

Scoping study towards a blueprint for public library development and sustainability in England

Final report

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Study conducted by:

Independent Mind

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1.Executive summary

CILIP and Libraries Connected share a vision of:

“ *An inclusive, modern, sustainable and high-quality public library service at the heart of every community in the UK.* ”

We are committed to working together to promote the value of public libraries, broker national partnerships, share best practice and drive innovation in the public library sector. This report is the result of a new, close collaboration between Libraries Connected and CILIP. It seeks to help meet the needs of our members and secure the future of the sector on behalf of the communities public libraries serve and seek to bring benefit to.

There were over 197 million visits to public libraries in England in 2017-18¹ and the number of those taking part in organised activities in their library has risen. This evidences the enduring and vital role public libraries play in the lives of people across England. Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England², the government's national strategy for public libraries, makes the case for the benefit that public libraries provide and their great future potential. It provides a strong vision and policy framework for library development on which this project seeks to build.

Yet public libraries, along with other local services, are facing significant reductions in funding which are leading to fragmentation, loss of infrastructure and skills in the workforce, lack of consistency in the public library offer and reduced capacity to collaborate within the sector and with those outside of it. The challenges facing the sector include circumstantial factors relating to the reductions in local government funding since 2010 and contextual changes, including in demographics and user behaviour, the impact of digital technologies and big data. In this

challenging context, public libraries are having to compete for core funding while facing outdated or inaccurate perceptions of what they are and the benefits they provide. This situation is further exacerbated by the need for cohesive evidence at the national level of the effectiveness of public libraries in addressing big social challenges.

There have been several national development initiatives for libraries over the last five years, but these have tended to focus on supporting innovation and change within individual library services. Whilst these are welcome, they have not generally addressed the structural support that can be brought into the wider national operating environment with a view to supporting the sustainability and security of the sector as a whole. This scoping exercise, funded by the Carnegie UK Trust, seeks to address this gap and take steps towards exploring what structural support in the national operating environment could look like, in order to ensure a confident and dynamic public library network in England with a robust funding base. It is therefore concerned with the high level, national picture and interrelationships between sector support organisations and resources rather than the specifics of the best model to deliver a given library service.

The findings of this report are based on desk review, interviews and workshops with a sample of Heads of Library Services, local government officers and elected representatives who make decisions about public libraries, strategic national bodies with an interest in public libraries and potential funders. We intend it to provide a starting point for wider conversations with librarians, library workers, service users and other key stakeholders about the future of support and development for public libraries.

Our research revealed that there is currently a disconnect between nationally co-ordinated sector development available for public libraries and the

1 <https://www.cipfa.org/services/research/public-library-users-survey>

2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/libraries-deliver-ambition-for-public-libraries-in-england-2016-to-2021>

experience of the sector on the ground: in essence support is not always getting to where it is needed most and local public library services may not see the help they need in the support available. It also established a clear consensus among those library and local authority stakeholders who participated in the study, that more support is essential in order to help the sector overcome challenges, build its offer and its confidence and become sustainable for the future.

The project tested a number of initial ideas about the possible components of a support system for a confident and sustainable public library network. This included exploring the idea of national funding and co-ordination of the public library network, various models for support at local and regional level and a range of ideas taken from the analysis of other library system models, such as regularly updated library laws and national funding of programmes and infrastructure. It emerged from the scoping exercise that at this time, a nationally funded and delivered public library service was considered neither feasible nor desirable by the majority of participants involved in the scoping study.

Rather, seven broad concepts were perceived to have the potential to be both feasible and effective in supporting the development and sustainability of the public library sector/service/network. Whilst a detailed exploration of the operational implementation of these ideas was outside the scope of this exercise, the following high-level concepts were nevertheless considered a promising starting point for sector support:

- Nationally organised and funded infrastructure and creative programmes.
- National standards or accreditation to define a quality service.
- Nationally co-ordinated monitoring and evaluation.
- National digital public library service.
- Regional network providing development and support to local libraries.
- Nationally co-ordinated workforce development to ensure a future-ready workforce.
- Support for new governance and delivery models.

Five of these concepts are already being developed or considered by various national library organisations in some capacity: national standards or accreditation to define a quality service; a “single digital presence for public libraries” (a term used within the Independent Library Report for England published in December 2014); a regional network providing development and support to local libraries; nationally co-ordinated workforce development to develop a future-ready workforce; and the Libraries Taskforce is undertaking a project to take forward action around Open Data with further work planned to demonstrate the value of data capture and the ways in which robust data can support advocacy and evidence impact. Alongside this, work is continuing to develop research to demonstrate the impact of the following three key areas of library activity:

- Health and wellbeing
- Digital skills and employability
- Literacy and reader development.

The fact these are in development demonstrates that national support is starting to mobilise towards the needs of the sector. Those who contributed to the scoping exercise felt that it could be fruitful to scope the remaining three concepts. However, we recognise that other key stakeholders, including frontline librarians, library workers and service users, have not been involved in this work and may propose additional ideas to build a confident and sustainable sector, and these ideas may also warrant further scoping and testing.

The scoping exercise has also developed a draft theory of change which brings the seven concepts together to show how they can make a positive difference to the sector. In order for these initiatives to achieve the change that can deliver what the sector needs and wants, it is essential that national sector support bodies and local services work closely together and combine their efforts towards a shared goal. Our hope is that this report will provide a starting point for a blueprint for a collaborative support infrastructure that bridges national organisations and local public library services, cements joint working and is successful in securing a sustainable national network of public libraries for the benefit of future generations.

2. Introduction & Context

2.1 Background

Libraries Connected³ and CILIP⁴ received funding from Carnegie UK Trust to scope the possibility of developing a blueprint for how national sector support bodies can work with public libraries to support and develop them over the next 3-5 years in order to ensure long-term sustainability and a positive future for public libraries. It is therefore concerned with the high level, national picture and interrelationships between sector support organisations and resources rather than the specifics of the best model to deliver a given library service.

The need for this scoping exercise stems from the understanding that recent national development initiatives have tended to focus on supporting innovation and change within individual library services. Whilst these are welcome, they have not generally addressed the structural support that can be brought into the wider national operating environment. Yet getting this infrastructural support right and aligning national sector support organisations in this environment is crucial for forging a positive future for public libraries and the communities that they serve.

Local Authorities have a statutory duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' public library service: there are currently c.3,000 public libraries in England as well as a number of other community-run libraries, although there is no accurate data about their exact numbers. In 2017-18 there were 197 million visits to public libraries in England and 157 million loans were issues in that time.

The provision of universal public library provision in England has its roots in the Victorian era as part of the wider philanthropic movement, in order to promote universal education, welfare and civic engagement. The Public Libraries Act of 1850 established the powers of Local Authorities to deliver free public libraries for local people. The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 went further, defining a service that is locally-led, regionally-supported and nationally-promoted.

Times change, and public libraries, librarians and library workers need to continue to adapt to contemporary challenges to ensure that they can continue to meet the needs of their users. These challenges include the impact of digital transformation, changes in demographics and user behaviour, large-scale changes in the funding model for public services and the expectation that libraries will support a wider set of social and economic outcomes.

In addition, local government has lost £16bn of funding since 2010 and is facing an £8bn funding gap. Public libraries have received a reduction in funding of £213m in real terms since 2010. This trend is likely to continue in the near future as local government budgets reduce further.

In this context, there is a requirement for greater support for public libraries and, potentially, for new thinking about libraries to ensure their long-term sustainability, and their existence as a national network that delivers a consistently high-quality service and continued capacity to deliver on key policy goals around education, culture, health, society, economy and wellbeing. In addition, it will be necessary to provide strong direction and support to enable public

³ Libraries Connected is the membership body for public libraries in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and is funded by Arts Council England as the Sector Support Organisation.

⁴ CILIP is the library and information association in the UK. CILIP works across the UK and represents a UK workforce of 87,000 information professionals working across the private, public and third sectors to unlock the value of information.

library services to respond to the range of ongoing challenges and changes with profound consequences for the way the service is designed, delivered, monitored and promoted. This scoping exercise is a starting point for exploring what a more aligned, collaborative and structured approach to stewardship could look like in order to enable the sector to succeed now and in the future.

2.2 Objectives

The scoping phase had the following objectives:

- To stimulate new thinking among national sector support bodies that provide support for public libraries about how to work in collaboration to ensure a strong public library network in the future.
- To scope ideas for public library sector support from within the UK and abroad.
- To test these initial ideas to understand which may have the greatest potential to deliver practical support to public libraries in the near future and warrant further exploration.
- To gauge funder interest in supporting new ideas for the development of the sector.
- To develop a draft plan for developing a blueprint to support and maintain the sector over 2-3 years from 2019 – 2022.

2.3 Approach

Project governance

A cross-sectoral Advisory Group was convened to comment on project approach and provide guidance for the project as it developed. Appendix 1 provides the details of the advisory group members. The Advisory Group met on 22nd November 2018 and 30th January 2019.

Research and consultation approach

In the scoping phase we conducted initial scoping research and consulted with a sample of stakeholders, using the following approach:



Throughout the consultation, on the advice of the Advisory Group, we adapted IDEO's 'design-led' concept development process to ensure the project effectively engaged participants and considered new solutions. This involved working with stakeholders to achieve consensus on the nature of the problem and the outcome that we are looking for, testing ideas generated in the desk research phase as well as asking for new ideas.

Desk research and interviews

- The literature review report can be found in Appendix 2.
- The countries and sectors of focus for the literature review were directed by the Advisory Group recommendations.
- The literature review and international stakeholder interviews were conducted in November and December 2018.
- The findings from the literature review fed into a number of 'straw man concepts' for different ways to support library services which were consulted on in the stakeholder workshops and interviews.

Workshops with library stakeholders

- The workshops took place on the 7th and 8th January 2019.
- There were 16 attendees at the workshop in Leeds and 18 at the workshop in London.
- The Heads of Library Services were selected from Libraries Connected member lists to represent a variety of types of Local Authority and Library Service delivery models.
- A range of national stakeholder organisations were also invited to attend the workshops. A full list of workshop attendees can be found in Appendix 1.

Local Authority interviews

- The in-depth interviews with Local Authority stakeholders took place by phone and face-to-face in February and March 2019
- Local Authority stakeholders, including elected representatives and executive staff who were proposed by Libraries Connected members rather than being free-found. Although attempts were made to ensure a range of viewpoints were represented, this means that most of those interviewed had an interest in public libraries.

Meetings with potential funders and key stakeholders

- Meetings took place between January and March 2019.

The scope and scale of this project means that findings and opinions are indicative rather than definitive. However, the fact that representative bodies were consulted and the large degree of consensus provides a level of confidence in the findings of the scoping phase.

2.4 About this report

This report is divided into three key sections:

- Chapter 3 provides an analysis of the policy context for this project.
- Chapter 4 sets out the findings from our research activities. These findings are summaries of the desk review and views and opinions voiced in the stakeholder meetings and interviews, along with a precis of relevant documents. They are not intended to express the views either of Libraries Connected or CILIP but to provide transparency about the reasoning behind the approach suggested in chapter 5.
- Chapter 5 sets out Libraries Connected and CILIP's joint view on how the Blueprint for Libraries should be designed and delivered.

3. The Context

3.1 Strategic priorities for public libraries in England and the UK

It is important that any consideration of practical, structural support in the national operating environment for public libraries is based on, and can help achieve, the strategic priorities of the sector. To this end, the desk research reviewed six recent strategic publications about the future of public libraries across the UK, including the current government strategy for public libraries: “Libraries Deliver: Ambition of Public Libraries in England”.

The review found agreement on the following attributes that will continue to be essential for the future of public libraries:

- Public libraries as trusted/safe civic spaces both in local communities and online.
- Maintaining the central role of reading and information in public library services.
- Continuing to develop the role of public libraries in providing digital access and skills.
- Ensuring that public libraries have strong and productive partnerships in place at both local and national levels, which demonstrate the contribution they can make to broader agendas.
- Increasing focus on public libraries as co-produced spaces and services with local communities.
- The importance of appropriate training and skills for people working in public libraries.
- Strong evidence of the value they provide and the difference they make to people’s lives.

In addition, more recent literature emphasises the need to develop a data-rich public library service with a strong online presence.

In terms of where public libraries may provide the greatest value to communities and government

over the next few years, the desk research found that the following policy areas are given greatest focus:

- Supporting essential skills development for the 21st Century, including literacy, digital literacy and creative digital skills.
- Making a strong contribution to the economy, placemaking and regeneration.
- Enabling social mobility and encouraging people to develop to their full potential throughout their lives.
- Supporting cultural cohesion, civic engagement and participation.
- Encouraging and enabling creative and cultural activities and exploration.
- Contributing to wellbeing, including reducing social isolation and loneliness.

The workshops and interviews conducted on the back of the desk review sought to test these strategic priorities and ask questions about how the existing support structures available to public libraries help them deliver on these strategic priorities, and if not, what more could be done.

3.2 Local authority priorities

In addition to reviewing the current strategic thinking about public libraries at a national level and exploring international models of delivery, a sample of 10 local authority interviews enabled an initial exploration of the local context in which public libraries are funded and delivered.

All local authorities consulted as part of this project reported having had to find significant savings in recent years and a number were looking to reduce expenditure further over the next 2-3 years across a range of services. For most local authorities this represented significant pressure on services, however some were able to draw on

reserves or other sources of income to ‘smooth’ out the effect of the loss of central government grants, at least temporarily.

In addition to budgetary pressures, there were a number of other common issues that local authorities are tackling which came up in a number of interviews:

- Increases in the cost of children’s services.
- Increases in the cost of adult social care.
- Tackling declining high streets.
- Tackling poverty.
- Economic development and skills agenda.
- Placemaking and building communities.
- Loneliness and social isolation.

There is some significant overlap between these issues and the strategic priorities of public libraries identified in the desk research, including:

- **Demand management:** as navigators for people in the community who require additional support, including families experiencing difficulties and vulnerable adults. There was some discussion of new initiatives joining up public libraries with adult and children’s social services as part of an ‘early warning system’ or replacement for day centres that have had to close. However, it was felt that public libraries are currently less effective at performing this role for vulnerable young people, because they are not likely to be used by young people at risk of exclusion.
- **Supporting economic development initiatives.** This is currently happening in some locations with regard to business support services but stakeholders feel this is a role that can be further developed and would add value to the local authority or LEP.
- **Placemaking and building communities:** public libraries are seen as places for human interaction, neutral, safe spaces or ‘community hubs’ where people can meet others and pursue interests with other like-minded local residents, contributing to social cohesion. They also fulfil a role in placemaking and supporting

thriving high streets as well as providing opportunities for co-working and enterprise hubs.

- **Health and wellbeing:** this was mentioned although several stakeholders felt that currently the focus for funding is on acute provision rather than prevention and there is not currently strong enough evidence to make the case for diverting funding into prevention via the public library, over and above delivery of support.
- **Promoting creativity:** stakeholders emphasised their role as places where people can be creative and build confidence.
- **As places of informal learning:** where people can be introduced to new skills in a non-threatening environment and potentially start ‘learning journeys’ that may take them on to formal education or new careers.

Whilst several local authority stakeholders felt that public libraries could or did already deliver against their priorities, almost all felt there was greater scope for them to do so and not all local authority stakeholders viewed public libraries as delivering against their priorities. Furthermore, the importance of making the economic case for culture in general was emphasised.

4. Public library support needs

4.1 Challenges that public libraries are facing

What support do those leading and governing public libraries need?

There was broad consensus among workshop participants that public libraries are facing unprecedented challenges due to funding constraints and the need for the sector to transform so that it can continue to deliver a highly valued service that responds to people's changing needs in a sustainable way.

The workshops confirmed the challenge for public libraries in England as follows:

Public libraries, along with other local services, are facing significant reductions in funding which are leading to fragmentation, loss of infrastructure and skills in the workforce, lack of consistency in the public library offer and reduced capacity to collaborate within and out of the sector.

In this context, public libraries are having to compete for core funding. The challenges in doing so are compounded by outdated or inaccurate perceptions of what public libraries do and the benefits they provide. There is a need for cohesive evidence at the national level about the effectiveness of public libraries in addressing big social challenges that they, in fact, help alleviate.

Despite their diversity in terms of role in the public library sector and type of library service or local authority, those who participated in the workshops were able to define a common desired outcome:

“ A confident, dynamic national public library network with a robust funding base. ”

In order to achieve this aim, attendees at the workshops voiced the following needs:

- Structures to support quality local delivery in a national library network.
- Renewed confidence in the current role and future sustainability of public libraries.
- Attract sustainable, long-term funding to the sector by clearly articulating the value and benefits of public libraries.

Constraining factors

The workshop and in-depth interview participants also identified constraining factors that could impact the success of the development and initiation of a blueprint aimed at providing support to the sector.

These factors are:

- **Diversity of delivery models, levels of service and ambition:** the current network is very diverse in terms of delivery models and levels of service which makes it difficult to design support that will be relevant to all and to define a consistent public library offer and brand to raise public awareness. In addition, there are varying attitudes to technology and service innovation.
- **Public perceptions and the public library image:** public libraries are perceived by the public to be hyper-local – there is very little sense of a public library service even across a local authority, let alone in a national context. In addition, public and political perceptions of what public libraries are and what they offer can often lag significantly behind the reality which means that there is a lack of appreciation of the ways in which public libraries can support communities.
- **Workforce capacity and attitudes:** there is a need to get staff buy-in to changes but this

can be challenging when there is low morale and some of the frontline workforce can be defensive and averse to change. At senior levels, a ‘hollowing out’ of the service can mean there is a lack of capacity to deliver innovation.

- **Local authority finance systems:** because of short-term budgets and planning cycles it can be difficult to plan and implement consistent change over a longer period. In addition, some local authority stakeholders signalled that in some places the local authority funding system may crash before any transformation can be implemented.
- **Tensions between local funders/stakeholders and national funders/stakeholders:** at present there can be a tension between national organisations and local funders which can inhibit co-operation and is a significant risk to the successful implementation of any national support initiatives.
- **Challenge of measuring impact:** there is a need for evidence/benchmarking of impact and this is challenging to collect because public library services are often integrated with other services and impacts are difficult to separate. In addition, local services may not see the benefit to them of participating in national data collection exercises, especially where resources are already tightly stretched, because the majority of their funding comes from local sources.
- **Risk aversion:** stakeholders pointed to the fact that the sector is very consensus-driven, and that this can lead to beneficial activities taking longer to implement and potentially not being implemented in time. In addition, a fear of failure was also identified, rather than an openness to a ‘test and learn’ approach. However, there was consensus that something new is needed and that people may be more open to new ways of working now than before, because of the difficult situation many public library services are facing.
- **Political barriers:** in addition to the division between local and national organisations, stakeholders identified difficulties in co-

operating across local authority boundaries in many areas and the political pressure that certain interest groups can place on local authorities to prevent or minimise change.

4.2 National sector support resource mapping and gap analysis

As part of the workshops, participants identified the national support that the sector has at its disposal and the gaps in support they have experienced.

Some stakeholders had positive experiences of support from Arts Council England and the Local Government Association. Library stakeholders emphasised the potential of Libraries Connected to provide support and appreciated the support already being provided, but those working outside of the library sector were less familiar with Libraries Connected, CILIP or any other library support organisations. The Libraries Taskforce was mentioned by a few stakeholders, but local authority stakeholders were not able to identify local impact or presence. Those with greater familiarity with the sector felt that national organisations could co-operate more effectively to establish a joint agenda.

“*The organisations that work on this should all be working together, trying to achieve the same global aims.*”

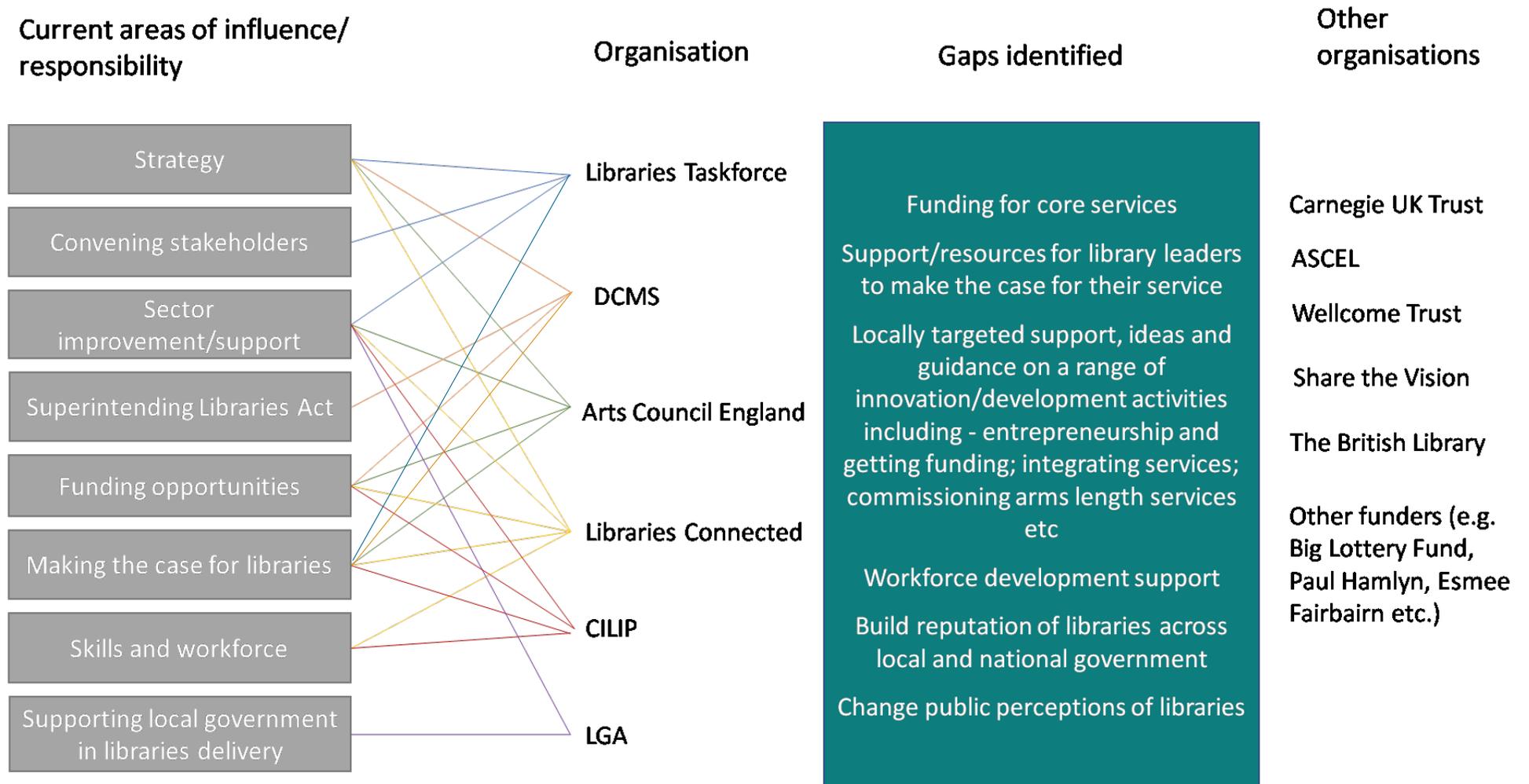
In general, there was felt to be an absence of support at local level for public libraries and decision-makers making difficult decisions or seeking to innovate which resulted in decision-makers ‘going it alone’ or seeking informal peer support.

The support needs identified across the workshops and local authority interviews have been cross-referenced with the support requirements identified in the interviews with Local Government stakeholders to develop the following sector map and gap/needs analysis (see overleaf).

This analysis confirms that while library strategy, stakeholder engagement and advocacy is a crowded space at a national level, there is a gap in sector-facing support. Even where organisations have a nominal responsibility for sector improvement and workforce development, people cannot clearly identify what tools and support are available in relation to service transformation and innovation. When this support is available, there does not appear to be a clear delivery mechanism to ensure that it reaches the services and local areas where it is needed, and instead relies on the sector to find the information, which they may not be aware is available in the first place.

Additionally, although national support and strategy for public libraries appears to be a crowded space, the gap analysis reveals several other organisations that could have a role to play in supporting the sector where there are gaps. This poses the question, which will be revisited later in this report, of which organisations are best placed to fill the gaps in support and whether there are other organisations who have the skills and experience in developing and delivering specific activities.

Figure 1 Map of national institutions that support public libraries and gap analysis⁵



⁵ Figure 1 has been designed to provide a visual summary or shorthand for the views expressed in the consultation rather than the point of view of either CILIP OR Libraries Connected.

4.3 Learning from other library systems

Given the various support needs of the public library sector in England, it is helpful to consider whether other public library services have got support “right” and whether there is any learning that can be taken from these examples.

As such, the public library systems in Australia, Finland, The Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Norway, Singapore and the USA were examined as part of the desk research. Trading standards and public health services in England were also examined because they provided insight into approaches across other sectors which may be relevant to public libraries. The findings of the desk research into other library systems are appended to this report.

Centralised systems

Public library services in Singapore and Northern Ireland are examples of centralised public library systems. In Northern Ireland a single library authority replaced 5 separate education and library boards in 2009. Although public library delivery is adapted in different locations, programmes are developed centrally and rolled out locally, allowing for a consistent offer. In Singapore the library system is a core element of the government’s economic development strategic planning to develop a “learning nation”. Despite the strong central governance of public libraries, small community libraries are often staffed extensively by volunteers and shaped through co-production with local people.

Systems with central support, regional delivery and locally determined provision

The Netherlands, Norway and Finland provide instances of public library systems with strong central organisation, alongside locally defined delivery. In Finland although funding is dispensed by local authorities, it is provided via statutory state aid based on a per population funding formula. In Norway and The Netherlands there is a regional library structure which acts as an intermediary between local library services and

the National Library. Public libraries are not free in the Netherlands, with members paying a range of fees for membership depending on age and ability to pay. In all of these systems, national programmes are developed and funded nationally and, where relevant, rolled out locally via the public library network. The digital library service is delivered nationally in each of these jurisdictions and public library laws are regularly updated.

Devolved public library systems

Public library services in Australia and the USA provide insight into how devolved systems of public library provision with very limited central government oversight operate. In Australia there are strong state and local government funding and administrative structures, which replace central government oversight to a degree. However there is variation in funding levels and approaches to public library delivery across the states. Australia has national standards and outcomes indicators for public libraries and these are used on a voluntary basis by the different library authorities. In the USA there are elements of federal funding and oversight of public libraries, but each individual state’s law defines what a public library is and local public library boards are largely self-governing.

Library system support and organisation ideas explored in the stakeholder workshops

It became clear, as a result of the desk research, that each library system operates in a unique national – political, economic, cultural – context and could not be considered in isolation from this context. It therefore emerged that it would be unhelpful to ask stakeholders whether a whole public library system could be imported into England to better support public libraries as this would necessitate the wholesale transfer of a broader cultural, economic and political approach to public services that goes beyond that of the public library service, and this was clearly untenable. However, a number of ideas or ‘components’ of each system were identified as valuable and transferable to the English context. These were pulled out as “straw man ideas” and

used as a basis for discussion in the workshops to understand whether they could provide useful support to help achieve the aim of a confident and sustainable public library network in England. These “straw men ideas” were:

- Single national library service.
- Nationally organised and funded programmes e.g. reader development programmes.
- National standards or accreditation used to define quality service.
- Nationally co-ordinated monitoring and evaluation.
- National digital public library service.
- Regional network providing development and support to local libraries.
- Updated library laws to define expectations of public library services.

4.4 Appetite for change

The library stakeholders and Local Authority stakeholders that engaged with the scoping exercise were open to exploring new ideas to address the gaps in the national operating environment in order to improve the sustainability of the sector.

Specifically, they considered the ‘straw man’ ideas described in the previous section to support and develop the public library sector. The chart on page 21 summarises the responses to the different ideas in relation to how positively they were received and the potential for those ideas to have a strong positive impact on the sector. Those ideas with broad support or interest across those engaged with the scoping exercise and therefore recommended for further exploration are:

- Nationally organised and funded programmes.
- National standards or accreditation used to define quality service.
- Nationally co-ordinated monitoring and evaluation.
- National digital public library service
- Regional network providing development and support to local libraries.

Those ideas not recommended for development at present (single library service and new legislation) were not rejected out of hand, but they were not considered feasible or appropriate activities at this time.

In addition, during the consultation process the need for attention in relation to public library skills and support for new governance and delivery models was discussed. These two topic areas will be discussed in more detail following the consideration of the straw man ideas.

Each of the ideas outlined above will of course require significant development and consultation, and any support expressed for them was qualified by the requirement to engage a broader range of stakeholders and for further review and development.

4.5 Detailed review of responses to straw man ideas

Single national library service

The majority of participants engaged in the scoping study did not welcome the idea of a single national public library service. The reasons for this were:

- It would not be close enough to communities.
- It would not be efficient and could be overly bureaucratic.
- It was moving in the opposite direction to the localism agenda and also to the idea of integrated services at local level.
- It would be difficult and complex to implement (e.g. calculating costs of delivery in different settings).
- There are political obstacles to giving up control locally or giving away local budget to a national organisation.
- It would require an Act of Parliament which is unlikely to be forthcoming, especially given that other pressing political issues are mounting in the wake of Brexit.

“ *Where you have national services and local outcomes there is always a mismatch. It would not be cost effective or locally accountable.* ”

However, a small minority did feel that the idea was interesting and should not be completely discounted. The main reasons for this were:

- It could be an option of last resort where public library services were not able to be funded and delivered by local authorities.
- It presents an opportunity for innovation and new delivery models and while it may be flawed or unworkable, at least it demonstrates ambition.

“ *We need some change and where there is something like that out there already [single national library service] we should learn from it.* ”

“ *It's an idea that makes you stop and go 'what?' – and that's not necessarily a bad thing. It's new thinking and it shouldn't just be dismissed out of hand.* ”

Nationally organised and funded infrastructure and creative programmes

“ *Having a national drive on library campaigns and initiatives, which could be adapted locally, would have a massive impact.* ”

Generally, the concept of nationally organised and funded programmes – for example, creative programmes, advocacy campaigns for public libraries, infrastructural support, or roll-out of technology to ensure consistent national provision of core activities and service – was well received by those who participated in the scoping exercise. Both library and local authority participants welcomed the opportunity to relieve some of their public library budget through centralised purchasing and felt that this would give them a suite of resources they could draw on flexibly in local delivery.

It was felt that this kind of national funding would be more palatable to local authorities than ring-fenced funding for libraries, or even competitive funding that would not be available to all. Participants also appreciated the opportunities to attract national funding from other departments into public libraries and the recognition that they could be a useful resource for applying government policy directly into communities at reasonable cost.

However, those who engaged with the scoping exercise stipulated that:

- Local authorities/local library services should be consulted about the kinds of tools and programmes they want to see developed, to ensure these meet their priorities.
- Depending on the type of programme, additional funding for implementation (e.g. staff time or training) would be required.
- Nationally organised and funded programmes should not prejudice or override local initiatives or partnerships that meet local priorities.
- Impact evaluation should be built into the models, so that the sector can easily demonstrate the value of this investment. (Business and IP Centres provide a practical example of how to do this and the benefits of doing so.)

One participant mentioned that the LEP was already working with their library service in this way and that they had been able to channel European funding into capital and training investment in the public library service because they were able to deliver against their priorities.

National standards or accreditation

“ *At present footfall and issues are the only way we have of measuring performance and these are not very 'energetic' measures. This [standards or accreditation] could be a new way to measure how far libraries are thriving.* ”

The majority of those consulted were broadly positive about accreditation for public libraries because it would help them make the case for their delivery approach to government and local people. It would also enable them to benchmark against national expectations and to drive improvement. However, there were some caveats identified such as:

- Standards or accreditation should be primarily user and outcome focussed – scoping study participants acknowledged it would be challenging to set outcomes flexible enough to respond to different local priorities whilst also providing a unified and clear view of what a comprehensive and efficient service looks like.
- Scoping study participants therefore thought that standards or accreditation should be developed in consultation with local authorities and Heads of Library Services – to ensure the measures are relevant, clear and flexible.
- Scoping study participants also stated that standards or accreditation should be primarily administered via self-assessment and peer review rather than an external evaluation process.
- There was also some nervousness among participants about how DCMS might use accreditation and whether this would be a tool for central government intervention. However, some participants felt that accreditation needs to have ‘teeth’ and there needs to be consequences for not meeting standards. For example, to provide ‘teeth’ by linking standards or accreditation to the 1964 Public Libraries Act and providing a definition of a ‘comprehensive and efficient’ service.
- Public library stakeholders engaged in the scoping exercise were also interested in standards that are aspirational and would stretch and challenge the sector rather than setting the bar low with a minimum standard.

There is a tension between flexibility and enforceability: accreditation or standards need to be well defined so that people understand them but flexible enough to work in local contexts.

There was also some concern voiced by scoping study participants that in the current funding environment, accreditation or standards will not provide the same stimulus to ‘up the game’ as standards might do in an environment with adequate funding available. For example, Wales has library standards but no library services met them in 2018.

A minority of those who engaged with this study felt that accreditation would not be helpful, either because it might be bureaucratic and irrelevant or because it might not be flexible enough to respond to the range of different delivery models available, or it might discourage innovation. These were primarily issues in relation to the execution of the accreditation rather than the concept.

This report uses the expressions “Accreditation” and “standards”, since these were referred to during the consultation. For the purposes of clarity, the term “standards” should be understood to encompass industry-led standards that are defined and managed by sector organisations and do not have any specific legal force in statute. The term “Accreditation” should be understood to refer to the process of assessing compliance with those industry-led standards, and again not as enjoying any specific regulatory force. Neither term should be understood to refer to Government-mandated standards or norms, which fall outside the scope of this report.

Nationally co-ordinated monitoring and evaluation

Developing nationally co-ordinated monitoring and evaluation frameworks and processes was strongly supported by most of those working in library service planning and delivery. It was felt to have the potential to both make a positive impact on consistency of service provision and contribute to and support the development of an evidence base that could be used to raise the profile of public libraries.

However, the local authority officers and executives involved in the scoping exercise

were less wholeheartedly positive about the idea. These participants expressed the concern that monitoring and evaluation would not be developed for local funding purposes, but for national organisations and may therefore not be relevant to local funders. This could mean that some local authorities do not support the data collection necessary for national monitoring and evaluation to be successful.

Heads of Service also stated that it would require resourcing and support to deliver because library services may not have capacity or skills to manage this in-house. The Business and IP Centres were seen as adopting a good model for low-resource approaches to evaluation because they provide evidence of impact without transferring a huge burden on libraries.

Those engaged in the scoping exercise also discussed the challenges of proving the impact of public libraries. These challenges included the fact that people engage with public libraries in informal and varied ways over a long time period and the fact that public libraries are integrated with other services, so it is hard to pinpoint the impact they provide separately from other interventions.

National organisation and delivery of digital public library service

“ *It [a national digital public library service] might help to develop the library brand so it's more recognisable, like the 'i' for information centres on the high street.* ”

The vast majority of those who participated in the scoping exercise were supportive of the idea of a national digital public library service, which might include shared back-end systems (such as those used by a growing number of consortia) and/or a co-branded user-facing offer promoting offers beyond an individual library service's own geographical boundaries. Several people mentioned that local authorities had all opted into a single planning portal several years ago and that it felt like a useful rationalisation of costs and

resources. Furthermore, scoping study participants identified the potential of a digital public library service to create a national library brand and improve customer experiences.

During this research, colleagues were undoubtedly aware of a scoping study into options for digital transformation for public libraries in the UK, drawing on ideas from the 2014 Sieghart Review (ibid.) and funded by Arts Council England and Carnegie UK Trust. However, because this was being researched by the British Library in parallel to the Blueprint report people were not able to give unqualified support and further conversations will be needed. Library stakeholders engaged in the scoping exercise were keen for the following to be explored as part of a nationally organised digital public library service:

- a single national spec on IT for public library services to drive IT departments to develop a better and more effective service; and
- licensing and usage of e-resources and marketing them to the public.

A small minority, while not against the idea itself felt sceptical about the chances of the success of a nationally organised and delivered digital library network because they had seen other initiatives fail, with significant cost or were concerned that it would not provide a great return on investment in terms of public impact.

Regional networks providing development and support to local libraries

Among the Heads of Service who participated in the scoping exercise there was strong support for regional library development support, providing that regional organisations do not replace local accountability and delivery. At present, a gap in provision is perceived in relation to knowledge exchange and sharing resources and bridging the divide between national priorities/organisations and local priorities/organisations. Heads of service that participated in the scoping study cited examples where regional support has been beneficial for other sectors. For example, archives and museums have benefitted from regional

development officers to support knowledge sharing and partnership development, raise awareness of funding opportunities and help the sector maintain high standards. It was, however, acknowledged, that there is currently a lack of resource in the library sector to co-operate regionally and some services may struggle to engage.

Among local authority stakeholders who engaged with the scoping exercise there were mixed responses to the idea of regional support in the form of Library Development Officers. Those local authorities who felt they needed support to develop new partnerships or identify funding opportunities were broadly welcoming. However, those who already had strong partnership working locally did not think they would add value. In addition, some were suspicious of anything that felt too ‘bureaucratic’ or felt that it may lack relevance for them:

“*It’s always the same – those who are already doing great get funding and those who aren’t miss out. It feels like it would be the usual suspects who would be included [in a regional network for development and support].*”

“*It is fine in theory but it doesn’t always work in practice. We already collaborate anyway. If there is money available for this, why not put it directly into libraries?*”

Updated library laws to define expectations of public library services

There was some interest in reviewing the 1964 Public Libraries Act because it is felt to be out of date. However, it was pointed out in one workshop that changes in legislation are not within the gift of the sector, but of government and that there is very little interest in this issue in government at present. There is also a feeling that this could take a long time and have an uncertain outcome (with possible removal of statutory status). It was therefore not something that stakeholders involved in the scoping study recommended taking forward as a priority at this time. However,

the point was made that some activists are lobbying for a new Act and therefore it would be prudent to consider what might be in a new Act so that it can be tabled alongside any activist proposed legislation.

4.6 Suggestions that emerged from the research process

In the process of discussing and debating the straw man ideas, stakeholders involved in the scoping exercise raised other activities that could help contribute to the provision of structural support in the national operating environment for public libraries: nationally co-ordinated workforce development and support for new governance and delivery models.

Nationally co-ordinated workforce development to develop a future-ready workforce

An additional idea that garnered support among those that engaged in the scoping exercise was to develop further work on a nationally co-ordinated workforce development plan to develop a future-ready workforce.

Support for exploring new governance and delivery models

Those making decisions relating to the best way to develop and deliver library services are not always clear about the support available from national sector support bodies to help them navigate possible options for the governance and delivery of these services. Whilst this support exists in pockets, many of those working in the sector, and decision-makers from outside of the sector, are not aware of this support and some may not feel that the support or advice available is tailored to their specific context. For example, it emerged from discussions with stakeholders involved in the scoping study that the following possibilities for new governance and delivery models for public libraries were of interest:

- unitary services controlled by local government;
- co-production/delivery with the public of local libraries;
- support for multi-service integration; and

- review and recommendations for income generation and charging options.

Broadly those stakeholders engaged with the scoping study were keen to see more support at local level for local authorities exploring new governance and delivery models. They were also clear that this support should be led by the needs of local authorities. In this way, stakeholders feel that a rationalisation of the number of library services and new delivery options such as integrated services can be explored and that the outcomes from these changes can be monitored and shared with other library services.

“*I had hoped for a rationalisation of library services [in my region], but it hasn't happened and it might need some external support to get going.*”

“*There is an opportunity to develop combined authorities around the devolved cities.*”

4.7 Visual overview of appetite for ideas

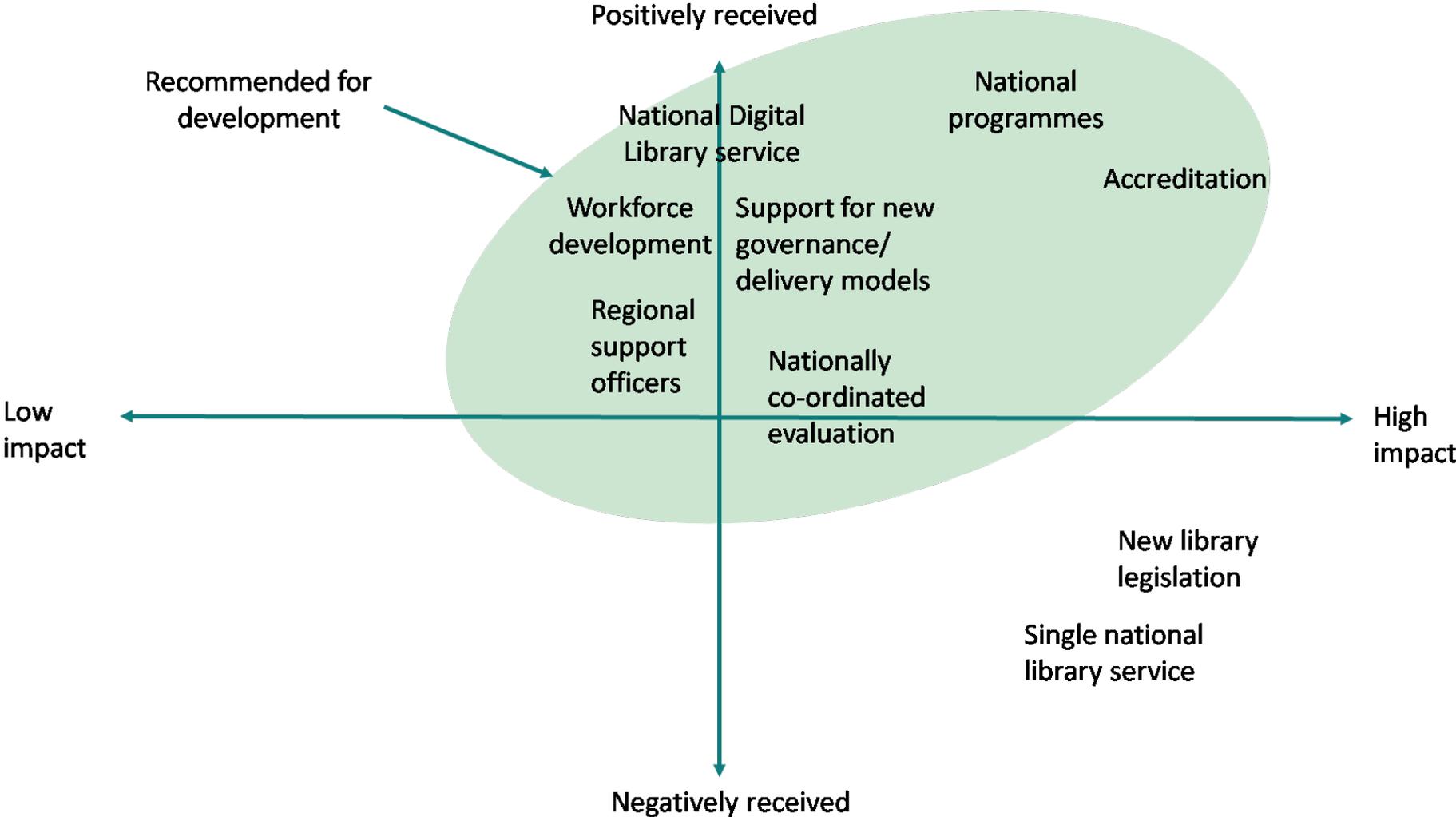
The diagram provides a visual overview of the ideas in relation to how positively they were received by stakeholders engaged in the scoping and whether those stakeholders thought the ideas would be effective in bringing the required change to the national operating environment. Those ideas in the top right-hand quadrant are clearly perceived to be highly appealing and effective. However there are other ideas which are either slightly less appealing or perceived to be slightly less effective which it may be worth pursuing - either because they are necessary aspects of the sector support offer (e.g. monitoring and evaluation frameworks) or because the responses on effectiveness are based on lack of confidence in execution rather than the idea itself (e.g. regional support offers).

4.8 Funding and financial sustainability

A key aim of this research, as defined by both the Advisory Group and scoping study participants was to explore how national sector support bodies could support the financial resilience of public libraries.

During the course of the consultation it became clear that there is substantial resistance to central government either funding core delivery of public libraries directly or via ring-fenced funding to local authorities. Central government funding was seen as potentially removing public libraries from local accountability mechanisms and creating inefficient bureaucracies. This was felt to be problematic as, despite the difficulties that some local authorities are experiencing in financing public library delivery, there was still a sense that public libraries should be locally designed and delivered. Furthermore, central government funding and administration of public libraries was felt to run counter to the current trend towards localism in service design and delivery. In terms of ring fencing, it was suggested that ring-fenced funding for public libraries would be difficult to defend in the context of cuts to other essential local government services.

Figure 2: Analysis of responses to the straw man ideas



In addition, several stakeholders pointed out that an Act of Parliament would be required to remove the responsibility for funding library services from local authorities and in opening up the existing Libraries Act for discussion, this may have the effect of removing the statutory status of public libraries rather than improving their financial position.

However, there was enthusiasm among scoping study participants for central funding for the following:

- Nationally organised and funded programmes: the positive experience of national funding for wifi rollout was seen as an example of where central government funding could make a positive difference to the consistency and quality of the public library offer without undermining local delivery. National funding for programmes could encompass both infrastructure and creative programme development.
- A national digital public library network: it was felt that the current system of individual public library websites was inefficient. Those consulted did not think that there would be significant resistance to a national infrastructure, as long as library users could still easily access their local offer.
- Support for exploring new governance and delivery models: this could involve tailored and detailed work with individual authorities or groups of authorities who are interested in joint working to understand how a range of new models or sources of funding could be developed to ensure the future sustainability of their service. While it would not entail provision of financial resource, it may entail provision of human resource and expertise at times of change.
- National support and workforce development to enable library leaders to make the case for public libraries, to leverage local funding and gain a seat at the table in local partnerships, would be welcomed. National library bodies are seen as having a role in enabling local

library services to build their own financial sustainability, rather than to provide this to them. However, in order for this support to be effective, it needs to be locally tailored rather than generic.

Income generation and charging

Participants at the workshops felt it was worth opening up the debate about charging for a range of activities, including library membership, because it could provide full cost recovery for service delivery. However, numerous issues regarding charging were identified by participants, including:

- the fact it would require a change in the law if the public were asked to pay for library membership;
- political and local resistance to charging;
- equalities issues;
- public libraries are trying to define themselves by the public impacts they provide beyond their lending service. However, charging for lending services could entrench the value of public libraries in resource lending rather than the public value they deliver; and
- those who support the idea feel that the USP and value of public library membership would need to be clearly defined.

Notwithstanding these issues, charging may be one of the issues that warrants further exploration as part of considering the pros and cons of various governance and delivery models.

5. Towards a Blueprint for Public Libraries

5.1 Components of a possible Blueprint for sector development

The analysis of the straw man ideas and additional ideas proposed by stakeholders involved in the scoping exercise have made it possible to identify seven key activities that scoping study participants agree will support the overall sustainability and quality of public library delivery:

This is an initial list based on the consultations carried out in this scoping study. All require further consideration and development, while other key activities may be also be identified following wider consultation with other key stakeholders.

We have developed a draft theory of change to explore how these activities could lead to a confident, dynamic national public library network with a robust funding base.

Nationally organised and funded programmes

- Could range from reader development programmes to infrastructure development
- Opportunity to leverage funding from other government departments to develop and deliver programmes through public libraries
- Would require a co-ordinating national body and governance/accountability to the sector and local authorities

Standards and accreditation

- Already being scoped by Libraries Connected

National monitoring and evaluation

- Work is already underway by Libraries Taskforce in relation to taking forward action around Open Data with further work planned to demonstrate the value of data capture and work is continuing to develop research to demonstrate the impact of library activity.
- To determine the unique value and contribution of public libraries
- To provide a strong evidence base for advocacy
- To support any comms activities/campaigns with the public and stakeholders

National digital library service

- Single Digital Presence being scoped by The British Library
- Not clear yet whether the final proposals will encompass all aspects of a national digital library services as imagined in the consultation

Regional development support network

- Already being scoped by Libraries Connected

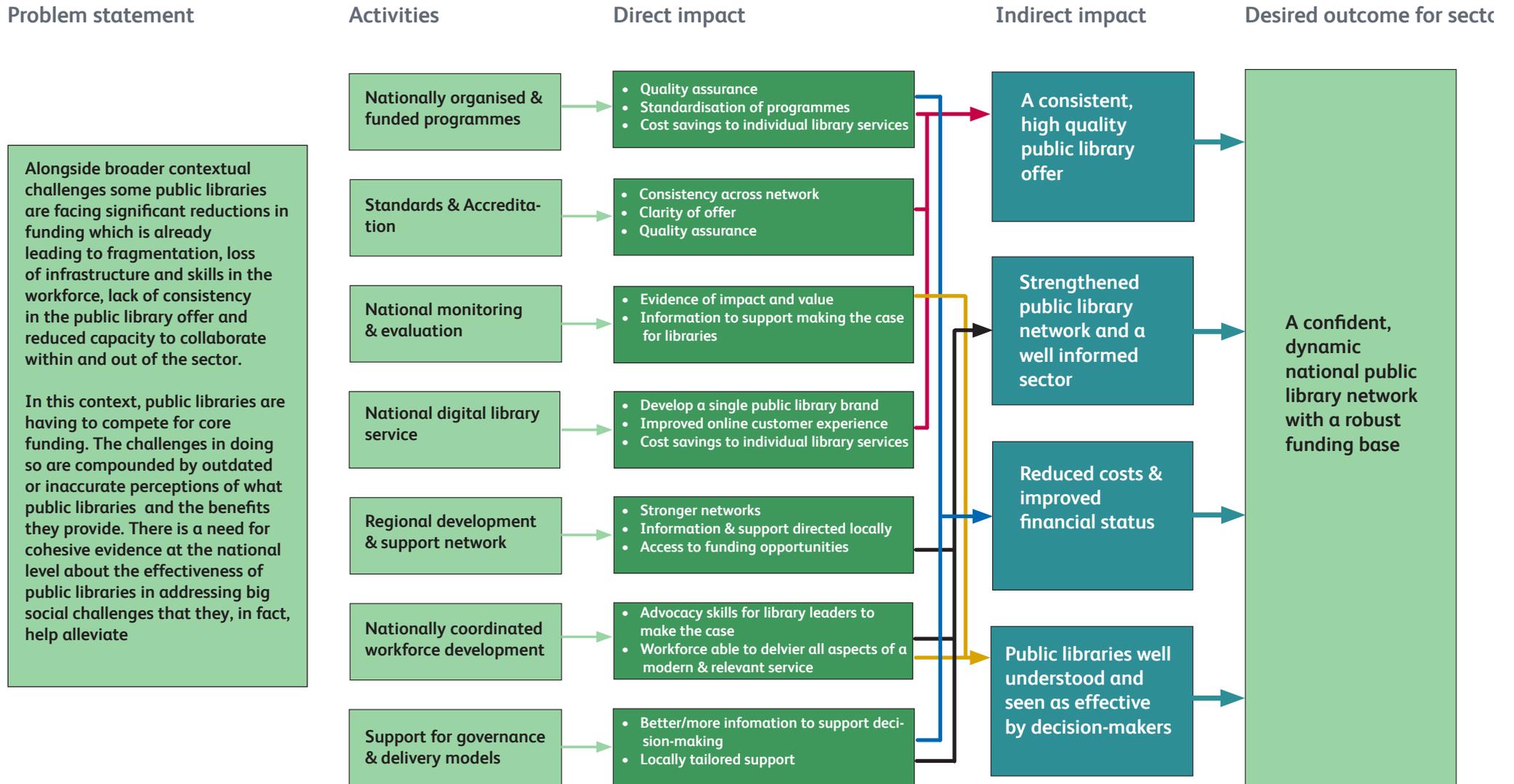
Nationally coordinated workforce development

- Work is already underway by CILIP and Libraries Connected to develop a new Public Library Skills Strategy
- To build influencing skills in heads of library services
- To ensure the public library workforce is equipped to respond to changing public needs/expectations and able to deliver against them
- There may be other needs that were not identified as part of this e.g. how to design/deliver data-rich services

Support and advice for new governance and delivery models

- A programme of support that can be flexibly deployed
- Exploring new and emerging practice
- Helping to develop innovative solutions

5.2 Draft theory of change for the Blueprint for Libraries



5.3 Developing Blueprint activities

While Libraries Connected and CILIP have led the work to conduct a scoping exercise into a possible focus for a collaborative approach to a blueprint for public libraries development in England, it is clear that this cannot be led or delivered by one or two national library organisations alone. The Blueprint plan must be supported by the sector for it to succeed and endorsed by all national bodies engaged with public libraries. In addition, of the specific activities that may comprise the Blueprint, some are already being developed either by Libraries Connected/CILIP or by other national organisations. The leadership and ownership of the new activities proposed should be considered as part of the stakeholder consultation on this report.

A number of the activities identified and explored in this scoping study are already underway. These include:

- **National standards and accreditation:** Libraries Connected will begin scoping approaches to accreditation in 2019. The guidance from this consultation suggests that accreditation should be flexible but aspirational enough to drive improvement in the sector. A risk of introducing accreditation at this time is that library services which are already under pressure may not participate in the accreditation programme. Accreditation could be linked to the superintendence of the 1964 Libraries Act but this will need to be balanced against concerns in local authorities that this will entail or encourage central government intervention in the delivery of local library services.
- **National digital library service:** the concept of a 'Single Digital Presence' is currently being scoped by the British Library, and any work on this concept should be informed by this and any local or regional initiatives currently underway.
- **Regional support structures:** Libraries Connected has commissioned Activist to scope a regional support offer for public libraries. The final report and business case from this work will be available concurrently with this report. Initial feedback about this idea in this research suggests that this will be welcomed by library officers. A number of challenges have also been identified that the design and delivery of regional support will need to address. These include ensuring senior local authority representatives recognise its value, that it has clear measures to demonstrate its impact and that it can be targeted at areas of need including services that do not currently actively engage with national library organisations or sources of funding.
- **Nationally co-ordinated workforce development:** Arts Council England has commissioned Libraries Connected and CILIP to undertake the public library skills strategy which will provide a framework for workforce development activities. The findings from this project suggest that these activities should focus on leadership and advocacy skills and on ensuring the frontline workforce is skilled and able to deliver all aspects of a modern public library service. In addition, as more local authorities consider integrated services, it will be important to consider how public library skills fit into the wider vision of the 21st century public servant⁶, data-rich service and other new developments of significance to the sector.

There are three new strands of work that the scoping study identifies which will need to be further developed in future projects. These are:

- Nationally co-ordinated and funded infrastructure and creative programmes.
- Support for exploring new governance and delivery structures.
- Nationally co-ordinated evaluation and monitoring.

6 See "The 21st Century Public Servant" by Catherine Mangan and Catherine Needham, University of Birmingham <https://21stcenturypublicservant.files.wordpress.com/2014/09/21-century-report-281014.pdf>

For each of these activities, development work will be required to establish:

- Which organisation should lead this activity?
- How could this activity be funded?
- What stakeholders need to be engaged for this programme to be successful?
- How should the activity be delivered and what should it include?

We believe that a design or test-and-learn approach would be appropriate for each of these activities. This would ensure a wide range of stakeholders, library workers and end users are engaged and that the solutions developed work with and for the sector rather than placing additional burden on already overstretched services.

However, this project has revealed the importance of oversight of all blueprint activities at a national level to ensure that they deliver against the aim of creating a confident, dynamic public library network with a robust funding base. An additional advantage of national oversight of the blueprint activities is that it would enable a flexible and responsive approach that is able to adapt to the changing situation on the ground in local authorities, where funding issues mean that difficult decisions are being made at a fast pace. For example, it would enable the reconsideration of activities currently considered out of scope or not appropriate to support the sector at this time, but which may become necessary if the public library network appears close to collapse.

5.4 Next steps

1. The ideas outlined in this report are based on engagement with a sample of stakeholders engaged at a national level with the public library sector. It is therefore essential to test out the ideas with broader national and local stakeholders, the wider library sector and users to understand whether the strands proposed for development are desirable and feasible,

and to identify any changes or additions that need to be made to ensure a blueprint meets its objectives. This is essential so that the strands can be developed, tested and refined to meet the needs of the sector

2. It is essential to establish which national body is able to oversee the development of the blueprint work, including supporting continued wide stakeholder engagement as it develops. Ownership and funding of agreed strands of work will also need to be explored and defined.
3. Collating baseline data about sector confidence and financial sustainability ahead of implementation of the blueprint in order to be able to measure progress towards the final objective of a confident, dynamic public library network with a robust funding base.

Appendix 1: list of organisations engaged

Advisory Group members:

Sheila Bennett:	Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
Mark Freeman:	Libraries Connected
Alison Heppenstall:	b2b partnerships Ltd
Isobel Hunter:	Libraries Connected
Ilona Kish:	EU Public Libraries 2030
Charlotte Lane:	Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
Sophie Lancaster :	Libraries Taskforce and Arts Council England
Catherine Mangan:	Public Services Academy, University of Birmingham
Nick Poole:	CILIP
Jenny Peachey:	Carnegie UK Trust
Jonathan Robinson:	Civic
Liz White:	The British Library

Participants in interviews and workshops:

Arts Council England	London Borough of Merton
Australian Library and Information Association	Manchester City Council
Birmingham City Council	Newcastle City Council
British Library	Norfolk Library and Information Service
Chief Cultural & Leisure Officers Association	Oldham Council
Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport	Richmond and Wandsworth Councils
Gloucestershire County Council	RNIB
Halton Borough Council	Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
Health Education England	Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Health Education England	Rutland County Council
Hertfordshire County Council	Scarborough Borough Council
Hull City Council	SCONUL
Inspire – Culture, Learning & Libraries (Midlands)	Somerset County Council
Koninklijke Bibliotheek	South Tyneside Council
London Borough of Newham	Stockport Council
Leeds City Council	Suffolk Libraries IPS
Local Government Association	The Growth Hub
Libraries NI	The Reading Agency
Libraries Unlimited	Wakefield Council
London Borough of Ealing	Warrington Borough Council
London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham	Wellcome Trust
	Westminster City Council

Appendix 2: Background research

About this document

This document is intended to provide information and inspiration to help frame possible solutions that can be explored further in later stages. It is structured in the following sections:

1. Context

This provides information about the current state of the sector in England

2. Strategy

A summary of public library strategy documents for England/the UK over the past 5 years

3. Current approaches to governance and delivery

A brief summary of governance and delivery of libraries in England and assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of this approach

4. Alternative models

This is not an exhaustive review of library funding and governance models from around the world but it briefly describes these models for:

Australia

Finland

The Netherlands

Northern Ireland

Singapore

The USA

5. Other sectors

This section explores possible insights from other sectors in the UK, including Trading Standards, the NHS and Public Health.

1. Context

Public perceptions and usage of public libraries

- Public libraries are highly valued by the public, with 75% of the population saying that public libraries are important for their community.⁷
- DCMS Taking Part survey has recorded a reduction of 16% in library usage in England since 2010 from 50% to 34%.⁸
- However, these figures have been challenged by Carnegie UK Trust which found in 2016 that 46% of people in England and around 50% of people across the UK still use public libraries and that the picture around usage varies across the UK, with only a slight decline in England.⁹
- Notwithstanding any potential decline in library usage, there are more than 250 million in-person visits and 90 million online visits to public libraries in England per year, which is more than any other cultural service.¹⁰
- Public libraries are broadly used across the community, but particularly by young people aged 16-25, BME groups, households with children and people who are not working.¹¹

Funding and return on investment in public libraries

- CILIP's analysis shows that there has been a loss of funding of £213 million in real terms for public libraries in England since 2010 which has resulted in the loss of 10% of public library service points.

7 "Shining a Light: The Future of Public Libraries Across UK and Ireland", Carnegie UK Trust, 2017

8 Insert ref to Taking Part

9 "Shining a Light: The Future of Public Libraries Across UK and Ireland", Carnegie UK Trust, 2017

10 "Public Libraries, The Case for Support", CILIP, 2018

11 "Shining a Light – Data Booklet", Carnegie UK Trust, 2017

- Analysis shows that public libraries are both good value, costing £13 per capita per year, but also provide an excellent return on investment of between £5 and £7.¹²
- Looking to the future, Local Government, which is the biggest funder of public libraries, is looking at a funding gap of £18bn from 2019 and beyond.

2. Library strategy

A review was conducted of recent strategy and policy documents pertaining to public libraries in England and the UK.¹³

Six documents were reviewed:

- “Public Libraries The Case for Support”, CILIP (2018).
- “Libraries Connected: Our Manifesto”, Libraries Connected (2018).
- “Shining a Light: The Future of Public Libraries in the UK”, Carnegie UK Trust (2017).
- “Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 to 2021”, Libraries Taskforce, DCMS (2016).
- “Envisioning the Library of the Future”, Arts Council England (2013)”.

There are some differences in emphasis across these documents but they all broadly agree on the following essential attributes for the future of public libraries:

- Public libraries as trusted/safe civic spaces both in local communities and online.
- Maintaining the central role of reading and information in public library services.
- Continuing to develop the role of public libraries in providing digital access and skills.
- Increasing focus on public libraries as co-produced spaces and services with local communities.
- The importance of appropriate training and skills for people working in public libraries.

In terms of where Public Libraries provide the greatest value to communities and government over the next few years, the following policy areas are given greatest focus:

- Supporting essential skills development for the 21st Century, including literacy, digital literacy and creative digital skills.
- Making a strong contribution to the economy, placemaking and regeneration.
- Enabling social mobility and encouraging people to develop to their full potential throughout their lives.
- Supporting cultural cohesion, civic engagement and participation.
- Encouraging and enabling creative and cultural activities and exploration.
- Contributing to wellbeing, including reducing social isolation and loneliness.

3. Current approaches to governance and delivery

Core funding for public libraries is provided through Local Authority budgets, even in cases where the service is sub-contracted or spun out to independent delivery organisations.

There are currently 152 library services in England, of which:

- 126 are mainly funded and delivered directly by Local Authorities.
- 13 are mainly funded by Local Authorities but are delivered by independent third sector organisations that have been set up for the purpose of delivering the public library service.
- 3 are delivered under contract by third sector or private organisations through a non-profit making arm (GLL in all of these cases at present).

In addition, several Local Authorities have devolved the delivery of one or more public library sites to voluntary community-run organisations, with a range of funding and support provided by the

¹² Ibid.

¹³ ‘Recent’ is defined as having been published between 2013-2018

Local Authority, but at a much reduced level to those libraries that are delivered through the professional public library service.

- As of 2016 there were 300 public libraries in England that were community-run.¹⁴

Strengths of the current system

- Public libraries are a statutory service, as defined by the 1964 Public Libraries Act.
- Allows for locally appropriate services to be developed.
- Local authorities have freedom to allocate funding as needed.
- Supports local democracy through the local government system.
- Freedom to innovate, both in terms of new services and in terms of governance and delivery mechanisms.
- Freedom to develop local partnerships.
- National work has focussed on helping public libraries demonstrate how they deliver against local priorities which means that they are often well positioned against local priorities.

Weaknesses of the current system

- The 1964 Act is unclear about what 'comprehensive and efficient' means.
- A patchwork of different delivery models is emerging which makes it difficult to maintain the national library network.
- Lack of national standards for public library delivery – difficult to hold local provision to account for the public.
- When Local Authorities are under extreme financial pressure funding for public libraries can be squeezed/cut.
- Decisions about delivery and governance are often based on financial need rather than quality and best provision.
- Difficult to co-ordinate/implement national programmes for public benefit.

- National bodies/departments may not be clear about the contribution of the national public library network to their priorities.

4. Alternative models

4.1 Australia

The Australian public library network consists of 1,530 public library service points (1,455 fixed points and 75 mobile libraries).

Funding for public libraries in Australia is usually provided by a mix of local government and state funding, with the greater part of funding provided by local government, except for the Australian Capital Territory (where Canberra is located) and Tasmania where public libraries are entirely state funded. The level of funding provided, both per capita and in absolute terms, varies significantly across the different states of Australia. The federal government provides no direct funding for local public libraries, although it does fund the National Library of Australia which provides services to the public as well as services which are used by public libraries.

Within each jurisdiction, libraries operate within the regulations and rules applicable to their local context (e.g. in accord with Council strategic plans, staffing and volunteer policies, ICT infrastructure). State-based library associations and networks have a coordinating role and support collaboration between municipal and/or regional library services. There are six state libraries which operate under a jurisdictional Library Act or similar legislation. These Acts can also provide for funding to and/or govern public library services to be delivered in the state. Neither the Australian Capital Territory nor the Northern Territory has a Library Act.

In 2016 the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) Australian Public Library Alliance (APLA) and National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) updated the national

¹⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/631715/Research_and_Analysis_to_Explore_the_Service_Effectiveness_and_Sustainability_of_Community_Managed_Libraries_in_England_-_May_2017.pdf

standards¹⁵ for Public Libraries. The national standards inform service planning, assessment and continuous improvement, and have been a practical tool for comparison among library services. To support the implementation of the new national standards, a Framework for Australian Public Libraries is included in the latest draft of the standards document. The document also provides a set of outcome indicators for reporting and evaluation.

The approach to standards in Australia uses IFLA/ UNESCO's Public Libraries Manifesto and a range of other standards documents from Australian territories and other countries as sources of inspiration.

4.2 Finland

There is a national network of libraries including public/municipal libraries, research libraries (the nucleus of which is the academic library network) and other libraries. All municipal, academic and research libraries are open to all members of the public free of charge. There are 738 main and branch public libraries in Finland and 140 mobile libraries.

Summary of the relevant actors and their roles:

- The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for national library policy, national funding proposals and for drafting relevant legislation.
- Public libraries are run by municipalities who also determine the extent of services and allocate funds to libraries at their discretion. Local authorities receive statutory state aid for operating a library based on a unit price per inhabitant, which is calculated from real library expenditure in all municipalities every four years. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Culture grants discretionary government transfers to support the production of national online services and other library projects of

national significance as well as the provision of new library buildings or mobile library services.

- Helsinki City Library is the Central Library for Public Libraries and has responsibility for developing the national public library network and programmes. It provides shared services for public libraries across Finland. It is supported in this by the Council for Public Libraries. This is a national body with representation from major public libraries across Finland as well as a cross-section of municipalities. The council co-ordinates between municipal public libraries and represents them at a national level.
- There are also public libraries assigned with regional development responsibility: they are responsible for ensuring that their region develops in line with local needs and national policy.
- The National Library of Finland co-ordinates and develops services for research libraries in Finland.

Finland has a Library Act which is regularly updated. The most recent Library Act came into force in 2017. Under the Library Act, every Finnish municipality must provide library services that meet certain standards, including in relation to staffing, service provision and accessibility. As there is legislation in place the municipality or ministry could be legally challenged if individuals or professional bodies do not feel they are fulfilling their obligations under the Act. However, it is not yet clear how those standards are assessed and whether legal challenge has ever been undertaken or has been successful.

4.3 The Netherlands

The Netherlands is administratively divided into central government, provinces and municipalities (local authorities). While much policy implementation is decentralised into municipalities, provinces oversee public library provision at a regional level. The decentralisation of public libraries aligns with decentralisation of welfare, culture and health. Currently there are

15 https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/20160714%20Guidelines%20Standards%20and%20Outcome%20Measures%20for%20Australian%20Public%20Libraries%20-%20MANUSCRIPT%20VERSION_0.pdf

158 public library organisations working for 393 municipalities. In a number of provinces, the provincial support organisations for public libraries have also merged. There are nine organisations, three of which operate in two provinces¹⁶.

In Holland there is a charge for membership of the local public library, however non-members can access study spaces collections and reference resources within the public library building. Membership fees are for local library networks only and are offered at differential rates for different levels of access (e.g. computer and wifi only vs full borrowing rights). Membership is free for under 19s and substantially discounted for people aged under 26. A nominal fee of €5 per year is charged for people in receipt of state benefits and certain membership tariffs include discounts for people aged 67 and over.

A new public library law was adopted in 2015. The law sets out the requirement for public libraries to give the general public access to information and culture and also defines the scope of a national digital public library and provides for its funding. The new legislation provides for the provision of a national library card, so that the public can join the national network, inter-library loans and other forms of co-operation between provincial public library networks. It also defines the purpose of the public library and translates the generic principles of the UNESCO manifesto into five functions of the public library.

At a national level, the new Library Act has meant that the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (KB), the National Library of the Netherlands, is now responsible for implementing national programmes. The allocation of funds to the KB by the minister of Education, Culture and Science is based on an

overall strategic 4-year plan which is devised in collaboration with members of the national library network.

The KB's role under the new legislation includes strategic oversight of the public library network, national programs such as reading programs and illiteracy and special library services for the print disabled and management and implementation of a national digital library. It also has responsibility for conducting a research program into the value of the library, an innovation program, knowledge sharing and professional development at a national level and a national collection plan.

The culture budget is the main source of library funding, but small amounts of funding are starting to be made available from other departmental budgets. Although such financing often still seems to be incidental, it appears to reflect and acknowledge the potential role of libraries in addressing broader social issues that transcend the cultural domain.

The strengths of this system include both national and local responsibility for effective delivery of the public library system while ensuring that local public libraries develop a distinct local flavour in collections and services. The weakness is that the new law does not require municipalities to offer a public library service, they can opt out or provide a minimum service that could be a 'race to the bottom'. In addition, the change from devolved policy and management of public libraries to the KB strategic oversight has been resisted by some parts of the sector

4.4 Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has a single library authority called Libraries NI. The functions of Libraries NI are set out in the Libraries Act NI (2008)¹⁷ and it

16 The current Dutch system of organising and funding public libraries was developed in 1998 due to perceptions that the public library system lacked the cohesion required to address the challenges of the 21st century. The Meijer Committee recommended the creation of 'basic libraries' with separate front and back offices, and the transformation of provincial central libraries into provincial service organisations, in order to boost the strength of the sector. The signing of a joint agreement (Koepelconvenant) in 2001 by the three government layers involved marked the official start of the process of library renewal. This means that while the number of branch libraries did not change dramatically, the number of organising bodies reduced substantially.

17 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2008/8/contents>

has been in operation since 2009. Libraries NI is overseen by the Department for Communities, and currently operates 96 branch libraries in

Northern Ireland, two specialist libraries, and 16 mobile libraries.

Libraries NI replaces 5 Education and Library Boards which used to operate in different areas of Northern Ireland. Libraries were the first function to be removed from these boards, but now there is also a single unitary education authority which operates across Northern Ireland. Therefore, the centralisation of libraries administration is part of a broader trend of rationalisation and reduction of layers of administration across different areas of policy and delivery in Northern Ireland. This process was conducted after the Good Friday Agreement and the establishment of devolved government in Northern Ireland at the end of the 20th Century. As part of this there was a comprehensive review of public administration with a focus on reform and rationalization.

Part of the reason for establishing Libraries NI was also in order to reduce costs and increase efficiency. Since the establishment of Libraries NI there has been a reduction of 110 FTE posts (22% reduction in staff) across the organisation in both back-office and frontline staff. This has not resulted in a reduction in service and the organisation is able to do 'more with less'. The Libraries NI annual reports show that the numbers attending libraries and the activities supported by public libraries have actually increased year-on-year despite real terms reductions in budgets. Libraries NI operates with limited volunteering and is primarily delivered by paid staff.

Since 2009 there has been a standardisation of programmes, with core programmes promoted in all libraries. There are local variations in service delivery, reflecting local needs but the core programmes are delivered across all libraries.

The key governance methods to ensure quality across this large single library service include the

strategic business plan and annual plan which have KPIs that are monitored by the board of Libraries NI. In addition they are required to report to the Department for Communities. They are looking to incorporate more qualitative feedback into their reporting and assessment of progress and they are also moving to outcomes based accountability for staff, so that they are not just measuring what they are doing but how well they are doing it.

The strengths of this model are the opportunities for reducing administrative layers and economies of scale across the single library service as well as the opportunities for standardisation and quality management of core programmes as well as bulk purchase procurement opportunities and single standardised IT networks. This can also translate into a clear offer for the public and better understanding of what public libraries provide. The weaknesses of this model, as it stands, are the limited opportunities for community involvement in design and delivery of services outside of formal consultation and commissioned surveys and the difficulty of maintaining senior staff visibility and accountability to front-line staff when running a large, centralised library service.

4.5 Singapore

Singapore has a population of 5.6 million people on an area of 721.5 km square. Singapore operates a centralised library system in terms of funding and governance. In Singapore the National Library Board (NLB) manages the National Library, 26 Public Libraries and the National Archives. Established on 1 September 1995 as a statutory board, NLB is an agency under the Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI).

Singapore has few natural resources and a high population in a small geographic area. It also has a pivotal geographical position in the region, between China and India and is close to numerous other south and east Asian countries. It has therefore taken the strategic decision to invest in its population's knowledge and skills with

a particular focus on cultural brokerage between different business cultures to secure economic advantage. Public libraries form a key strand of this strategy to become a “learning nation”.

Singapore has a three-tier Public Library System which consists of regional, community and neighbourhood libraries. Regional Libraries have an autonomous management structure and a range of collections and services. Smaller Community Libraries function as Township Libraries, serving the general needs of the residents of that town. The Neighbourhood Libraries are often located at void decks of public housing estates and in community centres and bring library services to the doorstep of children and aged. Library development is aligned to the national concept plan for the physical development of Singapore. Community and neighbourhood libraries are often designed using co-production principles with local businesses and communities and many rely heavily on volunteers to support the service, drawn from the local community.

The National Library Board (NLB) launched the Libraries of the Future Masterplan in 2015 with the aim to develop the public libraries with seamless access, both physically and digitally. All publicly funded libraries in Singapore are being linked to form a network of borderless libraries to facilitate easy and timely access to relevant information. Users and librarians are able to access a variety of information databases from their homes, offices and libraries. Five public libraries have opened in 2017 and 2018, exemplifying next-generation libraries that serve as hubs for reading and lifelong learning across physical spaces and digital platforms. These newly-opened libraries feature customised spaces for all users and a greater integration of digital content, enhancing the overall library experience.

Public libraries are also a core part of the government’s economic growth strategy. They are increasingly required to develop their capabilities to gather, analyse, distil, collate and

make available useful information from different cultures to support the nation’s ‘cultural arbitrage’ approach to business development. This also includes translation services to support cross-cultural understanding in developing business propositions.

4.6 USA

There were 16,568 public library buildings in the US according to the 2016 Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Public Libraries Survey. (The Figure of 9,057 supplied by the ALA includes library systems which have multiple branch locations so the actual number of physical locations is considerably higher than 9,057).

Public libraries in the USA are funded by a combination of local property tax, state and federal funding. They may also receive charitable endowments and local philanthropy of various types, as well as funding from large national and international charitable foundations. While this provides a diverse range of funding, much funding that is provided especially federal or charitable funding, is restricted to certain programmes and activities.

Federal structures

There is Federal provision of funding for public library services through the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) (1996). The LSTA is overseen by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) which is responsible for distributing federal funding for library services. IMLS is authorised to award financial assistance, collect data, form strategic partnerships, and advise policymakers and other federal agencies on museum, library, and information services. The mission of IMLS is to advance, support, and empower America’s museums, libraries, and related organisations through grantmaking, research, and policy development.

More recently the Museum and Library Services Act of 2010 came into law. The new law emphasizes the critical role of libraries and museums in meeting the essential information,

education, research, economic, cultural, and civic needs of the people of the United States. In addition to codifying the Laura Bush Librarians for the 21st Century program, the law also provided IMLS with responsibility for advising the President and Congress on library, museum, and information services policy and enhanced the agency's federal partnership role.

State provision for public libraries

State law determines whether an entity is a public library. States can release funding for the establishment of new libraries where there are gaps in provision. They also provide funding, usually for specific programmes relating to state policy and priorities.

Local governance and provision

After being established and funded through a resolution, public referendum or similar legal process, the library is usually managed by a board of directors, library council or other local authority. While the library's governing board has ultimate authority to establish policy, many other organisations may participate in library management or library fundraising, including civic and voluntary associations, women's clubs, Friends of the Library groups, and groups established to advise the library on the purchase and retention of books.

Public libraries in the USA have experimented with public-private partnerships. For example, Jackson County, Oregon, closed its entire 15-branch public library system for six months in 2007, reopening with under a public-private partnership and a reduced schedule.

Standards

The American Library Association (ALA) has published a range of guideline documents for the management of public libraries. Most of these documents date from the early 2000s. Standards for public libraries are issued on a state-by-state basis, although some states do not have any published standards for public libraries. Standards, where they exist, are used to

determine which organisations qualify for state aid, where it is available. These standards or qualifying criteria may be recent or may not have been updated in the past 100 years.

5. Other sectors

5.1 Trading standards

A research study in 2015¹⁸ found that over the past few years almost all trading standards departments have experienced sharp cuts in their budgets and most now operate with about half the number of staff that they employed five years ago. Unit costs were found to be highest in the lesser populated and more geographically extensive local authority areas while the costs for some of the UK's largest population centres (or where two neighbouring departments were working together through a shared service arrangement) were among the lowest, suggesting the prevalence of economies of scale.

The report also found that collaborative working is increasingly a key characteristic mode of operation for trading standards departments. 80% of survey respondents in the 2015 study said that their department was working collaboratively with either (or both) another trading standards department, regional and/or sub regional services and/or another partner (including from the private sector). The drivers behind collaboration were cited as a combination of making efficiencies and cost savings, sharing intelligence and skills and securing service resilience. However, the survey also highlighted barriers to ongoing collaboration including local politics, resource constraints and the differing priorities of other agencies and other councils.

The LGA's 2015 strategy document "Remodelling Public Protection"¹⁹ argues for rethinking traditional ways of managing local government regulatory services. It discusses different ways of funding the existing model, so that businesses

18 <https://www.tradingstandards.uk/media/documents/news--policy/research/inlogov-15-139-the-impact-of-local-authority-trading-standards-in-challenging-times-r2.pdf>

19 <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/remodelling-public-protec-9ad.pdf>

are responsible for picking up more of the cost rather than the state. It also argues for consideration of a shift in ownership of some of these activities so that some functions that are currently the responsibility of councils be overseen by businesses with a stake in them, rather than by the state and towards self-regulation. In 2016 it published a review of Trading Standards²⁰ which examined some of these hypotheses in more detail. It found that:

- Trading Standards functions were more resilient and cost-effective where they were operating over a sufficiently large population and those services that were least likely to be in crisis were unitary or merged services across local authority boundaries. “Even following the cuts, these services retain relatively large staff bases, are able to cover a range of specialisms, and believe that that they are sustainable and resilient.”
- There was a need to define a minimum standard for Trading Standards services because there was a belief that some services were already operating below that standard.
- It called for honesty about what could be delivered in the current funding environment and openness about what services were being delivered and what services were not: “current level of resources cannot sustain the same level of protection, across the same number of areas, as was the case previously”.

The LGA responded to these proposals by agreeing that larger unitary services could provide economies of scale, where they still have local accountability and sit within Local Authority structures.

5.2 NHS

The Kings Fund and the Health Foundation²¹ have argued for the need for a “Transformation Fund” to help the NHS change the way it works

to meet the challenges of the 21st Century in the context of the budget available. Their document “Making Change Possible” recognises that there is no evidence base about what works in terms of transformation and so the fund would be an ‘act of faith’, however it does highlight the shortcomings of a fragmented approach to funding transformation and to delivering change.

5.3 Public Health

The Faculty of Public Health is calling for a “Prevention Transformation Fund” in the 2019 spending review²² because locally delivered public health services are struggling to cope with Local Authority funding cuts. It calls for the fund to invest in activities that will enable authorities to “change their pattern of investment... as well as to trial new interventions to further increase our evidence base about what works”. However, this proposal is focussed more on interventions that make a difference and targeting investment towards these than on structural transformation.

The British Medical Association has argued that austerity means that public health needs to be increasingly delivered across all aspects of local authority services²³. It supports the “health in all policies” approach to embedding public health across all services and recommends that the impact on individual and public health is accounted for in the nation’s economic strategy and decisions on social policy. However, it also argues that more investment is required in order to maintain high quality public health services and provides advocacy advice for practitioners working in local settings.

20 <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/lga-trading-standards-rev-b20.pdf>

21 https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/field_publication_file/making-change-possible-a-transformation-fund-for-the-nhs-kingsfund-healthfdn-jul15.pdf

22 <https://www.fph.org.uk/media/1917/prevention-transformation-fund-discussion-paper-final.pdf>

23 <file:///C:/Users/katie/Downloads/BoS-Health-in-all-Policies-Austerity-Briefing-2016.pdf>