the beneficial impact of management development activities, so there is a strong case for maintaining peer review and leadership training as key elements of the action plan.
- Books, reading and learning activities are finding their own coherence. Diversity needs to be maintained but reading, learning and digital resources also need to be more related.
- Strategic coherence is achieved through dialogue. A continuing dialogue between MLA and SCL and other parties at both national and regional levels has to be central to this.

Recommendations

8.17 Generally:

- i. The strategic work begun by the action plan 2003-2006 will need to be continued and financially supported for the foreseeable future, particularly in a context where large investments are being made (as happened with People's Network and is about to happen with Community Libraries).
- ii. Going into the future, all elements of the Framework action plan need to be critically appraised through two lenses: one, how exactly do we imagine they contribute to the development of individual library services? And, two, to what extent do they directly contribute to the mobilisation and self-organisation of the sector around the Framework vision?
- iii. The overall action plan budget is not of a size where shifting or concentrating resources in itself will have real impact. This is a dilemma which can only be managed not resolved. Nevertheless while it is difficult to make all the necessarily disparate elements of the action plan into a coherent whole, it is possible to think through all these elements as part of a coherent whole. (The more thematic structure of the recently agreed Framework for the Future: Action Plan 2006-08 augers well in this regard.)

8.18 Specifically, we would recommend for the execution of the Action Plan 2006-08:

- iv. Regularly refresh the Framework vision through dialogue within and between the SCL, MLA and DCMS. (Exploring the implications of the findings of this report and subsequent action planning provides an immediate initial focus for this dialogue.)
- v. Maintain the emphasis on developing management capability: through management development (such as leadership training); through peer based processes (such as peer review, action learning sets, and mentoring); and through use of appropriate standards and measures.
- vi. Join up and make more connections between reading initiatives and learning initiatives, and develop the digital initiatives with a more direct relationship to the reading and learning initiatives.
- vii. Recognise that the Community Libraries initiative will be the main available vehicle for public library improvement over the next few years and work with the Big Lottery Fund to ensure that projects funded are

strategic not only for the library service involved but for the national library system as a whole.

Appendix 1: the survey

Overview and purpose

A1 The survey was designed to be answered by Heads of Library Service or their designated representatives, in order to evaluate the contribution of the Framework for the Future Action Plan to improvement and change in key areas of the library service.

A2 The survey instrument investigates the attitudes and understandings of Heads of Library service across four main thematic sections, reflecting the main areas of Framework for the Future Action Plan: (i) Building Capacity; (ii) Reading and Learning; (iii) Community and Civic Values; and (iv) and Digital Citizenship. In addition, a fifth section of the survey deals with more general issues concerning Framework. The survey consisted of 29 main items including closed, free and fixed-choice response questions.

A3 Content development of survey items was informed by empirical findings and early policy analysis. As a methodological tool the survey builds upon, tests and validates the qualitative research conducted by the evaluation team up to the end of phase two of the evaluation. The format and content of the survey was also agreed and refined through discussions with representatives from SCL, MLA and DCMS. The final draft was piloted with a small sample of stakeholders to ensure comprehensibility and coverage prior to full mailing.

A4 Quantitative data were coded and processed using statistical analysis software. A specialised computer based qualitative analysis package was employed for the thematic analysis and aggregation of qualitative free text responses. Direct quotes from the raw qualitative data are also presented where relevant.

A5 The survey was mailed as an electronic attachment with a covering email to all 149 library authorities across England in June 2006.¹³ Respondents were given approximately five weeks to respond either electronically or directly by post.

A6 Results presented in this report represent the synthesis of responses and are reported sequentially by question and main section. Quantitative results are presented descriptively as straightforward percentages and results are interpreted on those terms. To enable meaningful reporting, percentages are rounded to whole number integers.¹⁴ Where relevant the absolute frequency of responses to a question or option are also provided. Furthermore, where appropriate to a question or section a descriptive summary of results is also provided.

¹³ We would like to thank Sarah Wilkie at the MLA for her assistance in sending out the electronic survey on our behalf.

¹⁴ Decimal rounding only contributes to an occasional error margin of +/-1% - 2%.

A7 All data collected, including individual names or specific library services were treated in strictest confidence and used only for the purposes of the evaluation.

A8 Results and interpretative analysis are based on data from 63 of 149 possible survey returns. This represents a percentage response rate of 42%. Whilst this is acceptable for a survey mailshot, it must, however, be noted that in this report no inferences – especially not those concerning the extent of impact of Framework – ‘from survey data alone’ have been made; since the dataset represents less than half of respondents only and *not* the total possible number of Heads of Library Service/library authorities. For a number of questions in the survey, this issue is further compounded by participants exercising their free choice ‘not’ to answer a particular question. Overall, in terms of both the survey and its questions, we have no data on non-responders or their motives for not responding.

Survey report

Change and development in library services

A9 Generally we have found that participation by individual library services in Framework action plan activities has led to improvements in services, partnership working, culture and efficiency. For instance:

- Almost all respondents to our survey – 97% – reported that involvement in Framework action plan activities had led to service improvements in their library service. Only 3% reported that it had not.
- The great majority – 76% – reported that involvement in Framework activities had led to new partnerships in their library service. 24% reported that it had not.
- The great majority – 75% – also reported that involvement in Framework activities had led to cultural change in their library service. 24% reported that it had not. (1% of participants did not respond to this question.)
- Just over half of respondents – 51% – reported that involvement in Framework activities had led to efficiency gains in their library service. However, just under half – 48% – reported that it had not. (1% of participants did not respond to this question.)

A10 However the greatest impact of Framework is clearly through the existence of the Framework vision itself, it is this public vision which has given direction, made sense of circumstances, and created a new legitimacy for individual library service change and development.

A11 Our survey results bear this out. The vast majority of respondents – 78% - considered the level of positive contribution that the Framework vision has made to helping them inspire change and improvement in their public library service as strong or very strong. The majority of respondents, 60% rated the level of positive contribution that the Framework vision has made to helping them inspire change and improvement in their public library service as strong. A further 18% rated the contribution as very strong and 21% rated the contribution as weak. No respondents reported that Framework vision had not made a contribution. Only 1% of participants did not respond to this question. Key impacts included those on service redesign and planning; and on influencing elected members and the wider local authority

A12 A theme which is frequently mentioned in relation to the impact of the Framework 'vision' is how library services have used Framework as a tool to aid the planning of service structure and delivery. For some, it has contributed to a radical redesign of the service as a whole or of certain elements of the service:

“[Framework] has led to a fundamental re-evaluation of the service, giving a clear focus and sense of direction.”

“[We] re-modeled our staffing structure on Framework - [it] provided a framework and made it easier to argue why it needed to be done.”

“[Framework] contributed to a major review of service provision, alignment and culture change programme.”

A13 Others describe the use of Framework in less dramatic terms, but its potential for use both as an organising structure and as a resource to aid strategic decision-making is clearly recognised. For example:

“The vision has been central to our prioritisation of aims and objectives and [the] development of our work plan.”

“[Framework] has provided a focus for service planning.”

“[Framework] provided a setting for local strategy planning.”

“[We] used [Framework] as a basis for library action plans, targets etc.”

“Our strategy is based on the F4F vision which involved a redefinition of the library service and changes in emphasis/ service which ultimately released funding for investment in the service.”

A14 Framework has also been helpful in that it provides heads of library services with a clear 'vision' of libraries and a vocabulary which they can use as an advocacy tool to change the perceptions of libraries held by members and officers in the wider local authority setting. It serves to support arguments that position libraries as services which can and do deliver local priorities and agendas:

“[Framework is a] useful advocacy tool with members and senior colleagues.”

“[Framework has made a contribution] by having a simple easy to communicate set of priorities that I have been able to use in many different forums. This has meant that I can keep the message simple and ensure politicians [and] colleagues across the council understand what we are about.”

“It has helped the members understand the scope of a modern public library service.”

“[Framework contributes] by providing a strong and consistent message of the vision for libraries; by providing ongoing support materials and relevant campaigns; by... securing value for money... All this enables me... to deliver a clear message to

staff and Members of the value and relevance of our libraries to our communities.”

A15 And this advocacy has affected the ability of some services to promote change and secure investment from within the authority:

“[Framework] provided a real push to politicians to determine the right shape and size of the service and an investment programme.”

“The library modernisation plan has received Cabinet approval. This is a 3 year plan for the full refurbishment of the service, including some new builds, some relocations and everywhere refurbished. This is due in part to the realisation of the value and impact of the service on the life of the individual and local community – as promoted by Framework.”

Building capacity

A16 Results clearly indicate that a very significant majority: 81% (51) of Heads of Library service considered that Framework leadership training had made a strong contribution to helping develop management in their library service. And 6% (4) stated that Framework leadership training had made a very strong contribution in helping to develop management. Only 10% (6) of respondents reported that Framework leadership training had made a weak contribution and 2% reported that it had made a very weak contribution.

A17 In summary, almost all survey respondents reported that Framework leadership training had made a very positive contribution to helping develop management in their library. No respondents reported Framework leadership training had *not* made a contribution to helping develop management in their library service.

A18 In the survey we asked whether the impact of leadership training on your library service could be enhanced by follow-on activities such as: Mentoring; Action Learning Sets; Top-up training days; One-to-One Coaching; Diversity and Positive Action Training; Master Classes on a specific service; Involvement in Programme Steering Groups at regional or national level.

A19 76% of respondents indicated that the impact of leadership training could be enhanced by top up training days as a follow-on activity. (In response to this question 100% (63) of all respondents made at least one or more choices of activity. This data is presented here in descending rank order of popularity of choice for *each* option only.) 57% of respondents indicated that the impact of leadership training could be enhanced by mentoring as a follow-on activity. Approximately half or 51% of respondents indicated that the impact of leadership training could be enhanced by action learning sets as a follow-on activity. 48% of respondents indicated that the impact of leadership training could be enhanced by Involvement in programme steering groups at regional or national level as a follow-on activity. 44% of respondents indicated that the impact of leadership training could be enhanced by master classes on a

specific service as a follow-on activity. 37% of respondents indicated that the impact of leadership training could be enhanced by one-to-one coaching as a follow-on activity. Finally, only 18% of respondents indicated that the impact of leadership training could be enhanced by diversity and positive action training as a follow-on activity. Some respondents commented more generally that, as cultural change is so difficult to achieve, coverage of the training would need to be increased and follow-up training and support made available, if library services were to see a significant impact.

A20 We were able to ask survey participants whether the public library standards encouraged their local authority to make library service changes: the majority, 65% of survey respondents, reported that public library standards had encouraged their local authority to make library service changes in terms of 'longer opening hours'. (32% of respondents reported 'no'. 3% of survey participants did not respond to this question.); 67% of survey respondents reported that public library standards had encouraged their local authority to make library service changes in terms of 'more investment in stock'. (32% of respondents answered 'No'. 1% of survey participants did not respond to this question.) A minority, 14% of survey respondents, reported that public library standards had encouraged their local authority to make library service changes in terms of 'number of service access points'. (76% of respondents answered 'No' to this question. 10% of survey participants did not respond to this question.)

A21 Some respondents to the survey elaborated on these responses, one saying, for example, that:

"We would have wanted to implement these changes anyway, but the PLSS have helped us argue the case". And another that: "The standards have brought into sharp focus the need for continual change and development in order to deliver improved customer focused services. Awareness of service performance has been increased by staff at all levels. Attention on performance has been noticeable at Directorate and Corporate level ."

A22 Respondents were also requested to state whether the public library standards encouraged their local authority to make other unspecified library service changes. Of those 51% of survey respondents who wrote a response the three most frequently mentioned service changes were:

- Additional PCs or sustainability of public access to ICT
- Refurbishment (ranging from modest to significant) or new building stock
- An emphasis on customer service and customer service training.

A23 Other service changes mentioned by several respondents were:

- Greater awareness of performance management in general

- Improved reservation and request service
- Investment in stock
- Better partnership working.

A24 Other service changes mentioned by at least one respondent included:

- review of mobile library services
- increased investment in marketing
- modernisation and rationalisation of service points
- piloting children's outreach libraries in Children's Centres
- greater number of opportunities for learning and reader development
- promoted joined up working with other council specialists eg. on census data and community profiling.

A25 Caveats were attached to some of these statements: one respondent mentioned that, although library standards played a role in securing capital for refurbishments, the prime driver for this was actually CPA (R4); another stated that the increased investment in stock they had received would not be repeated this year due to savings being made. One respondent, who answered 'no' to parts a – c stated that:

'[library standards] have meant that the authority has maintained spend on libraries and we have been able to demonstrate improvement for the maintained spend'.

A26 In summary, the survey results indicate that for the majority of survey respondents, the public library standards have encouraged their local authority to make library service changes in terms of both longer opening hours and more investment in stock. However, the majority of respondents also reported that public library standards had *not* encouraged their local authority to make library service changes in terms of the number of service points. Overall, and in line with the findings from our qualitative work, those survey respondents who commented on public library standards largely agreed that the introduction of standards was welcome, but that work still needs to be done to improve their effectiveness both in terms of refining the standards themselves and of giving standards 'teeth', possibly through the use of sanctions if standards are not met.

A27 Some respondents praised the marketing strategy, for example:

"links with national media have been particularly beneficial."

"the Little Book of Public Libraries is a brilliant advocacy tool."

While others criticised it, for example:

"[we are] not impressed with [the] marketing tools – where is the image bank we were promised?"

“marketing has been ineffective – [it] lacks focus and visibility.”

Reading and learning

A28 In our survey almost the entire sample – 97% of respondents – reported that they had specific plans and strategies to promote reading (only 3% reported that they did not have specific plans or strategies) and 92% – again, almost all respondents - reported that they considered that their involvement in reading projects supported by the Framework action plan had helped their library to develop better quality customer services. (Only 6% of respondents reported that involvement in reading projects supported by the Framework action had not helped their library develop better quality customer services. 2% of survey participants did not respond to this question.)

A29 Likewise almost the entire sample – 94%, of respondents – stated that they did have specific plans and strategies to promote learning in their library service (only 6% reported that they did not have specific plans or strategies) and the great majority of respondents – 73% – considered that their involvement in learning projects supported by the Framework action plan has helped their library to develop better quality customer services. However a minority, – 21% of respondents -considered that their involvement in learning projects under Framework had not helped them to develop better quality customer services. (6% of respondents reported that they did not know.)

A30 Further a significant majority of respondents – 76% – considered that the national reading or learning activities they had been involved in had enabled their library service to make a strong or very strong contribution to shared, local public policy priorities. 71% considered that the national reading or learning activities they had been involved in had enabled their library service to make a strong contribution to shared, local public policy priorities. 5% considered that the national reading or learning activities they had been involved in had enabled their library service to make a very strong contribution to shared, local public policy priorities. 21% of respondents considered that the national reading or learning activities they had been involved in had enabled their library service to make a weak contribution to shared, local public policy priorities. 1% of survey participants did not respond to this question and 2% did not know.

A31 Specific examples of this contribution included (73% of survey participants provided a written response to this question):

- Summer Reading Challenge
- RAW
- Vital Link
- Bookstart
- Adult learning programmes / Learn Direct / learning centres / family learning events
- Children's mobile library
- Link-in
- Reading groups

A32 These activities were considered to impact on local priorities around:

- Education

“Supported adult achievement of accredited and non-accredited learning goals and improved infrastructure for learning. The Summer Reading Challenge has allowed us to strongly contribute to the raising standards in the schools agenda, through a Libraries LPSA target”¹⁵

- of children, both at school and outside of school through family learning

“Introduction of dedicated Children’s Mobile Library serving 18 primary schools which were giving the Council some cause for concern”

- of adults, both concerning the basic skills agenda and lifelong learning

“We have a specialist post to deliver the basic skills agenda for the service resulting in basic skills readers groups. These have enabled us to demonstrate our contribution to ‘Sustainable development and regeneration’ a key strand in our Community Strategy”

- Employment and economic vitality (via adult education but also through more directly relevant projects)

“RAW and Link in - both [are] getting high levels of participation and [there is] evidence of people making progression into employment.”

- Health

“Vital link” work with recovering drug users has contributed towards local health and community priorities through reader development. ”

- Stronger communities

“Both the summer reading challenge and Book Start programmes have been recognised as contributing to the Every Child Matters agenda, particularly the Enjoy and Achieve theme. ”

- Culture

“Some library initiatives contributed to authority gaining Beacon Status for Culture & Sport for hard to reach groups. ”

¹⁵ All the illustrative quotes in this sub-section are drawn from survey respondents

A33 But perhaps not always as much as they should:

“Programmes such as the Summer Reading Challenge, Vital Link etc certainly contribute to shared priorities but it is sometimes difficult to get that contribution recognised and reflected in wider plans.”

A34 While only a minority – 32% of respondents – considered that national books, reading and learning programmes have provided savings to their library service (the majority, 60% considered that national books, reading and learning programmes have not provided savings to their library service. 8% reported that they did not know), the vast majority, 81% of respondents considered that national books, reading and learning programmes have provided added value to their library service (10% of respondents considered that national books, reading and learning programmes have not provided added value to their library service. 9% reported that they did not know). Common examples (67% of respondents offered a written response to this question) of both savings and added value offered by survey respondents include:

- providing savings in staff time as planning activities have been undertaken, and promotional materials have been created, elsewhere
- providing savings in printing costs
- enabling events to be scaled-up, both in terms of size and duration
- providing better quality ‘professional’ materials and marketing which have created a nationally recognised brand
- providing training for front-line staff which lead to increased ‘product knowledge’ and confidence.

A35 Several caveats were attached (to positive statements) concerning the cost of promotional materials: one respondent felt that, although the programmes added value, there had not been cost savings as some of the promotions are quite costly and that the material is not necessarily packaged in the way they wanted it to be; another respondent stated that promotion materials are increasingly having to be purchased.

A36 Finally, some respondents also commented that they considered that the Framework Action Plan had not directly contributed to service improvement in the area of reading or learning activities, and that initiatives had been being developed prior to Framework and would have continued to be developed had Framework never been published. However, these respondents reported that Framework has provided an organisational framework and context for these initiatives that is proving valuable:

A37 As regards online subscriptions and national licensing agreements: almost half of the total number of respondents to our survey – 49% – reported that as a result of new online subscriptions they had been able to make small financial savings on stock procurement, and another 27% reported that they had been able to make considerable savings. (Only 21% of respondents stated that they had not been able to make any significant savings). 3% of respondents did not answer this question. Similarly, the majority of respondents – 64% – considered that the national licensing agreement with major commercial suppliers (the ‘Reference Online’ initiative) had provided savings to their library service (30% considered that it had not provided savings. 3% of respondents did not know and 3% did not respond to this question); and the vast majority of respondents – 83% – considered that the national licensing agreement had added value to their library service. (11% considered that it had not, 5% reported that they did not know and 1% of participants did not respond to this question.)

A38 Several respondents added that national initiatives had enabled them to add value by providing services that otherwise would not have been possible:

“national agreements have allowed us to provide services previously unattainable”.

In particular, promotional materials and joint procurement services were mentioned as having a positive impact:

“the national brokering of electronic subscriptions is brilliant. More please! It has enabled us to provide a range of resources that we would not otherwise have had sufficient budget to be able to provide”.

One respondent, however, stated that their regional stock purchasing consortium was managing to provide more cost effective services than Reference Online.

Community and civic values

A39 Community development has been central to improvement efforts in many of the library services where we have undertaken case study work, and this has been largely borne out by survey findings where the vast majority of respondents consider that the Framework action plan has made some significant positive contribution to the way their library service engages with the community. A significant minority – 24% of all survey respondents – reported that the Framework action plan had made a strong or very strong contribution towards the way their library service engages with their community; and most respondents – another 51% - reported at least a weak contribution. 22% of all survey respondents reported that the Framework action plan had made a strong contribution towards the way their library service engages with their community. 2% of respondents reported that it had made a very strong contribution. 10% reported a very weak contribution. Only 11% of respondents reported that the Framework action plan had *not* made a contribution to the way their library service engages with the community. 3%

of respondents reported that they did not know what level of contribution it had made.

A40 Specific community development elements of the action plan have been relatively underdeveloped so far in terms of on-the-ground impacts – however, as we have seen above and in the previous section, community development is central to many perhaps most activities of library services.

A41 The 'Designing Libraries' website and the 'Disability Web Resources' have provided resources for community engagement but our survey respondents clearly report that the former has not added value while reports on the latter are more ambiguous. The minority, 32% of respondents stated that the Designing Libraries Website had added value to the delivery of customer services in their library. The majority of respondents 60%, stated that it had not added value to the delivery of customer services in their library. 8% of respondents reported that they did not know if the service had added value. 33% of respondents stated that Disability Web Resources had added value to the delivery of customer services in their library. However, a slightly larger majority of respondents, – 41%, stated that it had not added value to the delivery of customer services in their library. 24% of respondents reported that they did not know if the service had added value and 2% of respondents did not answer this question.

A42 We were also able to explore in the survey to what extent survey participants 'anticipated' a positive contribution from the new Community Development Toolkit. The majority of respondents – 56% – anticipate that the Community Engagement Toolkit will make a significant positive contribution to the way they deliver services in their community. Although a number of respondents stated that they did not know what the level of contribution would be for the anticipated toolkit, only a very small number reported that they did *not* anticipate that the toolkit would make any contribution. The majority of respondents, 56%, anticipate that the level of positive contribution that the Community Engagement Toolkit will have on the way in which they deliver services in their community will be strong. 2% of respondents reported an anticipated very strong contribution and 15% of respondents anticipated a weak or very weak level of contribution (3%). Only 2% of respondents reported that there they did not anticipate that the Community Engagement Toolkit would make a contribution to the way they delivered services in their community. However, 22% (14) reported that they did not know what level of contribution the Toolkit would have on the way they delivered services in their community. Only 3% of data were missing for this question.

A43 A minority – 27% – of survey participants offered further perspectives on the specific contribution of the community development activities in the action plan. As these are highly consistent with our qualitative research they are worth mentioning at some length. Although one respondent stated that it is the policies and strategies of their local authority, as opposed to service-specific tools, that are driving community engagement strategies, several respondents welcomed the Community Engagement Toolkit, for example:

“some of the issues about relating effectively to this area of work is a lack of local capacity. We have been a traditional service and the other themes [of Framework] have fitted better with our way of working in the past. This will give a basis for future developments.”

Though a number of respondents found it difficult to disentangle the impact that Framework is having in this area from that of locally run initiatives, they felt that the two were mutually reinforcing. Others felt that Framework provided momentum and direction to service improvements which were already under way:

“[our library service] already had a strong track record of engaging with the community. However, a management team sub-group is now in place, specifically looking at the Community Engagement toolkit with a view to further improving our performance in this field.”

A44 Nevertheless, based on our qualitative research, and in particular on our review of documentary evidence and on discussions with MLA staff, we would tend to agree – at least to date – with the survey respondent who observed that:

“with the exception of [the] Community Engagement Toolkit, this is the weakest strand of Framework for the Future.”

Digital citizenship

A45 A good majority of respondents – 76% – considered that the People’s Network services they had been involved in had enabled their library service to make a very significant positive contribution to shared, local public policy priorities. The majority of respondents – 67% – considered that People’s Network services they had been involved in had enabled your library service to make a strong contribution to shared, local public policy priorities. 9% reported a very strong contribution, and 17% considered the People’s Network services that they had been involved in had enabled their library service to make a weak or very weak (1%) contribution to shared, local public policy priorities. Only 1% of respondents considered that the People’s Network services they had been involved in had not made a contribution and 5% reported that they did not know. Further and additionally the great majority – 84% – of respondents to our survey also reported that in their local authority there is corporate recognition of the role of People’s Network for delivering e-government services. Only, 16% reported that there was not recognition of the role of the People’s Network for delivering e-government services.

A46 Specific examples included:

- e-government (including access to local services) and digital citizenship

“[The] corporate e-services officer is well aware of our digital citizenship role and has worked with us to assess demand for or

pilot various services e.g. web services for older users, e-citizen national pilot. ”

“Higher visitor numbers to libraries as a result of PN availability which has strengthened our position locally. Other council services can develop their own e-services more confidently knowing that every resident has theoretical access to the internet via libraries.”

- social inclusion (of older people, BME communities, immigrant communities, and families without ICT at home)

“Silver surfer type activities have led to greater social inclusion amongst the elderly .”

“We know that the profile of PN users includes a wide range of BME communities [and] those without IT access at home.”

- community/adult learning/ lifelong learning

“It gave us the opportunity to bid for a LearnDirect contract to run from the libraries. It has formed the basis for our skills/ knowledge in social inclusion issues relating to IT. ”

“[PN] and other ICT resources have enabled the service and partners to deliver over 600 structured learning events each year (leading to accreditation, up-skilling and skills for life). ”

- sustainable development and regeneration

“[Our] on-line enquiry service gained national recognition for high standard of service. This was seen as a major contribution to 'sustainable development and regeneration.’”

“PN itself has raised the profile of the library service to the extent that colleagues across the council are clamoring for us to promote access to their service areas through local libraries because of the contribution we make to social inclusion; improved customer access and service. ”

A47 The general case for national resources is well made by one survey participant, who says:

“Developing these services nationally improves and enhances the 'offer' that we can provide to our customers via the libraries website. This contributes to social inclusion, lifelong learning and active citizenship. It demonstrates that the library service is meeting customers' expectations for an evolving and exciting service.”

A48 Elements of the Framework action plan have been aimed at exploiting the new PN infrastructure through the development of new digital resources, including: *The People's Network Enquire Service*; *the People's Network Discover Service*; and *the People's Network Read Service*.

A49 However these resource developments have not been closely aligned with the reading and learning elements of the action plan (though the reading projects do have their own web based support elements). This raises interesting questions concerning whether digital developments should be a thing in themselves, closely linked perhaps to the e-government agenda, or provide a cross cutting support and exploitation for other activities? There is no right answer here; it is a practical matter to be worked through by the actors given current circumstances and constraints.

A50 Unfortunately the results of the survey on the digital resources developed under the action plan were indeterminate. With the exception of the *People's Network Enquire Service* which – ironically, as it is now threatened with closure due to falling subscriptions – was clearly reported as having added value, inferences based on quantitative data, concerning whether or not the remaining digital resources provide added value to library services were more ambiguous; both because there were a significant proportion of 'don't know' answers associated with the questions about these services and an overall balance of both negative and positive responses.

A51 The results in full were:

- The People's Network Enquire Service
The great majority, - 79% of respondents stated that the People's Network Enquire Service had added value to the delivery of customer services in their library. The minority, 13% of respondents stated that the service had not added value and 8% of respondents did not answer this question.
- The People's Network Discover Service
30% of respondents reported that the People's Network Discover Service had added value to the delivery of customer services in their library. 30% also reported that the service had not added value and a significant number of respondents (40%) reported that they did not know if the service had added value.
- The People's Network Read Service
27% of respondents reported that the People's Network Read Service had added value to the delivery of customer services in their library. A similar number, – 25% reported that the service had not added value. Significantly, nearly half of the total number of respondents, – 48% reported that they did not know if the service had added value to their library.

A52 Several respondents to our survey considered that initiatives within the area of digital citizenship are having a significant impact on library services:

“This has to be the single biggest contributor to improving public libraries in the past five years. A library success story!”

“People’s Network [is the] biggest single factor, other than opening hours extensions, in getting new users into libraries”.

Others consider that more needed to be done and suggested that virtual services be included in the public library service standards, and that resources be better targeted.

A53 Again, Framework activity in this area was seen by some as raising the profile of library services. A number of respondents also expressed the view that libraries are leading the way with regard to e-services:

“[digital citizenship activities have] helped to raise the profile of the library service in the borough as we led the way with the number of e-enabled services for some time. The value of facilitated access to e-services is also recognised by some of our colleagues.”

At least one respondent however – confirming findings of previous case studies on the use of PN¹⁶ – stated that, while the People’s Network infrastructure had an impact at the corporate level within their authority, the new services have had little impact on the public as they use the service for email and internet access.

The contribution to change in the public library system as a whole

A54 Almost all – 94% – our survey participants agreed or strongly agreed, and none disagreed, with the following statement (Respondents were asked to select from the following fixed-choice options: ‘strongly agree’, ‘agree’, ‘neither agree’ nor ‘disagree’, ‘disagree strongly’ ‘disagree’ and ‘don’t know’. The majority, 70% of respondents stated that they strongly agreed with the assertion: 24% reported that they agreed with the assertion. Only 6% reported that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the assertion. No respondents disagreed with the assertion to any extent.):

“Given the national public library system is, and has to be, self organising; national bodies such as SCL and MLA must work closely together to help the sector.”

A55 Among the survey respondents who wrote a response to this question – 35% – there was considerable consensus that it is important for key actors in the library system to share the same focus, act in a joined-up manner, and speak with one voice. A number of respondents also mentioned that there are other key ‘players’ who are important in the system: DCMS, DCLG, DfES, the Audit Commission, LGA and local authorities are all suggested as having a significant role and as needing to be incorporated into the ‘one voice’. Also in

¹⁶ Sommerlad, E, Child, C, Ramsden, C and Kelleher, J, ‘Books and bytes: new service paradigms for the 21st Century library’ Big Lottery Fund, London, 2004.

this context, several respondents expressed the view that there were currently too many organisations with overlapping responsibilities in the sector. Only one respondent questioned whether or not there really existed a national library system.

A56 The following selection of quotes gives a flavor of those responses:

“It is vital that national bodies advocate the service with national and local government, and that they do so in unity.”

“There may be benefit derived from SCL/MLA collaboration but there are other equally and possibly more important players who should be active players. the power[ful] players are local authorities/ LGA/ and various departments of government.”

“We need a national voice to support our local visibility and influence. There is also a coordination role in sharing good practice to support more rapid development.”

“BUT SCL is not the statutory agency and MLA needs to support SCL financially if it wishes SCL to carry out its responsibilities. The Arts Council does not expect NALGAO to do their work, and neither should MLA. Also, it is OK for SCL and MLA to disagree on occasion.”

“[There are] too many overlapping organisations [which] dilute impact and divert resource away from frontline services.”

A57 Further, most respondents felt that to secure the future development of their library services the role of regional bodies – regional MLAs, regional SCL, etc. – as change agents and champions will be critical. (29% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement that:

“To secure the future development of my library service the role of regional bodies – regional MLAs, regional SCL, etc. – as change agents and champions will be critical’. 30% of respondents reported that they agreed with the assertion and 24% of respondents were neutral in their response to the assertion, - neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Only 16% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (3%). 1% of respondents did not answer this question.)

A58 Those survey respondents who added some elaboration to this – 48% – made a range of, often contrasting, related observations. Roles that the regional bodies could do usefully play included in their views:

- Influencing resource allocation
- Regional offers to secure added-value/ enhanced services
- Validators / challengers
- Champions
- Improving CPA performance.

A59 Several respondents stated that, in order for regional bodies to be influential, they need to be credible and adequately resourced. And several respondents stated that local agendas were far more important than regional ones. The following selection of quotes gives a flavor of those responses:

“The regional agenda is crucial to the development of libraries. Regional agencies need to have the capacity to support this development.”

“National government is increasingly looking for regional developments for services such as libraries.”

“The role of [the local] consortium is also becoming important, especially as it now represents a sizeable proportion of SCL [in the region].”

“As external validators / challengers of what is happening. However they need to ensure they have the appropriate credibility to be able to do this effectively.”

“Library authorities are independent and it is essentially down to my local political and professional leadership, not a regional body.”

“Whilst appreciating the support of regional groups it is difficult to envisage their actions securing the future development of the library service locally.”

“Regional grouping is a mismatch of size and responsibilities. [It] depends on the strength of the regional group and how they work together.”

A60 The participants in the survey kept repeatedly coming back to the point that Framework has succeeded in providing a much needed focus for library services which has aided planning and local advocacy. However, some of them felt that even more focus is necessary and that the initiatives in the Action Plan need to be refined if they are to function as a coherent whole. Further a desire for Framework to have more ‘teeth’ has also been expressed by a number of people – though others in the community are inherently questioning of any ‘national’ attempts to determine the activities of local library services. Some notable quotes from our survey respondents in this regard:

“It is very helpful that F4F is there as a national framework and support structure which is enabling a greater degree of joined up working and networking than ever before.”

“It has been useful when dealing with partners and other sectors. But it has ‘no teeth’. It has consolidated what was already happening with the best of current practice.”

“The PLSS tie up to CPA is crucial – when Council performance can be affected by its library service performance, then politicians notice and resourcing in times of leanness can follow. As a consequence, giving the Framework Action Plan increased power as part of any statutory framework will be helpful.”

“In the year before publication of F4F this library authority had carried out a fundamental review of its purposes, articulated a new vision for its future, and implemented a new structure and planning process to deliver it. It was gratifying to find the following year that this vision... very closely reflected the vision and priorities set out in F4F...Influence of F4F and its associated Action Plan would obviously be greater in authorities where this necessary re-focusing of mission and priorities was as yet underdeveloped .”

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