

**An investigation into the non-borrowing use of public library
services**

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By

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1.0 Introduction

Sponsored by Sheffield Libraries and Information Services, this study investigates the non-borrowing use of Tinsley library, a small community library service, located on the outskirts of the city of Sheffield.

The context for the research was provided as a result of a recent survey conducted by CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) into the use made of a sample of public libraries across the city. The survey asked respondents to specify what they had done at the library during 'today's visit' (when the survey was carried out). The findings revealed that Tinsley had the lowest percentage of respondents who said they had come to the library to return/borrow books (51.8%). The second lowest number of book borrowers was at Uperthorpe library (62.7%). Yet interestingly, this library had the highest number of respondents who had come to read newspapers/magazines. The figures for other activities in the same sample reveal a lesser disparity between Tinsley and other libraries surveyed (Sheffield Libraries, Archives and Information (1999)). Discussion with library staff confirmed that despite the low number of book issues, this library supported a vibrant community of users.

This apparent anomaly of low issue statistics, but high overall usage, suggests a value and worth to the service that may not be appropriately represented in current performance indicators that rely heavily on the convenient but somewhat crude measure of issue statistics.

In order to add richness and depth to the findings of this study two other service points within the city, will be considered allowing meaningful comparisons and

valid statements of library use to be made. Detailed profiles of each of the libraries and their respective user communities are provided below.

1.1 Aims

The primary aim of this research was to investigate all the uses made of the public library that are not in anyway related to the traditional borrowing facilities, in order to provide some fresh insight into the use made of the public library service exclusive of all borrowing. In this way it is hoped that library managers, politicians and policy makers can have a better knowledge and awareness of all that libraries do and the implicit value of this to the communities they serve.

In view of the vibrant and diverse nature of each of the community libraries surveyed in this study (outlined below) an important consideration of the intended user survey would be to gain some useful insight into the general characteristics and 'behaviour' of library users and impact of these variables on the way the library is used. The study would also examine the extent to which the library satisfies the needs of non-borrowers.

The research attempted to answer the following specific questions:

I What are the extent and features of non-borrowing use made of the library?

What is the overall picture of library usage?

What, if any, is the distinction between borrowing and non-borrowing use of the library?

II To what extent do the services provided by the library meet the needs of non-borrowers?

What are the specific facets of non-borrowing usage?

To what degree are both the 'expressed needs' as well as the 'unexpressed' expectations of non-borrowers being met by the library?

What do the frequency and patterns of library use reveal about the relative importance of the library to users?

Overall, what is the level of satisfaction of non-borrowers with library provision?

III To what extent do the general characteristics of the users influence and explain the non-borrowing use made of the library?

The following characteristics will be considered:

Age, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status

IV What do I, II, and III reveal about the overall value and impact of the library to the wider community?

How do both users and staff, at all levels perceive the library?

To what extent do current performance measures reflect the value and importance attributed to libraries?

As a result of its non-borrowing functions and perhaps indicative of its understated significance to the wider community, in what way does the library contribute to the following areas:

Personal development, social inclusion, community empowerment, a sense of identity and place and the economic capacity of the local community.

1.2 Background

‘About three fifths of the English and Welsh population regularly visit public libraries...[a]bout 24 million adults (aged 16 years or more) in England and Wales are public library users’ (Aslib (1995: 113)). The Comedia (1991:10) study into town centre decline and renewal in Britain found that ‘the library was used by a wider cross section of the population than almost any other public, commercial or retail institution in the town centre’

However library members, managers, commentators and politicians have, over the years defined the role of the public library within a number of closely defined functions relating to education, information access, culture and leisure. These have been legitimised by a number of recent statements of public library purpose. For example the 1994 UNESCO Public Library Manifesto ‘proclaims UNESCO’s belief in the public library as an important and vital force...providing access to knowledge and information in support of education and cultural development’. (In Aslib (1995:99)). Previous studies in public library usage suggest that the mainstay of these core functions remains the borrowing of books. Luckham (1972: 62) found that 83 per cent of survey respondents used the library to borrow books. Similarly, Totterdell and Bird (1976) in the Hillingdon

study found that the majority of respondents also used the library to borrow books. Twenty years on, the trend seems to be the same. The Household Library user survey noted that 80% of visits over the two-month period prior to interview involved borrowing books. (Bohme & Spiller (1999:15.)) In essence, the image of the public library, as currently configured, is predominantly that of a book based service' (Aslib (1995:179)).

Increasingly however libraries have become the providers of much more than borrowing services. A number of previous studies refer to the social impact of libraries as a vital but somewhat less tangible indication of the value of the public library beyond its established borrowing functions. For example the Cleveland case study in Comedia (1993) of two very deprived areas states that the library played an important role in supporting 'the carers and volunteers in the community'. It was felt that a sophisticated system of 'cost-benefit' analysis was needed, derived from the 'cost' of not having a library at all. In a similar vein, a staff respondent in the Social Audit (Linley & Usherwood (1996:32)) said that:

"A lot of people come through the doors, they don't actually borrow books, the issues aren't very high but an awful lot of people come in, read the newspapers, have a cup of coffee, maybe look at some books. Not necessarily to borrow them".

Proctor, Usherwood and Sobczyk (1996: 26), investigating the impact of the Sheffield Libraries strike were surprised by how many respondents overall, missed the library for a reason not specifically related to the core services of 'reference information and book lending'.

Each of these pieces of research provides an indication of the 'added value' of the library. However within their remit they do not examine in enough depth the specific nature and contribution of the distinctly non-borrowing element. The Book Marketing Limited Survey (1997), *Libraries and the Consumer* offers a

comprehensive survey of library usage in Britain eight years prior to publishing. Broad distinction is drawn between book borrowing and other 'ancillary' services inclusive of other borrowing items like CD's etc. This broad distinction places some limitations on the ability to make rigorous comparison between strictly borrowing related and non-borrowing library usage.

The relative lack of research relating to the non-borrowing use of the library may, in part be perpetuated by the restrictive performance indicators which remain sympathetic to the bookish definitions of the core library functions, in the library world. Although visitor statistics have been recorded since 1992 this approach remains highly quantitative and does not scratch beneath the surface of whom, why and what the library is being used for apart from borrowing. A significant benefit of the present research is that it offers a unique opportunity to document this more specifically, also examining the general characteristics of the non-borrowers in order to understand the relationships and patterns that may determine the use of the library. In this way it is hoped that policy makers and politicians and other stakeholder can be informed of the *real* experiences and expectations of *real people* for whom policy is formulated. Mellon (1993:3) put it succinctly:

“Without some understanding of the people we purport to serve libraries will become no more than static warehouses. Librarians must study the people who need the information as carefully as they study the technology of information”.

Sandwell Community Libraries 'lapsed' user survey (1997) presented in its concluding recommendations, with a degree of poignancy, the need to consider the non-borrowing use of libraries. The survey found that most of those who had apparently 'lapsed' were in fact using the library for various purposes other than lending. This highlights the concern of relying on issue statistics as the primary measure of library performance. There is an underlying danger that unless you have a 'live' ticket, 'you will not be counted'.

Undoubtedly, current national debate is beginning to recognise a broader remit for public libraries as '*our street corner universities*' Libraries are presented with the challenge of responding to the variant demands of the *information superhighway* and developments in Information Communication Technologies, while remaining responsive to the particular social and cultural values of the communities they serve. At every level practical evidence as well as creative thinking is needed to promote the rich variety of 'public goods' that the library has to offer as a warm, dignified place, a sanctuary from the hustle and bustle of every day living. It is a place where staffs know many of the faces by name and are willing to help if needed, a 'home in a public place'. Comedia 1993).

1.3 Location of the study

1.3.1 Brief

In order to guide the reader, this section outlines in brief the specific locations at which the research took place. Detailed profiles are provided later, in chapter four.

Tinsley library, the focus for this study, was proposed by Sheffield Libraries as a particular example of heavy non-borrowing usage and worthy of further investigation. Located on the outskirts of the city, on the border between Sheffield and Rotherham councils, the community comprises mainly two distinct ethnic groups, white and Asian. It is also an area of relatively high unemployment and deprivation.

Two other service points, Highfield and Burngreave were chosen for comparative analysis within the study. This choice was made in consultation with the East Group Manager (responsible for the area in which the sample libraries are located) and the line manager for Tinsley library. It was decided that if effective

and meaningful comparisons were to be drawn these two locations should be somewhat similar to the focal library in terms of their size and the make-up of the communities in which they function.

The geographical spread of the sample libraries was also considered to be a significant issue. Flanked on three sides by Rotherham council and the M1 motorway, the library is one of the few remaining council amenities in Tinsley. (see Map 1, appendix 1). The other two libraries are located within the inner city area of Sheffield. It is interesting to see if this geographical diversity has any impact on the way that the library is used.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Overall approach

The overall approach adopted by this research is a highly inductive one. This is variously referred to as *grounded theory* through which patterns, themes and categories are allowed to emerge from the data as it is collected and interpreted, rather than imposing them on the data (Patton 1990).

The nature of the study is such that no theory or hypothesis exists beforehand to adequately explain the numerous issues relating to the non-borrowing use of libraries. Instead it is appropriate to test and apply the results of my study to the 'problem' that is presented. Spradley & McCurdy (in Mellon (1990: 9)) offer this explanation of the relevancy of this method to the study of people and circumstances within a particular environment: 'Instead of asking 'what do I see these people doing?' we must ask 'what do these people see themselves as doing?' This means letting the data decide, allowing the participants themselves reveal how they 'fit into' the environment being studied without imposing preconceptions and perhaps misconceptions on the setting. (Mellon 1990).

In addressing the aims of the research a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods were used in order to gain the richest picture of the nature and extent of non-borrowing use.

Initially, the 'hard' facts relating to the distribution, frequency and extent of the variables set out in the aims were obtained through quantitative methods which, 'utilise statistical information derived from questionnaires containing closed questions or 'forced' questions'. (Foddy (1993:12)). This would provide the backbone to the data, allowing quantitative calculations to be made and documented and causal relationships and patterns to be examined 'in a value-free environment' (Denzin & Lincoln (2000:9)).

However, such methods do not appropriately address the variations and nuances of the human subject. Therefore this research places significant emphasis on qualitative methods exploring the extent to which the quantitative data reflects more general patterns and more importantly, the emotions, attitudes and opinion, drawn from specific examples and personal perspectives of the participants, that are difficult to capture using strictly defined quantitative methods. Loftland and Loftland (1995:16) state that the overall goal of social or naturalistic inquiry is to 'collect the richest possible data...to earn intimate familiarity with the sector of social life that has tickled your interest'.

Nonetheless, the weaknesses in each approach must be noted. Quantitative methods may provide a greater degree of precision and certainty to the findings but they are limited in the depth and scope of understanding they provide. In the same way 'speech' (words) and numbers can be selective. The speaker may say what they think the listener wants to hear and visa versa'. (Blaxter et al (1997:171).

2.2 Case studies

In addressing the issue of the non-borrowing use of an individual library, the researcher is presented with a unique set of circumstances; characteristics and relationships that combined contribute to the phenomena being examined. In practical terms this offers a convenient opportunity to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of events. Bell (1999:10) asserts that such an approach is particularly appropriate for individual research 'because it allows one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth, within a limited timescale.'

However, in order to accredit any degree of validity and reliability to the distinctive findings of an individual case, the results must be subject to some scrutiny. Comparison with two other service points will enable the researcher to identify differences and similarities that may exist within and between the 3

cases. Following this analysis it may be possible to reflect on both why and under what circumstances these differences and similarities may occur. Admittedly the success of any comparative study is dependent on the ability of the researcher to understand and interpret events correctly.

Ultimately, '[w]hen applied as a research method, case studies are usually carried out to generate findings of relevance beyond the individual cases'. (Fielder, in Glazier & Powell (1992:37)). Denscombe (1998) captures the point well suggesting that, although each case is in some way unique, it is also a single example of a 'broader class of things'. It is hoped that the findings derived from the three case studies included in this study will allow broader generalisations to be made about the nature and extent of the non-borrowing use of the public library service.

2.3 Literature review

Blaxter et al. (1997:110) define a literature review as 'a critical summary and assessment of the range of existing materials dealing with knowledge and understanding in a given field'. It has already been noted that little directly related literature exists on the subject of libraries and non-borrowing. This necessitated a much wider remit of sources referenced. This included an examination of the various studies that have been made of library usage overall.

Bohme & Spillers *Perspectives of Public Library Use 2* (1999) provided a useful compendium of recent survey information.

Other sources included surveys of library users and uses, accessed from the University of Sheffield's library catalogue. *Star*, via author/title key word search, government reports relating to the national perspective of public library use and current political debate on their use and potential. These were available both in

paper format and Online, from the World Wide Web. Some relevant library management data was also accessed from Sheffield Libraries and Information Service

Finally, a substantial number of monographs and periodical, both current and less recent, were accessed from the university library catalogue and Online databases such as Web of Science and LISA (Library and Information Science Abstracts), as well as Online newspapers such as the *Guardian* and the *Times*.

Each of the search strategies outlined above, provided a variety of useful sources appropriate to the study as supporting evidence to either validate or refute the findings presented in the report.

2.4 Methods of investigation

2.4.1 Self-conducted questionnaires

Questionnaires were conducted in person with a total of 118 library users approached at each of the three sample libraries. This took place over a two-week period between the 18th and 29th June 2001.

The questionnaire (Appendix 2) was semi structured, containing both closed, structured question so that precise data could be compared, and open-ended questions which allowed the respondents greater expression using their own words. This added a richness and depth to the data that would not otherwise be possible through strictly defined questions.

In light of the ethnic diversity of the communities surveyed, it was suggested by library staff that for many potential respondents English might not have been the first language. Therefore, conducting the questionnaire in person maximised the response rate and also gave the researcher some control over how the questions were interpreted, while assuring respondents of the confidentiality of their responses.

Given that many non-borrowers may not have cause to approach staff or issue counters, it was decided that self-completion questionnaires left at pick-up points in the libraries may produce a poor response rate. For these reasons, a face-to-face interview would be the most appropriate method of surveying.

2.4.2 Questionnaire sample

The non-probability method of quota sampling was used in this study. 'Here, the general characteristics of a population is known from data obtained, from for instance the census. The proportion of people in particular age groups, social class etc. is known beforehand and the sample will consist of a proportionate quota of people with those characteristics' (May (1997:87)). This involves selecting a sample, which would be considered representative of the whole population.

Electoral ward statistical data from the 1991 census was referred to. However as both Tinsley and Highfield fall into larger wards, it was not possible to get an exact estimation of the extent to which the proportion of respondents in these two libraries match the overall population in each area. Thus broad comparisons with the 1991 census information were supplemented by general estimates of the make-up of the user population in each of the library catchments areas, provided through discussion with library staff.

The survey work was carried out in each of the three libraries at various times of the day and week, ensuring as far as possible a representative sample of the user population in the library catchments areas.

2.4.3 Pilot questionnaire

Immediately prior to the two-week period of user interviews a small pilot test was carried out on a sample of the survey population, to:

‘...get the bugs out of the instrument so that subjects in [the] main study will experience no difficulties in completing it and so that you can carry out a preliminary analysis to see whether the wording and format of questions will present any difficulty when the main data are analysed’ Bell (2000:127)).

A key alteration as a result of the questionnaire was to omit two questions that seemed to produce slightly duplicate responses as those received from other questions. This reduced the length of time it took each respondent to complete the survey.

Also as a result of the pilot the order of the questions was altered so that they were placed in a more logical sequence, with the most demanding, open-ended questions first and the closed, factual questions at the end.

2.4.4 Non-participatory observation

A further tool of naturalistic inquiry used in this study was non-participatory observation. Somewhat akin to bird watching, the observer remains detached from the setting and merely observes what is happening and records the findings. Jordan (in Slater, 1990:39) states that such observation lends itself to the study of ‘institutions like libraries, where members can be seen going about

their business regularly in a relatively enclosed environment'. This was carried out during the two-week period devoted to fieldwork. A similar period of time was initially set-aside in each of the sample libraries to observe and record events. Complimentary to the conducted interview:

“Observation studies events as they actually occur and also what people do rather than what they say they do...observation can be use to study both use and usage”. (Mullings, in Streatfield (152:1990).

A semi-structured approach was adopted whereby the researcher observed events against a prepared number of themes, pre-determined by the literature review and the initial findings suggested by the conducted questionnaires, reviewed by the researcher as objectively as possible.

At its simplest level the purpose of such observation was to document generally how the library was being used, in support of the stated aims, i.e. were people using it to borrow/related, for *other* reasons or both. The researcher also wanted to observe conversations, body language and interactions amongst users and also between users and the staff in order to get a sense of the atmosphere and environment in which the respondents were functioning. Gorman & Clayton (1997:23) assert that the only genuine way of knowing is to become part of the subject's world; thereby better understanding the meaning they attract to events'.

2.4.5 Semi-structured face-to-face interviews with service users who used the library for non-borrowing reasons

While the open-ended questions in the survey produced a valuable source of personal perspectives, it was felt that the 'beguiling directness' to face-to-face questioning might be off-putting, causing some respondents to hurry their responses due to time constraints.

Thus a number of brief unstructured interviews were conducted with willing library users who were approached in the library. They were asked to give a very brief profile about themselves and the relative importance they attributed to their local library. Questions were phrased in an informal way encouraging respondents to feel at ease and able to express their own personal feelings and opinions. As suggested by Whyte (in May (1997:143) 'observation may inform some of the most important questions we want to ask the respondents, and interviewing [in its broadest sense] helps us to interpret the significance of what we are observing'.

2.4.6 Semi-structured interviews with library staff

A total number of 14 members of staff, distributed across each of the three libraries, were interviewed by the researcher. A stated aim of the research was to gain as many different responses as possible. This fairly substantial number of interviews provided a rich array of data documenting both the actual tangible 'value' that people attribute to the library and the underlying feelings and beliefs.

The interview schedule included 7 library Assistants, 2 from Tinsley and Highfield and £ from Burngreave; 4 Cultural Library and Information Officers, employed by Sheffield Libraries, to address the library needs of the various ethnic minority groups in the city (of which two had dual roles as Line Managers for Tinsley and Burngreave libraries); Multicultural Library and Information Officer, with overall responsibility for the various ethnic groups; the Community Librarian, Highfield and the East Group Manager, responsible for the division of libraries in which the sample in this study are located.

Interviews with staff would also serve to confirm or challenge the survey and observed findings. It was also of interest to find out the extent to which the

perceptions of staff holding different positions in the library were similar or different. This would contribute to a holistic picture of the significance of the library both to its users and across the library profession. As Mellon put it:

“To study people as if they existed only within the functions for which they were hired, produced useless data, to study functions from the perspectives of the people that perform them, can contribute to improving performance” (Mellon (1990:143)).

A semi structured interview guide was used (Appendix 3.0). A number of broad themes were prepared to direct the progress of the interview while not compromising the flexibility of the semi-structured approach which enabled the interviewee to respond in their own words, while allowing the interviewer to probe beyond prescribed questions by using neutral prompts. (Jordon, in Slater, 1990).

The themes covered were broad enough to allow the same interview guide was used for all of the interviews with front-line and professional staff, facilitating meaningful comparison at the point of analysis. Although some natural bias may have occurred, depending on how the questions were interpreted, this research method proved very rewarding. Slight amendments were made to the interview guide to accommodate the distinctive role of the Group Manager (Appendix *).

The responses were recorded with the permission of the interviewee and supplementary notes were taken where possible during the interview, which it was hoped would not cause too much distraction but would save the researcher time fully transcribing later. All of the interviewees who consented to the use of a tape recorder during the half hour interview stated beforehand that they would not find it off-putting.

2.5 Triangulation

The validity of data retrieved through case study research is improved if a variety of research methods are used (Clayton, 1995). In this study a variety of methods were used to collect data. For instance interviewing library users, talking to staff and merely observing the settings as they appeared provided a number sources from which the findings could be scrutinised, interrogated and collated to create a meaningful picture of events.

It has already been noted that a mix of quantitative and qualitative techniques were used in this study. In this way the researcher is able to 'draw upon the unique strengths of each – thus providing both macro and micro – level perspectives on a single project' (Gorman & Clayton (1997:32)). Gaining a variation of perspectives allows each to be weighed and measured against the other providing a better understanding of the subject. Notably, the quantitative questionnaire supplied the data needed to describe events while the face-to-face interviews with staff and users gave an opportunity for personal interjections and points of view taken directly from the lives of the individuals involved. All of this facilitates greater certainty in the findings and adds depth and rigour to the research process.

2.6 Data analysis

'The essence of data analysis is the development of an understanding of the information it contains' (Peacock, in Slater (1990:83)).

It is widely acknowledged that the methods used to analyse data retrieved depend largely on the nature of the information being sought as defined by the aims and objectives of the research. This involved a genuine ability to decipher

relevant and useful data from otherwise interesting but perhaps irrelevant information, maintaining definition and focus on the research topic.

Given that this study used a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods in order to satisfy its aims, this dual approach needed to be replicated in the process of analysis. The quantitative data obtained from the library user questionnaires was entered into an Excel spreadsheet using a number of predefined codes relating to the prominent themes as they presented themselves. '[T]he object of quantitative analysis and interpretation is to reveal any features of commonality between various elements of data within a batch/between batches of data' (Peacock, in Slater (1990:76). Thus the researcher was able to identify dominant patterns and relationships and make arithmetical counts of user characteristics such as age and gender etc. for a precise comparison and analysis of the frequency and extent of the non-borrowing use of the libraries referenced.

The quantitative data was analysed in a much more manual way. The open-ended questions contained within the questionnaire as well as interview recordings were loosely transcribed and the most illuminating word-for-word quotes from the respondents were noted. These were organised in a number of common themes. This same index was applied to both the face-to-face user interviews and observation recordings. In this way recurring ideas and differences could be viewed together. These were aggregated into a manageable data set for manipulation into the final report. The researcher is both scientist and artist, 'condensing volumes of data into quantifiable data units' to discover patterns and connections while creatively interpreting events from the individual perspectives of the respondents in order to arrive at a meaningful account of the phenomena under study (Gorman and Clayton (1997:199.))

2.7 Limitations of the present study

2.7.1 Selection bias

Consciously or unconsciously, any sampling method is subject to some bias. With a self-conducted questionnaire the researcher needed to be aware of the temptation to select potential respondents who appeared to be most approachable or those who matched the selection criteria.

It is also worth noting that direct face-to-face questioning may have proved slightly off-putting for more vulnerable respondents, although given the wealth of illuminating responses obtained such an affect is considered to have been minimal in this case.

Differences in opening times across the libraries and the practical difficulty of the researcher distributing their time equally between each of the libraries meant that an identical 'sampling pattern' could not always be followed.

Burngreave, Tinsley and Highfield are open 28 hours, 28 hours and 32 hours a week, respectively. The weekly late opening coincided in two of the libraries, which meant that the researcher could not be present on each occasion. This meant that the sample of people using the library during the late opening period was not representative of all three libraries.

Also, given the diverse nature of the communities surveyed it is not possible to say with any certainty whether the non-response to some questions was because respondents were not confident enough in English to understand the question or simply that they were responding in the negative. However the affects of this on the results retrieved, if any, is thought to be slight, as most library users seemed able to understand the questions, which were phrased in an appropriately straightforward and simplified way.

Also, because of the limited time and resources available to the researcher in undertaking a small-scale research project –the relatively small sample size of 118 respondents places some constraints on the ability to make decisive generalisations from the findings.

2.7.2 Observation bias

The ability of observed events to reveal usable data is constrained by the personal perspective of the observer and the unconscious preconceptions that they might bring to the observed scene. With the benefit of hindsight, it was felt that a slightly more structured method of recording might have produced more precise results, making it easier to make direct comparisons. Bell (2000:158) suggests the use of tick boxes ‘in order to identify aspects of behaviour which you have identified beforehand as being of likely relevance to the research’. The loosely structured note-pad recordings may have been affected by the subjectivity and personal bias of the researcher. Because of this it may be possible to only make inferences from the observations.

The time set-aside for this purpose was also affected by the predictable fluctuations in library usage. For instance, during one observation period on a particularly warm summers afternoon a total of three people visited the library. This in itself may be a statement of the way in which the library is used – depending on how good or bad the weather is, or simply a reflection of the inconsistent patterns of use (‘busses always come in 3’s’ syndrome). Therefore to supplement this the researcher kept a written diary of data-rich observations as they occurred during the two-week fieldwork period.

While these interjections may not be considered in any way representative of the sample population they do allow tentative inferences to be made in addition to questionnaire responses.

3.0 The extent and features of non-borrowing use made of the library service

3.1 Introduction

The primary objective of this study set out to explore in broad terms the extent and features of non-borrowing use of the sample library services. In this way an overall picture can be formed of:

- I. The extent to which non-borrowing services and facilities account for the overall use of the library service.*

- II. The specific facets of non-borrowing use made of the library and perhaps indicative of the value and importance attributed to these functions.*

These findings form the basis upon which more detailed analysis of non-borrowing as a dimension of library usage can be made.

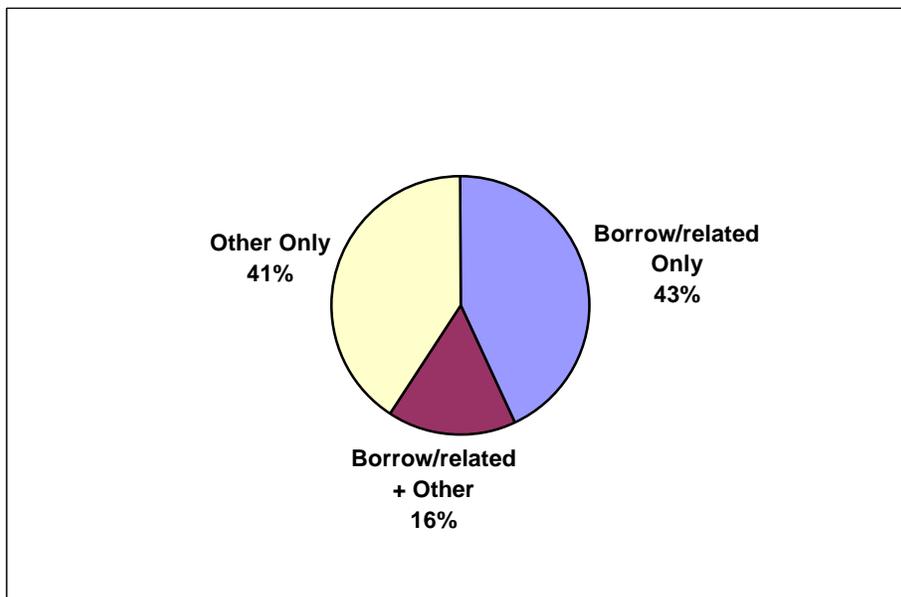
The user questionnaire drew a distinction firstly between library usage during *today's visit* (on the day when the interview was conducted) and secondly between overall user habits. The former provides a tangible snapshot of library activity while the latter offers a holistic picture of use. These two dimensions will be examined separately.

3.2 The extent of non-borrowing use during today's visit

3.2.1 Results

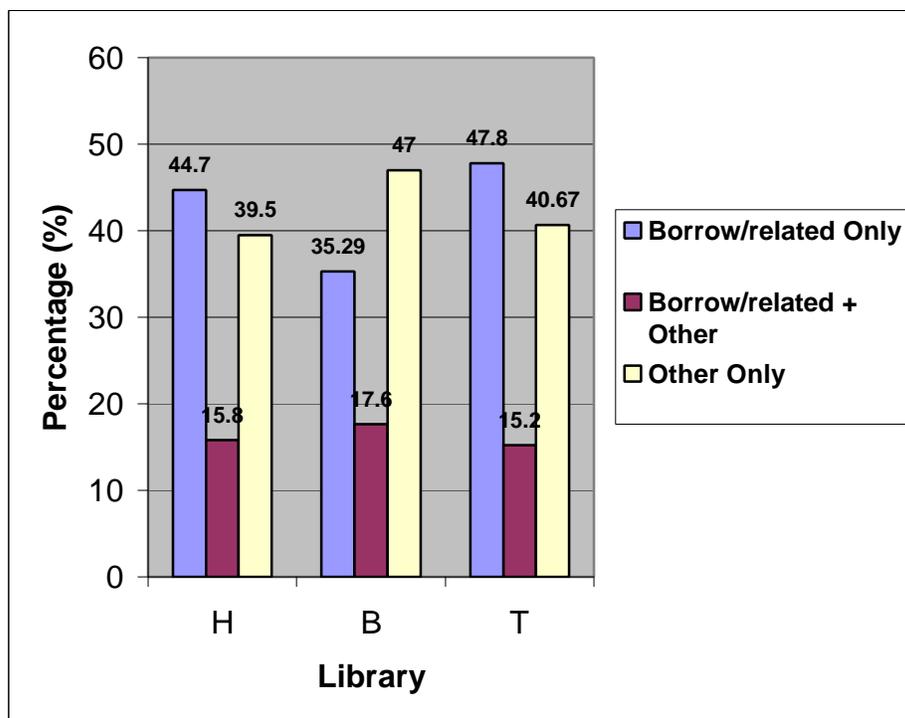
The opening question to the user survey asked the respondents in each library to say why they had come to the library on that particular day (when the interview was conducted). This revealed some interesting findings, as illustrated Figure 3.1, below. Overall 43% of the total number of respondents said they had visited the library for borrowing and borrowing related reasons, like renewal and returns, only. A similar number, 41% had visited the library for non-borrowing reasons only. Overall a significant minority, 16% of respondents were using it to do both borrow/related and other activities.

Chart 3.1: Overall use of the library during today's visit



These figures were largely distributed in equal measure across each of the three libraries; 44.7% in Highfield and 47.8% in Tinsley came to borrow/related only. The figure was marginally lower in Burngreave at 35.29%. A like proportion of respondents in each case used the library for 'other' reasons only. Burngreave had a higher number of 'other only' users.

Chart 3.2: Overall use of the library during today's visit, distributed between the three sample libraries



3.2.2 Analysis and discussion

These impressive figures of non-borrowing usage compliment Comedia (1993:19) which asserted that 'libraries accommodate many more additional activities beyond lending books'. Evidently in the present study 'other' activities

feature as significantly as the established borrowing/related function. Related research on a national level confirms a noticeable shift in emphasis in the way that libraries are used. Insight (1999:8) found their research into lending libraries suggests 'book issues down, library use up'. While clear distinction cannot be drawn as to the extent to which this shift is attributable to an increased use of other borrowing services like video's and CDs, by implication the library is much more than a book lovers haven.

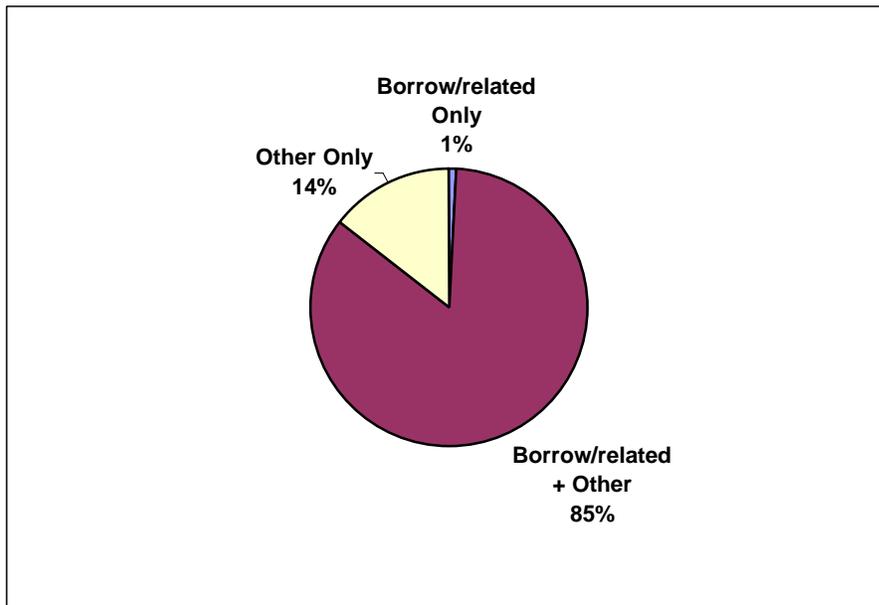
That a similar proportion of users in each of the three libraries were coming for either borrow/related or 'other' reasons suggests that library users often come to the library with a particular motive for doing so. It can be inferred from this that visiting the library is not an entirely serendipitous activity, but a purposeful and decisive one (this is examined in greater detail later in the report).

3.3 Extent of non-borrowing use overall

3.3.1 Results

The use of closed questions in the questionnaire relating to whether or not respondents used each of the respective library services produced some precise quantitative data about the way the library is used more generally, on other occasions. These calculations reveal a somewhat different picture to that identified in the snapshot responses to current day usage (See Chart 3.3, below).

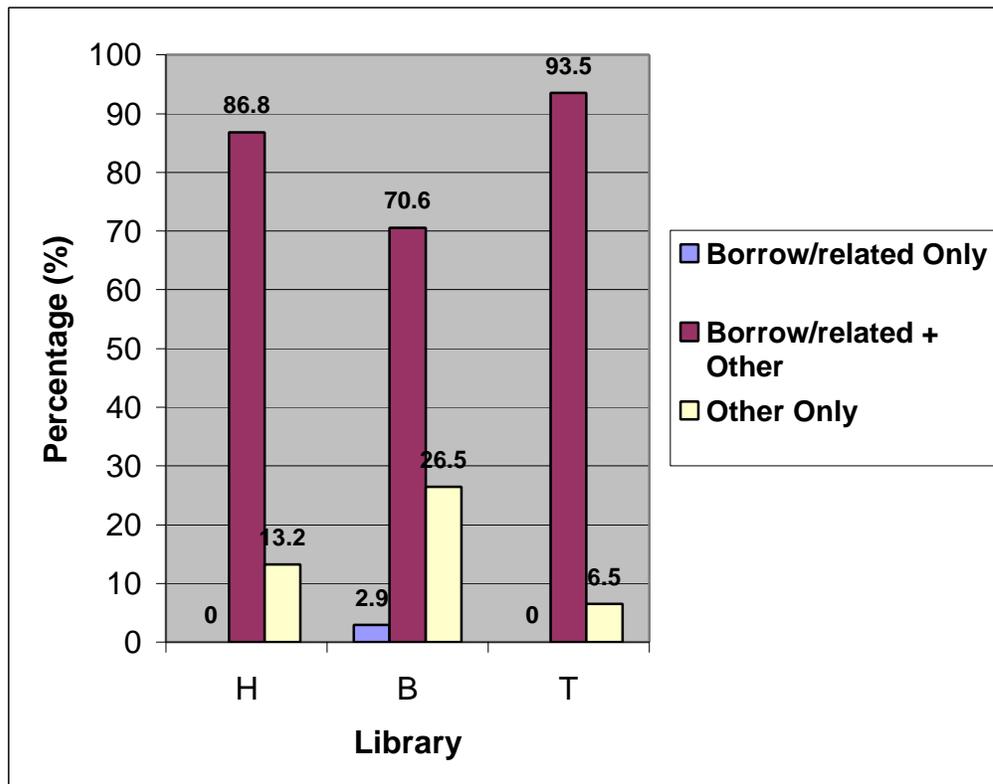
Chart 3.3: Library use on all occasions



An overwhelming 85% of the total respondents interviewed used the library for a combination of borrow/related and 'other' activities. 14% were using the library for 'other' uses only. One respondent said they used the library for borrow/related reasons only.

A large percentage of respondents in each of the individual libraries were using it for a variety of reasons, as outlined in figure 3.4, below'.

Chart 3.4: Library use on all occasions, distributed between the three sample libraries



Respondents at Burngreave were three times as likely to have used the library for other reasons only as those in Tinsley and almost twice as likely as those in Highfield, with a subsequently lower percentage using it for borrow/related and 'other' reasons as well.

3.3.2 Analysis and discussion

The fact that only one respondent out of a total of 118 had used the library solely for borrow/related reasons, suggests that the library's function as a source of books cannot be considered an end in itself for the majority of users. For the vast majority borrowing activities took place alongside another unrelated activity. Thus, the library equates to something far greater than a static borrow and exchange resource.

The findings of the Household Library User Survey support this. In this national survey it was found that only a quarter of adult public library users used public libraries purely for borrowing related reasons. 'Over three fifths of adults who used a public library [to borrow] also used one other facility offered by public libraries (e.g. obtaining information)' (Book Marketing Limited (1998:7.))

The 14% in this study who said they used the library for 'other' reasons only, is significant enough to indicate that for many people the non-borrowing functions of the library justify its *raison d'être*.

Proctor et al (1996:27.) investigating the impact of Sheffield Libraries Strike noted that for a significant number of users 'the impact of the closure...meant far more than simply being deprived of reading materials'.

Altogether, 99% of the respondents in the current study were using the library either exclusively or inclusively for non-borrowing purposes. This is a significant finding highlighting the need to investigate the importance of less tangible benefits that users derive from their local library, so that they might be appropriately acknowledged and legitimised in national directives on public

sector performance. Failure to do so is evidently to misrepresent and under value all that people look to the library to provide. The following section will examine in detail the specific facets of non-borrowing use.

3.4 Features of non-borrowings use of the library during today's visit

3.4.1 Results

Respondents gave a total of 22 reasons for visiting the library on the day when they were interviewed. These are displayed in Table 3.1, below. This multiplicity of reasons is broadly dispersed with a number of small values where only 1 or 2 respondents answered in the affirmative. While these small values may not be considered representative of the general population of users, the large number of reasons offered, demonstrates that in a single day a small community library performs many functions.

Table 3.1: Reasons given for ‘today’s visit’ to the library

Reason for visit	Total Sample	H Number respondents 38 29%	B Number respondents 34 32%	T Number respondents 46 39%	Total Respond's %
Borrow/related reasons					
Return/borrow books	118	19 (50%)	10 (29.4%)	20% (43.4%)	49 (41.5%)
Return/borrow magazines	118	1 (2.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.8%)
Return/borrow CDs	85	2 (5.3%)	1 (2.9%)	N/A	3 (2.5%)
Return/borrow talking books	118	1 (2.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.8%)
Return/borrow video's	118	6 (15.8%)	11 (32.3)	13 (28.3%)	30 (25.42%)
Read/browse in library	118	6 (13.2%)	3 (8.8%)	3 (6.5%)	12 (10%)
Info. For general interest/leisure	118	4 (10.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (3.3%)
Local community information	118	1 (2.6%)	1 (2.9%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.7%)
Careers information	118	3 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (2.5%)
Read newspaper/magazine	118	6 (15.8%)	14 (42.2%)	10 (21.7%)	30 (25.43%)
Used photocopier	118	1 (2.6%)	4 (11.8%)	3 (6.5%)	8 (6.8%)
Bought second hand books/other items	118	1 (2.6%)	0 (0%)	2 (4.3%)	3 (2.5%)
<i>Offers value for money</i>	118	1 (2.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.8%)
Part of life	118	2 (5.3%)	1 (2.9%)	1 (2.1%)	3 (2.5%)
Passing time	118	3 (7.9%)	0 (0%)	2 (4.3%)	5 (4.2%)
Convenient location	118	2 (5.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.7%)
Talk to staff	118	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (6.5%)	3 (2.5%)
Socialise	118	1 (2.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.8%)
Join library	118	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.2%)	1 (0.8%)
Used space to study/work	118	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.2%)	1 (0.8%)
Used computer/	84	0 (0%)	N/A	1 (2.2%)	1 (0.8%)

Although 49 respondents (42.5%), the highest value said that they had come to return/borrow books, significant proportions of respondents came to the library for reasons not related to borrowing at all. Three reasons emerged from the data as being significantly more prevalent than all of the others. 30 respondents

(25.42%) had used the library to read newspapers/magazines and return/borrow videos. The third most popular use was to read/browse in the library - 12 respondents (10%). It can be assumed that a portion of those using the library to read for leisure, were reading newspapers/magazines. Other activities overall included using the photocopier (8 users), passing the time (5 users), return/borrow CDs (3 users), talking to staff (3 users), careers information (3 users) and as part of the daily routine (3 users).

3.4.2 Results and discussion

These results support the findings of previous research, which reveal that book borrowing remains an important function of the library. Similar to this study, the CIPFA PLUS archive for 1997, surveying 260 authorities in England, asked respondents what they did during today's visit (options prompted). Far in excess of all other activities, 76% of their respondents had used the library to borrow/return books, followed by 27.4% using it to browse (Bohme & Spiller (1999:52)). Insight (1999:11) also conformed that a majority of 52% of respondents in their survey, were using the library to return / borrow books. The Berkshire countywide survey also stated that 'books remain the main reason for visits to all of the libraries it surveyed (Berkshire County Libraries (1990)).

Consequently, the Department of National Heritage (1997:15)) concluded that in spite of the 'medium term' advances in Information Technology etc. '...books remain, for many the most convenient, compact and user friendly source of information and works of the imagination' (Department of National Heritage.

Undoubtedly the leisure activity of reading has an enduring personal value to many individuals. When asked why they enjoyed visiting the library, the

comments below typify the views of users who said they used the library to borrow books:

"...because I love reading"

"...because I read a lot"

"...because of the variety of books"

However evidence from this study reveal that far from being peripheral activities, the non-borrowing functions of the library are a decisive element of use. Notably the distinction between book borrowing and some *other* uses was not quite as marked as the CIPFA findings (above). 49 (41.5%) were borrowing/returning books, compared with 30 (25.43%) of respondents reading newspapers/magazines (see table 3.1, above).

More than simply supplying a source of reading materials, the data conforms the important function of the library as a physical place, an accessible public space in an otherwise urban setting. By combining the 25.43% of respondents using the library to read newspapers/magazines with the further 10% using it to read/browse, bearing in mind that there may be some overlap between the two, a total of 36% were using the space available in the library to read. This is only marginally lower than the 41.5% of people who had come to the library when interviewed, to borrow/return books. In other words, being able to come to the library and read is of equal value as the availability of books for borrowing.

This snapshot replicates the Aslib (1994:154)). Review findings, which state that second to book borrowing "other library resources, especially newspapers and magazines and reference works' are valued. The findings show that the library represents an important community asset not only because of the services and facilities it provides but also as a physical entity in its own right.

The Social Audit report (1998:16) noted that 'the pleasant atmosphere and environment for browsing were repeatedly referred to'. In support of this, a few of the respondents who said they were using the library as a place to read during *today's visit*, interjected their responses with comments on the importance of the libraries atmosphere as a decisive factor:

"...It's nice and quiet and there are many books"

"...It's a relaxing place to come and read"

"...it's a quiet environment to come and read"

In many respects, these findings necessitate a shift in perspective, or at the very least, a willingness to acknowledge the potential benefit derived from the unfettered right of having a mutually accessible place to go beyond the often individual and perfunctory activity of reading. Charting this social value, Greenhalgh et al (1995:52) remark:

"The library space is regarded as a sanctuary, a place where one may sit, read, browse and remain un-harassed, nobody is judged and therefore nobody is found wanting"

In validating this assertion, the results of the current study endeavour to provide measurable evidence of these 'other' functions of public library usage.

In order to complete this picture the subsequent section will examine the features of library use on all other occasions. This will facilitate a fuller understanding of how the library is used and the 'value' attributed to it.

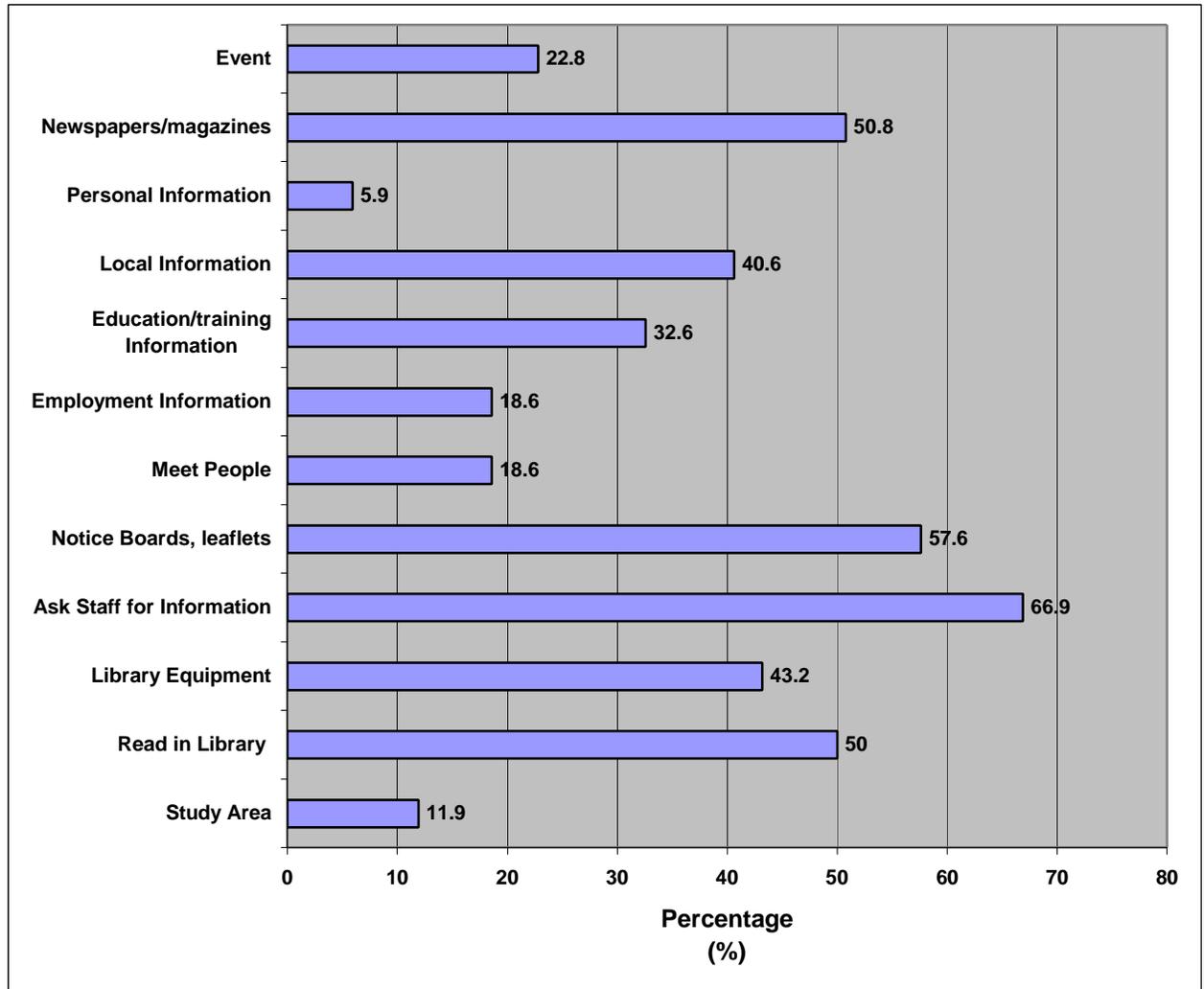
3.5 Features of non-borrowing use overall

3.5.1 Results

To complete the general overview of library usage it is necessary to examine the features of use on all other occasions, as well as the snapshot preview of a current-day visit. This will facilitate a fuller understanding of the most prevalent uses and the subsequent value attributable. Figure 3.5, below displays the non-borrowing uses made of the library overall. This data was collated from the closed questions posed in the questionnaire relating to the services people used in the library.

85% of interviewees said they used the library for borrow/related reasons (outlined above), the majority (78.8%) use the library to borrow books at some time. Chart 3.5 below sets out the use of non-borrowing services across the three community libraries surveyed.

Chart 3.5: Overall use of non-borrowing facilities



Six principal uses emanate from the data. These included *asking staff for information* (66.9%), looking at notice boards/leaflets (57.6%), read newspapers/magazines (50.8%), read/browse in the library (43.2%) and use library equipment (43.2%) and as a source of local information (40.6%). Other uses such as education/training information (32.6%), employment information (18.6%) present significant values. However for reasons of clarity the most prominent six reasons will be examined in detail.

The impressively high percentage of people who said that they approach library staff for information is a clear indication that the library as a physical place is far greater than the accumulation of books and resources stored on its shelves. It is an entirely 'human' place with in which frequent interactions are taking place between one person and another. But, perhaps more importantly this demonstrates the valuable role of library staff as 'helpers', in helping library users solve their information dilemmas. A recent pamphlet (undated) outlining a piece of research commissioned by the University of Central England for the Library and Information Commission into the *cross – use of public-funded libraries* reaffirmed this assertion, stating that 'In general, public libraries were more likely than libraries in other sectors to used because of where they were and the helpfulness of the staff. (Library and Information Commission: p.18).

Previous research over the years has also emphasized this value. Many respondents in the Hillingdon survey (Totterdell and Bird (1973:93), replied that they found the staff helpful. This was also a common feature in the Social Audit Linley & Usherwood, 1998) in which it was felt that library staff contributed to the creation of a warm and pleasant environment with a reassuring ambiance where people felt able to come.

Commenting on this issue, however, Muddimann and Black (1993) express a degree of concern for what they see as an increasing move towards a 'cultural supermarket' approach, in which the public library as just another *heritage* institute, amongst others, which is paradoxically leading to 'a formalisation of the relationship between organisation and client'.

Yet, evidence from this study reveals that the community library retains much of its appeal as a truly local facility. The following comments from library users demonstrate that apart from an available contact for help with answering a

specific information need, where a relationship has been built up between staff and users, the line between service provider and friend is blurred.

“...we meet people and the staff are so good. We treat them as our old friends”.

“...the staff are very friendly and helpful”

“...I like reading and the staff are very pleasant”

It is interesting that while asking staff for information and looking at notice boards/leaflets ranked the two most popular non-borrowing activities, 66.9% and 57.6% respectively, each of the community libraries are used to a lesser extent as a source of local information, 40.9%, with a discouragingly low percentage, 5.9% using it to access personal information on matters such as housing and welfare benefits. (The possible reasons for low usage in these areas will be given in the subsequent chapter (See p85-93). While it could be argued that many of the enquiries made to staff for information may relate to borrowing (information not requested in this study), by implication the quantitative analysis suggests that if people use the library to obtain some form of information, they are most likely to ask a member of staff.

Undoubtedly this human factor cannot be overstated. In a recent survey, funded by the British Library, investigating the impact of social class and status on citizenship information needs, it was found that that ‘the preferred method of obtaining information was talking face-to-face with a person (Marcella and Baxter (1999: 43)). If necessary librarians are at hand to provide an approachable ‘human’ point of contact through which to interpret, explain and present information in a way that makes it easier for people to understand.

Moreover much information seeking may not be motivated by a distinct need to ‘know’, many valuable information exchanges take place on a much more casual basis, between friends. The physical presence of the library provides a ‘space’

for such interaction. Interactions between library staff and users, observed by the researcher confirm this. During an observation period at Highfield library an elderly lady engaged in conversation with a staff member in which she expressed her constant fear of burglary and a sense of ‘anxiety’ now that she was living alone. Library staff later explained that as a ‘regular’ non-borrowing visitor to the library, the sole purpose of her visit was often simply to have a chat with the staff, who afforded a listening ear and were willing to help if they could. As staff member put it:

“Its all about getting to know people, reading them and building up a relationship with them...no matter what they ask me I must try and help”

In support of this, a respondent in the Sheffield library strike research missed the local library during its closure because of its local capacity as a local information source and because of ‘...the close affinity of people in a small community who are anxious to help’ (Proctor et al (1998:61)).

Accordingly, the purposes of the public library have justly been defined as ‘stretching from an information to a caring role’ (Landry (1993:11)). Comments from both library users and staff exemplify the importance of this function as a mutually interactive process of giving, receiving and sharing experiences:

“I can count people I know by name...some people pop in simply to tell you about their day and the things that have happened in their lives” [Library staff, Burngreave].

“We have two Asian gentlemen who come in, the ones English is very good and the others is absolutely shocking. The one who can speak English helps the other one out with his bills because he can’t read English. I don’t think he’s ever borrowed a book, he comes in because he sees his pall...who explains things to him” [Library staff, Highfield].

I am chair of a local organisation and I use the library to get information and also to display information [Library user, Burngreave]

This same sentiment was expressed by Proctor et al

The Aslib Review (1995:169) coined these somewhat fluid functions as 'sporadic' or 'occasional benefits', as opposed to what is considered to be the more enduring or 'perpetual' benefits of popular fiction or 'audios and videos' that can be borrowed. Yet the results from this study reveal that collectively, *asking staff for information, notice boards/leaflets* and to a lesser but not insignificant extent *local information* was used by 60 per cent of the total 118 respondents.

National statistics validate this finding. CIPFA statistics report a 60 per cent growth in the number and complexity of enquiries made to the public libraries over a period of ten years (CIPFA. (1986-). This demonstrates an enduring demand and expectation that the library and its staff will be able to help.

Concurrent with the results of the sample of 'Today's visit', significant numbers overall, use the library to read newspapers (50.8%) and as a place to read/browse (50%). This was further endorsed by observations made over a number of consecutive days when the researcher was present in the library. As a local community facility each of the libraries sampled was used by a number of 'familiar faces', people who could be seen reading the newspaper in the library during almost all of the days when the researcher was present. Although it must be added that in quantitative terms this number was small it can be inferred that the library 'as place' offers an important element of continuity and stability in peoples lives, As Comedia (1993:16) put it, 'the library is seen as a 'window on the world', where newspapers can be read, the events of the day absorbed and followed'.

Comments from Librarians and users support this observation:

"We have some regulars like Mr J_____, and Asian gentleman who comes in on a regular basis to chat quietly and look at the newspaper and chat about what's in it"
[Library staff, Highfield]

When asked to define how important they considered the library to be comments from users include:

"It is vital because I can't afford books and I read the papers most day's" [Library user, Tinsley]
"...because I can read the paper in my own language" [Library user, Burngreave]
"It is important to have English and Urdu papers – in multi languages" [Library user, Tinsley]

Invariably, having access to newspapers is of particular importance to certain groups, particularly ethnic minorities and those for whom English may be a second language. This valid contribution to a socially cohesive and inclusive community is discussed elsewhere (See p124 - p134). However the Group manager for the East Group captured the essential significance of this function to the purpose and philosophy of the public library:

"To me, if the library was just lending books and that's all we were intended to do we would be designed differently...there are few places where people can come and sit and not be bothered by anyone...in the central library you cannot do that kind of thing because there is no where to sit, the central library is not designed for that sort of use".

Contrary to Aslib's (1995:130)) assertion that people are prepared to travel further to a larger central library because of '[t]he range of resources, services and specialist capabilities', the findings of this research reveal that the provision of an open and accessible public space where people can come and sit is

perhaps one of the most important and enduring functions of the small community library, and rests at the heart of its public ethos.

4.0 The importance of non-borrowing services to library users

4.1 Introduction

Having provided a birds-eye view of the extent and features of non-borrowing use of the public library, this chapter will examine in greater detail the importance of these functions to library users and the benefits they derive from them. This addresses two underlying aims of the study:

i. To understand the value and importance attributed to the library service by those who use it. Within this, the following factors will be considered:

- *Frequency and patterns of use*

Complimentary to Comedia (1993), these indicators were chosen as a likely representation of the attractiveness and sense of loyalty felt towards the library as a regular destination.

ii. To consider the extent to which the general characteristics of the users influence and explain the non-borrowing use made of the library?

The following characteristics will be considered:

Age, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status

Prior to this, the following section will provide a brief profile of the library communities referenced in this study, and the characteristics of the library users, necessary to a clearer understanding of the intrinsic relevance of the non-

borrowing features of the library to its community. Basic statistical data is derived both from the 1991 census (2001 census information was unfortunately unavailable at the time of writing) and the compendia of Neighbourhood Statistics accessed from the National Statistics Office, Web pages, and presented according to the electoral ward areas.

The geographical locations of the three community libraries examined in this study, Tinsley, Highfield and Burngreave, fall into the following electoral wards respectively: Darnall, Sharrow and Burngreave. Because two out of three are included within larger ward areas, it is difficult to provide rigid and accurate demographic comparisons between the community of library users and the precise catchments area they serve. As a result these profiles cannot be considered complete. They are presented only as a guide to the nature and characteristics of the three communities examined in this report. Community Library and Information Officers particularly involved with the various minority groups, citywide, also provided some supplementary personal estimation's.

4.2 Community profiles

4.2.1 Population / Ethnic make-up

Tinsley

Ward: Darnall

Location: Tinsley is very much a peripheral Community, surrounded by the border with Rotherham council on two sides and the M1 motorway on another (Appendix 1, map 1).

Population: 18'332.

Ethnic make-up: White 15305, Black/Caribbean 163, Black African 11, Black Other 62, Indian 75, Pakistani 2096, Bangladeshi 342, Chinese 4 and Asian/+other 274

Burngreave

<i>Ward:</i>	Burngreave
<i>Location:</i>	Located within a mile of the city centre
<i>Population:</i>	14'700
<i>Ethnic make-up:</i>	White 10818, Black/Caribbean 1127, Black African 177, Black Other 316, Indian 51, Pakistani 1656, Bangladeshi 26, Chinese 38, Asian/+other 491

Highfield

<i>Ward:</i>	Sharrow
<i>Location:</i>	Located within a mile of the city centre
<i>Population:</i>	13513
<i>Ethnic make-up:</i>	White 10422, Black/Caribbean 526, Black African 226, Black Other 164, Indian 97, Pakistani 1184, Bangladeshi 243, Chinese 282, Asian/ + other 369

4.2.2 Comment

Although compiled from electoral ward data, not directly comparative to the library catchments areas, these somewhat crude profiles allow a number of rudimentary inferences to be made, regarding the nature and make-up of the communities analysed within this study.

Evidently each of these communities is cosmopolitan and diverse in their ethnic make-up with people drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures. The electoral ward of Darnall is composed of two prominent ethnic groups, White and Pakistani as well as a substantial number of people categorised as 'Asian/Other'. Similarly, Burngreave has a prominent Pakistani and Black/Caribbean community. To a similar extent, the electoral ward of Sharrow, in

which Highfield is located, also has a richly diverse ethnic make-up including, Pakistani, Black/Caribbean/African, Bangladeshi and also Chinese.

A greater degree of accuracy might have been afforded had the data from the recent 2001 census been available at the time of writing. Consultation with library staff closely involved with the various ethnic groups within each community confirmed that, broadly speaking these general trends remain the same. Although it was suggested that there has also been a substantial increase in the numbers of asylum seekers and refugees seeking refuge from political, religious and social turmoil in their country of origin. As a result it was felt that the communities particularly around Burngreave and Highfield were somewhat transient in their nature, with a constant trickle of 'new arrivals' as opposed to a long established populous.

Thus, it can be inferred that collectively each of these ethnic groups form a significant 'minority', in the broadest sense of the word. A crucial consideration in this study is the extent to which this diversity impacts on the way that the library is used.

4.2.3 Socio – economic profile

Another factor, which the literature suggests, is a defining factor influencing the way that the library is used, is the level of economic and social deprivation of the community. Investigating the relationship between levels of deprivation and library use in London Boroughs and English Metropolitan districts, Creaser and Sumsion (1995) found that the book issues were lower in areas with high levels of economic and social deprivation. A key indication of poverty is the number of people in receipt of social security benefits. Some telling statistics are outlined below relative to each of the electoral wards referenced in this study. This

information has been extracted from Sheffield Trends (1999), *an annual compilation of indicators for Sheffield*. (Ward in brackets)

Tinsley (Darnall)

Indices of Deprivation 2000 (1 equals highest): 561 out of 8414

Income Support claimants (Resident population Age 16 +(Mid 1998):
1'925 (13%, higher than Sheffield average, 10%.)

Housing Benefit (HB)/ Council tax benefit (CTB) claimants (Dec 1998):
19% - 30% of households receiving both HB & CTB

Burngreave (Burngreave)

Indices of Deprivation 2000 (1 equals highest): 60 out of 8414

Income Support claimants (Resident population Age 16 +(Mid 1998):
2350 (21%, higher than Sheffield average, 10%.)

Housing Benefit (HB)/ Council tax benefit (CTB) claimants (Dec 1998):
More than half of households receiving both HB & CTB

Highfield (Sharrow)

Indices of Deprivation 2000 (1 equals highest): 1059 out of 8414

Income Support claimants (Resident population Age 16 +(Mid 1998):
1840 (12%, higher than Sheffield average, 10%.)

Housing Benefit (HB)/ Council tax benefit (CTB) claimants (Dec 1998):
Between 19 and 30 per cent of households receiving both HB & CTB

The extent of deprivation in each of these wards is most defined when compared against other wards within the city of Sheffield. For example, whereas Burngreave ranked 60 out of 8414 wards in the indices of deprivation, Broomhill, a more affluent are ranked only 7953 out of 8414 English wards. Similarly, while 13% of residents in Darnall claimed income support in 1998, only 2% of the population in Ecclesall did so. This study will attempt to unravel the significance of these variables on the use and value derived from the library.

However, despite these broad similarities, there are many distinctions within and between each of these communities that may also influence the way they use their local library. What follows is a brief synopsis of each community of library users, loosely derived from conversations with library staff, and in particular the Community Library and Information Officers closely involved with the different ethnic groups within the city (official profiles of each community were unavailable to the researcher).

4.3 Library user profiles

4.3.1 Tinsley

Comparative to census information, library staff confirmed that Tinsley library supported two distinct ethnic groups: *White and Pakistani*. It was estimated that the library is used by approximately 70% of both of these resident groups.

Indicative of the level of deprivation in this area, it was also felt that the unemployed, spanning across all age groups, heavily used the library. Another group thought to be significant was *young Asian adults* who, it was felt, used the library more than their white counterparts, particularly as one of few sources of leisure and entertainment in the area. Staff also stressed that '*young mothers*' '*regularly*' used the library as a source of children's literature.

4.3.2 Burngreave

The profile of users at Burngreave broadly match the description of the wider community, with a high concentration of both white and Pakistani users, as well as a growing population of *Somali* and *Yemeni* users, falling into the younger age brackets. It was suggested that white users were more likely to be in the older age groups, with younger non-white residents using the library more. Staff also commented that the library was used proportionately less by the African/Caribbean community in view of their strong presence in the local area.

Indicative of the socio economic trends outlined above, many within the ethnic minority groups are thought to be *unemployed* with a growing *refugee community* recently arrived in the UK

4.3.3 Highfield

While the ward statistics report a proportionately large community of Pakistani residents within this, library staff stated that, alongside the White community, the second largest group of users (apart from the white community) were drawn from the concentration of Chinese residents living in the local area. The Cultural Library and Information Officer responsible for this group estimated that around 80% of the local Chinese community use the library. The library also supports a new community of refugees and asylum seekers. A larger proportion of users are thought to be in the middle (45-54) age group and above. (Although, the library has a vibrant population of children, using the children's library located upstairs, not included in this study).

Common to both Tinsley and Burngreave library staff intimated that many of the users were not in paid employment.

4.4 Frequency and patterns of use

The way that people use their local library can represent a tangible indication of the value and importance they attribute it. Consequently this chapter investigates the frequency of visits as well as any distinctive patterns of use made of the service. Frequency of visits was also compared against the characteristics of the users and the purpose of their visit. Each of these elements is considered separately.

4.4.1 Frequency of visit

Results

The survey asked users to indicate how often they visited the library. The overall results are shown in table 4.1, below:

Table 4.1: Frequency of library visits

Frequency	Total Sample	H Number respondents 38 (32%)	B Number respondents 34 (29%)	T Number respondents 46 (39%)	% Total respondents
First Visit	118	0 0%	1 3%	1 2%	2 1.69%
Once a week or more often	118	21 55.26%	23 67.64%	33 72%	77 65.25%
Once every 2 weeks	118	7 18.42%	8 23.52%	4 9%	19 16.10%
Once every 3 weeks	118	6 15.78%	1 3%	7 15.21%	14 11.86%
Less than once a month	118	4 10.52%	0 0%	1 2%	6 5.8%

A substantial percentage of users surveyed (65.25%) visit the library once a week or more often. By comparison, a relatively small number of respondents said they visited the library once every two or three weeks or less often. This is a key indication of the value and importance of this service to its users.

This encouraging percentage of visits to the library once a week or more, is substantially higher than the combined number of respondents reported by

Proctor, Usherwood and Sobczyk (1996) to be visiting 'more than once a week' or 'about once a week' (40%). The authors state that this high frequency of use 'suggests reasons for using the library not directly attributable to book borrowing', as the loan period in Sheffield is three weeks' (p.21). These figures are also much higher than Berkshires countywide survey (Berkshire County Libraries (1990), which noted that only 11% visit more than once a week.

Direct comparison cannot be made between the substantive national reports undertaken by Comedia (1993) or Aslib (1995) as they both use 'within the last fortnight' as an indication of use. This suggests that previous research has largely 'underestimated' the frequency of library use. Proctor et al (1996) make a broad comparison with research in Cleveland, quoted in Comedia (1993), which showed that over half of the respondents had visited the library within the last fortnight. Using the same indicator, Adlib (1995) found that 54% of library users visited frequently.

Corroborated by the findings of this study, each of these pieces of research suggests that libraries exist as a vital feature in the lives of those who choose to make of them.

Interestingly, Proctor et al. (1996) noticed some differences in the frequency of use between the four community libraries they surveyed. One possible reason for this, they suggest, may be related to the level of deprivation, i.e. only 15% of users in Broomhill, an apparently affluent suburb of the city, visited the library more than once a week, compared with 47% in Darnall, a more deprived area.

Bearing in mind that social and economic deprivation was considered to be a prominent issue across each of the communities surveyed in this study, the differences in the percentage of frequent users, was not so marked, therefore

supporting this assertion. From this it is possible to infer that socio-economic status is a significant variable influencing the way the library is used. In this case, if you are unemployed, and by implication, less well off, you are more likely to visit your library often.

Time spent in the library

Respondents to the questionnaire were asked to specify from a choice of options, the length of time they spent in the library during a visit. These findings substantiate the intrinsic value of the library service to its users.

Length of stay	Total Sample	H Number respondents 38 (32%)	B Number respondents 34 (32%)	T Number respondents 46 (39%)	% Total respondents
Ten minutes or less	118	5 13.15%	2 5.88%	3 6.52%	10 8.47%
Half an hour – 1 hour	118	31 81.57%	22 64.70%	29 63.04%	82 69.49%
1 – 2 hours	118	1 2.63%	9 25%	11 23.91%	21 17.79%
More than 2 hours	118	1 2.6%	0 0%	1 2.1%	2 1.69%

Table 4.2: Duration of library visits

It can be seen from Table 4.2, above that the majority of respondents, 69.49% spend on average, up to half an hour in the library during a visit. A sizable percentage of respondents said that they usually spend between 1 and 2 hours in the library on a normal visit. It can be assumed from these findings that visiting the library is by no means a fleeting encounter in which people simply

pass through instead it is an activity to which the majority of visitors devote a reasonable period of time.

The evidence so far reveals that not only do the vast majority of people surveyed in this study visit the library often, they also spending a significant length of time in the library. The underlying challenge in this assertion is to assert its significance to the politicians and decision makers as a reliable indicator of the importance of the public beyond a book collection point. Complimentary to much of the literature on library usage, an important consideration in the subsequent section of this report will be to examine more closely the characteristics of the individual users of the library in understanding the distinct benefits they derive from it.

4.4.2 Characteristics of library users and frequency of visit

Age and Gender

The survey asked respondents to provide some demographic information about their age, ethnicity, employment status and gender. This would allow the researcher to get a clear impression of the characteristics of the library users, in order to discover the influence of these factors in explaining the non-borrowing use of the library's surveyed. Examined against the frequency of use, this would also provide a clearer picture of the relative importance of the library to the particular circumstances of the individual user.

Results and analysis

An almost equal percentage of men (31%) as women (34%) visit the library once a week or more. Table 4.3 below, shows the percentage of 'frequent' visitors to the library, according to their age:

Age group/ % respondents visit once a week or more (Total sample 118respondents)	16-24	25-24	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Base sample	19 16.10%	32 27.11%	20 16.94%	15 12.71%	15 12.71%	20 16.94%
TOTAL	12 63%	23 71.85%	10 50%	11 73.33%	6 40%	16 80%

Table 4.3: Respondents visiting the library once a week or more by age group

Evidently older users visit the library most frequently. 80% of respondents age 65+ visit the library once a week or more often. This was also found to be the case in Proctor et al (1996), Berkshire County Libraries (1990) and Aslib (1995). Each of these studies stresses the particular importance of the library to this group, as a safe and warm environment to go and spend recreation time. While, at the other end of the age scale the literature suggests that the younger age brackets, namely those in the late teens to twenties and the 45-54 age range make less use of the library (Aslib (1995)).

However this study lays these previous findings open to scrutiny. Although older people may use the library more, a substantial number of respondents across each age range visit the library very frequently. Contrary to Aslib (1995) those between in the 45-54 age range are the second most likely to visit the library often. A significant 63% of 16-24 year olds visit frequently. Those least likely to visit the library once a week or more are people between the ages of 35 and 44 (50%) and 55-64 (50%), although these are impressive figures on all accounts.

Overall this paints an impressive picture of library usage and undermines the commonly held assumption that libraries are the familiar haunt of either the very young or the old. A Book Marketing survey noted that 'they are used in

disproportionately large amounts by women, the under 20s and over 60s'. (BML 1992 Survey, quoted in Linley and Usherwood (1996:77).

Yet applying these findings as a definitive statement of use, applicable to all libraries, may in fact be too simplistic, underestimating a range of other decisive factors influencing library usage.

Employment status

Much of the previous research has stressed the link between the frequency of library visits and employment status. This research found, unsurprisingly that the library is used most often by those who perhaps have more time on their hands or greater flexibility to chose when to visit. These include those looking after the home (83%), the unemployed (76.42%) and the retired (68%) (See table 4.4 below). In this sense, some of the relationships unearthed in these findings may be causal.

Employment status/ % respondents visit once a week or more (Total sample 118respondents)	Looking after the home	Looking for work	FT employ't	PT employ't	At college/ univ'y	Retired
Base sample	18 15.25%	25 21.18%	15 12.71%	15 12.71%	18 15.25%	25 21.18%
TOTAL	15 83%	15 60%	7 47%	7 47%	10 56%	17 68%

Table 4.4: Respondents visiting the library once a week or more by employment status

Interestingly, Proctor et al (1996) found that the library was used more by the retired than those looking for work. However, as indicated above, this research found that the unemployed and those looking after the home make more frequent

use of the library. Similarly, although not directly comparable these findings would seem to challenge the claim of Aslib (1995) and Marcella & Baxter (2000), using the socio-economic grades AB, C1, C2 and DE as indicators, that those in the lower brackets: CE and DE tend to use the library less than those in the higher socio-economic groups (assuming that the unemployed may necessarily fall into a lower socio-economic band). In a similar vein, Book Marketing Limited (1998:24) states that 64% of AB households use non-borrowing related services compared with 44% of DE's.

Ethnicity

75% of Pakistani respondents use the library at least once a week or more, compared with 51% of White respondents. The combined percentage of non-white respondents use the frequently was also greater than then of the White respondents, 70% compared with 51%. This suggests that the public library plays an important part in the lives of ethnic minority communities.

The following section will examine more closely the impact of these factors in explaining the various facets of non-borrowing use of the library.

4.4.3 Frequency of visits and non-borrowing use made of the library

A number of previous studies are consistent in their findings that in general, those most likely to visit the library frequently, do so to borrow books. Proctor et al' (1996: 20.)), investigating the affects of the Sheffield Libraries strike found that '91% of regular users surveyed used the library to borrow books' Comedia (1993:36)) was 'surprised', in the Cleveland case study that frequent use still related to the traditional function of book borrowing. Aslib (1995:154)) states that 'frequent users are the main borrowers of books and, to a lesser extent, other media'.

However the findings of the current study provide clear evidence that use of the library for *non-borrowing* purposes is an important motivating factor for recurrent and regular use of the library.

Frequent visits to the library and non-borrowing use

Results

Table 4.5 below sets out the most prevalent non-borrowing uses made of the library by respondents who said they visited the library once a week or more:

Usage / visit once a week or more often	Base Sample	H Number respondents 38 32%	B Number respondents 34 29%	T Number respondents 46 39%	Total Respondents
Read/browse in library	50%	34%	41%	43.47%	80%
Newspapers/magazines	50.8%	34%	41.17%	39.13%	75%
Meet people	18.6%	13%	9%	17.39%	73%
Ask staff for information	66.9%	29%	29%	65.21%	65%
Library equipment	43.2%	23%	23%	34.7%	65%
Employment information	18.6%	11%	6%	17.39%	64%
Notice boards/ leaflets	57.6%	21%	20.5%	60.86%	63%
Local information	40.6%	18.42%	15%	34.78%	58%

Table 4.5: percentage figures of frequency of visit (once a week or more often) and non-borrowing use of the library

Although 67% of respondents who said they visited the library once a week or more, were borrowing books, a far greater percentage were using the library as a *place* to read/browse and/or to peruse the newspapers (75%). There may be some overlap between these two figures as people reading in the library may be reading newspapers. Yet use of the library, as a place to come is obviously significant. This is far higher than the national average of 9% reported by Book Marketing Limited (1995:23) and echoes the earlier findings of this study into the

way the library was used during *today's visit*, where the most prevalent non-borrowing reason for visiting the library on the particular day when interviews took place, was to read the newspapers. Combined with the number of people using the library to read/browse, 34% of respondents, the highest value, had used the library as somewhere to sit and read. Overall 77.96% of people using the library for this reason visit it once a week or more. This supports the findings of Proctor et al (1996:23) into the affects of the Sheffield libraries strike, in which 78% of respondents missed the library for leisure purposes most.

The association between these two results would seem to verify the findings derived from the snapshot preview of immediate usage, as an affective indication of the most likely facets of use made on a daily basis. As the table above illustrates, the prevalence of this facet of use is common to all three libraries surveyed. However respondents at Tinsley and Burngreave are slightly more likely to have used it in this way.

An equally significant proportion of non-borrowing users (73%), visiting the library once a week or more, use the library as a meeting place. Respondents at Tinsley were almost twice as likely to use for this reason as those at Burngreave. An almost dissimilar, and impressive overall number also use the library to ask staff for information (65%), use library equipment (65%), look at notice boards/leaflets (63%) and make use of local information (58%). However significant differences emerge between the individual libraries.

Most noticeably, while 29% of respondents 'frequent' visitors at Highfield and Burngreave, a far greater percentage (65.21%) of those at Tinsley approach staff for information. A similar pattern can be observed with a far greater proportion of people at Tinsley (60.86%) looking at notice boards and making use of local

information (34.78%) compared with 18.42% and 15% at Highfield and Burngreave respectively.

Analysis and discussion

Proctor et al (1996:21) note that while all four community libraries surveyed in their study, 'provided activities and facilities beyond the traditional function of book lending', they could find no evidence that the differences in frequency of use observed between the libraries surveyed, was related to the presence or absence of this factor'. It is clear from the current research that the non-borrowing functions provided by the library are sufficient incentives to warrant frequent visits. The reasons for this invariably deserve further scrutiny.

Table 4.5, above illustrates the eight main categories of non-borrowing facilities and activities provided by the library are utilised by a consistently high percentage of people who visit the library once a week or more often. This quantitative data provides tangible evidence of the enduring importance of these functions to the community of library users. By implication, in the current study, those who visited less than once a week can be considered to do 'occasional users' by comparison Aslib (1995) defined this group as those people who visited less than once a fortnight. Yet in general terms the results of the current study deviate from the national findings, which suggest that 'occasional users' mainly visit the library for purposes other than borrowing. A thorough understanding of such discrepancies invariably lie with the distinctive make-up of the communities served by the libraries. The benefits of a localised study allow a closer examination.

The library as 'place'

An enduring theme throughout this study would seem to stress the importance of the library as a physical location. Not only is it the most prevailing facet of daily

use, as depicted in the section on *Today's visit*, it features is a crucial incentive for regular visits, whether to read newspapers or magazines, browse or to meet friends. Comments from users emphasise this:

"It is pleasant to come and sit down and I'm on my own at home...I get a bit of company and I can speak to people. It's one of my favourite places" [Elderly library user, Tinsley].
"We meet all our friends and chat, we're all welcome" [Library user, Tinsley]
Its very important to meet people and ...you can ask people [staff] about other things as well as library" [Library user, Tinsley].

This social, caring function echoes the findings of Proctor et al (1998:65)), investigating the impact of the reduced library opening hours and closures in Sheffield libraries:

"For many older borrowers who lived alone, it was a lifeline, their only form of contact with people – somewhere to if they had no friends or relatives"

Discussion with library staff at each of the libraries confirmed this to be the case for many library users participating in the current study. Regular visits to the library provided a constant in the lives of many otherwise isolated users.

"Mrs _____ is very ill...we may be the only people she sees" [Library user, Tinsley]
"Mrs _____ comes in every day that we are open – you've got to care about people" [Library staff, Tinsley].

A number of respondents from the ethnic minority communities, valued the library most for its benefits as a warm and un-inhibiting meeting place:

“The library is where we can see each other and get together and find out about each other...we come when we’ve taken the kids to school”

“Its somewhere I can come with the children...it’s a little outing” [young Pakistani, respondents, Highfield].

Interestingly, white respondents who did not use the library in this way, also appreciated the value of this function to others:

“It’s a meeting place for the Chinese and Asians”. [Library user, Highfield]

“A lot of the Pakistani’s use it to read papers” [Library user, Tinsley]

Within this, there is some implication that perhaps people from the different ethnic communities use the library slightly differently. The findings of this study, depicted in table 4.6 below, would seem to confirm this:

% Respondents / Ethnicity visiting the library once a week or more often	White	Non-white
Read/browse in library	27.27%	66.15%
Read Newspapers/ magazines	35.18%	61.53%
Meet people	21.43%	65.4%

Table 4.6: percentage of White and Non-white respondents visiting the library once a week or more, who use it as a place to come and spend time.

Evidently a much greater proportion of non-white respondents regularly use the library space as a place to go and spend time, compared with white respondents. Within this, 70.45% of Pakistani respondents, the second largest single ethnic group, after whites use the library to read for leisure compared with 26% of white respondents. There are undoubtedly a number of reasons for this. At the most

elementary level it may be determined by the amount of time people have available in their daily routine to visit the library.

Certainly there is abounding evidence from previous research to suggest that a large proportion of people in full-time employment are effectively barred from making effective use of public libraries because of the restrictive opening hours which tend to coincide with office hours when many people are at work. (The impact of this factor is dealt with in the following section looking at the 'unexpressed needs of library users' (See: Chapter 5))

Moreover statistical data suggest that levels of unemployment amongst ethnic minority groups in the UK are higher than that of white people. Recent evidence from the European Social Fund, hosted by the Department for Education and Employment [Online], states that 'the unemployment rate for ethnic minorities is 'more than double that of non ethnic minorities, 13% compared with 5.8% for non-ethnic minorities'. (Department for Education and Employment) The reasons for this are invariably complex and multi faceted. This was also confirmed in the current study. 38.18% of white respondents were either in full time or part-time employment, compared with 12.50% of ethnic minority respondents.

By the same token, overall the data revealed that 44.44% those in either full-time or part-time employment visited the library once a week or more, either to read newspapers/browse or meet people. However a higher percentage of those respondents, not employed or at college or university used the library more in this way: 50% of those looking after the home, 71% of those looking for work and 52% of retired respondents.

Within this analogy observations recorded by the researcher suggested the importance of the library as a place to sit and read newspapers, particularly to people from the ethnic minority communities. Over the two-week period, while the fieldwork was taking place in the libraries, observations suggested that those people using the library seating or table area were often from ethnic minority communities. On many occasions there was two or three people around the table at one time reading newspapers. Although such observations were intermittent, recorded at various times when the researcher was present in the library, the fact that the observations were the same on many occasions increases the probability that the observations are valid.

In quantitative terms the data suggests the particular importance of this function to library users who defined their ethnic origin as Pakistani. Tinsley has the highest proportion of users from this group, with a correspondingly high number of them using the library to read newspapers (See table 4.7, below).

Read newspapers / Ethnicity: visit the library once a week or more (Total sample 118 respondents)	H Number respondents	B Number respondents	T Number respondents
	38 32%	34 29%	46 39%
% Total respondents reading newspapers in library	39.47%	25.54%	50%
White	25%	40.90%	8.6%
Pakistani	66%	65.45%	78.26%
Other	71.33%	74.72%	0%

Table 4.7: percentage of respondents who visit the library once a week or more often, and read newspapers/magazines by ethnic group

Comments from both staff and library users verify the quantitative findings:

“Asian people are more likely to use the library to read newspapers or use the photocopier or fax”. [Library staff, Tinsley]

“Urdu men come in to read the paper, they see it as a safe place” [Library staff, Tinsley]

“Older Asian people use it [the library] for magazines and newspapers more than books”
[Library staff, Burngreave]

This compliments the findings of the Hounslow study, quoted in Comedia (1991:92). Surveying a community with an equally high Asian population, the library’s supply of a mixture of English and Asian Newspapers, provides a ‘specialist current affairs perspective that begins to match the social and cultural interests of readers’. Reading newspapers in the library, is a unique activity that does not require the reader to approach the staff, speak the same language or have items stamped when leaving the library.

Yet, the benefit of the library as a haven, a welcoming place to go and spend unorganised leisure time, is not confined to men. During a morning period of observation it was observed that a number of women, who appeared mainly to be from ethnic minority communities, felt comfortable to come and sit in the library to read newspapers alone.

For a number of respondents, the crucial factor was being able to access newspapers in their own language, from their country of origin. A significant 71.79% of respondents who said they spoke a language instead of or as well as English, said they read a foreign language newspaper.

"I would not be able to afford the Chinese newspaper except in the library" [Library user, Highfield]

"It helps me to know what's going on in my country" [Library user, Burngreave]

At an individual level, this can be a vital aspect of personal well-being, a sense of inclusion in what may be an otherwise impenetrable world, hindered by the barriers of language. Greenhalgh captures the importance of this well:

"The merit of a library is that it holds, and by holding confers legitimacy on a diverse rang of cultures" (Greenhalgh (1995:43).

There is some evidence to suggest that the benefits of being able to access materials in your mother –tongue span all age groups, both young and old. A brief face-to face interview with a library user, age 16-24 years, at Burngreave, confirmed this:

"I am originally from Somalia. I have recently moved here from London and I have relatives in Sheffield and I am looking for work at the moment.

I come into the library probably at least 3 times week sometimes in the morning and afternoon to read the Arabic magazines and newspapers. It is a nice place to come and it gives me something to do...there are not many other places to come and sit down" [Library user, Burngreave].

It may also has a strategic value, as was pointed out by the East Group Manager:

“If you are a refugee, maybe there is a greater need to know what’s going on back home. Someone rooted in Sheffield is surrounded by information...refugees are often on the edge” [East Group Manager, Sheffield]

For reasons of personal confidentiality, it is difficult to know how many respondents were refugees or asylum seekers. However, conversations with Staff stressed the transient nature of the communities particularly at Burngreave and Highfield, where it was felt that there were large numbers of asylum seekers and recent arrivals into the country.

Research carried out by Proctor et al (1996: 26), to investigate the impact of the temporary services closure during Sheffield public libraries strike in 1995, found that three out of the four community libraries surveyed, to find out the reasons why the library was missed, over half of those who responded said ‘they missed it most for a reason related to their well-being or lifestyle’, as well as part of the weekly routine of elderly people. This confirms the conclusions of the Cleaceland case study (In Comedia (1993:37)) of two libraries ‘serving large and relatively disadvantaged housing estates.’ (Comedia 1993:37). In the Cleveland case study the report noted that one of the most important roles the library had was: “...in providing a friendly library with a good and varied book stock, in effect a local institution.” (Comedia 1993:36). The local presence of the library as a ‘safe haven’ may be its greatest achievement above all else.

Ask staff for information

In practical terms, staff, at each of the libraries felt that for many, the library represented an approachable and respected public information point, valued most for the ‘human-face’ it afforded to the process of information sourcing. Staff at Burngreave noticed an increase in individual enquiries for help in completing the recent 2001 Census forms. A further example was relayed by

staff, of a recent visitor who had been given a form to complete by the Housing office (located next door to the library). Uncertain about how (or it was felt, unable) to complete it, the man came to the library for help.

It can be inferred from this that the public library, in particular may act as a 'safety net', to catch individuals who might be marginalized by other institutions. Invariably, it is the nature of the library as a 'people place' that must mark its distinction. This assertion is also implicit in the findings of the quantitative data. Women are more likely to approach library staff for information than men. Although there are encouragingly high percentages for both, 70.45% of women said they approach staff for help, compared with 59.25% of men.

Similarly 70.45% of Pakistani survey respondents ask staff for information compared with 59.25% of White respondents. (It must be added that in order not to place too much constraints on respondent's time, the current survey did not inquire about the frequency of information inquiries.) Reference to table 4.5, above indicates that the vast majority (65%) of library users asking staff for some information were Tinsley respondents. Again, the Cleveland case study noted the importance of staff in determining the frequency of library visits:

"In both [libraries] staff had created a very warm, almost domestic ambiance, a 'home from home', and this made the library appear to be symbolically owned by – and belonging to the community, unlike other forms of public provision such as job centers, youth clubs, training projects, welfare centers and some community centers on the same estate" (Comedia (1993:36)).

It is increasingly acknowledged in Human Resource Management texts, that customer' perceptions of an organizations quality is held 'in the hands of its people' (Smith (1990). Essentially, the faces that greet us behind the library counter represent the public face of the organization and for many – the organization itself.

Observation made in this study, suggest a similar 'ambiance' between staff and users, as that noted by Comedia (1993). Library staffs address many of the users by their first name and both staff and users engage in familiar conversation. It was noticed during the observation period that some 'regular' library visitors felt at ease to discuss and share their daily 'joys and woes' with staff. In particular, an elderly lady 'popped in' at her 'usual time' on a Friday afternoon, on her way back from a shopping trip, to sit down for a rest and chat with the staff. In this way, library staffs have built up a close relationship with library users, recognizing that:

"If you are friendly, people will feel able to approach you...they are more likely to come back" [Library staff, Tinsley]

"People must have the confidence and feel comfortable to come forward and ask. For Example: A young Asian boy wanted to find a spelling for an Urdu word, he preferred to ask me rather than the person working here who could speak Urdu...he's a slow learner and I have built up a relationship with him, he feels more comfortable to ask me for advice and help " [Library staff, Tinsley]

This interjection suggests a strong degree of social interaction between users and staff that cannot be taken for granted or assumed to exist within the public sector as a whole. Linley and Usherwood (1998:27) discovered that in Somerset, "the most extensive discussion of the libraries information role occurred in the focus group of disabled people and their carers". It was suggested that:

"...some of the people who are happy to go into the library for that kind of information wouldn't set foot inside a council building".

Library staff in the current study made an almost identical comment:

“People would use the library before going to the housing office next door, the library is more general” [Library staff, Burngreave].

Consequently, far from just being an information point, the importance of the library as a physical and ‘public’ presence rests in its capacity to contribute to the creation, structure and sustainability of *community*. Synonyms relating to this idea, provided by the Oxford English Dictionary include: a social group; a locality; sharing common characteristics or interests; common practises; ‘joint possession’, ‘in agreement’ and with a ‘common identity’. (Oxford English Dictionary: 2000). As applied to the sphere of public library use, the library has the potential and sometimes does form part of the structure that binds together the disparate elements of what may otherwise be fragile and vulnerable locations – a capacity that cuts across the confines of culture, age, ethnicity and gender. This was particularly felt to be the case in Tinsley, where both staff and users expressed a sense of being on the peripheral:

“Tinsley has an obvious geographical barrier – on the border with Rotherham on three sides and then you have the motorway, its like an island” [Library Staff, Tinsley].

This sense of psychological and physical isolation may have made the information needs of the community greater and therefore central to the role of the library, explaining the disproportionately high numbers of information usage. This was also the case with the library’s provision of reference information such as notice boards, leaflets (63%) and other sources of ‘local information’ (58%). By comparison, on average 20% and 16.5% Burngreave and Highfield respondents used these facilities, respectively.

Harris (1998:26) noticed a similar phenomenon in the profile of Todmorden respondents, one of three localities surveyed as part of a study of the social impact of libraries: 'there was a strong sense of the need for 'places to go'. Comments from young Asian respondents interviewed in this research, reiterate this:

"It is interesting and it gives me something to do"
"It keeps you off the streets" [Library users, Tinsley].

Particular to respondents from ethnic minority communities, library staff felt that the library was seen as an acceptable place for young Asian girls to go. As Comedia (1993) put it: 'The library is an approved space in Asian family terms':

"...men are happier to allow their women to go into a library and borrow Asian video's but they would not let their women go into an Asian video shop, instead the men always go to borrow them. In that way we are actually giving women more choices" [Library manager, Highfield]

As was observed in the Todmorden case study (Harris (1998), perceptions of the value of the library service above all other amenities, were very positive:

"If we hadn't got the library in Tinsley there would be nothing else. For us it's a must!"
"In Tinsley there are hardly any services or service providers...without it we would be isolated even more. Also, if there were no library in Tinsley it would be two bus journeys to Darnall or a bus and a tram ride to a library in town" [Library respondents, Tinsley].

These comments demonstrate that the library is an indispensable community asset, both a first and last resort particularly in communities where there may be few alternatives [this is discussed in greater depth later]. A significant part of its appeal lies in the fact that it is a local facility. The following remarks typify the

sentiments of many users when asked why they enjoyed visiting the library and how important they considered it to be:

“Its convenient and near” [Library user, Highfield]

“Its convenient and close to home” [Library user, Tinsley]

“I prefer to come here as it means I don’t have to go into the town centre”

“It’s very important as you don’t have to go far”

“Not everyone can get to Central – its convenient and accessible for local people and this encourages the children” [Library users, Highfield].

In Tinsley, the sense of local ownership of the library was particularly strong, perhaps animated by the geographical dislocation of this community and demonstrated by the close relationship between staff and users – a friendly place where people felt able to just pop in if only for a rest with their shopping. This was a key finding of the research of Proctor et al (1998:88), investigating the impact of opening hour reductions and library closures. Many of their respondents found the alternative library service unsatisfactory, as an ex-user put it: *‘its like drinking in another pub and not your local... You’re not part of the community elsewhere’*.

Bearing in mind the focus of this research, into the non-borrowing use of the library, it is interesting to note the Department of Education’s supposition on library performance in deprived area:

“It is not clear why authorities with a relatively high proportion of adults receiving income support should have fewer books on loan. It could be that this association is an indication that the poorest in society do not see libraries as relevant to them...”

This overriding attitude invariably shadows any capacity to envisage a broader vision of library contributions, beyond borrowing. Yet, all the signs suggest that libraries are used very frequently for much more than borrowing services.

It remains to be said at this point that if the poor don't borrow as many books as their more affluent counterparts, then the frequent visits of many surveyed in these case studies is evidence that they are using the library for reasons exclusive to borrowing. In the matter-of fact, but poignant words of one respondent:

"The library is essential for so many things in a poor borough" [Library user, Burngreave].

The challenge remains to ensure that these 'other' uses are included in any assessment of the performance and value of the library service.

Less frequent visits and non-borrowing use of the library

Results

A relatively small numbers of people across each library surveyed said that they visited the library either fortnightly or once every three weeks (See table 4.1 above). Overall 19 (16.10%) respondents visit once every two weeks and 14 (11.86%) visited once every three weeks. Only 6 respondents visited less than once a month. These low frequencies compliment the extensive use that is otherwise made of the libraries surveyed. In order to allow meaningful analysis of these small variables, the figures for those visiting the library less than once a week have been collated and loosely classified as 'less frequent users', presenting a richer overview of the frequency of library visits.

Table 4.8: percentage figures of frequency of visit (once every two or three weeks) and non-borrowing use of the library

Usage / visit once every two or three weeks	Base Sample	H Number respondents 38 32%	B Number respondents 34 29%	T Number respondents 46 39%	Total respondents
Library equipment	43.2%	27.94%	27.76%	12.82%	66.66%
Notice boards/ leaflets	57.6%	21.73%	27.76%	15.39%	63.63%
Ask staff for information	66.9%	9.3%	20.82%	25.65%	57.57%
Local information	40.6%	31.05%	3.4%	15.39%	51%
Newspapers/magazines	50.8%	12.42%	17.35%	10.26%	39.39%
Read/browse in library	50%	9.3%	20.82%	7.6%	36.36%
Attend event	22.8%	6.2%	3.4%	10.26%	21.21%
Meet people	18.6%	6.2%	3.4%	5.1%	15.15%

The highest percentage (81%) of those visiting the library once every two or three weeks said they used the library to borrow books. However for the purposes of the current study, the two most popular non-borrowing uses, depicted in the Table 4.8, above, listed in descending order of frequency, are *using library equipment* and *looking at the notice board/leaflets*. Asking staff for information and accessing local information remains important.

Analysis and discussion

Comparison of the primary functions of library uses between ‘very frequent visitors’ and ‘less frequent visitors’, displayed in Table 4.9 below, reveals an interesting shift in emphasis.

Three most popular functions of very frequent users (once a week or more)	Respondents who visit the library once a week or more often	Respondents who visit the library once every two or three weeks
Read/browse in library	80%	36.36%
Newspapers/magazines	75%	39.39%
Meet people	73%	15.15%
Three most popular functions of less frequent users (once every two or three weeks)		
Library equipment	65%	66.66%
Notice boards/ leaflets	63%	63.63%
Ask staff for information	65%	57.57%

Table 4.9: Comparison of top three most prevalent non-borrowing uses between 'very frequent visitors' and 'less frequent visitors'

From the table above, it can be seen that effective access to information is an important library function for 'less frequent library visitors'. This depicts a noticeable shift in emphasis away from the spatial and societal functions of the library as an indiscriminate and accessible *place*. Although still an important presence, the most popular uses for frequent library visitors, read/browse in the library, newspapers and as a meeting place, did not feature as prominent for less frequent visitors. Instead they appeared to value the library more for its traditional function as a reference information source.

Certainly effective access to information may be considered the vital ingredient that enables people to make sense of their environment, to evaluate and respond appropriately to circumstances as they present themselves, Comedia (1993:71) refer to it as 'a pre-requisite of citizenship and individual economic well-being' As indicated in the data, (Table 4.9, above), although this was not the principal function for very frequent visitors to the library, the high percentages reveal that this information function was very important nonetheless.

In general terms 69.35% of women look at library notice boards or pick up leaflets; 44.64% of men use this facility. People in full time employment (53.33%) access this information slightly more than those looking for work (45.71%). Also 68% of retired people and 61.11% of those looking after the home also value the library as a source of quick reference local information. It may be assumed that the bulk of this information may have related to local community events and organisations, what Leech (1999:42) refers to as 'citizen action information', which allows people to participate in local processes", since overall, only 5.9% of the total respondents said they had used the library as a source of personal information relating to social and welfare issues.

Notably, 75% of 16-24 year olds in Tinsley used this service, the highest value across all age groups. Despite the near-by presence of Tinsley Advice Centre, giving information on benefits, immigration, housing and related issues, the libraries provision of 'what's on' information is undoubtedly filling an information need for young people. In part this may be explained by the relative geographical isolation of the community at Tinsley, where there may be few alternatives as a source of local information.

Aslib (1995:169) defined these benefits as 'occasional' or 'sporadic' to the extent that their use is motivated by a specific, perhaps 'occasional' need, whether to find out a particular piece of information or make use of library facilities like the photocopier. They may not require any intervention between library staff and users and might equally be provided at another venue. However, despite the fact that some functions might be performed elsewhere and by other media, evidence from this study reveals that many people choose the library for these needs.

However, at the heart of all of these non-borrowing functions is the importance of the library as a place to go – perhaps for help, advice, reassurance, a particular service or resource, or quite simply a friendly accepting face.

Conversely, Landry suggests that the real benefit of a library service may lie, not with the actual services it provides, but by the very fact that it is, by nature a public place open to every body (Landry (1997). As one community member, consulted as part of the Audit Commissions research, 'Joined up Places', put it: 'You cannot have a community unless you have a place to meet'. (Audit Commission 1999: 32).

5.0 Extent to which the provision of non-borrowing library service satisfy both the needs and expectations of library users

5.1 Introduction

The previous section has attempted to explore the *demand* for the library service by looking at the use made of it and the characteristics of those who use it as a non-borrowing service. However Totterdell and Bird (1976) suggest 'measures of use are, by definition, measures relating to expressed needs only and as such, fail to address those expectations that may be as yet unrecognised and unvoiced. The Aslib Review team (1995) also identified the importance of evaluating not only 'expressed' needs but also looking at services people would use if they knew they could have them, when evaluating library performance.

Consequently, this chapter will consider the influencing factors and the reasons people gave for not using the non-borrowing services provided by libraries. Certainly it must be acknowledged that the level of expectation and 'unexpressed need' will depend on the sum of individual demands and needs specific to each community of library users. Meanwhile two issues have been identified for this analysis:

- I Expectations – reasons respondents gave for not using library service*
- II The level of awareness of non-borrowing services provided*

5.2 Unexpressed needs

The conducted questionnaire asked respondents to specify their use of a number of non-borrowing services provided by the library, these included *Information services, reading newspapers in the library, attending events held at the library and use of ICT facilities*. If they said that they did not use any of these services, they were asked to specify why, and where appropriate, to suggest any possible improvements that could be made to encourage them to use the service more. In this way it was hoped to discover the extent to which the library service is meeting the needs of non-borrowers, unravelling their demands, expectations and overall level of satisfaction with non-borrowing library provision.

Information

Previous studies verify the general affection with which the library is regarded as an appropriate access point for information. A recent National Survey carried out by Mckrell et al (1998), found that 78% out of 115 library authorities surveyed said that they offered 'problem solving information on a regular basis'. (Bohme & Spiller (1999: 71). The Library and Information Statistics Unit (2000) reports that 58 per cent of the population hold library membership, and library staff respond to over 50 million enquiries each year, on a wide range of topics.

However, while an auspicious 40.6% of the total respondents said that they used the library as a source of local information, only 5.9% said that they used the library to access vital information relating to social, economic and welfare issues. This supports the findings of Marcella and Baxter (1999:125), investigating the information seeking behaviour of public library users. They state that:

“The majority of respondents felt that public libraries were suitable places for finding information...on welfare benefits, jobs, careers and on housing, although there was little evidence that they had approached public libraries for such information in the past”.

It is not possible to know precisely why people did not use the library for this kind of information, as the request for a reason was included at the end of a number or other prompts. Yet, advocating the need for effective access to information as the ‘forth right of citizenship’, after food, clothing and shelter, the National Consumer Council noted:

“People will not be able to get their due as citizens of present day society unless they have continuous access to the information which will guide them through it...” (National Consumer council (1978:6.))

It is true that the ‘art’ of living would seem to have become a more complex balancing act than previously accounted. An enduring need has arisen for honest, open and decipherable information to help some of the most vulnerable members of the community to navigate a path through increasingly complex bureaucratic structures.

However, in the current study, 46.61% of people did **not** use the library as a source of what is commonly referred to as ‘vital’ information, concerning important every-day issues such as social and economic welfare and employment and education. 25.42% of these said that they had no current need, 11.86% said they were unaware that the library held such information. 74.47% did not specify a reason. Of those who stated a reason for not using the library in this way, three said that they normally go elsewhere, 2 use the Internet at home, one had no time and one respondent felt that the scope of information available was inadequate for their needs.

Comment

There is mixed feeling in the library world regarding the current capacity of the library to meet the various information needs of its users. On the one hand Greenhalgh (1995) is confident that owing to the broad appeal of the public library, it is in a unique position to provide valuable access to information. Yet Sturges, (quoted by Brophy) asserts that it is the inability of the public library sector to find its own formal and distinctive role within the maze of information provision that lies at the heart of its demise. He poses the rhetorical question:

“Should they be a medium of education and institution, an information source, a cultural focus for communication or an addition to peoples leisure pursuits through the lending of fiction’ (Brophy 2000:162).

Invariably, to define the role of libraries within any of these categories is to both understate their capacity and underestimate their potential as will be discussed in further in the subsequent section. Yet while evidence from the current study promotes the ability of the library service to make a valid contribution to a wide variety of areas, no less as a vital sign-post or gateway to a wider information network, there is no room for complacency.

The 11.86% of respondents who were unaware of the availability of ‘survival’ information at the library, is a significant minority. Comedia (1993:24) states with a certain amount of trepidation that: ‘the public library service is extensive but strangely invisible’. This lack of visibility was a feature of the Social Audit research. Library staff in Somerset commented:

“The information system...is not used very much. I think a lot of the problem is that although we have a lot of information there, people expect to find it somewhere else” (Linley & Usherwood (1998:25).

While information is variously charted as a core library function, to some extent it remains secondary to the provision of book for borrowing. This limited vision of what libraries can and do provide lies at the heart of this study, and indicates a need for libraries to market the variety of services with confidence. They must be viewed positively as potential information sources, for when the information needs of individuals change, and they must actively encourage the perceived need and value and need for vital information.

When asked overall to suggest any other types of information they would like to see made available at the library 16 responses were received. Within this, more people felt that job-related information was poor, reiterating a lack of visibility:

“The jobs board is not very clear, it doesn’t stand out to me – I only just noticed it was there” (Library User, Highfield).

“The jobs information is out-dated” (Library user, Burngreave).

Implicit of a lack of awareness, although the library has a job vacancies board, another Highfield respondent stated:

“It would be better if the job vacancies were here and not in town, it would be easier here”

Two respondents between the age of 53 and 64 also commented on the lack of ‘citizenship information’ relating to their rights and entitlements. Other suggested improvements included more information on education and training opportunities as well as up-to-date information on European regeneration initiatives.

It is perhaps discouraging to note that while 61.91% of non-whites had used the library for some aspect of 'vital' information, compared to 43.64% of whites, all of the suggested improvements to the provision of this kind of information came from the latter, and 78% of these were in full time employment. Previous research supports this finding. The Birmingham survey of Central Library users, found that 'in general...fewer ethnic minority respondents said they were *very satisfied*' with the service. Therefore, this implies that the lack of response from this group cannot be assumed to mean total satisfaction with the library service. Coventry City Libraries study into the use of library services by Ethnic minority communities, also asked respondents to suggest possible improvements to the library service. Similar to the current research, the majority of respondents were unable to think of any improvements.

It is conceivable that this 'silence' is implicit of a more general trend that suggests those better informed and perhaps better equipped to address their information needs, are more likely to air their objections when these needs are not being met. It is equally possible that people from ethnic minorities have lesser expectations from the library service. This may be the case with new arrivals to the country, not well versed in the library culture and therefore less demanding of it.

However Clough and Quarmby (1978: 313) note that people from ethnic minorities '...often more sorely in need of information than any other section of the community', are often deprived of it. In an increasingly multi-cultural society, this need has not diminished, as more and more people endeavour to have their say in the processes of the day. Roach & Morrison (1998) make a similar observation that as yet libraries are 'failing to address' the needs of ethnic minorities.

In the current study the views amongst library staff regarding the libraries contribution in this area were mixed. There was overall optimism about the traditional association of the library as a general information point. A staff member expressed this concisely:

“People see a library and immediately think they can get help there”.

However some staff, across all levels of the profession commented that perhaps the library could do more to address the information needs of ethnic minorities:

“For the immigrant community their main priority is to settle down in the new country...their need is information...survival is the main issue. The library is not doing enough in this area, we have information but it’s not visible – people are unaware that its there. We don’t need to include it in their own language but make it simpler to understand. If my English is broken a lot of information will put me off and I will think that what I know already is ok” [Cultural Library and Information Officer, Burngreave].

“We ought to have more notices in other languages...if you can’t read English and you look at our notices it’s like reading Greek...they don’t really stand out” [Library Staff, Highfield].

There was also practical evidence of positive initiatives in this area in other libraries:

“The sign for Firth Park Library is also in Urdu...so people can see it from a distance in their own language...this is practical evidence of inclusion, a role model for Tinsley and Highfield” [Cultural Library and Information Officer, Highfield].

A crucial concern expressed in this first comment, and a recurring issue, is the need for the library to make itself and the services it provides more visible to potential users, to contribute to what Pendleton and Chatman refer to as ‘Small world lives’:

“One way in which we might begin to bridge the gap [between the ‘information rich and the information poor’] would be to introduce both ourselves and the items we produce as trustworthy, reliable and useful to their situation” Pendleton and Chatman (1998:750).

They suggest a more active endeavour on the part of librarians to identify the needs of all members of the ‘information community’. Another staff respondent in this study felt that:

“We need to do more and more talking to the community to find out their actual needs....They are telling us their needs but we are not listening” [Cultural Library and Information Officer, Highfield].

Invariably the process of identifying the varied information needs of various elements of the community is a complex one and different communities have different needs and requirements. Yet Astbury (1994:134) suggests that in their traditional role as information providers, libraries have tended merely to present the enquirer with the ‘data’ ‘The information versus advice role of the libraries is as yet...an unresolved issue’.

Certainly, simply informing someone of their rights does not necessarily mean that they will benefit from them. Makay, quoted by Hill (1994:14), rightly asserts that, ‘we say we have received information when we know something has changed’. More than simply acquiring information, it is what we do with it that counts. However there was less certainty amongst some members of the profession about how the library should go about addressing these needs.

One of the recommendations made in the Department of Culture, Media and Sport: *Libraries for All: social inclusion in public libraries* (1998) was that library authorities should consider what specific services need to be tailored to meet the needs of minority groups and communities. In response to this the Library and Information Commission (1998) felt that the reasons for exclusion were perhaps

too numerous and complex to appropriately address the needs of any one group who are 'conventionally' regarded as being excluded. As one staff member put it, in the current study:

"It is about getting the balance right between meeting the needs of the different communities" [Librarian, Burngreave].

A common point mentioned by the Cultural Library and Information Officers, with specific responsibility for addressing the needs of the ethnic minority communities was that many people were not accustomed to the 'library culture' and in many respects may not have seen it as relevant to their needs.

"Particularly in countries like Bangladeshi and Pakistan the library is seen very much as academic. Many people come from very rural areas of their country and have very little formal education in their own language and they are not very familiar with the library set-up. Still, many, after living in the UK for 30 years are learning about what the library provides" [Cultural Library and Information Officer, Burngreave].

There is an underlying tension here; on the one hand libraries are poised with the need to understand the preferences and expectations of the communities they serve while also making the services they offer relevant to the different needs of those communities.

Raddon and Smith (1998:26), investigating the information needs of refugee groups, found that 'information providers are frequently part of bureaucracies which may involve barriers relating to systems, attitudes, place and sensitivity'. Similarly, Aslib advocated the need to promote the value of the library service to 'new arrivals who have not yet mastered English and the 'ethnic' elderly' (Aslib (1995:149). Although a slightly higher percentage of non-whites 54.54% said

they did not use the library as a source of vital information relating to employment, education or welfare, compared to 45.45% of white respondents, it is not possible to draw any meaningful comparisons with the findings of Raddon & Smith, as respondents, understandably, did not specify their residency status.

Offering an alternative perspective, the Group Manager felt that if there was an information deficit between certain groups in our society, it was more endemic of a class divide rather than a cultural one:

“At the root of it all probably class and social exclusion are as important as whether you’re White or Black. You might find more parallels if you looked at the different social class structure...Class is what distinguishes so many things between our societies”
[East Group Manager, Sheffield Libraries].

There is much in the literature to suggest that this is the case. Luckham (1971) was alarmed at the low levels of working class take-up of American public library services, a few years later, remarking on the findings of the Hillingdon study, Totterdell and Bird (1976) note that the middle class and those with a higher level of education were less confident in the libraries ability to supply [consumer] information.

Similarly, Martin, commenting on the potential of Community Librarianship noted that among the many people in the UK who may be missing out on benefits to which they are entitled, ‘it appears that those most ignorant of their rights are in regular contact with a wide range of professionals from social workers to doctors, none of whom is effective as an information provider’ (Martin (1989:105). Comedia concluded that:

“The principle of universal non-means tested provision has in practise led to a redistribution of resources from the poor to the rich, even while providing a general safety net for everybody” (Comedia (1993:21)).

The seven respondents (5.9%) in this research who said they had used the library as a source of vital information relating to benefits and welfare issues, were dispersed across the range of ‘occupation’ options presented in the survey, including both employed and unemployed. As such, this small number can in no way be considered representative of the general population.

However, a staff member at Tinsley had misgivings about whether the libraries supply of leaflets and local information ‘stood out’ enough to be a noticeable asset to users. In attempting to explain the strikingly low use of the library as a source of ‘vital’ information (5.9%), perhaps there is some validity to Greenhalgh’s questioning:

“...has it all become too low key...has the reduction of public expression to a fan of leaflets on a council coffee table and a display on a Hessian notice board been the consequence of the long term run-down of the public sector in favour of the private.” (Greenhalgh (1995:35).

In the social audit, the importance the library ‘as an information source for new comers into the area was mentioned by elected members, library staff and focus groups respondents’ (Linley & Usherwood (27:1998). However, in the current study, of the two respondents who said they had used the library for information when they arrived in the area, one commented that she now went elsewhere for information, while the second replied that:

*"I tried to use this library for information when I first came here, that's when I realised how * it was!" [Library user, Burngreave].*

Information Communication Technology

Certainly libraries in general have, in recent years found their position as information providers undermined by strong competition from the private sector. For example much community information is now widely available on the Internet and may not be associated with libraries (Murray (1998)).

The government's response to initiatives like the New Libraries Network envisages a positive vision for the Public Library Service as a vital competitor in this market. In his vision of a 'New Britain' Tony Blair stated:

"The Information superhighway should not just benefit the affluent or the metropolitan...just as books are available from public libraries, the benefits of the superhighway must be there for everybody. This is a real chance for equality of opportunity" (Department of Culture Media and Sports (CMS) (1996:1)).

A recent Office of National Statistics report (cited by the Commission for Racial Equality) concluded that 'levels of access depend very strongly on income'. This was backed up by a survey conducted by the Department for Education and Employment, which found that 68% of professionals had used the Internet compared with 22% of semi skilled and unskilled workers. It also found that older people and those from ethnic minorities are less likely to have access to the net. (Commission for Racial Equality (2001:2))

The lack of Information technology was a major source of dissatisfaction to a number of respondents in the current study, particularly in Burngreave and

Highfield, which, as yet did not have access to the Internet. While this short fall is in large part beyond the control of the community library, and part of a much wider, national debate concerning the open and accessible access to information for all, it has been argued that such a resurgence of political interest derives not from professional pressure but largely from economic and technological pressures, to which libraries have reacted to rather than instigated.

The following comments demonstrate a sense of frustration felt by some users, when asked to suggest any improvements to the provision of information sources in the library:

“The library is very poor. The Internet would make me use it. Some people and school kids in this area can’t afford it. But the voluntary sector is way ahead of libraries in using computers” [Library user, Burngreave]

“If they had the internet in here I would use it” [Library user, Burngreave]

“They need more computers ” [Library user, Highfield].

Library staff echoed similar sentiments to these. Particularly at Burngreave, staff felt that they had lost potential and current users as a result of not providing Internet access:

“We get daily requests for the Internet, but because we don’t have [it] we have to send people to Firth Park, and once we send them off to the new library we don’t see them again...we have lost readers to Firth Park. Most people have access to the internet...that’s the way things are going and they expect it to be free’ [Library Manager, Burngreave].

Invariably, while recent initiatives like the People’s Network and Libraries for all demonstrate national commitment to public libraries and the provision of ICT, the

'delay in some libraries offering access and others not, has resulted in customer expectations being dashed. Libraries already hard pressed are loosing out to competition both within the library world and beyond' (Batt (1993:1)).

It was also felt that the lack of Internet access meant that libraries were failing to reach a wider audience, particularly the younger age group as well as contributing to the availability of information for women from ethnic minority communities.

In Sheffield in particular, there is a lack of technology. This is excluding teenagers – trying to educate themselves and improve their knowledge. Technology would also help Asian women as a form of communication. Most newspapers are now on the web, if we had the internet, women could read the newspaper in their own language. Also there is language software...it helps everyone, you can see it, read it and enlarge it.” [Multi Cultural Information Officer, Burngreave].

By the same token, a significant 15.47% of respondents who had not used the library to access computer facilities said they were either 'uninterested', did not 'know how to use it' or felt that they were 'too old' (NB. this question applied only to respondents at Highfield and Tinsley, as yet Burngreave library did not provide computer access). Consequently there is some scope for libraries to encourage and enable their existing clientele in the use of new technologies, and ensure that both current and potential users are aware of its possible relevance to them if their prospective role as a first point of contact to new technologies and the 'people's university' is to be recognised.

Evidence from the literature verifies that the potential use of these technologies is extensive. Analysing the relationship between class status and information seeking behaviour, Marcella & Baxter (1999) asked respondents how often they would use computers to look for information, if public access to computers was

more widely available. A majority of 40.7% said they would use computers in public libraries regularly.

Moreover, one respondent, in this study commented to the effect that although they did not see the relevance of ICT in their own lives, they recognised its value to others, particularly the young:

"I know the young people come in and use the computer sometimes though" [Library user Tinsley]

This echoes the findings of Linley and Usherwood (2000:18) who note that 'users expect the library to provide more information technology even if they themselves do not like it very much'.

Finally, the evidence suggests that at present the libraries surveyed in this study are not meeting user expectations for the provision of information technology. However this has as much to do with the somewhat haphazard and staggered mode of introduction at a national level, as with a lack of willing on the part of the libraries concerned. Both library users and staff interviewed in this study recognised the introduction of new technologies would enhance the prestige and status of the library service in the 'new world of networked information, knowledge and learning' (Linley and Usherwood (1998:23.))

Opening hours

Common to a number of previous user studies, another area of concern expressed by a number of users was the inappropriate or restricted opening hours of library services. This was not an issue addressed in the survey

questions, however it was suggested by a number of respondents as a possible improvement to the service which would encourage them to use it more or make it more convenient to access.

Researchers in the Sheffield Strike survey noted that 95% of the respondents in one Sheffield library were not in paid employment, as a result '[t]here is a real possibility that employed people are being disenfranchised from the service due to its limited accessibility outside office hours' Proctor et al (1998:26). For this reason Comedia (1993:10) was concerned that this group of 'taxpayers' who 'could well become defenders of the library system' were being excluded. 'It may therefore be necessary for public-libraries to re-examine their priorities in terms of opening hours and the way in which such opening is advertised'.

An overwhelming 87.28% of respondents in this study were not in full time paid employment. This high percentage, reflects the broader community profile outlined in chapter 4, which indicate that the levels of unemployment in each of the areas surveyed was higher than the national average. Therefore it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which limited opening hours is prohibiting potential library users or whether in fact, the library users making use of each of these services is a 'true' representation of the communities they serve. It must be added that this assertion may be subject to some bias as; owing to time constraints the researcher was only able to interview Saturday visitors at two of the participating libraries, when those employed during the week would be most likely to use the library. Of the 19 respondents who said that they preferred to visit the library on a Saturday 7 people added to this that it was the only time when they could get in to use the library. 2 people said that they wished that the library were open later during the week.

Statistical evidence in the literature supports the view that working age people are to some extent excluded from using public libraries. The 25-64 age group makes up 64% of the population but accounts for only 41 per cent of weekly public library users. Similarly, the 35-54 age range accounts for only 18 per cent of all public library visits, against 41 per cent of over 65s (Sumsion et al (1995). These trends suggest a disproportionately low usage of libraries by the working age population.

Yet. Respondents who were not in full time employment also expressed dissatisfaction about library opening hours:

"The library is very important, I would like to see it open longer" [Library user, Burngreave, currently looking for work.]
"The opening hours are too short" [Library user, Burngreave, Retired]
"The hours [of opening] are very short. It should be open until 6 or 7 in the evenings" [Library user, Burngreave, at college/university].
"Its very convenient for research, it should be open all day every day" [Library user, Tinsley, at college/university].

Three out of four of these comments came from respondents at Burngreave. This may be partially due to the fact that this library had the shortest opening hours of the libraries surveyed.

These remarks were supported by recorded observations made by the researcher. On one occasion, during a period of morning observation a user came into the library shortly before it closed for the lunch hour, to use the photocopier. She was informed by staff that the library was about to close and asked to return at 1.30 when it reopened. The user left remarking with a degree of exasperation that:

"...every time I come down to use the photocopier [the library] always seems to be closed!" [Library user, Burngreave].

Such sentiments of frustration may be as much a result of limited opening hours as the way in which library opening times are advertised. Conversely, Wadley et al (1997:1) assert that:

"Given the statutory and societal duty which public libraries perform, inadequate service provision to any member of the community can only result in an undermining of the philosophical and political bases of the service and discrimination against certain of the service population, creating an imbalance between information rich and information poor"

Comments from library staff reiterate this:

"Opening hours are a problem. Tinsley Library used to be open longer before the cuts. There is one particular lady who works in town, she manages to run into the library and grab a book on Tuesday our late opening. But many people who cannot manage to get into the library but cannot afford books, may never come back to the library" [Library staff, Tinsley].

Cheshire libraries lapsed user survey (1995) also found that 25% of respondents said that poor opening hours had influenced their decision not to use the library. Libraries are failing a substantial group of potential users. (England et al (1995:124.))

Another concern raised by a number of the staff at Sheffield Libraries was that the public library was just one of a number of community institutions from which many people are effectively excluded as a result of their pattern of work.

“In the Bangladeshi community...many people...do part time jobs and night time work like the take-away or taxi...they are left out...they are left out...they can’t use the library or many other amenities because of these unsocial hours” [Cultural Library and Information Officer, Highfield].

“The Bangladeshi and Pakistani community, many in the younger generation work in restaurants or drive taxis, the libraries opening hours are a problem...by the time they get up the library is closed. We need to look at Saturday and Sunday opening. This would encourage family outings” [Library staff, Burngreave]

“It’s important that the public know that we are here. Things would be better if we were open all the time. We get a lot of complaints that the library is not open enough” [Library staff, Burngreave].

Consequently, no matter how valuable or otherwise esteemed the services offered by the library are regarded, if the library is not open for people to use them, then this value is reduced. Proctor et al (1998:1) investigating the impact of opening- hours reductions and closures in Sheffield, between 1986-1997, in their opening underline ‘the long term and progressive nature of service reductions in the public library sector in this country...In the last ten years (prior to writing) libraries open for more than 60 hours a week in England and Wales have fallen from 40 to 9, a reduction of 77%’. Consequently this is an on-going matter of national concern that needs to be addressed by politicians and policy makers.

Attendance of events at the library

Respondents were asked to specify in the survey, whether or not they had attended an event at the library, only 27 (22.8%) people overall said they had. This is a relatively low figure considering the large numbers of people who had used the library for other things like asking staff for information, (66.9%) or reading newspapers/magazines (50.8%). As with the other non-borrowing options, if they answered 'No' respondents were asked to state a reason. Of the 86 (72.88%) non-event goers, 28 (23.72%) were uninterested a further 34 (28.81%) were unaware of any events taking place at the library. Other reasons for non-attendance included being too busy or events taking place at an inconvenient time.

Given that each of the sample libraries are used extensively for a number of other building-based activities, it is interesting to detect any trends or relationships that may explain the relatively poor percentages of library users attending social events at the library.

Table 5.1 below, compares ethnicity against those said they were *uninterested* in library events.

Ethnicity/non attendance of events	H Number respondents	B Number respondents	T Number respondents	% Total Respondents
(Total Respondents 118) No.	38 32%	34 29%	46 39%	
Not attended an event	32 (84.21%)	27 (79.41%)	27 (58.69)	86 (72.81%)
Uninterested				
White	6 (15.78%)	6 (17.64%)	3 (6.52%)	15 (17.44%)
Non-white	2 (5.26%)	8 (23.52%)	3 (6.52%)	13 (15.11%)
Totals	8 (25%)	14 (51%)	6 (22%)	28 (32.55%)

Ethnicity does not appear to be a significant factor determining the level of interest in events, as there is very little discrepancy between the numbers of people from either ethnic group. Respondents at Burngreave were more likely to be uninterested in social events taking place at the library. A possible reason for this, suggested by library staff, may be related to diverging priorities and perhaps a genuine indifference on the part of users:

“The main priority for people in this area is survival!” [Library staff, Burngreave]

“Although the Babytime session is up and coming, last time we sent out information about this - but if people don’t come, what can you do? Some people do have the impression that the library is only about books”. [Library staff, Tinsley]

Another prevalent reason stated by respondents for not attending events at the library was a lack of awareness. In this case a slightly different picture emerges from the data. As is apparent from table 4.12 below, a similar number of respondents in both ethnic groups at Highfield and Burngreave said that they had not been to a library event through a lack of awareness. This would seem to support the findings of a recent survey by Coventry City Libraries into the city’s multicultural library services and their uses, which stated that an apparent lack of awareness of events taking place at the library is reflected among library users generally, ‘and not simply users of the multi-cultural services’ (Coventry City Libraries (1998)).

However, it is noticeable that Tinsley library had a far greater proportion of people from ethnic minority groups, compared with White respondents, who said that they had not attended through a *lack of awareness*. Thus, It can be inferred that the demand is far greater than the current provision of this non-borrowing feature of library use, perhaps endemic of the geographical isolation of this

community and the lack of alternative recreational activities in the area (noted earlier). This implicit loyalty can also be seen as a reflection of the genuine affection with which users regard the library service.

Ethnicity/non attendance of events	H Number respondents	B Number respondents	T Number respondents	% Total Respondents
Total sample 118 Respondents	38 32%	34 29%	46 39%	
Not attended an event	32 (84.21%)	27 (79.41%)	27 (58.69)	86 (72.88%)
Unaware				
White	6 (18.75%)	3 (11.11%)	2 (7.4%)	11 (12.79%)
Non-white	5 (15.62)	4 (14.81%)	14 (51.85%)	23 (26.74%)
Totals	11 (34.37%)	7 (25.92%)	16 (59.25%)	34 (39.53%)

Table 5.2: compares ethnicity and non-attendance of events with the number of respondents who said they had not attended through a lack of awareness.

However, a criticism that has sometimes been levied at libraries is that they have tended to be passive participants rather than active instigators in circumstances that impact on them. Certainly the lack of awareness of some users of the 'other' services offered by the library indicates a need for 'higher-profile marketing of the public library services, to show what's on offer and to encourage broader use and access for the widest possible range of people' (Library and Information Commission (1997). Accepting this, it is possible to argue that the auspiciously high numbers of people found to be using the library as a place to browse/read newspapers or as a meeting place, may be as much a causal affect determined by necessity as any conscious incentive on the part of the libraries.

Reflecting on the very positive findings of a study into the social impact of libraries (Matarasso: 1998) this author reflected in a more recent article that:

“The lasting impression I have...is how relatively marginal many of the projects were to the core of library services. Most were funded through non-dedicated, often time limited resources, and many had little practical link with many parts of a service, which essentially remains the organisation of book lending” (Matarasso (2000:35)).

Comment

The findings of this study expose a number of distinct areas in which the library is not meeting the meeting the expectations of many non-borrowers. As an information signpost the libraries surveyed in this study continue to fulfil an important need. However as a source of what Donohue terms ‘crisis information’ – ‘needed to cope with crises in the lives of individuals and communities’, the findings are less positive.

Lack of awareness

Research in Gloucestershire comparing the levels of awareness among users and nonusers of the services provided by libraries, notes some rather unsettling results. Researchers found that the awareness of even regular users of services which have been in existence for many years, was very disappointing:

“Over 20% of regular library users did not know that books could be requested, over 26% did not know that libraries offered a reference information service” (England and Sumsion (1995:178)).

The findings of this study confirm this, with many users unaware of events taking place at the library as well as some of the most fundamental information sources vital to every-day issues. The need for libraries to promote their services more

widely was a concern expressed by many of the staff members when asked to suggest any possible improvements to the service. One staff member felt that: perhaps the library could do more to market itself to potential users:

“There are many people – talking just about Highfield, not in the department as a whole, who are out there – excluded for a number of reasons who we don’t perhaps see. A lot of the out reach work isn’t being done” [Community Librarian, Highfield]

However there is also a sense that libraries exist very much within a schism, caught between the tension of often fractured and fragmented communities, factors beyond their control, which can serve to hamper their best efforts:

“We did have someone from the employment service come in and help people with their CV, but it was stopped because it was not very well taken- up” [Library staff, Burngreave].

Invariably there is a myriad of factors that combine to make the question of community and the libraries role within it, a complex one. There is much that remains beyond the control of the local libraries, requiring a combination of commitment and resources at a national level to fulfil a number of needs, both expressed and unexpressed. The lack of ICT facilities revealed strong feelings of frustration from both library staff and users. Secondly, efforts must be made to ensure that this valued facility is open and accessible at the times when people wish to use it. Need to match the needs of individual communities.

While libraries cannot hope to satisfy everyone’s requirements of them, they must actively endeavour to address the distinct needs of the communities they serve, inclusive of both current and potential users.

At an individual level, the public library continues to be regarded with affection and a certain amount of respect amongst many of the population. However it is evident that they cannot afford to take any thing for granted in sustaining these warm sentiments. The subsequent section will examine in more detail, the myriad of perceptions, opinions, reflections and assumptions that underpin the way we think about libraries.

6.0 Perceptions, priorities and performance measures in the public library

6.1 Perceptions of the library service

6.1.1 Introduction

Chapters 4 and 5 set out in largely quantitative terms, firstly the demand and use made of the non-borrowing related services provided by the library, and secondly the extent to which the provision of these services satisfies both the 'expressed' and otherwise unspoken needs of library users. These findings act as an indicator both of achievements as well as issues to be addressed within the profession.

However prior to drawing together a final assessment of the case studies considered in this research, the following section will consider in somewhat more empirical terms the opinions, impressions and overall perceptions of the library service by all those with a vested interest in this 'public good', including front-line staff, library managers and users.

This assessment will form the basis to a clearer understanding of the *value* attributed to the library service, beyond its traditional function as a book-lending facility. Following this, the report will consider the extent to which the way that libraries are perceived impinge upon the measures used to indicate library 'effectiveness'. This addresses a crucial aim of this study, to assess the degree to which current performance indicators accommodate a wider realisation of the 'value' of libraries, that are appropriately 'comprehensive' in their scope to reflect and legitimise all the things that people use libraries for and look to them to provide, in excess of the conveniently tangible measure of issue statistics (Matarasso (1997)).

6.1.2 Perceptions of the library service

In philosophy, "perception" is defined as the complex method of obtaining information about our surrounding world, specifically through our senses, and apprehending this information as part of our belief system and the way in which we understand and interpret the circumstances in which we find ourselves. The main weakness of this notion of perception is that much of what we perceive around us is based on a complex and constantly shifting set of personal expectations and preference which in many respects render these observations unreliable. Tversky and Kahneman, cited by Aslib (1995:136), suggest that 'people judge events as likely if instances of it are easy to imagine or recall' and this will depend on their knowledge and experience in this area. The Aslib review team go on to compound that the experiences of library users, although valuable, 'is best characterised as a long series of 'snap shots. They do not spend all day every day in a library, and they only see what is presented publicly to them by the library'

Therefore, acknowledging that while qualitative statements of opinion may not pass as sophisticated monitoring instruments, it is believed that they provide a useful insight into the underlying belief system and principles upon which specific habits of library usage may be motivated. This provided the platform upon which an authentic, less subjective appreciation of the value of the library service can be formed.

Literature outlining the current conceptual position of the library service, on occasion refers to a 'crisis of legitimisation', in which the public library is suspended within a myriad of possible identities as a medium of education and an information source; a cultural focus for communication and/or a medium of social and economic improvement. Comedia (1993:61), poses the question:

"Is the library to be conceived as a leisure, educational cultural, community provision or as a standalone service?"

There is a wealth of opinion to recommend the performance of the library service in each of these broadly interchangeable aspects. Aslib (1995:137) states that:

“Frequent users have a very positive image of public libraries. In particular, they feel that librarians are friendly, helpful and capable. They see libraries as well organised sources of reliable facts and figures, and they rely on libraries to provide the right information”.

This view was echoed by respondents in the current study; when asked to define why they enjoyed visiting the library a substantial number of responses related to the libraries core function as a source of information and reading, typified by the following comments:

“...because I refresh my knowledge and keep up with the times” [Library user, Highfield].

“...for information” [Library user, Highfield]

“...for factual reference information” [Library user, Highfield]

“...because I read a lot” [Library user, Tinsley]

“...its good for learning” [Library user, Burngreave]

“...because there are enjoyable books and video’s” [Library user, Tinsley].

“...because the staff are great and there are lots of nice books” [Library user, Tinsley]

Commendable as these functions are, they comply with a neatly defined vision of the library service geared towards the collection, organisation and dissemination of knowledge and information – a convenient solution to the so- called crisis of identity. There is a danger that in sustaining this neatly defined set of purposes ‘the library is likely to view itself as a resource, a repository of information to be concerned primarily with the flow of information, with materials rather than

people' (Lipsman (1972:11.)) Evidence of this was born out in the findings of the Social Audit research where it is noted that, people had not thought 'that a library could possibly improve the environment', one respondent commented:

"...I see that as a political thing, that's down to the Government and the local council. I really don't see the library as any kind of power source" (Linley and Usherwood (1998:28).

To some extent, staff and library professionals share an equally guarded view. The following comments exemplify the opinions of library staff in this study, when asked specify what they considered to be the priority of the library service:

"Reading! The library is a place to come and read and meet other people, a place within the community where they can come to learn" [Library staff, Burngreave]

"Books! Reading can give you so much pleasure and computers have not replaced that. It's reading that counts yet more than anything else. Books are what libraries are all about" [Library staff, Burngreave].

"Everybody from my age would say it's books...you'll never get away from looking at and feeling paper...The library is an essential part of the community for a number of reasons although in this area I do think books are a big part" [Library staff, Highfield]

It is not the aim of this study to compound or refute these views, but merely to present them as personal representations from active participants in the research setting. Yet the underlying assumption of the library service as currently configured is largely that of a service geared towards the tried and tested activities of book lending and information supply. These assertions are verified in the quantitative analysis of this study, which found that an overwhelming 85% of the total respondents interviewed used the library for borrow/related as well as 'other' activities. As such, rightly or wrongly, the profession has recently been

subject to a degree of dereliction from some quarters, for failing to take a more proactive role as an engine of societal development.

A common acclamation from library staff was that the library represents a safe and *neutral* place, sufficiently general in its functions to make it a non-belligerent, impartial environment. Undoubtedly there is much to recommend this as one of a few remaining symbols of that which we define as *public* – open and accessible to all who wish to use it. However there is a school of thought that suggests that in some respect it is this rather safe claim to impartiality that lies at the heart of the public libraries demise, preventing it from adopting a more assertive role in the relationships, interactions and issues that encompass the lives of those who choose to make use of it:

“The public library has become one more public service among a host of others, deeply valued by the third of the population who are heavy users, respected by most of the rest, and a familiar, perhaps too familiar part of the landscape” (Matarasso (2000:35.))

This sense of the over familiar and by implication somewhat overlooked presence of the public library was also raised by staff members interviewed in this study. Library staff across all points in the service expressed a view that the library was a victim of negative stereotypes:

“All libraries tend to be a bit out-dated...they are still in the old days and they don’t give the appearance that the library is up-to-date, that can be off-putting. People want new things...if you give people the impression that you are up-to-date then it shows a better image of the library and people feel more confident in it” [Cultural Library and Information Officer, Highfield].

“I can remember when I was at school, if you went into a library you had to be quiet, you didn’t move or raise your voice. We must change that image...create an easy feel to the library” [Library staff, Tinsley]

“The image of libraries seems to have dropped. Everything is going up-market and libraries are still lagging behind – this one’s quite nice” [Library staff, Burngreave].

There is an unspoken assertion in each of these comments that libraries need to affect a change of image if they are to assert a greater influence on the wider community. Aslib (1995) noticed a disparity between the views of 'professional' and 'other' members of staff, stating that 'other members of library staff are less sanguine [than 'professional' staff] about the quality of the service offered, and the modernity of the public libraries image, organisation and systems'. In the current study there does not seem to be a noticeable difference in opinion across different levels of the profession. Views are determined more by the distinct perceptions of individual staff members.

Yet, if the public library as currently configured, does not present a compelling image of modernity, similar to the findings of Lilley and Usherwood (2000), this research found some sympathy amongst staff and users that libraries have not always had the financial resources to achieve their potential.

"We try our best with the resources we have" [Library staff Tinsley]

"Staffing levels are a problem...we're constantly scratching for staff " [Library staff, Highfield]

"Burngreave is just another example of inner city decay- everything else like the banks have all moved out, there's not much left in this area"

These highly charged comments are evidence of the strength of feeling towards the library service, with an underlying sense that something more needs to be done. This strikes at the core of this dissertation, in understanding the value and worth that people attribute to their local library.

When asked to suggest any improvements to the current service, library staffs in Highfield and Burngreave see the arrival of new technologies and in particular

access to the internet as a significant opportunity to revitalise the image of the library and stimulate greater usage. At the time of writing, Tinsley was the only library in this sample, with Internet access:

“Libraries tend to have a dated image but libraries have changed and are changing with new technologies. No matter what your level of experience there will always be something to enhance your experience” [Library staff, Burngreave]

“Sometimes we get daily enquiries from people asking if we have the internet. If we did have this would improve the use of the library by other people and it would be good for the community in Burngreave where many families are poor and cannot afford computers...peoples skills would be improved as well” [Library staff, Burngreave].

“IT and the Internet will make a great deal of difference. Many young adults, children and elderly – all ages don’t have access to IT at home so the library would be the ideal place to come” [Community Librarian, Highfield]

“We are always getting asked about the Internet...we are definitely getting it this year, that’ll open up a new avenue” Library staff, Highfield].

Recent government initiatives appear to envisage a broader vision for libraries as an access point for those who might otherwise not have it. Through the ‘New Libraries Network’, £20 million has been made available to train all staff to a basic level of Information Technology, with a further £50 million ‘to create digital content for the network’, by 2002. (Library and Information Commission (1997:10).

However, it has been suggested that the evolution of new technologies has brought with it-increased demand and heightened expectation for almost instantaneous information gratification. The evidence so far suggests a feeling amongst many in the library world that the public library has been greatly disadvantaged in its ability to tap into this potential market by more boisterous competition in other sectors. The current drive toward the ‘networked library’

and Web access have been slow in coming and as a consequence have restricted the capacity of libraries to compete effectively in the modern information age.

Nevertheless, quite apart from the somewhat out-dated image of the library service it continues to inspire a core following of committed patrons. A number of authoritative pieces of research including Aslib (1995) and The Audit Commission (1997) note that although not continuously, libraries are used by all sectors of society during some time of their lives. A Highfield library user expressed this same sentiment with clarity:

“[The library’s] very important especially at different points in your life – for reference and information for young adults as well as for older folk coming through” [Library user, Highfield].

When people need to use the library at some time in their lives, its services are there and available. Far from being a ‘just in-time’ resource, there is an expectation that the library service should be a readily accessible constant. As noted by Aslib (1995:155) ‘if difficult or urgent problems arise, they can visit the public library and elicit information and guidance on events, remedies and possible courses of action’. In this sense, they potentially offer an auspicious mix of both the ‘hardware’ of technology and the ‘software’ of friendly and responsive personnel.

In the fray of instantaneous and simultaneous access to information from across the globe, this essential human element can be easily overlooked. Line (1997) makes the sensible assertion that even if some functions can be done elsewhere and by other media, for example, accessing information over the World Wide

Web that does not mean that the library should abandon them if they fall within its range of roles.

Interestingly, the Gloucestershire libraries study of the level of awareness amongst users and non-users, found that 'the library image was a more important factor for those who had never used the library (19.3%) than for people who had used it until recently (14.2%) (England & Sumsion (1995:177.)) While the issue of non-library usage did not concern the scope of this study, it is worth acknowledging from this finding that impressions and perceptions matter, and may be a decisive factor determining the use of the library at all. Admonishing conspicuously low numbers of white, teenager boys using the library (none of the survey respondents fell into this group) a staff member at Highfield commented perceptively:

"From a mans point of view, if I didn't work in a library I probably wouldn't come in here"
[Library staff, Burngreave].

Consequently, the collection of opinions and perspectives outlined above, suggest that if the public library is to broaden its usage and appeal it needs to improve its overall image and vision to accommodate a disparate and perhaps, more demanding user population.

The following remarks from library staff are a poignant illustration of the fact that while libraries are celebrated by many as an emblem of openness and neutrality, there may be a significant number for whom the library remains as apparently exclusive and uninviting place:

“A lot of people don’t know we’re here. We get people coming in asking ‘can I use this library?’ They think the library is only for certain groups of people” [Library staff, Burngreave].

“People are still intimidated...they assume it’s a place purely for knowledge, simply because they’ve not been in...it’s a lack of awareness. The perception of what a library is like when they’ve not used one is very different, but its getting them across the threshold...they know there is something in there but they think it’s not for them” [Library staff, Highfield].

Consequently, there is no room for complacency. In claiming the banner of broad-based appeal libraries must make a concerted effort to assert their presence, anticipating the needs of both current and potential users and in this way ensuring that the largely altruistic values attributed to public accessibility are not merely a coincidence of the physical library space but actively promoted and encouraged. This will require librarians to have a thorough knowledge of the communities they serve, inclusive of their demands, expectations and perceptions – expressed and unexpressed. Such information can be used as an effective management tool to supporting all that they do. Only when this is meaningfully represented in national policy can libraries be confident that they are achieving beyond the provision of books.

What follows is a brief discussion of current performance indicators and the extent to which they constitute an appropriate measure of library value and impact.

6.1.3 Performance measurement

“...just books, to me a library is book’s!”

This was the response received from one respondent when asked to specify the uses he made of the library. The evidence collected in this study, of the opinions and perceptions of many in the library world suggests that in some respects this is a fair representation of much of what we consider appropriate to libraries. Numerous statements from staff and users exemplified in the preceding section all point to the importance of the *book* as the essential priority for the library. Many national statements relating to libraries have also tended to consider them within equally constrained parameters. For example, the national mission statement for the public library set out in the Office of Arts and Libraries publication *Setting objectives for public libraries* states:

“The public library is a major community facility, whose purpose is to enable and encourage individuals or groups of individuals to gain unbiased access to books, information, knowledge and works of creative imagination...” (Quoted in Muddimann and Black (1993:2.))

It is small wonder then, that the value and achievement of this ‘public good’ has conventionally been calculated using easily quantifiable instruments like issue statistics. The 1991 Citizen’s Charter, cited by Comedia (1993) sets four questions that citizen’s may ask of libraries: How many books do libraries issue? How long are libraries open? How many visits are made to libraries? How much is spent on libraries?

Similarly, in the same year, *Keys to Success*, a publication from the Office of Arts and Libraries (predecessor to the Department of National Heritage) attempted to establish national guidelines and a common approach to assessing library performance. Apparently not very widely adopted, this attempted to measure

inputs, the resources needed, outputs – the use made of these resources and also impact – the extent to which the community intended to be served is being served (Bloor (1991.)) More recently, the Department of National Heritage (1993) set out a number of ‘key indicators’, to be used as guidelines. The focus is upon measures of efficiency and effectiveness, largely alluding to the rather dry counts of issue statistics, library expenditure, access and usage.

However the assertion in this dissertation to the activities performed by libraries that are not related to borrowing, presents a challenge to the status quo. It necessarily requires a conceptual leap away from what we may have considered the epitome of the public library, to encompass a much more fluid appreciation of all that it does – exclusive of the traditional functions of book lending. Evidence from this and other research into the social impact of libraries suggest that the conveniently quantifiable measure of issue statistics may not, in fact tell the whole story of the library, in understanding and evaluating the more intangible benefits they provide (Comedia (1993)).

This is no mean feat. For the purposes of this study library staff were asked to suggest any possible alternative methods to measure the performance of libraries beyond book issue statistics. There was broad agreement across all levels that merely looking at the number of book issues does not effectively account for all that libraries do, although there is less certainty about how to do it differently:

“Head counts are different to issues. You might get eight people sat at this table and only one of them will actually take a book out” [Library staff, Highfield]

“We need to count the number of enquiries and request” [Library staff, Burngreave].

“Issue statistics are a bad way of measuring how a library is used, they are used by so many people for different things. We could measure the number of enquiries we get” [Library staff, Burngreave]

“We should all have counts of everyone who comes through the door” [Library staff, Highfield]

Although visitor statistics and enquiry counts go some way towards recording the non-borrowing activities of libraries, these alternatives remain very quantitative in their approach, geared towards the counting of numbers. They do not take into account the less visible but equally valid benefits not accommodated by numerical tallies. As was noted by Linley and Usherwood (1998.) staff, interviewed for the current study found it extremely difficult to find tangible proof of the ‘other’ activities performed by libraries. However failure to address this issue exposes a real danger that library professionals, politicians and policy makers alike will measure only that which can be conveniently counted and ignore what may be the most important and perhaps most unexpected impacts (Usherwood (1996).

There is some evidence from the data that library managers and para-professional staff may be more aware than front-line staff of the need for a more comprehensive method of performance measurement that encompasses all that libraries do as part of a bigger picture:

“They should measure the whole thing...the indirect value to users, taking in

consideration others like social and educational service or advice services”
[Multi-cultural Information Officer, Burngreave].

“We need some form of mechanisms to measure people coming into the library without the head count when someone gets counted twice or they get missed out” [Community Librarian, Highfield].

Yet, there was also some sympathy amongst respondents that if libraries have been slow to envisage more sophisticated measures of performance, the increasing pressure of market-forces and fiscal demands has often hindered them. One library user commented to this affect:

Libraries could do more in the line of events and stuff for children but they don't really have the resources for that kind of thing do they” [Library user, Tinsley]

The Department of Culture, Media and Sport's national paper states:

“...pressure on resources has led to an ever more intensive search for efficiency of operations, while concerns to serve user needs has focused attention on effective” (The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (1997:96.))

In many respects the dual demands for efficiency and effectiveness are mutually incompatible. It may be that in achieving the former we sacrifice the latter depending on how we interpret these two concepts. Totterdell and Bird (1976:31), define efficiency as ‘maximum returns for units of inputs as opposed to effectiveness, the satisfaction of needs’. Aslib (1995:201) asserts that libraries are being hindered in achieving either ‘by the politicians and senior manager, with local authorities, who have created structures which deny the

library service the opportunity of performing to its potential'. As was noted by a Community Librarian, interviewed in the current study:

"Issue statistics are a priority because at the end of the day that is what politicians and Group managers are going to look at. It is difficult to know how else we could measure what we are doing" [Community Librarian, Burngreave]

There is a sense that the fiscal concerns of politicians and financiers predispose any measure of the effectiveness of libraries by their traditional and narrow role as book issuing points. Recently bombastic policy statements fail to appropriately address this discrepancy. The 1994 UNESCO Manifesto, quoted in Comedia (1993:49) states:

"Librarians should be accountable to the public they serve for the development and control of services. This can be achieved by basing policies relating to services and collections on the expressed and potential needs of the public"

In reality many judgements relating to the contribution of libraries are motivated by the need to provide tangible evidence of their achievement in providing value for money. This requirement has typically been met through the convenient measure of issue statistics. However, evidence identified in this study relating both to the *expressed* and *unexpressed* needs of library users suggests that there are many aspects of library usage which cannot be measured in these terms.

Certainly the rhetoric of the library as a community asset has recently been heard in many quarters, from librarians to elected members and politicians alike, realising a more positive image for the public library as 'the street corner university'. However, if this is to translate into anything more than meaningless mantra, a much more assertive and proactive demonstration of national support is yet required. This is perhaps best demonstrated in the reactions of library users:

"It is about time this Labour government stopped paying libraries lip service and actually put their money where there mouth is." [Library user, Highfield].

"The library should be important, but probably it isn't used as much as it could be" [Library user, Highfield]

"It should be important but I don't think that it is valued enough" [Library user, Highfield]

"The library is very important, but they are not as they used to be what with all the closures – we miss ours terribly, at the top of the road, since it closed down" [Library user, Highfield].

These statements are a clear indication of the strength of feeling felt by some towards the library service and indicative of the public sentiment that as yet, libraries remain undervalued and under-represented at a national level.

Another respondent who only came to the library occasionally only occasionally, to accompany his wife, was *surprised* to find that the library was used as much as it was.

In short, current perceptions of the public library, as presented in the data is of a service caught between two precipices. On the one hand it is held in high esteem as a warm and welcoming place. At the same time is a keen awareness of an image of the library as dull, insipid and somehow wedded to the virtue of silence. This is part of an ingrained and all too familiar stereotype that rate's librarians with perhaps the same level of sophistication and charm levied to the accountant or the statistician:

“They are dried up spinsters in bullet-proof tweeds. The only dates they have are embossed on their rubber stamps. They have nothing to excite them except the occasional stiff fine, and the nearest they get to romance is lending the latest Mills and Boon to similar saddos”. (Smith (2000:19).

The significance of this as a symbolic representation of an understated perhaps, undervalued occupation, can be questioned. However, in a current social and political climate that seems to place much weight on the ephemeral, the fact that such misconceptions exist within the popular conception is worth noting. These perceptions can contribute to unhealthy prejudice, which may serve, from the outset, to hinder a conscious consideration of the wider contribution of libraries that extends beyond the tradition of books and borrowing.

It is against this background that current performance measures have been set. The challenge remains for all those within the library profession to encourage a redefinition and reassessment of the way we think of libraries, inclusive of all that they do. Arguably, only when librarians themselves are wholeheartedly convinced of this added value, will they be able to mount a convincing case for policy and decision makers of the benefit and worth of public libraries, beyond books. As one member of staff at Tinsley library saw it, the challenge remains not so much to decide *what* to measure but to be more assured of *why* we are measuring it!

7.0 The ‘value and impact’ of the non-borrowing functions of the library

7.1 Introduction

The essential assertion made throughout this study is that libraries are much more than the accumulative sum of the items registered by the computer checkout terminal. The structure of this report has attempted to balance the quantitative information with more qualitative data in order to create a rich picture of library usage that is independent of the familiar borrowing functions. Against the current climate of accountability the quantitative data provides actual evidence to justify the many library services not appropriately represented in statistical measures. The more qualitative methods enrich the raw facts and figures with a tapestry of perceptions, insights, thoughts and emotions drawn from the responses of the individuals involved in the study, indicative of the broader social functions of the library.

So far the research has considered the non-borrowing services provided by the library, the characteristics of those using these services and the extent to which the needs and wants of non-borrowers are being met. However any discussion about the functions of the public library and the services it offers, must invariably concern itself with the purpose and affect of these services.

This concluding chapter will attempt to draw together the results of this analysis to form an impression of the overall impact of the non-borrowing related services of libraries on the lives of the individuals and communities they serve. A number of themes will be considered, including the value and impact of the library on:

- I. Personal development and individual health and well-being*
- II. Learning and education*
- III. Social inclusion and cohesion*
- IV. Local identity and 'a sense of place'*
- V. Economic vitality*

These broad headings have been taken from some recent research into the social impact of libraries, namely Linley and Usherwood (1998) and Matarasso (1998).

7.2 Analysis and discussion

Without deviating from the focus of this study into the non-borrowing use of libraries, much previous research points to the importance of leisure reading as a determining factor of library usage. Comedia (1993:57) defined the benefits of reading, which 'fulfils many functions for the reader, some of which are strongly educational, developmental, therapeutic, life – enhancing and part of a shared intellectual citizenship'.

None of these noble aspects are lost in the current assessment of non-borrowing/related library usage. The evidence suggests that much reading can and does go on inside the library walls. In the current study, 50.8 per cent of respondents said they used the library to read newspapers/magazines, a further 50 per cent said they used it to read/browse for leisure. A common point raised by many of those who said they used the library to borrow books was that it was 'free' and did not involve a payment.

One might easily apply this significance to the use of the library as a physical location, a place to sit and read. In this case the accessibility of *place* presents an environment that is, or should be free of prejudice and any predetermined

entry requirements, anyone is able to come uninvited. They can choose to stay and read undisturbed or equally they can use it as an opportunity to mull over matters of the day with fellow users. This fluidity of choice was particularly relevant for many respondents in the current study, drawn from a variety of cultural backgrounds and for which English may not be the first language. This activity does not require them to approach staff or issue counters and they do not have to have anything checked out to them. But most importantly, the provision of foreign language newspapers and literature preserves a vital link with the country of origin a personal identity with the aspects of culture and background that contribute to who and what we are – something not to be overlooked.

Sheffield Libraries and Information Service demonstrate a strong commitment to the needs of those from ethnic minority communities. The employment of a number of Cultural Library and Information Officers drawn from the various communities and devoted to their specific needs provides a tangible bridge for many to the services offered by the library that is to some extent appropriate to the distinct needs of the community.

Yet there is another equally valid dimension to the notion of a multi cultural community facility. Making available a host of services that seek to provide some relevance to the needs for various elements of the community, whether for borrowing or non-borrowing purposes, was recognised by staff as an invaluable opportunity for cultural harmony, as stated by a member of staff at Tinsley library:

“The library is place where the cultures can come together”

Consequently, while a local politician in Newcastle saw the library as ‘*a vehicle to enable a better interchange of ideas, and an ongoing representation of our culture*’ (Linley and Usherwood (1998:19)), the diversity of cultures acknowledged in each of the libraries surveyed in this study is witness to the fact

that Britain is no longer a mono-cultural society, this was noted by survey respondents:

"I have always valued the library. It is quiet and warm and it is one of the few resources we have - it is screaming multiculturalism"

"People can become better read and learn about each others cultures" [Library users, Burngreave].

It is difficult to think of another environment that enables people to come together on mutual territory, regardless of culture, race or class, distinctions which so often serve to divide us. In another sense as noted by Aslib (1995:72):

"By its very existence, free from propaganda and prejudice, with no axe of its own to grind the public library serves peace as well as democracy"

The freedom to choose between the various services offered by the library is a 'value' aspect in its own right. An interviewee newly arrived into the country stressed a personal sense of well being as a result of using the library and by implication his positive experience of the library may have contributed to a feeling of belonging and acceptance into the new society:

"I have not long come here from Pakistan. I feel respected here, by all the European people...I can stand here and nobody is asking me to move or what I am doing standing here" [Library user, Burngreave].

Research carried out by Proctor et al (1996: 26) to investigate the impact of the temporary services closure during Sheffield public libraries strike in 1995, found that over half of those respondents who said they missed the library said 'they missed it most for a reason related to their well-being or lifestyle'. This confirms the conclusions of the Comedia (1993:36). In its case study of two libraries

'serving large and relatively disadvantaged housing estates, the report noted that one of the most important roles the library had was 'in providing a friendly library with a good and varied book stock, in effect a local institution.'

Matarasso (2000:36) makes the valid assertion that 'the public library is simultaneously an educational, an advisory, a cultural and a social institution'. He goes on to suggest that if libraries are to fulfil their huge social potential they need to focus their energy on one particular aspect, the provision of information. Accepting this necessitates a broad appreciation of the concept. In many respects the process of acquiring and using information in whatever form it is presented to us is an opportunity for learning and personal development. The Department of Culture Media and Sport (1997:3) offers an elaborate but informative statement of the interchangeable value of information and learning:

"The urge to learn is a distinguishing feature of the human mind. Knowledge is power –and universal access to information is a hallmark of freedom in a democracy –but knowledge is also discovery, excitement, personal growth and self-confidence"

For many respondents in this study the library is not only a reference point for local information but also provides an opportunity for the exchange and sharing of information, between staff and users both as customer and client and also friend and carer, suggested in the recollections of library staff:

"One lady came in recently and said that she had been burgled, we phoned the community police and they took her home...it turned out that really, all she wanted was a bit of company" [Library staff, Tinsley].

Whether by coincidence or design, libraries are often there, as a last resort, to pick up the pieces when the formal information network fails, and yet they are not thought of in this way. Moreover these caring and social roles cannot be measured in numerical terms, and as a result, the danger is that they will go uncounted.

Beyond this, the abounding sense of goodwill that generally exists towards libraries has brought with it an encouraging measure of altruism. Even if respondents did not use some service facilities themselves, they recognised their benefit for others. A common expression of the importance of the library was the value and benefit of the services it provided for children and young people. As such there is a great deal to suggest that despite the often discouraging perceptions of libraries as being somewhat out-dated and old fashioned, there is an dual awareness of the continued relevance of this resource to the development of younger future generations ensuring its longevity.

“The younger generation come and play games, books and video’s...there’s lots of facilities for young people” [Library user, Burngreave, age 65-74]

“It is important for the young ones who use it for tapes and things. This is a popular library” [Library user, Highfield, age group 55-64]

“It is very important – for the Asian children. It is nice to see children reading, not many do” [Library user, Tinsley, white, age 45-54]

Proctor et al, (1996) noticed a similar tendency. Even if respondents did not have children of their own, they recognised the benefit of the library as a learning resource for children. The ethos of openness manifest in public libraries may in fact be self-perpetuating in encouraging attitudes of social and cultural tolerance, effectively giving reality to the notion of community. In this sense the public library is made both necessary and possible through the community it serves.

As noted earlier, the related value of the library as a convenient and local facility was an important factor for many respondents. The significance of this in fostering a sense of local identity and belonging cannot be understated. A few respondents felt that the local community library provided a more personalised service than was provided at the larger Central library, which in turn had contributed to the development of the library *habit*.

"It's habit – I always come to the library, it's better than Central" [Library user, Highfield]

Just as the 'Sheffield Closures' researchers (Proctor et al, 1996) found that the library visit had become an invaluable activity for which no suitable alternative could be found during its closure, the findings of this study must accredit the library with a similar value:

Library user comments

"I love the library, the staff are great – you can sit down and chill...its natural for me to come to the library"

"I've always come to the library since I was a child and teenager..."

"I've been coming here ever since I've lived in Tinsley, nearly fifty years"

In some respects rather pallid nouns like 'service' and 'facility', with their meaning firmly lodged in the insipid and somewhat impersonal act of resource provision, fail to give adequate recognition to the full value of libraries to the individual lives of many who use them. Visiting the library can be a way of life for many, a reassuring constant in uncertain times. Accumulative data from staff, users and also observations made by the researcher, in this study, suggest this to be the case for particular groups within the community, for example, as a place where those not working, can come and read the newspapers or as a point of contact

and companionship for the elderly. This amounts to what Martin (1989) terms 'preventative social work'.

All of this helps to create a more positive image of public services in general. As representative of the local authority and in turn local government, public libraries and librarians '...occupy a special position within society, both as providers of services and as moulders of public opinion' (Martin (1989:119)). Therefore delivering the services most relevant to the needs of local people in the most appropriate way may improve the level of satisfaction with the local authority and the role of local government. Some staff interviewed in this study felt that the library was a respected representation of authority – particularly among many from ethnic minority communities. For the Chinese community, the presence of a bilingual member of staff at Highfield library, was seen to demonstrate the positive commitment of the local council to many in this group, sometimes hindered by a language barrier:

"If you see a library it can remind you that it is part of Sheffield Council and you will be able to get information on any other service there" [Cultural Library and Information Officer, Highfield].

Clearly the potential impact of the library is duplex. Providing an available place for people to come whether to access a specific piece of information or simply to sit and read, contributes to the personal well being of the individual. The accumulative result of this, in fostering an environment in which every individual feels they have a place and a mutual right to participate, must have positive implications on the wider community, facilitating a greater degree of harmony across and between groups. It follows that a cohesive community provides the foundations for greater sustainability and 'economic capacity'.

Yet the economic impact of the library proved a difficult phenomenon to capture, by the quantitative methods used in this study, but the data revealed some anecdotal evidence of the libraries contribution to those looking for work. Some respondents said they used the library on a regular basis to read the 'jobs section' of the daily and weekly newspapers and look at the 'jobs board', although it is impossible to prove if these respondents found employment as a result. But having access to this information provides, at the very least, the awareness of an opportunity perhaps worth pursuing - people are 'in the know'.

A number of Tinsley library users were also combining their visit to the library with a shopping trip. However, complimentary to the findings of Linley and Usherwood (1998), staff interviewed at Burngreave felt that although the library was situated near some local shops, its impact would have been greater if it was located within a larger shopping area. The researcher felt that because this library is also positioned slightly off the main road, on a rise, it is less visible to people passing by. There may be lessons to be learned regarding the planning, design and presentation of the library building – if it is to reach its potential audience.

In summing up, all of the evidence presented in this report would seem to point in one way or another, to the value of the library as a physical place. More than a shared space *for* the community, it can be seen as an essential ingredient *of* community. There are tentative signs of late, of a possible shift in the tide, to accommodate a more authentic impression of the value of libraries in the future. As part of its 'action plan for public libraries', Re:source (2001:15) the nationally representative body for libraries recognised the need to:

“Demonstrate the value of public libraries through the measurement of impacts on individuals and communities [and] to develop measures that evaluate qualitative outcomes rather than inputs or outputs”.

A combined initiative between libraries to promote their value and worth, along with lasting national commitment may ensure the ongoing contribution of libraries to the well-being and development of both individuals and community.

8.0 Conclusions and recommendations

When the present study was proposed it was recognised by the researcher that its value was two-fold. Firstly in identifying the ways in which a small community library is used, exclusive of all borrowing functions. Secondly, to understand the significance of this 'other' usage in determining the overall value of the library to the community it serves, beyond books and borrowing.

The intended outcome of this study was to present a reliable case supporting the non-borrowing use of libraries. It was hoped that this would provide both practitioners and policy makers with a useful insight into the other services and library uses that can so easily be overlooked in the decision making process. Much has already been said in the literature about the traditional functions of the public library as a booklovers haven and 'temples of learning and culture'. More recently research has sought to identify the social impact of libraries as a deviation from the typical quantitative account of book issues and service provision.

However, with the specific aim of documenting and understanding the non-borrowing uses of the library it was hoped that this study would add something new to the existing body of evidence on the *value and impact* of the public library service.

From the findings presented throughout this report the following key factors emerged:

8.1 The extent of non-borrowing use made of the library

The present study provides some valuable quantitative data on the nature and scope of the non-borrowing use of the library, which has been sufficiently documented in many earlier research projects. The findings showed that during 'today's visit', when the user interviews took place, a similar number of people were using the library for borrowing/related reasons only (43%) as for non-borrowing reasons only (41%). Considered overall, an overwhelming 99% of respondents had user the library for non-borrowing reasons (85% borrowing/related and other, 14% other only).

- **The research suggests that while the lending of books and other materials remains an important library function, libraries are invariably used for many more reasons. Accepting the results of 'today's visit' as a likely snap shot of daily comings and goings in the library, there is a significant probability that a very significant proportion of users will be using the library for reasons not related to borrowing.**

That only one respondent out of a total of 118 used the library for borrowing reasons only, is effective confirmation that non-borrowing is an extremely important facet of library use, in urgent need of recognition.

- **The research suggests that previous published studies into library usage have failed to document this sufficiently and in doing so, effectively disregarded a more than significant aspect of library usage.**

8.2 The features of non- borrowing library usage

The Library as 'place'

Generally speaking the initial findings reaffirmed the body of research that acclaims book borrowing to be the core library function. However, beyond this traditional role, the data revealed some very encouraging aspects of non-borrowing uses. The most prevalent of these rely on the library as a building-based resource. During 'today's visit' a quarter of respondents used the library to read newspapers/magazines with a further 10%, the second highest percentage were reading or browsing in the library. This picture is reflected overall, with well over half of the total respondents using the library to ask staff for a piece of information, look at notice boards, read newspapers/magazines or browse in the library. Observations made by the researcher also confirmed the use of the library as a resting and reading place.

An important distinction must be made from the nature of these findings. Beside the time taken to choose an item to borrow from the library, whether a book or CD, a borrowing activity can be carried out relatively quickly and with limited contact with others, and the benefits of which may or may not be reaped after the person has left the library. By comparison many non-borrowing activities are societal in their essence and their value to the user is almost instantaneous whether through interaction with library staff to solve an information need or leisure time spent within the walls of the library – as opposed to somewhere else.

- **The research exposes the apparent short sightedness of commentators, observers, professionals and policy-makers alike in the library world in failing to acknowledge these visible aspects of library usage and the implicit value they have to the personal well-being of the individual. They may also be seen as a reflection of the regard for the library as a place where people *choose* to come to seek help or merely to spend their time.**

The importance of the library as *place* was reinforced by the analysis of the frequency of visits made to the library and the reasons for coming. A significant majority of respondents, 65.25% visit the library once a week or more often. Continuing the trend so far, the three dominant uses were read/browse in the library (80%), newspapers/magazines (75%) and meeting people (73%).

- **The results provide unequivocal evidence of the very high value placed on the use of the library as a place to come and spend time on a regular basis – irrespective of all borrowing facilities.**
- **The research drew two broad distinctions between ‘very frequent visits’ – once a week or more and ‘less frequent visits’ – once every two or three weeks. Previous national surveys, namely Aslib (1995) used ‘once a fortnight’ as an indicator of frequent use. The extensive number of visits to the library ‘once a week or more often’ observed in this study, are a stark indication that the value of the library to the lives of many individuals has often been underestimated.**

The library as an ‘information junction’

The less frequent visitors, visiting once every two or three weeks, not unexpectedly, did not place high emphasis on uses of the library as a *place*. However they matched their counterparts who were visiting ‘very frequently’, in the use of the library as an information point, asking staff for information (57.57%) and looking at notice boards (63.63%) and local information (51%).

- **These findings support the longstanding ‘core’ function of the library as an ‘information gateway’. This was summed up well by a member of staff:**

Anything you don't know and you want to find out, you can come into the library. If the library can't help them it can point them in the right direction or give them a point of contact.

The library plays a valuable function as an access point to events and issues both local and outside the community. There was a much greater concentration of information use at Tinsley compared with Burngreave and Highfield. Qualitative statements from staff and users confirmed that this was particularly important to this area. Because of its geographical location on the outskirts of the city, some respondents felt that the town was cut off from many other services and amenities.

The importance of library staff in determining library usage

At Tinsley library, in particular, the role of library staff often extended from an information reference source to friend and confidante. Observations made by the researcher as well as comments from users and staff all emphasised the importance of building up an appropriate rapport between staff and users, creating an ambience between library staff and users

- **The research revealed that the level of staff responsive in understanding and anticipating the needs of users was a decisive factor encouraging the vast majority of users, both 'very frequent' and 'less frequent' to approach them for some form of information or, as confirmed by observations and user interviews, simply for friendly verbal exchange and banter.**

Some library users at Tinsley commented that they sometimes made spontaneous visits to the library, or en route to somewhere else, to have a 'chat' with staff. A similar phenomenon was observed by the researcher, at Highfield and supported by evidence from discussion with staff.

- **The research also suggests that common to most service sector enterprises it is *people* not facilities, who provide the distinction between a crude utilitarian function and a place where customers/clients/users come because they get enjoyment and pleasure from doing so.**

8.3 A sense of local identity

Creating a warm and welcoming place where people feel able to come, a place that is not discriminatory, that does cast judgements and where there are people willing to help if you need them, invariably contributes to a sense of local identity

There was a strong sense of ownership of the library at Tinsley. Many users commented to the effect that in that area in particular the library was seen as 'a must', it was seen as a focal point for the community. For the large population of users from ethnic minority communities, many of whom, the researcher was informed, may have originated from the same communities in their home country, there was a sense that in some respects the library had replaced the idea of 'meeting by the well' as a social environment and meeting place.

8.4 Characteristics of users and their use of libraries

Frequent visitors to the library (i.e. once a week or more often) are more likely to be people who may be assumed to have more time on their hands and so greater flexibility about when they choose to use the library, for example those looking after the home (83%), those looking for work (60%) and the retired (68%). In this way it can be seen to provide a necessary degree of consistency to peoples lives.

- **The evidence suggests that the library may be a particularly important community asset to communities with high levels of unemployment and economic and social deprivation, where access to other sources of recreation and leisure may be limited.**

The library was also used more frequently (once a week or more often) by those from ethnic minority communities, 70% of non white users compared to 51% of white users. An important feature of many of these users was access to newspapers in their mother tongue.

- **The research indicates the importance of the library in meeting the needs of different groups within the community, most specifically in providing a vital link for many with their country of origin and the psychological and emotional identity that implies to the personal well being of individuals**

8.5 The extent to which the library meets the needs of non-borrowers

Library users gave four main reasons for not using non-borrowing services supplied by the library: lack of awareness, not interested, no need and inadequate provision. This featured particularly in the low use of all three libraries as a source of personal information, event attendance, and the use of computers. In the first instance, while some people said they did not require information of this kind, for others the questionnaire revealed a lack of awareness that the library held this information. National statistics relating to the take-up of income – related benefits, 1998/99 reveal that the average amount of income support left unclaimed was between £540 million and £1'340 million (National statistics (2000)). This suggests that the need for 'crisis' information is extensive.

There was anecdotal evidence from both staff and users that the library could do more in this area and that that they were not meeting all the information needs of particular groups in the community, particularly ethnic minority groups.

A similar picture was presented when examining the 'attendance of library events'. Users at Tinsley, indicative of the affectionate regard for the library were more likely to be unaware rather than uninterested in this service.

- **The research exposes a need for libraries to be more proactive in anticipating and responding to the un-stated needs of library users. There is a need to realise the potential of the non-borrowing functions of libraries so that they are more than a causal affect of the physical space provided between the library walls, but part of an active strategy identified and pursued by the library.**

Libraries are hindered in their capacity to compete in the technology stakes because of the haphazard and lackadaisical implementation of vital facilities like the Internet into public libraries. Staff at Burngreave and Highfield libraries stressed that they had lost users because of the absence of this facility.

- **The evidence suggests that still greater tangible proof of the governments commitment to place the public library at the heart of a networked society is needed**

Staff and some users felt that libraries remain blighted by a negative public image. They are still seen as being old fashioned and out-dated.

- **The research revealed that perceptions and image play a vital part in setting a precedent of how libraries are rated at a national level and possibly impact on sustaining limiting and non-representative**

performance measures, used to determine the effectiveness and value of the library service to the individuals and communities they serve.

8.6 Value of non-borrowing

In summary, evidence presented in this study, both in quantitative and qualitative terms as achieved the stated aim, in raising awareness of the purpose and value of the public library service beyond its borrowing capacity. Realising a true appreciation of these 'other' uses as being as important if not of greater value than borrowing facilities to many individuals, may us to make require a conceptual leap away from the familiar understanding of the *library*, towards a broader appreciation of what libraries can and do achieve

8.7 Areas for further research

The findings of this small-scale study reveal the valuable contribution of libraries beyond a source of borrowing materials. However a number of questions emanate from the data, which the researcher was unable to address within the scope of the current study.

Particular issues in need of further research include:

1. This research examined three communities with relatively high levels of social and economic deprivation and found that non-borrowing use of the library was an important function. Further research is needed to consider the extent to which socio-economic status has an influence on the way that the library is used.
2. The remit of this study did not allow closer scrutiny of the relationship between the quality and provision of borrowing service in impacting on non-borrowing use. It would be interesting to find out if people use the library more for non-borrowing reasons if the borrowing provision is poor.
3. The data implied that the relationship between library staff and users might be an important factor influencing the way people choose to use their local library. Further research is needed to discover the real importance of library staff on library use.
4. The study revealed that the current performance measures of library effectiveness, which are largely fiscal in their approach, fail to accommodate all that libraries do exclusive of borrowing and issues statistics. Urgent research is needed into developing quantitative

measurement criteria that can measure the less tangible benefits of libraries

5. More extensive research is needed to determine the extent to which meaningful generalisations can be drawn from the findings of this localised study.

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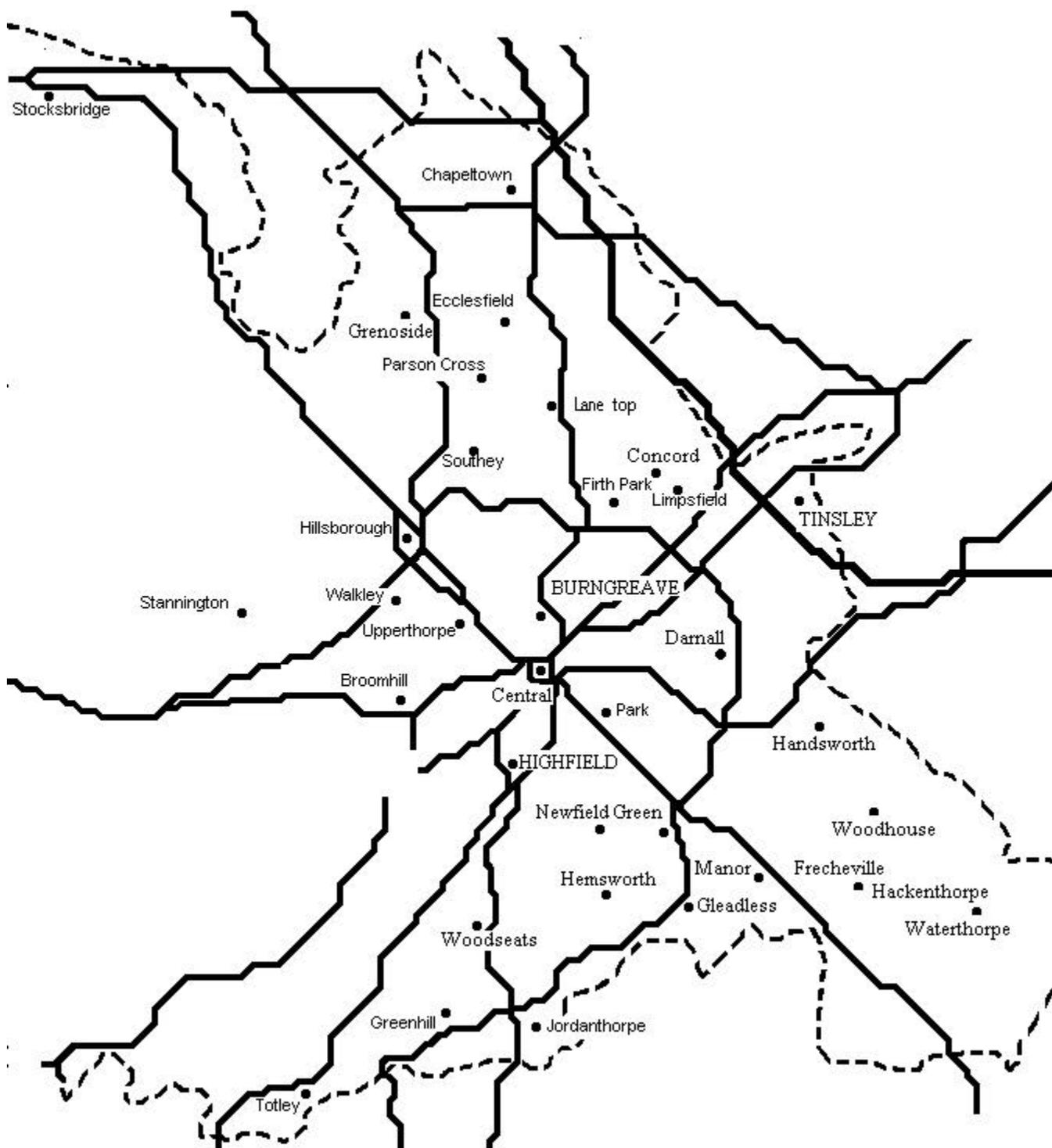
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APPENDIX 1: Map of Sheffield Libraries and Information Services



KEY: The three libraries surveyed in this study are in capital letters

APPENDIX 2 : User Questionnaire

1. Why have you come to the library today?
2. Why do you enjoy visiting the library?
3. Please say how important you think your local library is to the community.

4. How often do you visit the library? (please tick only one box)

First visit to the library

Three times a week or more often

Once or twice a week

Once every two weeks

Once every three weeks

Less often than once a month

5. Why do you visit the library as often as you do?

6. At which of the following times do you prefer to visit the library?

Morning (9-30 am – 12-30)

Afternoon (1-30 pm – 6 pm)

After 6 pm

Other, please give times

7. When you visit the library, how long do you spend on average? (please tick box)

Ten minutes or less

Half an hour

1-2 hours

More than 2 hours

8. Do you use the library for any of the following reasons? (please tick as many boxes as necessary)

To use the library as a place to study

To use the library as a place to read for leisure

To use a photocopier/fax machine

To ask staff for advice or information about something

To look at the notice board/exhibition

To meet other people

Any other reason? Please explain

None.

9. The library provides information/leaflets on (list below). Have you used the library to find information on any of these? (please tick as many boxes as necessary)

Jobs

Education and Training opportunities

Local Events and Information

Personal Information (e.g. Benefits, Legal, Financial or Housing)

None – why is this?

10. What other types of information, if any would you like to see available at the library?

11. Do you use the library to read newspapers/magazines?

Yes – which ones do you read? No, why is this?

12. Councillors Surgeries', poetry reading and similar events are held at the library. Have you attended any of these events recently?

Yes

No – if not, why?

13. What other sorts of events would you like to see in the library?

14. Have you used a computer in the library for any of these reasons?

Word Processing

Internet

CD ROMs

Computer databases

To use the library catalogue for information ('Help Yourself')

None – why is this?

15. Do you use the library to borrow books? (please tick box)

Yes – what types are they?

No – why is this?

16. Is it easy for you to find the books of your choice at the library? (Please tick box)

Yes No – why is this?

17. Which of the following do you borrow? (please tick as many boxes as necessary)

Large print books
Tapes
Talking books
Video's
Magazines
CDs
Others, give details

18. Which of the following languages do you read?

English
Pashto
Bengali
Arabic
Urdu
Chinese
Punjabi
Other, which?

19. What is your ethnic origin? (Please tick box)

White
Irish
Black-Caribbean
Black-African
Black other
Bangladeshi
Pakistani
Indian
Chinese
Other, give details

20. Are you

Male

Female

21. In what age group are you? (Please tick box)

16-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

53-64

65-74

75-84

85+

22. What is your occupation? (please tick box)

Look after the house

At college/university

Looking for work

Retired

Full time paid employment

Something else

Part time paid employment Self employed

APPENDIX 3: Interview Guide: Semi-structured Interviews with Library Assistants

1. Non borrowing use

In your opinion, what is the extent of use made of the library service beyond a source of books and other borrowing materials?

2. User Characteristics

Judging from your experience of working with the user community at this library, how is the library used by people from different ethnic groups:

Is there a difference in the way the library is used by the different ethnic communities? Please give examples.

3. Social Inclusion

Tell me what you think is the libraries contribution to social inclusion – a place where anyone can come.

How do you think the library helps certain groups of people, i.e.

Women, young people, elderly people, people with disabilities?

3. Lifelong Learning

Tell me what you think is the libraries role in promoting Lifelong Learning, i.e, helping people to learn above and beyond formal education?

4. Economic Vitality

Tell me how the library might contribute to the economic vitality of the local community

5. Possible Improvements

Is there anything that the library could 'do'/offer to make it more valuable to the people who use it?

6. Performance Indicators

Current Performance Indicators emphasise the importance of issue statistics as a measure of library 'success'. Given the other important functions of the library, can you suggest any other possible indicators of how well the library service is meeting the needs of its users?

7. Borrowing

From your experience, what are the things borrowed most from the library?

8. Frequency

What are the busiest periods of use of the library:

10. Value and Impact

What is the library offering that makes people visit it often?

APPENDIX 4.1: Interview Guide: Semi-structured Interviews: Cultural Information Officers

1. Non borrowing use

The subject of this research originated from the Library. In your opinion, why is it of importance?

What is the importance of the library service beyond a source of books and other borrowing materials? E.g. Tapes, CDs, Video's etc

Do you think this use is specific to this library or to libraries in general?

2. User Characteristics

Judging from your experience of working with the user community at this library, how is the library used by people from different ethnic groups:

Is there a difference in the way the library is used by the different ethnic communities?

Is the library used differently by 'white' people as those from other ethnic groups?

3. Social Inclusion

Tell me what you think is the libraries contribution to social inclusion – a place where anyone can come.

How do you think the library helps certain groups of people e.g: women, young people, elderly people, people with disabilities

4. Lifelong Learning

Tell me what you think is the libraries role in promoting Lifelong Learning, i.e, helping people to learn above and beyond formal education?

5. Economic Vitality

Tell me what you think about the library's contribution to the economic vitality of the local community

6. Possible Improvements

Is there anything that the library could 'do'/offer to make in more valuable to the people who use it?

7. Performance Indicators

Current Performance Indicators emphasise the importance of issue statistics as a measure of library 'success'. Given the other important functions of the library, can you suggest any other possible indicators of how well the library service is meeting the needs of its users?

8. Frequency

What are the busiest periods of library use?

9. Value and impact

What is the library offering that makes people visit it often?

APPENDIX 4.2: User characteristics: Gender

Gender	Total Sample	H Number respondents	B Number respondents	T Number respondents
Total sample 118 respondents		38 32%	34 29%	46 39%
<i>Male</i>	56 47.45%	21 55.26%	21 61.76%	14 30.43
Female	62 52.54%	17 44.73%	13 38.23%	32 69.56%

APPENDIX 4.3: User characteristics: Employment Status

Employment status	% Total Respondents	H Number respondents	B Number respondents	T Number respondents
	Total sample 118 respondents	38 32%	34 29%	46 39%
<i>Look after the house</i>	18 15.25%	2 5.26%	4 11.76%	12 26%
<i>Looking for work</i>	25 21.18%	7 18.42%	10 27.77%	8 17.39%
<i>Full-time paid employment</i>	15 12.71%	8 21%	2 5.88%	5 10.86%
<i>Part-time paid employment</i>	15 12.71%	6 15.78%	4 11.76%	5 10.86%
<i>Self employed</i>	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
<i>At college / university</i>	18 15.25%	4 10.52%	7 20.58%	7 15,21%
Retired	25 21.18%	11 28.94%	4 11.76%	10 21.73%

APPENDIX 4.4: User Characteristics: Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Total Sample	H Number respondents	B Number respondents	T Number respondents
		38 32%	34 29%	46 39%
White	54 45.76%	26 68.42%	11 32.35%	17 36.95%
Irish	1 0.8%	0 0%	1 2.94%	0 0%
Black-Caribbean	3 2.54%	0 0%	2 5.88%	1 2.17%
Black-African	4 3.38%	0 0%	2 5.88%%	2 4.34%
Black-Other	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
Bangladeshi	2 1.69%	0 0%	2 5.88%	0 0%
Pakistani	44 37.28%	5 13.15%	12 35.29%	27 58.69%
Indian	1 0.8%	0 0%	0 0%	1 2.17%
Chinese	3 2.54%	3 7.89%	0 0%	0 0%
Somali	2 1.69	0 0%	2 5.88%	0 0%
Other	5 3.38	2 5.26%	3 8.82%	0 0%

Total sample 118 respondents.

APPENDIX 4.5: User characteristics: Age groups

Age group	% Total Respondents	H Number respondents	B Number respondents	T Number respondents
	Total sample 118 respondents	38 32%	34 29%	46 39%
16-24	19 16.10%	4 10.52%	3 30.95%	12 26.08%
25-34	32 27.11%	8 21.5%	13 38.23%	11 23.91%
35-44	20 16.94%	9 23.68%	7 20.58%	4 8.69%
45-54	15 12.71%	4 10.52%	5 13.15%	6 13.04%
55-64	12 10.16%	5 13.15%	2 5.88%	5 10.86%
65-74	11 9.32%	5 13.15%	4 11.76%	2 4.34%
75-84	5 4.23%	2 5.26%	0 0%	5 10.86%
85+	4 3.38%	1 2.63%	0 0%	3 6.52%