

AN INVESTIGATION INTO POLITICAL AND
PROFESSIONAL ATTITUDES REGARDING
COMMERCIALISED MODELS OF SERVICE PROVISION
IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents an examination of professional and political views on commercialised models of service provision in public libraries. Face-to-face interviews carried out with 6 chief librarians (or senior library managers) and 4 local elected members, provided qualitative data upon which to compare and evaluate professional and political attitudes towards several different aspects of commercialisation.

Firstly, opinions on private sector involvement in public libraries are discussed, with specific attention being paid to the Private Finance Initiative, outsourcing, and contractual and partnership arrangements with the private sector. Next, discussion moves to the issue of charging for library services and presents a range of professional and political opinions surrounding different types of charges in public libraries. The retail model of service provision is then explored in some detail, providing valuable insight into professional and political views on comparison, collaboration, and competition with the retail sector. A final discussion chapter throws light upon participants' different perspectives on the future impact of commercialisation in public libraries.

A principal conclusion to be drawn from discussion of these issues is that there is no overall agreement between or amongst the library professionals and elected members in this study, with regards to whether commercialised models of service provision are appropriate for public libraries. Taken together, political and professional responses to the aspects of commercialisation explored are based on a mixture of ideology and pragmatism.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Setting the study in context

By way of introduction, it serves a useful purpose to briefly explore different aspects of commercialisation and the ways in which commercial influences and ideas have in recent history, affected the public library service and the wider environment in which in which it operates. This will hopefully help to clarify what commercialised models of service provision could be taken to mean in the context of public services in general, and the public library service in particular.

At first glance, one might genuinely question the role that commercialism, more generally associated with private sector interests and based on concepts of buying and selling, markets and profit-making, has to play in the provision of a public library service. Though in their early days public libraries in both the UK and America received donations from private benefactors (Adam Smith Institute 1986; Knight 2003), universal taxation has always been their main source of funding. Very much part of the public domain and guided by a public rather than a commercial ethos, the public library has been seen to embody “some of the most important radical ideals - equality, provision for need rather than commercial profit, educational advancement, free access to, and free expression of, information and ideas” (Usherwood 1989: 12).

The public library service however, operates within a complex and changing political and economic climate. In common with other public services,

it has not remained immune to increasing commercialisation pressures – arising from globalisation and associated pressures to liberalise state-subsidised services – and manifested in Britain’s new “enterprise culture” of the 1980s and 1990s (Farnham and Horton 1996: 1). From the 1980s onwards in fact, the UK’s public services very much felt the far-reaching implications of an emergent and dominant New Right ideology, which favoured market-led approaches to service provision, and sought to reduce the scope of the public sector by introducing commercial practices from the private sector (Johnson 1997). Over the long term, business ethics and commercial values have continued to infiltrate public service management, and have encouraged a “move from professional and political to market based accountability” (Walsh 1995: xxi).

As might be expected, such developments gave rise to intense ideological debate in the 1980s and 1990s “about the nature of the role of the public library in society, about how it is financed and about who should deliver information services to the public within an enterprise culture, a Market Economy” (Astbury 1994: 131). For the New Right, particularly under the government of Margaret Thatcher, the answers to these questions were very clear. The *Ex libris* report published by the right-wing Adam Smith Institute recommended that the public monopoly of libraries must be ended immediately, arguing:

“It is only through charging economic prices and competing for customers in the market place that the real level of public demand for goods and services can be determined and a proper allocation of resources made” (1986: 40).

A later Government Green Paper made explicit its desire “to enlarge the scope for library authorities to generate increased revenues by joint ventures with the private sector and charging for specialised services” (*Financing Our Public Library Service* 1988: 1). Suffering severe funding cutbacks and under increasing philosophical attack from proponents of the New Right ideology (King 1988), the public library service’s future in the 1980s, looked bleak.

Into the 1990s, debate on the future of the public library continued to be dominated by issues of compulsive competitive tendering and charging for library services (Black and Crann 2002). At the very heart of this debate seemed to be the crucial question as to how the public library could “develop its identity as a public good in an increasingly commercialised world” (Comedia 1993: 54). In many respects, this is an issue with which the library profession today is still grappling, for there has been no neat reversal of commercial trends and no sudden retreat from the principles of new managerialism with the electoral victory of the New Labour party in 1997. In spite of a new government which was clearly more supportive and appreciative than its immediate predecessors of public libraries’ valuable social roles and economic contributions, the neo-liberal consensus built under Thatcher has, some believe, remained firmly entrenched (Webster 1999).

Commercial influences and private sector interests have thus continued to play a role in public service provision across the board. This is in part due to the fact that New Labour, whilst initially keen to find a replacement to CCT,

“agreed in principle with the need for the private sector to be involved in the delivery of public services” (Liddle 1999: 1). The Best Value regime was thus introduced to “improve the quality of local services, and the efficiency and economy with which they are delivered” (Crownshaw 1998: 5). Local authorities have subsequently been challenged to consider whether public services can work more efficiently and effectively in partnership with other bodies, including those in the private sector.

Having in the previous decade struggled against political imperatives which actively encouraged and endorsed full-scale commercialisation of public libraries, some in the library profession felt understandably hopeful that in this new political climate, there would be “much more scope for local government and professional bodies to be involved in designing and applying Best Value” (Liddle 1998:). There were certainly indications that the less prescriptive nature of the Best Value regime would allow for greater choice and flexibility in public service provision. The claimed intention of government is “to improve the performance and competitiveness of services, not create a particular model of provision” (Watson 2001: 8). More sceptical professional commentators have however, seen Best Value as little more than a disguised attempt “to open up public libraries to different suppliers, thereby creating a market environment and paving the way for the privatisation of public libraries” (Rikowki 2002: 74).

Whilst the current Best Value regime has given rise to different interpretations, what *is* clear is that charging, contract management, and the introduction of internal markets - described by Walsh (1995) as processes of

marketisation – are aspects of commercialisation which are all thinkable under the Best Value agenda. They have remained relevant, if not contentious issues, in relation to public library provision. Outsourcing in particular, was found by Ball and Earl (2002: 197) to be “relatively widespread and sophisticated” under the impetus of Best Value.

Aside from Best Value imperatives, some of the most recent and influential publications on public libraries seem to be encouraging open-mindedness when it comes to private sector involvement and commercial influences. There has been an emphasised need for increased innovation and partnership working (Framework for the Future 2003), further consideration of private finance initiatives to create better library buildings (House of Commons 2005), and the possible incorporation of ideas and practices from the retail sector (Audit Commission 2002; Coates 2004). A perceived need to address the widely documented problem of declining book issues and visitor numbers in recent years (Audit Commission 2002; Leadbeater 2003; Coates 2004) may also be encouraging more radical solutions and commercial approaches to service provision. Butterworth (2000) notes examples of enterprise within the profession where managers are seeking innovative ways to generate income to supplement continually tight budgets. These might include for example, sale of memorabilia, charging for marketed services, private sponsorship of library services and activities, or even lending consideration to direct charging (Knight 2003). Consideration is also being given to lessons that can be learnt from the

commercial sector's use of marketing techniques and branding (Hood and Henderson 2005).

This gives a very brief overview of the ways in which commercial influences and practices have in the past and present, affected the public library. An examination into current political and professional views hopes to delve deeper to uncover the realities of commercialised models in public libraries from the perspective of some of those with responsibility for, or an interest in, library service provision.

1.2 Previous research in this area

Though much has been written about aspects of commercialisation in public services such as libraries, there has not been a great deal of exploratory research into how commercial influences and models are viewed by people whose working roles and responsibilities relate directly to the provision of public services. In specific relation to the public library service, a few past research studies can be found which have directly or indirectly explored particular aspects of commercialisation from the perspective of chief librarians (Eastell 1994; Jones-Evans 1995), national politicians (Pearce 2003; Pearce and Usherwood 2003), and local elected members (Usherwood 1993). Usherwood's research with elected members in different local authorities revealed a diverse range of political opinions on issues such as contracting-out and charging, leading him to conclude that "politicians of different political persuasions do hold different views about the way the public library service should be financed

and organized” (1993: 209). Studies by Eastell (1994) on CCT in public libraries, and by Jones-Evans (1995) on income generation and profit-making activities, both illuminated different professional perspectives on certain aspects of commercialisation.

The author of this dissertation thus recognised a valuable opportunity to examine a range of professional views *and* political views, looking not only for similarities and differences in opinion within each camp, but investigating what comparisons could be drawn between political and professional perspectives.

Past research in this area also clearly leaves unanswered the crucial question of how library professionals and elected members *today* view commercialisation and its impact on the public library service. Section 1.1 of this introduction sought to place the development of commercialised models and influences in its environmental context. Global pressures, changes in national government, and reforms to local government, may all be seen as having had an impact on the environment in which the UK’s public library service operates and in which those with responsibility for public libraries work. It does not seem unreasonable to assume that such changes might have also affected the attitudes of those with responsibility for public library provision. On the other hand, political and professional views on commercialisation today may not be very different from those expressed a decade ago or more. A central purpose of carrying out this research is to avoid making any false assumptions based on

past conclusions, and to provide a current and accurate snapshot of the thoughts of several library professionals and elected members on this subject.

1.3 Aims and objectives

The overall aim of this dissertation is to examine professional and political attitudes towards commercialised models of service provision in public libraries. As indicated in this chapter's general introduction to the topic of commercialisation in public libraries, there are many aspects to this subject, not all of which can be explored in great detail or depth within the time available to conduct this research study. In view of this consideration, this dissertation aims to examine political and professional views on the following aspects of commercialisation which the author, having carried out an initial literature review, believes to be central to the topic and will allow for a rounded analysis of the subject:

- Private sector involvement in public libraries (focusing primarily on outsourcing, PFI, and partnerships and contracts with the private sector, rather than the issue of private sponsorship)
- Charging for library services
- The retail model of service provision

In view of the research gaps identified in Section 1.2, the specific research objectives of this dissertation are:

- *To obtain current professional and political views on issues such as outsourcing, charging, and retail influences in the public library service.*
- *To investigate ways in which views on commercialisation held by the library professionals and elected members involved in this study, converge or conflict.*
- *To investigate whether there are differences/similarities in attitudes towards commercialised models of library service provision between authorities under different political control.*
- *To gain insight into professional and political perspectives on the sort of impact commercialisation has had up to now in public libraries, and might have in the future.*

1.4 Dissertation overview

Chapter 2 will provide a discussion and evaluation of the research methods used to carry out this study. It will explain the choice of methodological approach taken before moving on to describe how this approach was applied in designing the research instrument, and then collecting and analysing the data. Results chapters 3, 4 and 5 provide discussion and analysis

of the views expressed by library professionals and elected members on the three fore-mentioned aspects of commercialisation: private sector involvement in public libraries, charging for library services, and the retail model of service provision. A final discussion chapter considers the future impact of commercialisation in public libraries, based on participants' general feelings, hopes or fears about the issues explored in the preceding chapters. Conclusions about the data gathered from each chapter will be drawn together and presented to form overall conclusions in Chapter 7.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Methodological approach

Once the overall research aim of the study had been clarified, it was necessary to decide upon the most appropriate methodological approach to take to fulfil this aim. It was the researcher's intention to explore and examine the views of study participants, as expressed in their own words. It was therefore immediately apparent that a qualitative approach, with its emphasis on words rather than numbers in the collection and analysis of data, would be more suitable than a quantitative approach, which typically employs measurements to test or prove a theory (Bryman 2001).

Having carried out an initial literature review, the researcher set out with some knowledge of issues and ideas that may arise. It was hoped and expected however, that the collection of qualitative data from the study's participants would generate the key theory upon which findings and conclusions would be based. According to Patton (2002: 129), "one of the strengths of qualitative methods is the inductive, naturalistic inquiry strategy of approaching a setting without predetermined hypotheses. Rather, understanding and theory emerge from fieldwork experiences and are grounded in the data". In this study, understanding of themes and concepts has been built and formed on the basis of what participants have indicated is relevant to them about the topic. Research has thus been guided by a grounded theory approach, in which "the researcher

attempts to derive a general theory of a process, action or interaction grounded in the views of participants...” (Creswell 2003: 14).

The participants’ views were obtained via in-depth interviews, a commonly used qualitative research instrument which “is often chosen as the primary method by which to study the subjective views participants hold of a particular situation or event” (Mellon 1990: 47). Denzin and Lincoln (1998: 11) feel that in-depth interviews carry the advantage of providing the researcher with “rich descriptions of a subject or perspective”. It was hoped that personally interviewing professionals and politicians with an interest in public libraries would produce in-depth, detailed discussion and help the researcher to understand the issues from the crucial perspective of those being interviewed.

2.2 Selecting the sample

As this dissertation sought to examine professional and political attitudes, it was decided that it would be most valuable to hear the views of professional library staff with responsibility for running the service (for example, Chief Librarians) and local politicians with responsibility for, or some knowledge of, library matters (for example, Cabinet members with responsibility for libraries and Opposition members).

Chief Librarians and politicians in 12 authorities within the author’s locality, that is, Yorkshire and surrounding counties, were selected as a sample. From this, it was hoped that at least 10 interviews could be arranged and

conducted. Whereas such a small sample would not fit the purposes of quantitative research, Patton (2002: 244) argues that there are no rules about sample size in qualitative inquiry; rather, “it depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with the available time and resources”. The final point in this list was indeed an important practical consideration for the researcher. The relatively short time span of the study demanded that the sample size was kept small enough to be manageable and that the costs of travelling to conduct the chosen method of face-to-face interviews did not exceed the researcher’s financial means. Furthermore, the researcher’s overall aim to gain knowledge and understanding of professional and political views on commercialisation in public libraries was appropriately met by studying a select number of information-rich cases from which to elicit useful insights and in-depth understanding (Flick 2002; Glazier and Powell 1992).

Although no major balance could be achieved in terms of geographical location, a concerted effort was made to ensure that the sample included variation in terms of type of local authority and political composition. This second contextual variable was particularly important given the study’s objective to compare and contrast views of professionals and politicians from authorities of different political composition. Due to the larger proportion of Labour-controlled authorities in the local area, it was unavoidable that more Labour authorities were selected for sample. The author was pleased therefore to receive positive responses from a Conservative-controlled authority and an authority where No Overall Control existed.

2.2.1 Making contact with potential participants

Chief Librarians from the 12 selected local authorities were contacted by letter (see Appendix 1.1) in Mid-May. Most of these responded positively to the letter's request for an interview, agreeing to participate themselves or agreeing to participation by a senior librarian or equivalent in their authority. As a matter of courtesy, the letter also requested their permission to contact councillors in that authority at a later date. Nobody specified at this time that they had any objections to contact being made with local councillors. The author therefore went on to write to the appropriate elected members of those councils in which interviews with the Chief Librarians had been arranged (see Appendix 1.2).

Securing the participation of elected members proved somewhat problematic. Several of the elected members contacted did not respond to the interview request, although sending polite follow-up e mails did produce one further positive response. The problem of gaining access to elites with busy schedules and heavy workloads had been identified in an earlier dissertation by Pearce (2003), who noted that "agendas that seem to the potential respondent to be highly sensitive, peripheral to his or her interests, or refer to matters which might show them to be inexpert, will create access problems (Moyser quoted in Pearce 2003: 18). Such factors may have accounted for a low response rate from the Cabinet members and Opposition members approached in this study and the following reasons might also be suggested:

- In some authorities, elections had just taken place, resulting in a change in roles and responsibilities (for example, in at least 2 authorities, it was known that the Cabinet member with responsibility for library matters had recently changed).
- One library professional interviewed advised that it would be inappropriate to interview the newly-elected Cabinet member in that authority, in light of the fact that he and his colleagues were in the very early stages of developing a working relationship with that person.
- Several library professionals expressed personal difficulty in gaining frequent access to the Cabinet member with responsibility for libraries in their authority. This may be partly attributable to the fact that under the Cabinet system in local government, one council member may be responsible for managing a huge portfolio, of which libraries are only a very minor component. In some cases, this may raise questions about how much time and attention can be devoted to library matters.

In total, 4 interviews with local elected members were conducted (the other 6 with library professionals). To ensure that enough attention was paid to political attitudes and to compliment the data collected from interviews with councillors, the author therefore drew upon political views and considerations expressed in the literature, including relevant information given in corporate plans on council websites.

2.2.2 Sampling issues and limitations

Given the relatively small number of interviews conducted, findings of this study are not intended to be representative of all local authorities and no blanket or generalized statements can be made about the attitudes of library professionals or politicians regarding the topic under study. This problem of generalizability in qualitative research methods has been widely acknowledged (Flick 2002; Patton 2002). Whereas quantitative research can be said to hold external validity in that results can be applied to new settings, people and samples (Creswell 2003), qualitative inquiry may be better understood in terms of 'internal validity', which Bryman (2001: 271-2) defines as "a good match between researchers' observations and the theoretical ideas as they develop". Through developing a close rapport with interview participants and building up a good contextual understanding of their beliefs and attitudes, it is hoped that the findings of this study will accurately reflect what has been discovered and can be judged on the principles of internal validity.

2.3 Designing the Interview Schedule

For a number of reasons, it was decided that the interviews should be semi-structured. Firstly, in order to achieve comparability of results, it was necessary to put the same statements and questions to each interviewee. Secondly, having carried out an initial but extensive literature review, the researcher had identified specific issues upon which the research study would focus and most of the questions posed sought to address these particular aspects

of commercialisation. At the same time, in order to understand the issues from the perspective of the participants, it was necessary to allow them sufficient leeway to respond in their own words and in their own way. The interview process was thus designed and conducted to incorporate some flexibility, placing emphasis upon “how the interviewee frames and understands the issues – that is, what the interviewee views as important in explaining and understanding events, patterns, and forms of behaviour” (Bryman 2001: 314).

The interview schedule consists primarily of statements with which the interviewees were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement, according to levels on a Likert scale (see Appendix 5). A Likert scale is commonly used when measuring attitudes and was felt to be useful for the purpose of comparing participants’ responses. One problem with solely relying on Likert scale responses is that “there is no guarantee that when one respondent says she ‘Agrees’ with something that she is not making as strong a statement as another respondent who says he ‘Strongly agrees’ (Foddy 1993: 162). For this reason, the interviewees were asked to qualify their chosen response by explaining why they had answered in that way. It was hoped that these additional statements would serve to provide the sort of rich and detailed data expected from qualitative research.

The interview schedule was divided into 3 main sections (Section A, B and C) which related directly to the different aspects of commercialisation chosen as a focus for this study. Questions in a final section (Section D) were designed to obtain interviewees’ general perceptions of the topic of

commercialisation, and its future impact in public libraries. The statements used to formulate questions in Section A, B and C were taken directly or adapted from quotes found in the literature, some of which represented strong opinion and were deliberately provocative. As this topic of this study raises some controversial issues, it was felt that using statements and quotes on which the interviewees' could comment avoided the problem of asking open questions that might be construed as leading questions. A number of open questions were incorporated into the schedule however, in recognition of the fact that this type of question also allows interviewees to say what they think with "richness and spontaneity" (Oppenheim 1992: 81).

2.4 Collecting the data

As has been observed, qualitative researchers, in seeking to understand the world through their participants' eyes, can be greatly aided by establishing close involvement, a good rapport, and credibility with interviewees (Bryman 2002; Creswell 2003). Face-to-face interviews provided the interviewer with the opportunity to build up trust and rapport through the use of positive body language. As Losee and Worley (1993: 143) assert, "an interviewer who appears interested and attentive can elicit insights and details that might otherwise be withheld (p. 143) In the majority of interviews conducted for this study, the use of body language to encourage open communication, and non-verbal cues to indicate understanding or encourage participants to elaborate on certain issues, enhanced the richness of responses obtained.

2.4.1 Tape recording

Prior to the interview, the interviewer sought and gained permission from all participants to tape record the interview. It was clearly explained that the contents of the tape would be used solely by the interviewer for the purposes of transcribing fully and accurately what had been said. Tape recordings of the interviews proved invaluable in allowing the interviewer to concentrate fully on the interview process itself and be more alert and responsive to what was said than would have been possible if note-taking had been the primary means of data collection. Full transcription of interviews allowed for clearer analysis not only of what was said but also how it was said, which as Bryman (2001) points out, is crucially important to qualitative studies which seek to understand the strength and depth of peoples' feelings.

2.4.2 Timing and flexibility

It was anticipated that interviews would take approximately 45 minutes and this expectation was conveyed to participants in recognition of the fact that many of them had busy work schedules. In practice, the varying willingness of participants to address the issues in full meant that the duration of interviews varied from half an hour to just over an hour. In some cases, the short duration of interviews was partly attributable to the fact that questions were answered in insufficient detail. The interviewer was somewhat reluctant to pressurize respondents into giving fuller answers if their general mannerism and body

language indicated they were unwilling to do so. It is duly recognised that a more experienced interviewer may have been able to deploy probing techniques more effectively to elicit more detailed responses from some less forth-coming respondents. However, allowing respondents freedom and flexibility to express their views as fully as they wished, worked positively in many cases. More detailed responses were not constrained by time factors or a tightly fixed interview schedule, and many interviewees were happy for the interview to run over 45 minutes. In fact, ‘rambling’ or going off at tangents was actively encouraged because it offered valuable insight into what the interviewee saw as significant and relevant about the topic (Bryman 2001).

2.4.3 Ethical issues and informed consent

Prior to interview, the researcher produced an Informed Consent Form which was read and signed by all participants. This acknowledged that participants’ rights would be protected during and after data collection (Creswell 2003). Given that many of the issues raised in this study are politically-sensitive in nature, fully informing participants of their rights and stressing confidentiality, also acted as a threat-reducing strategy to hopefully increase the interviewees’ level of trust (Foddy 1993). All participants agreed that they may be identified by name in the dissertation report [a list of participating subjects and their positions can be found in Appendix 2). In obtaining such consent, as when collecting the data, due care was taken to not to intimidate or pressurise participants. Furthermore, when participants have given ‘off the record’

information or requested that certain information not be included in the report, this right has been fully upheld.

2.5 Analysing and interpreting the data

Finch (1990: 132) argues that effective analysis of qualitative data requires a series of processes including “familiarization – building up knowledge of themes and issues contained in the data, systematic description of the contents of the data [...], and reflection of that description, looking at patterns, causal links and divergence”. Such steps and processes were taken in analysing the results of this study, though it must be noted that they began during, and continued after, data collection. As Patton (2002: 436) notes, “the fluid and emergent nature of naturalistic inquiry makes the distinction between data gathering and analysis less [than] absolute”. In collecting and transcribing the data, the researcher discovered emergent patterns and became more alert to themes that came up repeatedly in interviews and provided ideas about directions for analysis.

In interpreting and then presenting the findings of the study, the researcher made a concerted effort to remain as unbiased and neutral as possible. It must be recognised however, that the personal interpretation brought to qualitative data analysis is unavoidable (Creswell 2003) and at many times there was a strong temptation for the researcher to make judgements on the findings based on personal opinions, which needed to be kept in check. Patton (2002: 51) believes that in qualitative research, “the investigator’s commitment is to

understand the world as it unfolds, be true to complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerge, and be balanced in reporting both confirmatory and disconfirming evidence with regard to any conclusions offered”. Care has thus been taken in this study to refrain from manipulating data for the purposes of reaching easy conclusions, and to avoid any temptation to exclude information which runs contrary to the beliefs or the author, other researchers, or even the majority of participants in the study.

In presenting analysis of data, the author has used direct quotations from interview transcriptions to make explicit the evidence on which interpretations are based (Slater 1990) and to allow that this evidence is open to secondary scrutiny and analysis (Bryman 2001).

The views of the participants of this study are placed in the context of the relevant literature. As such, the arguments and evidence presented in the literature have been analysed alongside the data obtained from the interviews, and are incorporated into the results chapters.

2.6 Reflections

Generally speaking, participants had no difficulty in understanding the questions posed and were willing and able to offer detailed responses. This was particularly true of the Chief Librarians, many of whom had worked in the

public library profession for many years and could provide valuable accounts of changes that had occurred over that time.

The same questions were asked of library professionals and elected members so that responses could be compared. In a couple of interviews with the latter group, the meanings of questions needed to be clarified by the interviewer. The researcher now recognises that some interview questions and statements may have been more geared towards the Chief Librarians, who had more knowledge of professional issues and developments. A couple of elected members for example, questioned what was meant by 'professional values' (Q9).

A few participants also commented that for certain statements, it was difficult to give a response which corresponded with any of the options available on the Likert scale. Question 5 and 6 were seen to raise particular issues in this respect. Though this difficulty did raise questions about the appropriateness of Likert scale questions, the follow-up question to each statement enabled respondents to express the reasons why particular statements raised issues and complexities.

Interestingly, Section C on the retail model of service provision generated the most discussion by far. The quantity and richness of data collected from participants here could possibly merit a research study in its own right. Rather than attempting to explore in detail *all* the issues raised by participants,

the author was, in view of time constraints, compelled to be selective to some extent, bringing out the most prevalent themes and concepts which emerged from the interviews. The following chapters provide detailed discussion and analysis of these themes.

3. PRIVATE SECTOR INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

3.1 The Private Finance Initiative: practical and ideological considerations

The Private Finance Initiative has, in recent years, been playing an important role in widening the scope of private/public partnerships (Liddle 1998). “[Enabling] local authorities to achieve a major investment project and spread the cost over the life of a long contract,” it is a procurement solution now being used to design, build, finance and operate several public libraries, such as the impressive new library in Bournemouth (Levett 2003: 61). Presented by its proponents as “simply one way of delivering better public services” (Bingle in Coulson 2005), the PFI has indeed on the face of it, achieved great results for many public libraries, Bournemouth library and the hugely popular Ideas Store in Tower Hamlets (CABE 2004; Library and Information Update 2005), being just two examples. Several responses obtained in this study however, reveal considerable reservations, on the part of both library professionals and elected members, about the appropriateness of PFI in the area of public libraries.

Some elected members expressed caution about PFI on ideological grounds. Annette Noskwith (Cons) and Alec Rowley (Cons) felt that PFIs were fundamentally inappropriate for public libraries which should be kept within, and financed by, local authorities. Similarly, Bob Janes (Lab) commented:

“If you’re just talking about provision of a new building, that’s fine. But if we’re taking about private finance in terms of library development and control, I’m not interested”.

Almost ten years ago, Conway (1996) found it unsurprising that local government should consider the ideological issues of PFI, which in his view, reduced the flexibility and control of local authorities and was “designed to effectively make the public sector the tenant of the private sector” (p.27). For some members of local government in this study, there clearly remained similar suspicions about the ideological implications that lay behind PFI.

In the main however, reservations expressed about PFI centred around its practical and financial implications rather than purely ideological considerations. Cabinet member Simon Cooke (Cons), made a point of saying that he did not have a problem with PFI on ideological grounds, but because he thought it did not generally provide the most cost-effective option. This was a comment echoed by several library professionals, one of whom stated:

“I think they’re an extremely expensive way to build a library building. They cost a lot more than if we used what used to be, you know, under public procurement. And I don’t think they give value for money” (Janice Maskort).

David Fay identified an additional practical cost in terms of the extensive time needed to prepare a PFI bid. For the majority of library respondents however, it was the long-term costs of PFI that were the main source of concern, summed up here by Ian Watson:

“Whilst PFI would enable us to offer services today, in 25 years time I can anticipate that there will be a huge public sector burden, just to meet the repayments on these PFI schemes, possibly after the buildings cease to have any beneficial sort of function”.

With a view to the longer-term, many respondents recognised that PFI was becoming a mainstream way of obtaining funding in the public sector and appeared in the words of Steve Bashforth, to be “moulding the future”. For public libraries, it was certainly felt by the House of Commons Culture Media and Sports Committee (2005) that the PFI can play an important and extended role. Whilst many library participants recognised that PFI might be as Cabinet Member Simon Cooke put it, “the only show in town if you’re looking at major investment in new library facilities”, it was not felt to provide the best solution in every case or local authority. Martin Molloy commented:

“The issue for many authorities is not about needing a new PFI super library. [In Derbyshire], it is to replace the small network of libraries in rural areas. Now they tend not to come up to it in terms of PFI because the figures that you’re talking about just aren’t big enough”.

Both he and Bob Janes (Lab) emphasised the importance of looking at community partnerships and possibilities for use of joint accommodation with other public services, such as social services or health centres. In fact for libraries, partnership funding from the *public* sector “has been the most frequent source of money for extended or additional services” (LGA 2004: vii). Steve Bashforth also reiterated the need to be inventive about getting funds for buildings, stating:

“There’s a lot of partnership working. I mean, we’ll partner anywhere if it can improve what we’ve got”.

The professional body CILIP has recently urged that library building improvement should be achieved through a partnership fund between national and local government and the lottery, and is in the words of Chief Executive Bob Mckee, “not something that can be left to the PFI” (Library and Information Update 2005: 4). In the meantime, there is a perceived need amongst several of this study’s participants, to be realistic and pragmatic when it comes to improving library facilities. If private sector finance is felt by the local authority to be the best means of achieving this, then it presents an opportunity to be seriously considered (Simon Cooke, Cons). Several authorities have seized these opportunities, Sheffield City Council (2004) which has seen a major new library opening recently at Ecclesall through partnership with the private sector, being one such example.

3.2 Working with the private sector: contracts and partnerships

Private sector involvement in public libraries is in fact, nothing new (Beauchamp 1996). For many years now, libraries have been outsourcing certain service functions to private sector suppliers (Liddle 1998; Pantry and Griffiths 2005.) Participants in this study identified a great number which either were at the present time or could in the future, be contracted out. The following functions with the number of times mentioned were as follows:

- Stock selection and book supply (8)
- Cataloguing *and* bibliographic services (6)
- Provision of IT equipment and library management systems (2)
- Business information services (2)
- Serials budgets (1)
- Building maintenance (1)

It is interesting to note that stock selection and book supply were the most frequently mentioned. Shortly after all the interviews had taken place, a report carried out on behalf of the DCMS and MLA strongly recommended supplier selection of books for libraries and found that “the greatest efficiency gains could be made if all library services placed the same requirements on suppliers and negotiated through one mechanism with the suppliers of books” (PKF 2005: 4).

With regards as to whether any, or all, of these library functions should be contracted out to private companies, the most common response from both library participants and elected members was an objection to the word *should* in this context. Interestingly, the research study by Eastell (1994) on the possible introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering in public libraries also found a number of Chief Librarians objecting specifically to the compulsory element of CCT. The participants of this current study work within the Best Value regime which unlike that of CCT, might be generally viewed as permissive rather than prescriptive in nature (Crowshaw 1998). Out of those participants, three Conservative elected members and three library professionals (Farrington, Molloy and Watson) felt they could neither agree nor disagree with the blanket statement put to them about contracting out. They expressed a need to know the particular circumstances of each case and to weigh up the benefits and disadvantages to make a decision about whether in-house or outsourced provision would be best. In accordance with Best Value principles, there was thus evidence of some willingness to consider in each case, whether traditional ways of operating were necessarily the most efficient and effective for delivering the best service for the community (Ball and Earl 2002). Annette Noskwith (Cons) for example, said of contracting-out any particular library function:

“If it has been investigated for Best Value from all points of view, not just the financial point of view, but also the benefit of the user, then fine.”

In their pragmatism, it would thus seem that a number of respondents in this study could, to some extent, sign up to the “what counts is what works” philosophy said to be at the heart of the government’s Best Value approach (Hebson et al. 2003: 487). However, subsequent analysis of participants’ attitudes regarding professional values and local accountability issues in partnerships with the private sector, revealed tensions and conflicts which might be said to be linked to the important question of “what works for whom?” (Maile and Hoggett 2001: 514).

3.2.1 Professional values and responsibilities

The emergence in recent years of the ‘new public management’, has precipitated an intentional “shift away from supply-led services to demand-led services, no longer dominated by professional providers but responsive to the needs of those being served” (Farnham and Horton 1996: 260). Most participants in this study refer to the need to be responsive to library users’ needs and several emphasise the need for pragmatism in making decisions about the most viable means of achieving this. There was however a natural reluctance, particularly on the part of library professionals, to relinquish too much control or responsibility to private contractors. For the majority of library respondents, it was imperative to clearly specify contract conditions so that the checks and balances were there to ensure that professional standards were adhered to.

Several library participants were in fact, dubious as to whether certain library services could be outsourced without abdicating professional responsibility. Janice Maskort recognised that outsourcing may be appropriate for mechanistic operations such as cleaning, but pointed out that “delivering a library service is a lot more complex than that”. Martin Molloy agreed that delivering library services to meet the complex needs of today’s communities demanded professional input and expertise:

“I’d be very concerned for example, if children’s librarians were not still closely involved in selecting material for young people. And my reason for that is that those children’s librarians have a skill and expertise that’s been built up over years and their track record is excellent [...] I don’t sign up to the view that anything can be done by the private sector”.

This view certainly lends credibility to the argument that for providers of many public services, aspirations to high quality run contrary to moves towards the “deprofessionalisation’ of public services - seen in measures to dilute professional training standards, use of ancillary staff or outsourcing – and induced by pressures for less costly delivery systems” (Painter and Issac-Henry 1997: 289). Ian Watson reiterated the point that cost-effectiveness was not the only consideration that the public library service needed to take into account, commenting:

“If the reason for outsourcing is to do something at a lower cost and if it’s at the sacrifice of quality, then I would seriously question the rationale for that”.

Elected members Alec Rowley (Cons), Annette Noskwith (Cons), and Bob Janes (Lab) all stressed the importance of professional values in maintaining quality service standards in libraries. For Bob Janes, the library profession's values were nurtured within the public sector:

“I think one of the great strengths of the public library service is that we do have a public sector commitment to professionalism”.

Simon Cooke (Cons) took the opposite view:

“You know, there's this thing about the public sector ethos and service, and that service doesn't exist in the private sector. And I don't buy it [...] I don't think there's any difference in terms of serving the public between the public sector and the private sector.

For some commentators however, the primary profit motive of the private sector (Ascher 1987; Farnham and Horton 1996) is at odds with the traditional public sector ethos which is seen to be based on a more complex set of public service values, including “equity, fairness, community, citizenship, justice and democracy” (Rouse in Hebson et al. 2003: 485). A number of library participants recognised this fundamental difference:

“We all want to be effective and efficient but what drives the private sector is profit and loyalty to share holders. And what drives us is a different set of values” (Janice Maskort).

Some feel however, that an over-emphasis on professional values is sometimes used to disguise complacency and inertia, when in fact the profession needs to be more open to challenge on ‘the way we do things around here’” (Ruse 1998: 31). A couple of this study’s library participants agreed that professional values could be misguided and in certain cases, act as a barrier to finding the best ways of delivering today’s library services:

“When we talk about professional values, we’re talking about the outcomes of those professional values...what happens in communities. We’re not talking about professional values that mean this is the easiest way to organise it for professional librarians” (Martin Molloy).

“There’s too much professionalism amongst some of the older staff. The classification of books for example...it’s very nice but what’s the sense in it? [...] There are different sort of professional requirements now. There are whole areas which the profession needs to be getting some training on...tendering, procurement...” (Steve Bashforth).

Anne Farrington and Martin Molloy nevertheless believed that professional input in decision-making was crucial and could be best achieved if services were kept within the local authority’s remit. Here, in Molloy’s opinion,

professional views and values could be validated or blended in that they were “balanced by politicians making judgements based on what they know about the community, and other officers too with other experiences putting in their view”. Some feel however, that this sort of professional input and validation has been more difficult to achieve since the Cabinet system was introduced following the passing of the Local Government Act in 2000 (BBC 2001). Replacing the traditional committee system in many authorities, the Cabinet system has had in Janice Maskort’s view, some negative side-effects. She explained:

“Committee was a much better system in terms of maintaining contact between councillors and officers because you had regular meetings, you kept your members informed, whereas now the only people who are informed to the point of information overload are Cabinet members”.

A couple of other library participants referred to difficulty in maintaining frequent contact with busy Cabinet members, which may be in part a result of management restructuring under the Cabinet system, which has “further reduc[ed] the level at which Chief Librarians operate within the council structure” (Liddle 1999: 4). If, as Usherwood (1993: 25) argued, “a proper understanding of the motivations, hopes and aspirations of local politicians is an essential requirement for the librarian managing in a political environment” such recent changes in local government structures may indeed be weakening professional influence at the local level.

3.2.2 Local control and accountability

A couple of respondents felt that local control was inexorably linked to professional responsibility, pointing out that “if you haven’t got local control, you can’t have professional responsibility” (Annette Noskwith, Cons). The two concepts have also been linked by Issac-Henry (1997: 21) who observed that political accountability in local government seems to be “giving way to consumer/customer, financial, budgetary and managerial accountability [...], placing the consumer, and not the professionals or politicians, at the centre stage of public service organisations”. Several of this study’s library participants were thus as concerned about the issue of local control as they were about professional responsibility. There was again a perceived need to build rigorous checks and balances into contracts with the private sector. In recognition of the typically mechanistic and inflexible nature of contract specification (Kinnell 1996; Walsh 1995), Anne Farrington and Janice Maskort both expressed concern about the irreversibility of contract arrangements. Maskort commented:

“Once you’ve outsourced, [...] it’s very difficult to gain regain any control, especially if you haven’t got your specification right”.

As far as Ian Watson could see, local control could still be strong, so long as it was “written into the contractually-binding agreement.” The Cabinet member in his authority, Simon Cooke (Cons), also believed that local control need not

necessarily be compromised but, did identify the issue of local control as one of the main reasons to be cautious about outsourcing. He explained:

“If I’m a large organisation doing outsourcing of services, then my customer is the person doing the outsourcing, so the council or the library service. And so that provider is at a step removed from the real customer or the user who’s in the general public.

On the other hand, “if the public sector is the sole provider, then lines of democratic accountability in terms of responsibility, transparency and responsiveness are said to be more direct and complete” (IPPR 2001: 24-25). This is certainly something with which Martin Molloy and his Cabinet member Bob Janes (Lab) seemed to agree. Janes identified “a world of difference” between this type of democratic accountability and commercial accountability in the private sector. Molloy indicated agreement with the observation of Hebson et al. (2003: 487) that “the more formal the contractual approach to delivering services, the more likely it is that accountability to objectives shaped by changing political policies will be threatened by accountability to shareholders”:

“As soon as you start outsourcing on any large scale, the people who have responsibility are then completely different. If you’re dealing with the private sector, they’re responsible to their shareholders and directors [...] At the moment, library services are responsible to local authority members who are directly elected by the people, and the accountability is back to the people” (Martin Molloy).

Steve Bashforth held similar concerns about local accountability and control if the library service was to be outsourced:

“Here [in Barnsley], sports centres got outsourced to a Trust and it got all corrupt. Basically, no-one who paid for these sports centres had any control over what happened. In this situation, there seems to be no trust, no democratic control”.

Thus for Bashforth and others, the only way to uphold democratic control and to maintain people’s trust in the library service was to keep it in the hands of the local authority, where public managers and politicians could be held to account by the people they served.

3.3 Whole-service outsourcing

Questions 7 and 8 were designed to obtain participants’ views on both the feasibility and desirability of whole-service outsourcing for public libraries. In relation to feasibility, a range of responses were given across the board. In the ten years since the KMPG (1995) concluded that there was no viable market place to make whole-service outsourcing a practical possibility, Martin Molloy and Janice Maskort felt that there had been absolutely no change to this situation. They both pointed to a general lack of private sector interest in the whole library service due to the fact that “there’s not enough profit in it” (Janice Maskort).

Elected members Bob Janes (Lab), Alec Rowley (Cons), and Simon Cooke (Cons), also felt that there had been very little change. It was recognised by Bob Janes and Alec Rowley, as well as one library participant (Anne Farrington), that drivers for change could be identified within the context of the current Best Value regime and governmental pressures on local authorities to examine alternative models of service provision. Despite these general pressures and a clear recognition on his part that library services could be contracted out to deliver more efficiency, Simon Cooke (Cons) noted that public libraries may not lend themselves so easily to whole-service outsourcing:

“I think anybody who was to take on the whole-service outsourcing of libraries now, erm, it would be mould-breaking...It simply hasn't happened, partly because it's a complex service”.

In contrast, some library participants felt that the position on whole-service outsourcing had changed considerably since the KPMG report (Ruse 1998; Liddle 1999; Ball and Earl 2002). Anne Farrington, David Fay and Ian Watson all cited as evidence of this the case in Haringey, where in 2001 a private company, Instant Library Ltd, took over the management of that authority's library service (Edmonds, 2003). David Fay and Ian Watson both felt that if a service was completely failing and didn't have the in-house management capacity to turn things around (as was said to be the case

previously in Haringey), then buying-in the expertise was certainly an option to be considered:

“So long as it is managed through contracts and quality checks, it could be the right thing to do for some authorities if the circumstances dictated it” (Ian Watson).

If, as Ball and Earl (2002: 205) suggest, “a market for large scale and whole-service outsourcing [of libraries] is starting to appear”, then the pragmatic responses of David Fay and Ian Watson indicate that not everyone in the profession today remains “unprepared in attitude and approach” for this challenge (Liddle 1999: 11).

In terms of desirability, none of the participants expressed the view that whole-service outsourcing of public libraries was something they would necessarily wish to see. Again however, the strength of reaction against whole-service outsourcing varied considerably. For elected members Bob Janes (Lab) and Annette Noskwith (Cons), the outsourcing of the library service was fundamentally undesirable. Simon Cooke (Cons) was keen to emphasise the need for making decisions from a pragmatic rather than an ideological standpoint:

“Bluntly and strategically, you’ve got to do the work that says this is what the implications are of whole service outsourcing [...] I do think that knee jerk reaction of ‘no, it’s got to be a bad thing because it’s the wicked profit-making sector’ is wrong” (Simon Cooke).

When considering the appropriateness of whole-service outsourcing, Ian Watson and David Fay as noted, focused purely on pragmatic considerations. Martin Molloy, Janice Maskort and Steve Bashforth expressed concern about how values of democracy, trust and equality might be upheld if the library service was outsourced to a private company which put more emphasis on profit. These participants’ views might be said to represent not so much an inherent disdain for private sector motives, but a perceived practical difficulty in reconciling those motives with the library service’s obligations to promote things like social inclusion. Martin Molloy considered what would happen if libraries were run purely as businesses and said of whole-service outsourcing:

“I don’t see how you can make it work. You know, if I look at the kinds of services we provide to people with disabilities, you wouldn’t do any of that really”.

Such concerns mirror those of professional bodies such as EBLIDA (2003) who are keen to ensure that “the preservation of [...] cultural heritage, free access to information and the notion of a community-based library serving the needs of the local population, take priority over profit margins”.

3.4 Conclusions

Taken together, reactions of this study's participants to private sector involvement in the financial and operational management of the public library service reveal a mixture of realism, pragmatism and ideology. Individual responses show that participants from the same profession or the same political party had very different (sometimes completely conflicting) views on private sector involvement in libraries. It is also not possible to conclude that the responses of elected members were generally more pragmatic than those of library professionals or vice versa. In fact, several responses given by library professionals and elected members to the issues of contracting out and public/private partnerships were based on similar arguments. Interestingly, and perhaps reflective of the general way of thinking in that authority, views of the library professional and elected member in the same authority often shared a lot in common. For example, Simon Cooke (Cons) and Ian Watson in Bradford repeatedly emphasised the need to be pragmatic and open-minded about the most efficient ways of delivering services, and Bob Janes (Lab) and Martin Molloy in Derbyshire often referred to similar ideological issues related to inherent differences in the way the private and public sector operates. Though a number of respondents stressed pragmatism over ideology, an equal amount expressed reservations about private sector involvement in general and whole-service outsourcing in particular, on ideological grounds. If, as Kelly (2000: 3)

suggests, “the profit motive can sit alongside the provision of sensitive public services”, when looking at libraries, this is not a comfortable or desirable prospect for many of the library professionals and elected members who took part in this study.

4. CHARGING FOR LIBRARY SERVICES

4.1 Direct charging

In relation to the issue of charging for library services, professional responsibilities, core library roles and functions, and statutory requirements as defined under the 1964 Act, were all mentioned in the collection of responses obtained in this study. Some, but not all, of the participants made specific reference to legislation and statutory requirements, as grounds upon which to oppose the introduction of direct charges. None of the elected members did so. It has been argued recently that the library profession in any case, can no longer rely on statutory protection under the 1964 Act and should instead focus on developing strong and convincing arguments about the benefits of free access to information and the dangers of charging for services at the point of use (MacNaught 2005).

In terms of the dangers of introducing direct charges for public library services, there is perhaps none greater than the detriment this could have to the important role the public library has to play in combating social exclusion (EBLIDA 2003). The majority of participants thus strongly agreed with Usherwood's prediction that by ending the library's long tradition of making information available to all, regardless of ability to pay, the introduction of direct charges would "increase the gap between the information haves and have-nots" (1996: 194). Martin Molloy felt that in the twentieth century – the so

called Information Age - the fact that “more and more information is coming through suggest[s] that the gap between poor and rich is getting bigger”. Janice Maskort believed that “libraries fill an enormous role in helping to close that gap” and referred to the huge difference between affluent areas in which most people might for example, have home access to a PC, and areas of high deprivation where the library might for the majority, be the main source of a PC or literary material. Several participants thus felt that introducing direct charges for these services would penalise those without the ability to pay (Alec Rowley, Cons).

Simon Cooke (Cons) on the other hand, did not believe that the information gap in society was mainly attributable to socio-economic factors and did not therefore feel that the introduction of direct charges would make any difference. He argued:

“It’s a cultural divide; it’s got nothing to do with money [...] it’s not the information haves and have-nots so much as people who access information and people who don’t”.

Interestingly, the Chief Librarian in that authority, Ian Watson, was the only other participant who disagreed that direct charges would increase the divide between the information haves and have nots, arguing that they need not so long as they were introduced in the right way, with concessions built in. There was evidence that Watson too felt that ability to pay was not the only reason for an information gap in society. He pointed out:

“Although books as an item of expenditure are a lot cheaper now, there are still many people who don’t have any books at home and would not choose to buy them even if they had disposable income. And I think that’s a public need that still needs to be met” (Ian Watson).

From this last statement, it seems apparent that Watson does, like the majority of library participants, believe that the public library has an important role to play in bridging the information divide and should take active steps to encourage, rather than deter those who are information-poor, for whatever reason. As one participant stated in opposition to the introduction of direct charges:

“The more barriers we create, the more we alienate people and isolate them”
(Anne Farrington).

4.1.1 Fiction loans

All of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed that charges should be introduced for the loan of fiction books. For the majority of library respondents, the main reason for this was that the principle of free access was, and should be, an inviolable one. As Janice Maskort put it:

“The whole raison d’etre of the public library service is that items are free at the point of delivery”.

In fact, the principle of free access in relation to fiction material has long been the subject of debate. In making its case for the introduction of library charges, the Adam Smith Institute (1986: 2) directed specific criticism at a library service which it believed was “devoted to the supply of free fiction and other light reading, much of it of little or no literary merit, to people who could afford to buy books but choose not to do so”. Comedia (1993) also recognised that the lending of free fiction can present considerably more problems for librarians, than the free availability of instructional and reference material with clearer educational and civic benefits. This however, did not appear to be the case for any of the library participants in this study. Steve Bashforth, David Fay and Ian Watson, explicitly identified ways in which free access to fiction was crucial in promoting reading, literacy, and lifelong learning, objectives that the government itself has outlined as roles and contributions which the public library can make in society (Framework for the Future 2003). Libraries in their view, had an important role to play in encouraging and stimulating interest in reading and “ensuring that there were no blocks or barriers to access to the resource of reading” (Ian Watson). There was thus no clear evidence of a belief that non-fiction should command a commercial lending fee because it was somehow ‘less good’ for the public than was non-fiction. One participant explained:

“People need free access to any knowledge, that’s going to enhance their enjoyment of life, their access to democracy and ideas” (Anne Farrington).

Elected members Annette Noskwith (Cons), Simon Cooke (Cons), and Bob Janes (Lab), all also disagreed with charging for fiction specifically on the grounds that it was inappropriate to make, in the words of Bob Janes, “an artificial distinction” between non-fiction and fiction. Simon Cooke (Cons) also expressed firm opinions about the practical implications of charging for book borrowing:

*“If we start charging for library books, people will go and buy them...they’ll go to Oxfam or Waterstones...and that’s what they’re doing **now**. So the idea [of charging for fiction] is just a non-sense. We might as well close the library down”.*

4.1.2 The Internet

The issue of Internet charges produced a much wider range of responses. The majority of participants disagreed in principle with charging for the Internet. Once again, reasons came back to a perceived professional responsibility to be socially inclusive and provide free access for all. Responses from Ian Watson, Steve Bashforth and Anne Farrington indicated a clear belief that if the argument on free access to information in new media was lost, so too was “the principle that underpins the argument for free books at the point of use” (MacNaught 2003: 5). Ian Watson commented:

“In the same way that free access to reading material should be maintained, Internet access – although people will use it for e mail and for gaming – fundamentally it’s an information source”.

Elected member Bob Janes (Lab) agreed that the library's role to maintain free access and promote social inclusion would be seriously undermined by charging for the Internet. Two of the Conservative elected members however, agreed that Internet charges *were* acceptable, potentially to deter people from using the library for purposes that went beyond, or detracted from, its basic role and purpose:

"If people are sitting for hours on the Internet, that's not the object of the library [...] I feel very strongly that youngsters especially should be encouraged to do their own research, to read their own books, rather than just press a button and see" (Annette Noskwith, Cons).

"Allowing ten minutes free or something like that is actually a good idea, because it does allow people to then go and look something up, and provides that basic library service, if you like" (Simon Cooke, Cons).

Charging for the Internet beyond the first hour of use is indeed a policy which has been adopted in North Yorkshire. David Fay explained:

"I do disagree with it, but we're having to do it [...] Apart from the initial lottery funding to set it up – that was 3 and a half years ago - we haven't got any extra budgets to maintain it and in fact develop it [...] The money we get from charging is going back into the service".

Martin Molloy was strongly opposed to such measures on the grounds that library authorities were initially given lottery money to fund the People's Network on the condition that they would not charge for Internet access. Similar reference to a betrayal of responsibility to maintain free Internet access was made by John Pateman (2004: 36) who argued: "There is an increasing and disturbing tendency to charge for People's Network access, to meet income targets rather than to meet needs. This is creating a two-tier network for the haves and have nots – which is the exact opposite of what was intended by government and the New Opportunities Fund". In view of serious practical problems however, such as the "lack of money to replace People's Network machines" (Steve Bashforth) several library respondents in this study recognised, with regret and reluctance in each case, that in the future "one of the only ways to sustain access might be through charging" (Janice Maskort).

4.1.3 AV Material

In spite of fore-mentioned arguments in favour of free access to information across the board, it is an established and accepted fact that UK public libraries charge a fee for the loan of audio-visual material (Butterworth 2000). They break no law in doing so for the 1964 Act permits library authorities to levy charges for the lending of items other than books if they so wish to do so, and the 1989 Local Government and Housing Act only reinforced the need to maintain free access to *printed* material (Astbury 1994). The

majority of library participants, as well as elected members Simon Cooke (Cons) and Bob Janes (Lab), recognised the clear anomaly in upholding the principle of free access to information in one format, but not another.

Though Janice Maskort and Anne Farrington could not find any clear ideological justification for such a situation they, in common with almost all other respondents, emphasised practical difficulties in providing audio-visual material free of charge. The high costs to the library of free AV provision, particularly in view of the expense of replacing damaged material, was an important consideration for Bob Janes (Lab), Alec Rowley (Cons) and Simon Cooke (Cons). Most library participants agreed that in light of past and continuing budgetary constraints, the library might not be in a position to continue providing AV material were it not run on a self-financing basis. A number of participants felt that the money generated from AV provision now constituted “a crucial income stream” (Janice Maskort) which could be used to finance other parts of the service (Martin Molloy).

The whole issue of charging for AV material but not books raised significant questions in some respondents’ minds about the distinction between a ‘core’ and ‘non-core’ service. Bob Janes (Lab) commented:

“We are still in a position where I don’t think audio-visual is seen as the traditional core library service, whereas of course we know it’s important”.

As argued by Martin Molloy and Ian Watson, it is of course important, core even, for visually impaired people who are surely entitled to the same free access as others to audio books or spoken-word versions of text. At the same time however, Martin Molloy and Ian Watson, as well as Anne Farrington and Steve Bashforth, felt less sure that there were no grounds for charging for CDs or DVDs of feature films, as they could be classed as ‘entertainment’. So however, might fiction books, Anne Farrington pointed out. .

4.2 Premium or value-added service charges

As advocates of library charges have pointed out: “it has never been a basic principle that all public library services should be provided without charge” (*Financing Our Public Library Service* 1988: 2). On this basis, a case has been in the past, and more recently by the Laser Foundation (2004), for introducing charges in public libraries to enable users who are willing to pay to receive premium services. In this study, professional and political reactions to this proposal ranged so widely (from strong agreement to strong disagreement) that as one library participant commented, charging for premium services “may be one of those things that public libraries do need to get more clear about in their own way of thinking” (Ian Watson).

Those participants who opposed the introduction of charges for premium services (Anne Farrington, Martin Molloy and his Cabinet member Bob Janes (Lab)) all did so primarily for same reason: that those who didn’t have the

ability to pay would be excluded from being able to use certain library services.

Martin Molloy argued:

“The library is one of very few places now where you don’t have to provide your Goldcard or anything else [...] If we’ve got people who are skilled and trained, then they should be trying to do their best for everybody in the community, not just those who are the most well-off”.

All other participants however, had no fundamental objection to charging users who were willing to pay, a premium for a service that went beyond the basic service provided to all, or “added value” (Janice Maskort).

The practical and financial costs of running and maintaining services that demanded an intensive amount of staff time and work, such as extensive help with family history research, or business information searches, were very much at the forefront of many library participants’ minds. David Fay felt that genealogical research was not something that the library had the time or resources to adequately develop, and therefore argued that the only way to provide this service efficiently was to run it on a self-financing basis, using the money from charges to employ professional genealogists. Ian Watson also recognised:

“There are a number of people and organisations that will make extensive use of the free staff support to the extent that they begin to monopolize the available resource...and that may mean that other customers or parts of the service suffer”.

Watson therefore felt that charging was necessary not so much as to make a profit than as to “enable us to employ the staff that are needed to satisfy that in-depth research, as well as be there to support other customers who come in at the same time”. Indeed, other professional commentators have also in the past, found it difficult to see why libraries shouldn’t “offer extra facilities to those willing to pay, and invest the profits back into maintaining or enhancing the basic service” (Oppenheim 1991: 81).

From the perspective of all Conservative elected members, introducing charges for premium services was not unreasonable. With regards to researching family history, Annette Noskwith (Cons) argued: “If people want somebody else to do it for them, then in this day and age, you’ve got to pay for it”. The strongest support for premium service charges came from Simon Cooke (Cons). He argued:

“We’re offering huge amounts of information for nothing to support people’s hobbies. Now my hobby is cricket and I have to pay to do that. Why should my hobby not be subsidized and a person whose hobby is family history be subsidized?”

There are in fact striking similarities between this argument and the one made almost twenty years ago by the Adam Smith Institute (1986: 32) that “there seems no good reason why the state should be expected to provide leisure and entertainment facilities of one kind free of charge to the user when it does not do

so for others such as films or football”. Moreover, Simon Cooke felt that creating the right pricing strategies for premium services should be seen as a commercial exercise, arguing “if you’re going to charge for a service, you’ve got to add value and it’s got to be packaged right”. Similar points about the ‘for profit’ element of premium services and the need to get pricing details right to derive this profit, were indeed recently emphasised by the Laser Foundation (2004).

4.3 Information as a public good or a marketable commodity?

Simon Cooke (Cons) was in fact, the only participant who felt that public libraries should treat information as a marketable commodity. By not doing so, Libraries and Archives were in his view, missing a huge opportunity to market and commercially exploit their “enormous intellectual property resource”. He went on to say:

“There is no work being done on digitisation worth mentioning, the whole cataloguing or making access to it and packaging things...all of it should have been done on a commercial basis [...] There’s a huge amount that’s stuck there, not being used, that has the opportunity to be commercialised and to be turned into commercial products that can be sold” (Simon Cooke, Cons).

Whereas Simon Cooke felt that such measures wouldn't detract from the public library function, other participants were clearly concerned that treating information as a marketable commodity would compromise the library's key role to provide free, unrestricted access to knowledge. One commented:

"If you don't say information is a public good, you're admitting that you should charge" (Steve Bashforth).

David Fay also felt that information should be treated as a public good, adding:

"Until access for all is available in both the electronic and the printed service, then I think there's not really much point in libraries being there if that's not the case".

Anne Farrington and Janice Maskort also emphasised the need to provide free access to information, which in turn gave people access to democracy and ideas, and moreover acknowledged the fact that "citizens have a right to information" (Janice Maskort). There was thus strong recognition that access to information, along with personal liberties, political freedoms and socio-economic rights, was an essential "Fourth Right" of citizenship in democratic societies (Astbury 1994; Goulding 2000).

"An increasing tendency to put a price on information and thereby to treat it like any other commodity in the market place" (Astbury 1994: 136) was noted by several participants, who recognised moreover that knowledge was

perhaps coming to be perceived as one of the *most* important commodities in what Janice Maskort explicitly referred to as an emerging ‘knowledge economy’. Alec Rowley (Cons) pointed out:

“Knowledge is what runs the country. We’ve got to compete with the rest of the world and part of parcel of that competition is knowledge”.

It has been argued in the past that “when information is seen as vital to a capitalist economy rather than as a social good, commercial interests will start to supersede cultural or educational interests” (Goulding 2001: 3). However, it was precisely because of increasing emphases upon the economic importance of knowledge and consequent trends towards the commercialisation of information (Webster 1999), that it was, in Janice Maskort’s view, “even more important that librarians fight very hard to insist that knowledge is kept in the public domain”. This, for elected member Bob Janes (Lab), was the only way in which the cultural and educational interests mentioned by Goulding, could be promoted and protected:

“If you believe education and culture to be part of our normal daily lives, and part of our ‘deal’ with our communities, then there is no argument: information should be treated as a public good” (Bob Janes).

Similar arguments have been made by those who recognise information as a merit good which “promotes causes such as education, culture, informed citizenship, social inclusion and equality of opportunity” (Sumsion et al. 2003)

and by those who feel that one person's acquirement of knowledge and education extends to produce wider economic and social benefits, so-called "public good externalities" (Haywood 1991: 21). It seems to be the view of a number of this study's participants – including some library professionals and some elected members – that the positive values or merit aspects of information can be better protected if information is treated as a public good rather than a marketable commodity. Indeed, this may not be entirely unsurprising in view of the widely noted general concern in the public sector that merit goods and services may be under-provided if it were left to the market and not the state, to supply them (Farnham and Horton 1996; IPPR 2001).

4.4 Conclusions

One of the few things that was clear from this discussion about charging was that the public library today is "a place where both commercial 'paid for' and subsidised 'public good' material is available" (Comedia 1993: 55). What was less clear and more problematic for a number of participants in this study, was how to reconcile these apparently contradictory features of service provision. The only issue which produced a high degree of consensus amongst and between elected members and library professionals was that of charging for fiction material. Most agreed that this was a core function of the library service and should therefore remain free. However, the wide range of responses collected in relation to other service charges - Internet charges and premium service charges, in particular – revealed some very different professional and political opinions about which (if any) library services could be charged for, and

why. Those librarians and politicians who objected in principle with the introduction of direct charges repeatedly cited similar reasons for doing so: the public library's fundamental role to provide free access to information and to be socially inclusive. Whereas elected members usually formed arguments for or against charging on ideological grounds, it appeared that for several library participants, ideology sometimes needed to come second to pragmatism. Practical funding difficulties and the need to generate income to sustain or develop particular services were commonly cited reasons why the library might now or in the future, be compelled to introduce charges. Given that nobody other than elected member Simon Cooke (Cons) felt information should be treated as a marketable commodity, it seems fair to say that any agreement with library charges was not for the majority of this study's participants, primarily influenced by the profit motive or based on commercial imperatives.

5. THE RETAIL MODEL OF SERVICE PROVISION

5.1. Consumerism and the public library

The very fact that service provision in the public sector has not been intrinsically linked to financial motives and commercial imperatives has arguably helped in the past, to ensure that all individuals are treated as citizens, not consumers (Kelly 2000). In spite of increasing pressures on public services in recent years to promote consumer choice and sovereignty (Comedia 1993; Walsh 1995), the adoption of consumerist values in the public library context has not been without opposition. There is evidence that the use of consumerist language in particular, is problematic for some both within and outside the profession. One of this current study's participants highlighted the fact:

“There’s a huge rank of staff who don’t want to refer to people who use libraries as customers...they have very negative connotations of the word customer” (David Fay).

In much the same way, one elected member in an earlier research study by Usherwood (1996: 199) stated that libraries in his authority “will not use the term customer, it smacks too much of buying a pound of sugar over the counter”.

Behind such objection to consumerist language presumably rests some deeper conviction about the public library's role and purpose. It has been reasserted for example, that the public library should be a place where people "can experience their identity as citizens rather than consumers" (Worpole quoted in Black and Crann 2002: 152).

Even in the consumer world in which libraries today are said to operate (Laser Foundation 2004), Worpole's argument still appears to hold strong for some of this study's participants. Janice Maskort for example, felt that people who use the library service "have a democratic right, because they pay for the public library service [out of their taxes] and in that sense, it's theirs and they can come in and use that space". In view of this democratic right of citizenship, also exercised by means of the vote, Elock (1994: 194) argued: "We need to bear in mind that in applying consumer reforms to local authority services, we are not dealing with customers in the commercial sense but with citizens". Martin Molloy, as well as elected members Bob Janes (Lab), Annette Noskwith (Cons), and Alec Rowley (Cons), all showed agreement that a library user should be treated as a citizen rather than, as Martin Molloy put it, "a walking wallet".

People's identity as consumers, as well as citizens, was however recognised by a number of participants. Bob Janes (Lab) for example, agreed in principle that it should be a case of "citizen first ...but some aspects of being a consumer must be there because that's where we are in 2005". Janice Maskort noted that some people would just want to be consumers in the public library

and should be given that right. Anne Farrington believed that the way in which public services were delivered today was both customer-focused and citizen-focused.

Three participants furthermore, completely disagreed with the argument made by Worpole. Two of those, Ian Watson and his Cabinet member Simon Cooke (Cons), both failed to see any sense in the argument that library users should be seen as citizens rather than consumers. According to Simon Cooke:

“The idea that there’s a distinction between our identity as citizens and our identity as consumers is a load of nonsense”.

Ian Cooke also felt the distinction was irrelevant:

“Whether someone’s called a citizen, a member of the public, a customer, or a consumer...what matters is that those people are able to find what they need in the local library”.

David Fay felt that the view of library users as citizens rather than consumers was an old fashioned one, not matching today’s reality. He explained:

“All the research we’ve done suggests that we’re dealing with consumers, and fairly sophisticated ones at that.”

Such sentiments are not unique. It was indeed suggested not so long ago, that libraries would need to come to terms with an increase in consumer power, in order to satisfy customers with much greater expectations of service provision (Muir and Douglas 2001).

5.2 Retail influences in the public library

According to McArthur and Nicholson (2005: 2), there is thus an urgent need for libraries today to focus on “delivering a customer experience that is in parity with, if not leading the competition”. Much of that competition indeed comes from the retail sector, where bookstore chains, supermarkets, and Internet companies have been able in recent years, to supply people with books at discount prices (Grindlay and Morris 2004; Laser Foundation 2004). At the same time, and in view of a widely-noted decline in book borrowing, public libraries have been encouraged to adopt ideas and practices from their retail competitors (Tim Coates 2004) and to “follow retailing in being customer-led” (Laser Foundation 2004: 2).

5.2.1 Customer service: comparisons with the retail sector

A number of library participants in this study felt that libraries needed to aim to meet rising customer expectations of service - expectations that were in Janice Maskort’s view, being delivered through retail:

“It’s a very sophisticated world of retailing so people’s expectations are very high about what they expect in terms of physical environment, service, 24/7 access...”

Ian Watson agreed that people would compare the quality of customer service in the library with that experienced on the high street, and argued:

“Libraries need to work hard on improving the level of customer service, largely because the public are becoming more sophisticated”.

Anne Farrington showed concern that some people might be put off using the library if they did not “find the staff approachable and helpful in the way they would in the retail sector”. Also recognising the fact that the retail sector could teach libraries a lot about customer service, North Yorkshire County Council (2004) recently undertook a retail-based training programme with an external company to improve customer service skills of frontline staff. On these training measures, David Fay commented:

“It really brought home to me how far we’ve got to travel because a lot of our staff were saying ‘we don’t need this because we’re good at it already’...and some are brilliant and some of them are dreadful and think they’re good”.

Martin Molloy on the other hand, pointed out that there were examples of good and bad staff attitudes and general customer service, in both the public library sector *and* the retail sector. He remarked:

“I don’t have this feeling that there’s something intuitively better about the way they do it than the way we do it”.

The Cabinet member in Molloy’s authority seemed to agree, suggesting in fact that retailers might “learn from libraries in terms of things like public care and professional approach” (Bob Janes, Lab).

With specific regards to the comparability of libraries and book shops, participants also held some very different views. Whereas Ian Watson for example, felt that some library staff’s book knowledge was perhaps not as extensive or wide-ranging as that of staff in many book shops, Martin Molloy was keen to point out that book store staff often lack the knowledge and expertise of library staff, particularly in relation to children’s reading material:

“I’ve listened to Sales Assistants in book shops talking total rubbish [...] Parents would be much better going to the local library around the corner and talking to the Children’s Librarian to get some advice” (Martin Molloy).

5.2.2 A Customer-led approach to service provision

Though none of the participants expressed outright objection to the idea of a customer-led library service, a number felt that public libraries could not be customer-led in the same way as retail outlets such as book shops. Linked to the argument that libraries do not share the commercial sector's main profit motive, the issue of charging once again raised its head. Ian Watson argued:

“I think libraries do need to be customer-led...but not on a commercial basis in terms of who can pay most”.

It is interesting to note the stark difference in opinion here between two elected members from the same political party. Like Ian Watson, Alec Rowley (Cons) felt that “the library should be customer-led but not on a retail basis”, given that people pay their taxes to get access to reading material from the library and shouldn't therefore be charged for it. Simon Cooke (Cons) on the other hand, commented wryly:

Being customer-led doesn't mean don't charge the customer...most retailers I know do charge their customers”.

Central to the debate was also the issue of how a library which was customer-led could fulfil both the wants and needs of its users. For a number of participants, the library had to strive to achieve (a sometimes difficult) balance

between the two. The responses of elected members, Bob Janes (Lab) and Annette Noskwith (Cons), indicated as much:

“If you’re going to get a new Harry Potter book out next week, you’re going to make sure it’s on the library shelves. That’s customer-led. On the other hand, professional librarians will also guarantee there’s a range of quality information resources available for those that need it” (Bob Janes).

“Being customer-led doesn’t mean that you insist that people read what you think is good for them but it’s equally important that you don’t have complete rubbish at the other end of the spectrum” (Annette Noskwith).

Library participant Ian Watson added that perceived customer needs have to be weighed up against actual customer wants, with the latter sometimes taking priority:

“If we provide our service on the basis of what we think is the right thing to do, but the public don’t want to come in and make use of our facilities, then I would much rather go with a customer-led approach. This bases the delivery of services on a certain level of populism if you like, to ensure that we get sufficient people through the door to warrant our existence”.

Some librarians on the other hand, are reportedly said to fear that pressures to be competitive will lead to an “explosion of populism with 10 copies of the latest blockbuster novel made available at the expense of one

useful but expensive reference book” (Mackenzie 2002: 11). What did in fact emerge from responses of a number of library participants in this study – and specifically those who worked in Labour-controlled authorities - were some fundamental differences between the ways in which the book shop and the public library worked, particularly in relation to stock provision. Janice Maskort for example, remarked:

“Unlike Amazon or Waterstones or any other commercial book seller, we’re not here to provide the latest copies of the best seller...we’re here to provide breadth and depth, and are often the last resort for important work. There’s a conservation role for the public library as well as ‘let’s read the bestseller’.”

In recognition of the fact that libraries had somewhat wider roles to fulfil than the commercial book shop, Anne Farrington also pointed to the fact that the 1964 Libraries and Museums Act was all about providing a ‘comprehensive’ library service. Indeed, the pressures on public libraries to provide so many functions and services, or in the words of Steve Bashforth, “be all things to all men”, have long been recognised (Comedia 1993). Tim Coates in fact argued that the “policy of diversification has been a catastrophe for libraries...” (quoted in House of Commons 2005: 17). For Martin Molloy and Steve Bashforth however, the idea of modelling library stock provision on the customer-led approach taken by most commercial book shops, seemed to carry equally worrying implications. Steve Bashforth referred to a period some years ago, in which his library had been forced by budget restrictions, to follow this more

populist approach, with the result that the range of material supplied was limited mainly to popular family sagas and suchlike. Martin Molloy concluded:

“Tim Coates has been unhelpful because he’s brought two very different experiences together. And I mean, all the evidence shows you is the very narrow basis bookshops work on”.

5.2.3. Library space and the retail influence

For most participants, one of the most positive features of retail bookshops, and one about which public libraries *did* have important lessons to learn, was the effective way in which services were presented to the customer. A recent investigation by Helen Cartwright (2001) into different perceptions of retail bookstores and public libraries, indeed found that the public library was much less strongly associated with effective book display and promotion (2001), a point also reflected in one of this study participant’s responses:

“We can learn a lot from the retail sector on how to present things to people...presentation of books, marketing, promotion...they’re good at that”
(Steve Bashforth).

Anne Farrington agreed that the library needed “to present its services in a way that people recognise”, but noted that the library service was somewhat more restricted than the bookshop, in terms of being able to spend a lot of money on marketing the service.

Nevertheless, there is evidence to show that a number of library authorities today are taking increasing interest in marketing techniques which have been more traditionally associated with the retail sector. According to Hood and Henderson (2005: 26), “concern at falling library usage, the success of aggressively branded rivals such as bookstores, and [...] government policy initiatives intent on promoting a more user-focused service”, have all encouraged many library authorities to consider the use of branding strategies in promoting public libraries. Steps in this direction have indeed been taken by North Yorkshire County Council (2004: 3), where “the visual presentation of [...] libraries, vehicles and promotional literature is being improved by the adoption of a new corporate image”. Here, the image, look and feel of the library was blatantly crucial. David Fay explained:

“Unless you’ve got a product that attracts, it’s not probably going to matter what else you do”.

Most library participants in fact showed clear awareness that the appearance of many public libraries needed urgent improvement, and did feel that retail book shops set a very good example here. Janice Maskort and Martin Molloy both highlighted the fact that the problem came down not to a lack a professional awareness, nor to a lack of willingness to make libraries more attractive places, but once again, to a lack of funding to implement the necessary changes.

Another important question which produced no overall consensus between this study's respondents was the extent to which the public library could incorporate commercial ideas without becoming overly commercialised itself. One research study into public perceptions of public libraries in fact seemed to indicate a widespread feeling that libraries should in fact remain public sphere, neutral and non-commercial places (Black and Crann 2002). As previously noted however, retail models of presentation are undoubtedly influencing the thinking of those in charge of public libraries. Most participants for example, felt that libraries, like retail stores, should try to create a comfortable and attractive environment, sentiments also expressed by Ex-Arts Minister Tessa Blackstone, who explained: "It's not my aim to turn [libraries] into Starbucks. I just do not want people to feel they are in a miserable, cold, draughty place. People should think they are comfortable" (quoted in Library and Information Update 2003: 4). Simon Cooke (Cons) also emphasised that libraries, like cafes in retail bookshops, provided a safe meeting point.

Beyond these points of comparison however, it was felt by a number of participants, that the public library space and the retail bookstore environment performed fundamentally different functions and should continue to do so. Janice Maskort for example, argued:

"There are very few spaces that are public and free and neutral, and that's one of the public library's great strengths [...] you can actually walk in and not be challenged or have to pay."

Steve Bashforth was similarly concerned about commercial developments which might change people's perceptions of a traditionally free and neutral service. He commented:

"We don't want to get into a situation where people don't trust us anymore. When we get PFI, I suppose we might get some sort of shop. That's the commercial influence... You see shops and cafes in museums and they're often made out to be a bigger attraction than the museum itself...that's losing the plot I think".

Simon Cooke (Cons) however, pointed out that people could come into the library, read, and have a cup of coffee in a safe environment, and argued "the idea that the library can't commercialise on the back of that is non-sensical". In apparent agreement that having things such as a coffee shop was about "complimentality, rather than about in-your-face selling stuff" (Simon Cooke), the library participant from that authority added:

We run a refreshment area in this building and we operate our media service now from the foyer, so it's got a higher profile. And both of those things, whilst they earn income, help to create a much nice surrounding than we previously had [...] I think you can have a mixture of those types of services within the same building without making the place look or feel like a shop with pound signs everywhere and sales offers all over the place" (Ian Watson).

David Fay believed that there were also opportunities for libraries to earn extra income by charging businesses for the display of commercial information in the library. Anne Farrington on the other hand, worried about “the emergence of bias and influence once people have the opportunity to exercise that”. All library participants from Labour-controlled authorities in fact, as well as elected member Bob Janes (Lab), explicitly referred to the public library’s neutrality as being something that people valued and trusted, and something which should not be compromised by commercial interests. Martin Molloy in particular, expressed concerns about commercial influence on a larger scale, commenting:

“If you lined up with Sainsbury’s or Tesco or somebody, I’d start to seriously worry about that. What does that do to the perception of the public library, the trust and all the rest of it? I think people would stop seeing it as a neutral space”.

5.3 Collocation and collaboration with the retail sector

The idea of actually combining the public library with a supermarket produced a wide range of reactions from participants, from unbridled enthusiasm to outright objection, with a number of cautious or conditional responses in between. The majority of participants clearly recognised, and explicitly referred to the benefits of siting a library in a location “where people

are, where greater access occurs” (Bob Janes). Ian Watson summed up the general feeling remarking:

“The whole idea of collocation with some other service that can attract footfall, is very beneficial to the public library service”.

It was recognised by several participants that the library could be collocated with all sorts of different buildings in the community: as well as supermarkets and retail outlets, swimming pools, leisure centres, schools, Healthy Living Centres and Tourist Information Centres were all mentioned. Janice Maskort remarked:

“I’m not sure the future for libraries is stand alone [...] But that’s one of the joys of libraries: you can put them with anything”.

The idea of combining the library with a supermarket, as recently suggested by Earl and Ball (2002), was highly desirable in the eyes of David Fay, Ian Watson and Simon Cooke (Cons). It offered, in David Fay’s view, “fantastic opportunities” to offer an improved library service, in terms of longer opening hours, and to attract increased usage, in terms of convenient location. Similar benefits were identified by Ian Watson and Cabinet member Simon Cooke (Cons), who indicated that having a library attached to, if not part of, the supermarket, was an idea to which serious consideration was being given in that authority.

The idea has indeed become a reality in Coventry, where a new library has recently been opened within a Tesco Superstore, and is clearly reaping the benefits of its new retail location: open 60 hours per week, it reportedly received 12, 000 visitors and joined over 7,000 new members within its first 4 weeks of opening (Managing Information 2005). These impressive figures seem to lend credibility to Ian Watson's belief that in collocation of this sort, "there's a huge opportunity for us to be able to capture a market that we'd find it far more difficult to attract into a stand alone library". In Watson's view, having the library there and visible in a supermarket, offered a great opportunity to overcome people's possibly negative and outdated preconceptions of what a library does. He added:

"If we're thinking about family reading and learning, what better opportunity on a Saturday or a weekday evening, for the library to be able to have something on offer for the children of people who are going round shopping and those parents coming in when they bring the children in and when they come back to collect them" (Ian Watson).

Several participants however, identified potential problems in siting the library with the supermarket. One area of particular concern was how much control and influence the supermarket would be able to exercise in a collocation arrangement. Whilst Bob Janes (Lab) could recognise all of the fore-mentioned benefits in putting the library with a supermarket and found "the potential for car parking, for greater through foot, and for passing trade very attractive," he was keen to emphasise that the library must remain "an independent entity".

Martin Molloy also had no fundamental problem with libraries being located in shopping centres where he felt the library *could* “remain autonomous and be seen as an independent entity,” but expressed strong reservations about the library’s ability to uphold neutrality and trust if the supermarket was able to exercise influence in a collocation scenario. Anne Farrington had similar concerns about trust and neutrality though she commented:

“As long as you could ensure that there wasn’t any influence at all from the retail partner, I suppose it could work quite well”.

It was noted by some participants however, that the supermarket’s profit-making agenda would be the overriding factor in any partnership arrangement of this kind. Annette Noskwith for example, commented:

“What are the financial implications? The supermarket would want something back wouldn’t they? The theory is excellent but I think in practice it just wouldn’t work because they would want to have an input.”

Even Simon Cooke (Cons) who in fact, showed strong enthusiasm for the idea of siting the library service within the supermarket, noted:

“Supermarkets are a bit reluctant [...] They’re driven by sales per square foot and we’re asking them to put aside six or eight thousand square metres for a library, which is six or eight metres worth of lost sellings as far as they’re concerned” (Simon Cooke, Cons).

Indeed, Earl and Ball (2002: 202) identified the very same problem and wondered in this case, “what deals might be struck, involving the payment of rent and a volume-related activity fee by the public library, set off by access to the library’s user base”.

One related issue of concern was that collocation with a commercial partner would compromise the library’s traditional community ethos and values, especially given that “the owners of retail developments are often not concerned with community issues, only commercial success” (Worpole in Morris and Brown 2004: 127). “As a public space, the library helps to define a sense of community” (CILIP quoted in Information for Social Change 2004), yet in a commercial space, Steve Bashforth feared that this purpose would be seriously undermined:

“If you’ve not got something that’s linked with the community, it’s a soulless place. The branch library has an atmosphere which says this library belongs to you and you are part of the library [...] If you put a library with a supermarket, you just get a book supermarket” (Steve Bashforth).

Elected member Simon Cooke (Cons) on the other hand, seemed to have no problem with such a scenario. In Cooke’s view, the stock of a smaller branch library could easily be incorporated into the supermarket environment and be issued by supermarket check-out staff; library staff might be available at certain

hours to deal with enquiries, and failing that, people still had their separate central library. In this way he concluded:

“I can then offer a library service 7 days a week, 12 hours a day, which is a dramatic improvement on what we’ve got now” (Simon Cooke, Cons).

5.4 Conclusions

Issues surrounding the retail model of service provision produced a wide range of responses across the board, as indicated in this chapter’s discussion (and in Appendix 4). Whilst nobody disagreed that libraries today should be customer-led and most seemed to agree that libraries could learn from the retail sector’s presentation of services, any kind of overall consensus on the retail sector’s role in library service provision did not really extend beyond this. What did emerge was a *general* attitudinal division between those from Labour-controlled authorities and those from non-Labour controlled authorities. There was often a high degree of convergence for example, between the views of David Fay, Ian Watson and elected member Simon Cooke (Cons), whose responses seemed to indicate a general belief that the ‘customer-led’ library had a great deal to gain from comparing its own service provision with that of the retail sector. In recognition of people’s increasing service expectations as *consumers*, these participants were generally the most enthusiastic advocates of collaboration and collocation with the retail sector, giving clear indications that moves in that direction were being taken by their authorities. Participants from the former group on the other hand, often referred to the very different roles and

functions of the public library and the retail book store. Several of these participants indicated doubt over how, if at all, commercial ideas and influences could be incorporated into public library space without compromising the library's historic neutrality and its 'public' identity (CABE 2004).

6. THE FUTURE IMPACT OF COMMERCIALISATION

6.1 Opportunities and challenges for the public library in an increasingly commercialised world

Having explored participants' views on commercial influences found in the public library today, this chapter now turns to examine their political and professional perspectives on the opportunities and challenges commercialisation pressures might present in the future. It is initially important to note that whilst some participants saw commercialisation as a great challenge or opportunity, a number of others rejected the idea that public libraries in the future were likely to be largely dependent on, or centred around, commercial interests. Martin Molloy for example, pointed out:

“America is probably one of the most commercialised places on earth [...] But when you look at American public libraries, they're not run by commercial organisations [...] And I think one of the reasons for that is about the fact that the library isn't commercial, you know, it's not worth a big company putting all the money in [...] I don't think there's a case for commercialisation of libraries and I doubt whether it'll ever be demonstrated in the future either”.

Janice Maskort agreed that any commercial ‘threat’ to the future of the public library service in this country was probably exaggerated, arguing:

“I don’t think there is a huge commercial world out there dying to get its hands on public libraries because they know it won’t help them fulfil their core purpose which is to generate profit”.

Library participants David Fay and Ian Watson noted the more indirect influences commercialisation could have on the public library service. Their responses indicated a belief that libraries - operating in a world of increasing consumer power – would be very much affected by competitive pressures, perhaps negatively so, if opportunities to adapt and adjust to these pressures were not fully explored. Thus seeing commercialisation as something of a double-edged sword, Ian Watson warned:

“If it’s not grasped as an opportunity, it then does become a challenge and potentially a threat. And if anyone sort of just tries to turn their back on it and thinks it will go away, then they will be sadly disappointed” .

Along similar lines, David Fay argued:

“We have to be aware of what the marketplace is [...] Where there is an opportunity, for example, to bring in funding that may allow you to refurbish, where partnership working allows you to open longer hours...they’re all opportunities to be grasped really”.

The perceived need to compete to attract people into the public library has in fact been acknowledged elsewhere. McArthur and Nicholson (2005: 2) recently warned that “in today’s society, where people tend to be cash rich and time poor, the survival of the library service depends on its ability to compete with organisations in other market sectors, such as retail, leisure and hospitality”. Ian Watson agreed that where people had more affluence, they would also have more choice, and commercialism could indeed pose a potential threat in this sense:

“Where people are truly customers, they have the option of taking their business somewhere else if what is offered in the library doesn’t meet the standards that they know, anticipate or expect”.

Anne Farrington also felt it inevitable that there would be more elements of commercialisation creeping in to the public library service itself, but commented:

“I think it can be advantageous, as long as it’s carefully handled. I mean, there has to be professional input from public librarians to maintain that ethos of free access to knowledge and information”.

6.2 The public library in the twenty first century: redefining roles and values

Seeing this creeping commercialisation as a serious threat to the library's traditional mission to promote information as a freely available public good, one commentator argued: "If libraries don't ask what it is they are about, then they meet the challenges of commercialisation unprepared and incapable of doing more than adapting to a business agenda" (Webster 1999). For Ian Watson, the 'challenges' of commercialisation actually brought an "opportunity for the library service to look at what it does and to work out what the values are which it and its council see as important" (Ian Watson). Indeed, several library and council participants in this study explicitly referred to core library roles and values when making their case for, or against more commercialised models of library service provision in the future. Simon Cooke (Cons) for example, recognised that core functions of the library service needed to be re-examined and redefined, in light of commercialisation pressures. He argued:

"With a core function, you make a choice about what the public service function is of a library. And what we offer is free access to information. What we don't offer is sort of free, un-constricted access to information, and never had been. So what we need to do is define what is the free bit. And anything round it, you can begin to say right ok, how do we exploit this commercially..." (Simon Cooke).

Equally, those who did not want to see commercialisation gaining any ground in public libraries, often framed their arguments around what they considered to be the library's main purposes and objectives. Bob Janes (Lab) argued:

“A think people arguing for commercialisation are missing the clear issue of what the hell libraries are there for. They are not there as glorified bookshops, or as ‘book loan shops’. They’re there for a much more complex and socially diverse set of reasons”.

Commercialisation was thus something to which Bob Janes did not want “to give any credibility”, a sentiment shared by Alec Rowley (Cons) who stated:

“I just don’t want it at all. I think if there are any benefits to it, they’re going to be outweighed by the damage it’s going to do”.

The libraries traditional inclusiveness was also recognised by Annette Noskwith (Cons). Citing the library's social value as “a place for the community”, she explained:

“It’s equally as important for your old man who can’t afford a newspaper to be able to come in and read his newspaper as it is for a child who comes in and has some help with their homework. So I don’t really see commercialism coming into it” (Annette Noskwith).

In view of the library's complex and less easily quantifiable social objectives, the Local Government Association (2004: viii) in fact emphasised that "qualitative measures of performance [...] need to carry weight as well as counting visits made and books lent". Janice Maskort also pointed out that work to promote social inclusion was "highly expensive in terms of resources for what you get back" and would not therefore sit comfortably with purely commercial imperatives to boost book issues and meet income targets. Already, she explained:

The government wants us to be both socially inclusive and hit performance targets. And there is a real genuine tension there. The real danger for me of commercialisation is that it will make it even harder to maintain the social inclusion role" (Janice Maskort).

Articulating his argument with reference to the public library's unique value in society, Martin Molloy suggested furthermore, that there was no pressing need to turn to a more commercialised model of library service provision. In spite of a widely publicised decline in visits and book issues, Molloy was keen to point out that public libraries continue to perform well in attracting a huge amount of people – a number that many in the Arts and Entertainment World would envy. He argued:

“One of the reasons we’ve got those figures is that we are an institution. We are something that is there that people trust. And I think if we’re marketed as the Marks and Spencer’s library or the Sainsbury’s library or whatever, you’ll see people drifting away, and that’ll be the end of that. I don’t believe that will happen and I certainly hope that it won’t” (Martin Molloy).

6.3 Commercialisation: shaping a future model of public library service provision?

Whilst the vast majority of participants did not want to see any blatant commercialisation of the public library service, few went as far as to suggest that there was no role at all for the commercial sector in the future provision of library services. What did emerge from a number of participants’ responses was the fact that partnership working - be that with other services from the public sector, voluntary sector or commercial sector - was becoming increasingly widespread in the public library world. This may in fact be reflective of a more general shift from the “one-size fits all” model of public sector provision (IPPR: 2001: 31) to delivery of services through “mixed provision of in house services and contractual and partnership arrangements” (Sheffield City Council 2005: 6). This indeed seemed to be a positive development in the eyes of elected member Simon Cooke, who argued:

“We need to get away from the ideological argument between everything should be in-house or everything should be outsourced...that was a sort of 1980s/1990s argument which I think is misplaced now”.

Library participant Steve Bashforth in fact commented:

“I don’t really think of things in terms of commercialised models. I think of it in terms of partnership work – it’s always better to work with the partnership ethos so you don’t get into these ‘them and us’ scenarios”.

General concern has previously been expressed that in fact, “the pragmatism that Best Value and public – private partnerships draw on is in danger of being stretched to breaking point, the suspicion being that the pre-1997 ‘private good/public bad’ assumptions never actually went away” (Maile and Hoggart 2001: 518). Whether or not this is the case, several of those participants who felt that partnership working was moulding the future, were keen to point out that public – private partnerships were by no means leading the way. Martin Molloy commented:

“I think libraries have got to have much better partnerships, much bigger partnerships. They’ve got to work with a range of others and that range of others would not exclude the commercial sector but it wouldn’t be the starting point”.

Bob Janes (Lab) also remained cautious about conceding too much control over library service provision to the commercial sector in the future, and admitted:

“I would much rather an imaginative local authority library service develop any aspects of commercialisation than a local authority hand over its library service to commercial interests”.

Whilst Steve Bashforth did believe that each partnership or contractual opportunity with the commercial sector should be assessed separately, he seemed equally concerned that if there was *no* local control over, or local accountability for the public library service in the future, then there would inevitably be more commercialisation, whether it was desirable or not.

6.4 Conclusions

Clearly, nobody could claim to know for sure how much, or in what ways, commercialisation would affect the public library service in the future. Most participants' thoughts on the future impact of commercialisation were largely formed by looking at the sort of environment in which the public library service operates now, and by considering how (if at all) the library's traditional roles and values could be accommodated within more commercialised models of service provision. From this, it is not possible to conclude that commercialisation was viewed generally more as a threat than an opportunity or vice versa. The issue was clearly more complex, as shown by the fact that some participants felt commercialisation presented both threats and opportunities for the public library, and other participants in fact believed that commercialism would have only a negligible impact on the future provision of library services. The vast majority of participants did not indicate that they wanted to see a totally commercialised library service in the future, though several acknowledged that commercial influences and interests were likely to play an increasingly important role in library service provision.

The growing prominence of the partnership agenda, mentioned by a number of participants, seemed more indicative of a pragmatic need to work with a range of other service providers in the future, than of any kind of emergent private-public consensus. Indeed, a greater number of participants than not, felt that there must be limits on the amount of control conceded to the private sector, and on the levels of future influence exercised by commercial interests in the public library.

7. CONCLUSION

This study has sought to examine, compare, and evaluate professional and political attitudes regarding commercialised models of service provision in public libraries. In-depth discussion with library professionals and local elected members has illuminated a wide range of views on commercial influences in public libraries, as well as providing valuable insight into different perspectives on the general impact of commercialisation on the library service.

Professional and political reactions to all of the aspects of commercialisation explored in this study have been generally based either on ideological arguments or pragmatic considerations, or indeed a mixture of the two. A number of library professionals and elected members consistently drew upon inherent differences between the ideological values and traditional roles of the public sector and those of the private sector, to make a case against commercialisation of the public library service.

In Chapter 3's discussion of private sector involvement in public libraries, fundamental differences between democratic accountability and commercial accountability were emphasised by a number of participants. At the same time however, the pragmatism promoted by Best Value was evident in responses of those who emphasised the need to weigh up each case separately, when deciding whether in-house or outsourced provision offered the most

efficient and effective means of service delivery. On this basis, whole-service outsourcing was not always to be discarded as an infeasible option by everyone in this study.

In Chapter 4, many arguments made in response to the issue of charging also revealed a degree of pragmatism, with frequent reference being made to practical and financial needs as justification for some library charges. Once more however, many found it difficult to square the public library's fundamental principle of free access to information with commercial imperatives to make a profit, and the most common belief was that libraries should continue to promote information as a public good.

In Chapter 5, some participants' eagerness to learn practical lessons from, and collaborate with, the retail sector in a wide range of areas of service provision, was countered by others' reluctance to see the public library's trusted neutrality and social inclusiveness compromised by too much commercial influence in library space.

Final consideration of the future impact of commercialisation revealed a strongly perceived pragmatic need, on the part of some participants, for the library to compete in the marketplace in order to survive in a consumer world. Others believed that there was little case to be argued for the future commercialisation of a library service which existed to serve complex community needs rather than simple profit-making goals. It was thus found to be

more likely that public library service provision in the future would be shaped by pragmatic partnership arrangements with a range of different services, rather than be moulded into any single commercialised model.

A key conclusion to be drawn from this whole discussion is that no *overall* consensus about the feasibility or desirability of commercialised models of library service provision was found amongst the library professionals, amongst the elected members, or between the two groups. Elected members from the same political party expressed some very different views on commercialisation, as did those who shared the same profession. On a very general level however, the political control of their authority did seem to have an impact on the views expressed by library professionals. Those from Labour-controlled authorities were generally more cautious about commercial influences than were those from non Labour-controlled authorities, where participants' responses indicated that more commercialised models of service provision were being considered, developed or actually implemented at this present time.

Furthermore, where it had been possible to obtain the views of the Chief Librarian and Cabinet member in the same authority, it was found that their attitudes towards many aspects of commercialisation were similar, as were the arguments they used to make a case for or against more commercialised models of service provision. It might be assumed that this convergence of opinion was partly reflective of the general ethos in that authority, in terms of corporate objectives and the library's role in helping to meet them. The fact that the Chief

Librarian and the Cabinet member seemed to be thinking along similar lines might also be taken to suggest that good communication existed between the two.

Some library participants in this study however, highlighted the problem of being unable to gain regular access to Cabinet members. Chapter 3's discussion briefly touched upon concerns that the replacement of the old Committee system with the Cabinet system was making it more difficult to maintain effective professional-political communication at the local level. Unfortunately, the limited scope of this study restricted the amount of specific attention that could be devoted to this clearly important issue. It is therefore suggested that a future research study might be carried out to investigate more fully the impact of the Cabinet system of local governance on the development and management of the public library service.

The breadth and scope of this current study's discussion in fact gave rise to a great number of interesting themes, many of which seem highly relevant to the future of public library services in this country, and would benefit from more detailed future research. The tensions between customer wants and needs, as well as the lack of clarity about core and non-core library roles, are issues which have been widely debated in the past. They nevertheless do seem to merit further attention given that they appeared to be problematic for many of this study's participants, and may present barriers to effective problem solving and decision-making in the future.

Irrespective of their feelings about commercialisation, most of this study's participants also fully acknowledged that customer expectations of service delivery were higher than ever. It might therefore be beneficial for future research to expand on some of the issues raised in Chapter 5 of this study, by taking a more detailed look at customer service and staff attitudes in public libraries today.

One important perspective missing from this study has of course, been that of the general public. Different individual members of the public will obviously have different views on the roles and values of the public library service, just as different elected members and library professionals may have very different ideas to those expressed by the participants of this study. Research into the public perception of the public library service however, is always valuable. It can, and indeed should, help professionals and politicians to decide upon the most appropriate model/s of library service provision for the future.

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APPENDIX 1: LETTERS

1.1. Letter to Chief Librarians

Mr/Ms.....
Chief Libraries Officer

7 May 2005

Dear,

I am currently studying for an MA in Librarianship at the University of Sheffield and am writing to request your help with my planned dissertation, the subject of which is *Political and professional attitudes regarding commercialised models of service provision in public libraries*. I wonder whether you would be willing and able to spare the time to participate in a short interview. It would be most valuable to hear your views, and possibly those of other professional library staff within the authority, on topics such as outsourcing, public-private partnerships and premium service charges.

Additionally, I hope to approach and invite for interview local politicians who have a particular responsibility for library issues. The Municipal Yearbook indicates that the following would be worth seeing:

.....[Cabinet Member for *Community Services*]

It would also be interesting to hear the views of Opposition Spokespersons with responsibilities for library and information services.

I plan to contact the above persons in the coming weeks, providing you have no objections. I recognise however, that there may have been alterations to council

composition following the recent elections and would therefore be most grateful for any information you might have on any changing council responsibilities.

I am hoping to conduct face-to-face interviews from 8 June-8 July. If you are willing to participate in this study, it would be much appreciated if you could respond to this request as soon as possible, to let me know an interview date and time which is convenient for you. I can be contacted anytime at the email address or telephone numbers given above.

It is envisaged that the interview itself will last no longer than 45 minutes. If you are happy for me to do so, it would be helpful if I were able to use a tape recorder during the interview meeting, as an aid to note taking. I should emphasise that all collected data will be used solely for my own research purposes and no individuals or authorities shall be identified by name in the dissertation unless permission is given.

Many thanks for your time. I very much hope that you are able to help with this request. You will appreciate that because I need to obtain a sample to reflect different variables, not all of the people receiving this letter will be interviewed. However, I hope to be able to finalize arrangements by 3 June and look forward to hearing from you and possibly meeting you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Fox

Department of Information Studies, University of Sheffield

1.2 Letter to Elected Members

Councillor
Executive/Opposition Member for.....
.....

13 June 2005

Dear Councillor,

I am currently studying for an MA in Librarianship at the University of Sheffield and am writing to request your help with my planned dissertation, the subject of which is *Political and professional attitudes regarding commercialised models of service provision in public libraries*. I wonder whether you would be willing and able to spare the time to participate in a short interview. It would be most valuable to hear your views on topics such as outsourcing, public-private partnerships and premium service charges.

I am hoping to conduct face-to-face interviews with Chief Librarians and local councillors with responsibilities for library matters. I recently contacted the Chief Libraries Officer in, Mr/Ms, and he has kindly agreed to an interview meeting on..... If you are also available on this date, I would be very pleased to meet you for an interview at Alternatively, I could meet you on any other convenient date from mid June-mid July, excluding the dates on which I have arranged interviews elsewhere, which

are.....I do appreciate however, that your work schedule may be extremely busy, and interview can therefore be conducted by telephone if this is a more convenient method.

If you are willing to participate in the study, it would be much appreciated if you could respond to this request as soon as possible, to let me know a suitable interview date and time. I can be contacted anytime at the email, postal address or telephone numbers given above.

It is envisaged that the interview itself will last no longer than 45 minutes. If you are happy for me to do so, it would be helpful if I were able to tape record the interview, as an aid to note taking. I should emphasise that all collected data will be used solely for my own research purposes and no individuals or authorities shall be identified by name in the dissertation unless permission is given.

Many thanks for your time. I very much hope that you are able to help with this request and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Fox

Department of Information Studies, University of Sheffield.

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

LABOUR

Derbyshire County Council

- Martin Molloy (Director of Cultural Services)
- Bob Janes (Labour Cabinet Member for Community Services)
- Annette Noskwith (Cabinet Conservative Opposition Member)

Sheffield City Council

- Janice Maskort (City Librarian)

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

- Steve Bashforth (Chief Library Officer)
- Alec Rowley (Conservative Opposition Member)

Wakefield Metropolitan District Council

- Anne Farrington (Principal Librarian)

CONSERVATIVE

North Yorkshire County Council

- David Fay (Assistant Head of Services and Delivery, Libraries)

NO OVERALL CONTROL (NOC)

Bradford Metropolitan District Council

(Political composition: 38 Cons, 29 Lab, 15 LD, 4 BNP, 4 Green)

- Ian Watson (Head of Libraries, Archives and Information Services)
- Simon Cooke (Conservative Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Leisure and Culture)

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interview Details

Name:

Position:

Name and political control of local authority:

(For politicians only) Political allegiance:

Date of interview:

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this dissertation is to obtain your views on commercialised models of service provision in public libraries. The interview will be divided into 3 main parts, and should last no longer than 45 minutes. Your answers will be treated in confidence and no individual will be identified by name in the final report without permission.

- May I identify you by name in my dissertation? YES/NO
- Do you have any objections to this interview being tape recorded?
YES/NO

1) What is *your* understanding of commercialised models in public libraries?

The questions I am now going to ask will examine the following aspects of commercialisation: private sector involvement in public libraries; charging for library services; and retail influences in public libraries.

SECTION A: PRIVATE SECTOR INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

USING THE TERMS ON THIS CARD, PLEASE TELL ME THE STRENGTH OF YOUR AGREEMENT OR DISAGREEMENT WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS:

- 2) **Further consideration should be given to extending the role of Private Finance Initiatives in the area of public libraries.**
Can you please tell me why you said this?
- 3) **Some parts of the public library service *can* be contracted out to private companies**
Can you please tell me why you said this?
- 4) **Some parts of the public library service *should* be contracted out to private companies.**
Can you please tell me why you said this?
- 5) **A wide range of library functions can be outsourced without abdicating professional responsibility.**
Can you please tell me why you said this?
- 6) **A wide range of library functions can be outsourced without abdicating local control.**
Can you please tell me why you said this?
- 7) **Whole-service outsourcing is not appropriate for public libraries.**
Can you please tell me why you said this?
- 8) **In 1995 the KPMG report on public libraries concluded that the market place did not exist to make whole-service outsourcing a practical possibility? To what extent, if any, do you think the position on contracting out-has changed since this report?**
- 9) **To what extent, if any, should professional values be considered when judging the viability of public library partnerships with the private sector?**

SECTION B: CHARGING

USING THE TERMS ON THIS CARD, PLEASE TELL ME THE STRENGTH OF YOUR AGREEMENT OR DISAGREEMENT WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS:

- 10) **Charges should be introduced for the loan of fiction books in public libraries.**

Can you please tell me why you said this?

11) **Public libraries should charge for Internet access.**

Can you please tell me why you said this?

12) **In UK public libraries, the loan of audio-visual material incurs a charge but the same material in text does not. For example, in the case of a Shakespeare play, there might be a charge for the recording of the play but not for the text. What are your thoughts on this?**

USING THE TERMS ON THIS CARD, PLEASE TELL ME THE STRENGTH OF YOUR AGREEMENT OR DISAGREEMENT WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS:

13) **Charges should be introduced to enable users who are willing to pay to receive premium services (such as professional help with family history research).** *Can you please tell me why you said this?*

14) **The introduction of direct charges on those who use public libraries will increase the gap between the information-haves and have-nots.**

Can you please tell me why you said this?

15) **In public libraries, information should be treated as a public good, not a marketable commodity.**

Can you please tell me why you said this?

SECTION C: THE RETAIL MODEL OF SERVICE PROVISION

16) **Library services must follow retailing in being “customer-led”.**

Can you please tell me why you said this?

17) **Public libraries should remain public-sphere, neutral and non-commercial places.**

Can you please tell me why you said this?

18) **People should experience their identity as citizens rather than consumers in the public library.**

Can you please tell me why you said this?

19) **The public library has important lessons to learn from the retail book trade.**

Can you please tell me why you said this?

- 20) **It has recently been suggested: “There is no reason why a library should not be combined with a supermarket so that the commercial partner maintains the building and handles the routine of loans, and the library, sited in a dedicated area, is managed by library staff to offer help, information and advice”. What are your views on this?**

SECTION D: CONCLUSION

- 21) **What are your views on the opportunities and challenges of commercialisation in public libraries?**
- 22) **Is there anything about commercialised models of library service provision which has not been covered in this interview and you wish to add?**
- (For library professionals only) **May I finally ask how many years you have worked in the library profession?**

Thank you very much for your time, help and cooperation. It has been greatly appreciated.

APPENDIX 4 : BREAKDOWN OF RESPONSES TOLIKERT SCALE QUESTIONS

SECTION A: PRIVATE SECTOR INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

- (Question 2) Further consideration should be given to extending the role of Private Finance Initiatives in the area of public libraries.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Labour		II	I	I	
Conservative			I		
NOC				I	
Labour Elected Member		I			
Conservative Elected Member			I	I	I

- (Question 3) Some parts of the public library service *can* be contracted out to private companies.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Labour	I	III			
Conservative		I			
NOC		I			
Labour Elected Member		I			
Conservative Elected Member	I	I	I		

- (Question 4) Some parts of the public library service *should* be contracted out to private companies.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Labour	I	I	II		
Conservative				I	
NOC			I		
Labour Elected Member				I	
Conservative Elected Member			III		

- (Question 5) A wide range of library functions can be outsourced without abdicating professional responsibility.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Labour		I		III	
Conservative			I		
NOC	I				
Labour Elected Member				I	
Conservative Elected Member		III			

- (Question 6) A wide range of library functions can be outsourced without abdicating local control.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Labour			II	II	
Conservative		I			
NOC	I				
Labour Elected Member					I
Conservative Elected Member		I	I	I	

- (Question 7) Whole-service outsourcing is not appropriate for public libraries.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Labour	III	I			
Conservative		I			
NOC				I	
Labour Elected Member	I				
Conservative Elected Member	I		II		

SECTION B: CHARGING

- (Question 10) Charges should be introduced for the loan of fiction books in public libraries.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Labour				I	III
Conservative				I	
NOC					I
Labour Elected Member					I
Conservative Elected Member					III

- (Question 11) Public libraries should charge for Internet access.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Labour			I		III
Conservative				I	
NOC					I
Labour Elected Member					I
Conservative Elected Member		II	I		

- (Question 13) Charges should be introduced to enable users who are willing to pay to receive premium services (such as professional help with family history research).

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Labour		II		II	
Conservative		I			
NOC		I			
Labour Elected Member					I
Conservative Elected Member	I	I	I		

- (Question 14) The introduction of direct charges on those who use public libraries will increase the gap between the information haves and have nots.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Labour	III				
Conservative		I			
NOC				I	
Labour Elected Member	I				
Conservative Elected Member	I	I		I	

- (Question 15) In public libraries, information should be treated as a public good, not a marketable commodity.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Labour	III	I			
Conservative		I			
NOC	I				
Labour Elected Member	I				
Conservative Elected Member	II				I

SECTION C: THE RETAIL MODEL OF SERVICE PROVISION

- (Question 16) Library services must follow retailing in being “customer-led”.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Labour		II	II		
Conservative	I				
NOC		I			
Labour Elected Member	I				
Conservative Elected Member	I		II		

- (Question 17) Public libraries should remain public-sphere, neutral and non-commercial places.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Labour	III	I			
Conservative				I	
NOC		I			
Labour Elected Member	I				
Conservative Elected Member	I	I		I	

- (Question 18) People should experience their identity as citizens rather than consumers in the public library.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Labour	III	I			
Conservative				I	
NOC				I	
Labour Elected Member		I			
Conservative Elected Member	I	I		I	

- (Question 19) The public library has important lessons to learn from the retail book trade.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Labour	I	II		I	
Conservative	I				
NOC	I				
Labour Elected Member			I		
Conservative Elected Member	I		I	I	

APPENDIX 5: LIKERT SCALE RESPONSE CARD

PLEASE USE THE TERMS ON THIS CARD
TO INDICATE THE STRENGTH OF YOUR
AGREEMENT OR DISAGREEMENT.

STRONGLY AGREE

AGREE

NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE

DISAGREE

STRONGLY DISAGREE