

## A New Libraries Performance Management Framework



March 2007

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A CIP catalogue record of this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-905867-18-9

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# 1 Introduction

In 2002 the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Museum, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) introduced the Public Library Service Standards. These national library standards were a first step in comparing and benchmarking national library authority performance. In 2004 a review was undertaken which saw the introduction of a smaller and slightly revised set of standards.

Since their introduction, local authorities have responded well to the challenge of meeting the Standards and there have been significant improvements in performance against many of them. However, there is a growing consensus among library and local government stakeholders that some of the Standards as first developed have served their purpose and that they do not fully reflect the much wider roles that libraries now play in their local communities.

PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC) was commissioned in July 2006 by the DCMS and the MLA to carry out a review of the Public Library Service Standards (PLSS). The aim of the review was to gain an understanding of the PLSS by engaging with a range of national and local stakeholders to examine the extent to which they were still fit for purpose, to assess the impact they have made on the performance of library authorities, and how they are placed to adapt to future changes in policy and performance within the library service.

The overall aim of the review was to create a revised framework for assessing library performance which:

- is transparent and easily understood by all stakeholders;
- provide a reasonable assessment of the performance of library services;
- is meaningful, clear and without 'perverse incentives';
- continues to help define the phrase 'comprehensive and efficient';
- focuses on evaluating the quality of service delivered through outcomes and impacts on individuals and communities;
- has clear links to the high level Local Government Agenda to ensure credibility across Local Government;
- reduces the burden of collection;
- acts as a driver for improvement to services for local people; and
- is developed within the context of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) and future performance framework to ensure a coherent performance assessment regime.

During the review the Government published a major White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, which set out the government's vision for a modern local government.

Included within this paper was a proposal for a new performance management framework for the whole of local government which proposes the replacement of all service specific reporting frameworks with one new framework which is much more focused on the outcomes that are created by local government (and its partners') services than the inputs that go into them. Specifically, this signals the end of the PLSS as we currently understand them.

However, both DCMS and MLA are keen to ensure that the public library sector continues to deliver relevant and high quality services to local communities and that the role of libraries in contributing towards local authorities' wider objectives is recognised and understood. Effective performance management will be essential to this, and therefore work has continued to develop a new performance management framework for public libraries.

This paper presents the final consultation stage of the review and presents the DCMS's and MLA's proposals for the structure of the framework and the key performance indicators we propose to include within it.

This framework will not be compulsory but instead we hope will provide valuable information for local authorities to benchmark their performance against others to understand where their services are performing well and where they may be room for improvement. We also hope that the framework will help local library services to demonstrate the contribution that they can and do make to the deliver of wider community

outcomes and therefore secure a continued role in local public service delivery.

We therefore hope that many local authorities will choose to collect and report this information to enable us to share it across the sector for the benefit of all.

This framework is a work in progress, not least because there are still uncertainties about the national performance management framework and the user satisfaction and perception indicators that will support that framework. We expect more to be published by the Government over coming months which will provide more detail on this framework and we are committed to ensuring that the framework for library performance is aligned with the wider national framework.

Where possible we have sought to use performance indicators which are already tried and tested and which have demonstrated they can provide robust information. However, in some areas we propose to develop new performance indicators. These will need to be developed in consultation with key library stakeholders to ensure that they are capable of being collected in an efficient, reliable and consistent way.

We would therefore be grateful for your comments on the proposed framework, in particular the performance indicators contained within it.

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## 2 The context and the challenge ahead

### 2.1 The changing performance framework

The picture of performance management in local government has evolved considerably over the past ten years or so, and continues to do so. The early 1990s saw a heavy focus on inputs into services with the introduction of Best Value Performance Indicators. For some authorities this was the first time that performance against a set of performance indicators had been systematically collected and monitored. It also saw the development of the Council 'league table', comparing the performance of one local authority against another.

While many suggested that this approach was crude and simplistic it nevertheless brought performance management to the fore and encouraged local councils to think and behave differently.

As authorities have become better at managing performance, the nature of the national performance framework for assessing them has become more sophisticated and complex, resulting most recently in the introduction of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

At the same time as the national framework has been developing, so too have a raft of service based performance frameworks, many of which have been accompanied by

statutory reporting, targets, floors, ceilings and other mechanisms to encourage standardised performance.

It appears that in many authorities and in many services performance has improved over recent years and there is now an emerging recognition from many in local government that the national framework needs to change to reflect not only the development of local authorities' own performance management skills, but also to consider the increasingly complex environment in which they, and their partners operate.

In November 2006 the Government published a new local government White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*. Among other proposals, the White Paper set out the Government's vision for a new performance management framework for local government.

The proposals are centred around the removal of the existing separate service based indicators, targets and frameworks and replaces them all with one single 'place based', outcome focused framework for all local authority services. For the local public library service, this means the end of the Public Library Service Standards.

The proposed framework consists of around 35 national priority outcomes which set out the Government's key priorities and will be articulated through PSAs in the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007. Supporting these PSAs will be a core set of around 200 national performance

indicators on which all local authorities will be required to report progress towards the priority outcomes. In addition to this national set of Performance Indicators (PIs) there will also be a small core set of citizen and user satisfaction and perception measures, and a national set of efficiency measures.

Both the priority outcomes and the national set of indicators are currently being developed and DCMS is actively involved in their development to ensure that the role of cultural services in the delivery of wider community outcomes is recognised within the national indicator set.

Further detail on these proposals is expected in the near future, but we are confident that the proposals we set out in this document sit well with, and support, this emerging national framework.

Local authorities will be expected to develop a set of local targets as part of an enhanced Local Area Agreement. This agreement will contain around 35 targets which are likely to be a mix of:

- **floor targets** – where minimum standards are not being met, these targets will be set by government and will specify the amount and/or timescale for improvement up to such standards;

- **non-negotiable targets** – where Government determines that an equal improvement is required in all areas, universal local targets may be applied;
- **negotiable targets** – in such cases, the issues for negotiation may be whether or not to have a target, or the level at which the target should be set. Such negotiations will need to balance national requirements with local circumstances, performance and priorities;
- **local stretch targets** – should a further round of performance reward grants be approved in the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), it will continue to be paid, as now, for extra improvements in performance on targets within the Local Area Agreements (LAA) (ie stretch targets). Progress against these targets will not be performance-managed by central government, but only considered at the end-date when determining the level of reward grant earned.

A new annual performance assessment, the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), to be led by the Audit Commission, is also proposed which will include:

- an annual risk judgement;
- a direction of travel statement;
- a use of resources judgement, and;
- judgements from any inspection activities that have taken place flowing from the previous year's risk assessment.

The CAA will inform an annual review meeting of the Government Office and other government departments which will determine the nature of the ongoing relationship with the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and individual partners and any response required to any areas at risk from underperformance.

## **2.2 Where does the performance management framework for libraries fit?**

While the national performance framework is still in development we believe that there are clearly a number of areas where it can be used to support local authorities within the context of the new national framework.

First, we believe that using the framework will help local authorities to understand drivers of performance improvement for library services and lead to improved local library services. By providing a 'map' of performance measures, local authorities will be able to monitor and demonstrate the impact of changes in policy or funding on the performance of their library services.

Second, we believe that the framework can be used by local authorities to demonstrate the achievement of improvement in local library services to feed into the direction of travel statement for the authority.

Third, it can also be used as a tool to understand comparative performance between authorities as part of a drive to improve the value for money delivered by the services and thus support an authority's self-assessment under the use of resources judgement.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we hope that it can be used locally to identify key priorities for communities and demonstrate the role that library services can play in helping the Council and its partners to achieve the LSP's Local Area Agreement Targets. This may, in turn, mean including local priority targets for library services within the local performance framework to demonstrate the contribution that local library services can make to the achievement of wider community outcomes.

While we believe that the framework is a good start in achieving this fourth objective, we acknowledge that there is more work still to be done.

## **2.3 Work in progress**

No performance management framework is perfect, and in the dynamic world of local government things do not stay the same for long. We have attempted to set out in this paper a framework which will take public library authorities on to the next stage from the PLSS, towards a greater appreciation of the need to focus on achieving community outcomes through library services, rather than statutory targets.

We have looked at the future development of public libraries as set out in *Framework for the Future* and the MLA's recent consultation paper, *A Blueprint for Excellence*, to consider the challenges ahead for the public library service in developing the framework to ensure that it is informed by the direction of progress of public libraries.

But there is still work to be done by DCMS, MLA, local authorities and other national and local partners to continue the on-going improvement and evolution of library services. We have set out below a number of key areas where we propose to conduct further work over the coming months.

### **Demonstrating the contribution of local libraries to community outcomes**

While those working in the public library field have known for some time, there is a need to ensure that a wider range of stakeholders appreciate and understand the contribution that effective local library services can make to community outcomes.

There is clearly a role for a range of national partners, including DCMS, Communities and Local Government (CLG) and MLA to help articulate this case and to provide local authorities with the tools and support to make the case locally with members, officers and other partners.

This might mean, through the development and commissioning of toolkits, helping local councils to capture

evidence and articulate their arguments locally. It might mean commissioning new research to demonstrate the impact that library services can have on the achievement of different priority outcomes. Or it could mean bringing together existing research evidence to provide a clear and universal understanding of libraries contributions. In reality, it is likely to mean a mix of all three of these actions.

While some library authorities are already working with local partners to place library services at the heart of the achievement of community outcomes, many more need to learn from these to demonstrate the crucial role that they can play, particularly in the achievement of LAA outcomes. The MLA has an important role to play in supporting the collection and dissemination of good practice to allow authorities to learn from and share experience with each other.

The library community should consider what tools are available to it to capture more 'outcome' focused information in a consistent and comparable manner. In particular, it may be worth developing the existing IPF PLUS surveys to include a wider range of questions which ask users for their views on the impact that their use of library services has on them. This may be one way to take forward some of the learning and ideas of the Inspiring Learning for All programme and the Generic Learning Outcomes.

### **The ‘Virtual World’**

As libraries develop to meet the needs of 21st century communities more and more services are being provided on-line. Debate has continued for some time over how to measure ‘virtual’ use of library services and further work is needed to take this forward.

But it is not only ‘use’ of virtual services which need to be considered.

Mechanisms will also need to be developed to consider how to measure access to those services, to ensure that no group or community is excluded from accessing services in this way. Ways to measure quality and efficiency of those online services will also need to be considered to ensure that a comprehensive picture of performance can be developed which includes all services delivered by library authorities through the full range of access channels.

MLA are currently working with partners on addressing the issue of ‘virtual visits’ and library authorities will need to engage with them to reach a shared understanding of what is possible and practical.

### **Community engagement**

In order to ensure that local public library services are in tune with the aspirations and needs of local communities they will need to ensure that they engage with all of their communities to develop services which meet those needs.

This framework does not propose any measures for ‘community engagement’ and DCMS/MLA are considering whether further work is needed to investigate whether creating such measures might be possible.

However, we would suggest that the nature of local authorities and the different communities they serve means that it is likely to be difficult to find meaningful and reliable quantitative performance measures which can be used to assess community engagement.

### **Qualitative assessment**

Instead we believe that a more ‘qualitative’ mechanism for performance assessment to support this benchmarking framework might be a more useful line to follow.

Peer Review has so far provided a useful tool for local authorities to consider more subjective aspects of local performance and we support the continued development of such mechanisms. These tools should focus on those issues which are more difficult to measure through quantitative approaches. This includes matters such as community engagement, partnership working, both with other local authority services and with other public, voluntary and private bodies, and the impact of services on community outcomes.

During the review ideas have been put forward for the creation of a ‘Green Flag’ type scheme for library services. We will be developing our thoughts in this area to consider

whether such a scheme might be practicable, and if so how such a scheme might operate.

### **Conclusion**

This benchmarking framework must not be seen as the one and only tool for authorities to use in considering their performance and striving for improvement. It should be used by authorities in an informed way as part of a comprehensive assessment of the performance of local public library services.

### 3 Feedback from the consultation

In November 2006, the MLA circulated a consultation document to all library authorities in England which set out a proposed new framework for assessing the performance of local public library services. Over 40 authorities responded to the consultation document.

In addition, two workshops were held in London and Manchester with around 65 library stakeholders, including Chief Librarians, Directors of Library Services and corporate performance managers. Two further workshops were held, one with members of the Library Campaign and one with a group of young library users.

This section provides an overview of the feedback received from those responses and events.

#### 3.1 Feedback from stakeholder workshops

##### Local authority workshops

Overall, feedback at both of the events on the report and the draft framework was very positive.

The concept of 'personal wellbeing' as the most immediate outcome from library services was welcomed, although some expressed concern that it might be hard to 'sell' it to Councillors and other officers.

There was a strong desire for the framework to be supported by a core set of performance indicators that authorities could sign up to, which would provide comparative data between authorities. The potential power of this comparator data was said to be 'tremendous' when bidding for extra resources.

There was an expressed desire to see the framework shared with other sectors, for example health and education. Delegates also felt that more research was needed on the impact of some key library service initiatives, such as Bookstart, to demonstrate the ways in which libraries add value to wider community objectives – in order to support the premise of the framework.

The main concern expressed was the fact that the framework will not be statutory. This was thought to reduce the potential impact of the framework in terms of its potential impact on future funding levels for library services.

Even though the framework will not be statutory, delegates expressed a desire for DCMS/MLA to issue clear guidance about the data requirements for the performance indicators.

##### Library user workshops

The focus of the workshops with library users was to understand their motives for using a library and to ascertain what they considered to be important in terms of assessing the performance of their local libraries.

### *Library Campaign*

Understandably, there were a number of different reasons put forward for using a public library, but the common themes were:

- to get information – either from books (especially reference books and periodicals), or from the librarians;
- to get access to books that they could otherwise not get access to, due either to cost or because they are no longer in print or hard to find;
- because they valued the ‘public space’ provided by the library and the feeling of safety and security it provides; and
- for the pure enjoyment of reading as a leisure pastime.

When asked what factors they themselves would consider if asked to rate their library on a scale of one to ten, the common factors cited were:

- access, and in particular library opening hours;
- the quality of the building and the space;
- the range and size of the bookstock;
- the ease with which they could find information;
- the knowledge of staff; and
- the levels of engagement with users / communities.

### *Younger users*

The key reasons younger people said they used the library were to:

- access free resources;
- do homework / research;
- access computers;
- meet friends;
- relax / as a haven for personal space; and
- access other resources, eg DVDs, games, etc.

Even though the group were library users, they did cite some reasons for why they would not use a library, namely:

- they had to pay for certain resources e.g. DVDs / Games;
- opening hours were sometimes restrictive;
- it is [sometimes] cheaper to buy books elsewhere that are new; and
- the services and resources are not of interest.

Again, those at the workshop were asked what criteria they would consider in assessing the performance of their local library. Common responses were:

- accessibility;
- helpfulness / friendliness of staff;
- range and relevance of resources; and
- general image and design of the building.

### 3.2 Written feedback on the consultation document

The consultation document contained a number of questions to which responses were invited. These questions focused on six key areas:

- the concept of ‘personal wellbeing’;
- the aspects of performance covered by the framework;
- core performance indicators;
- measuring ‘efficiency’;
- measuring ‘quality’; and
- additional support requirements.

#### Personal wellbeing

There was very positive support for the concept of wellbeing, although some people in their responses thought whether focusing on the ‘personal’ element might undermine the community value of the services. It was therefore suggested that ‘community and personal wellbeing’ might be more appropriate.

Some concerns were expressed that measuring wellbeing might be difficult as it was seen as an essentially qualitative concept and as such, it might leave libraries open to the threat of cuts, or at least it would not support increased funding.

Satisfaction and use were seen as good indicators of the delivery of successful library services. Most respondents were keen to include the views of non-users or lapsed users

in measures of satisfaction, with some suggesting that there was a danger of complacency if only library users were surveyed.

A few respondents expressed concern about the costs of surveying non-users and commented that they would not be able to give informed views on services. There was overwhelming support from respondents for including other types of ‘use’ other than physical visits. In particular, there was a strong desire for online services to be measured – although many recognised the difficulties in defining a mechanism for measuring website use.

#### Aspects of performance

Respondents agreed that the five areas proposed for inclusion in the framework covered the key areas of focus and agreed that they provided ‘sufficient scope’ for an effective framework. There was some support for the development of a weighting system for the framework to ensure an equitable outcome score.

#### Core performance indicators

The key question asked around core performance indicators was whether the framework should be supported by a national set of voluntary performance indicators or whether authorities should be able to select their own indicators to support the framework based on local priorities.

There was overwhelming support for the development of a national core set of indicators to measure performance, supported by clear guidance on the calculation of the indicators.

Many called for the indicators to be compulsory, expressing concern that the voluntary nature of the indicators might threaten the robustness of data collection and the ability to make comparisons between authorities.

An example of the feedback received was:

*“PLSS did libraries the world of good introducing some rigour in what they did. To do away with that would be very dangerous.”*

There was also a call for DCMS/MLA to collate and publish annual performance figures.

Suggestions of core performance indicators included:

- penetration of service i.e. targeting hard to reach groups;
- level of community engagement (physical and virtual);
- regular use as percentage of residents / various age groups;
- net cost per visit or per issue;
- cost per transaction;
- use of services in a non-library environment;
- book issues;
- school visits;

- outreach and off site work (as measure of contact time);
- satisfaction ratings (users and non users);
- value for money / cost per visit;
- opening hours;
- book acquisitions per 1000 population;
- National Summer Reading Challenge/Bookstart/Home Reader Service;
- user profile figures, ie link between population and use;
- ICT – age and speed of equipment and amount of downtime; and
- benchmarking around lifelong learning / reader development.

### **Measuring efficiency**

The consultation document requested views on whether a measure of cost efficiency should be included at the ‘outcome contributor’ level along with satisfaction and use.

The majority of respondents felt that a cost efficiency measure should not be included at that level because it did not contribute towards wellbeing.

There was however support for including such measures in the framework but since efficiency indicators were thought to contribute more to whether the service was fit for purpose, they were thought more appropriate at the lower level.

Some respondents expressed concern over the inclusion of cost efficiency measures because local authority budget

structures for library services varied widely and could not be compared across authorities and / or because some rural authorities might potentially lose out because of a failure to secure economies of scale. Others suggested that any cost measures included should be weighted to account for regional or other cost variations.

Suggestions for cost efficiency measures included:

- ratio of staff to non staff costs;
- book / item turnover;
- net cost per use of the service [wider use of the service];
- net expenditure per head of the population;
- staff efficiency;
- spend on materials per head of population.

### **Measuring quality**

The consultation document focused on questions around the use of the Public Library User Surveys (PLUS and Children's Plus) and asked for views on suitable measures of quality.

Generally, views on the PLUS survey were that they provided useful statistical and anecdotal evidence of user perceptions of library services. There were some concerns expressed that the survey responses were limited to the experience of users on the day of their visit and that the three year cycle meant that data was out of date for much of its life.

In terms of the actual content, there were mixed views, with some suggesting that it was too long and that a shorter version should be used. Others were concerned that some of the questions around library layout and more detailed questions on user experience had been removed from the most recent version of the survey.

Some respondents suggested that a shorter survey should be developed which could be used more frequently. Others advocated the adoption of a non-user survey.

Other suggestions for measures of library 'quality' included:

- an overall measure of satisfaction;
- 'Chartermark';
- request supply times;
- Stock quality healthcheck;
- Ratio of complaints to compliments;
- Measuring processes, enablers, outcomes (the EFQM model); and
- Hours of active engagement (of excluded groups).

### **Additional support from the DCMS/MLA**

The final questions in the consultation document focused on what support library authorities felt they needed from DCMS and the MLA.

The key response from the consultation was the raising of the national profile of libraries. In particular, respondents were

looking to DCMS and MLA to commission more research into the impact of public library services on local communities and greater promotion of the role that the service can have in delivering wider community benefits.

There were also calls for DCMS and MLA to play a role amongst other government departments and other relevant national bodies to promote libraries as a key part of other agendas by highlighting the contribution that the public library service can make to the achievement of high level strategic outcomes for local communities.

A number of respondents wanted DCMS/MLA to make the performance framework and/or the reporting on performance indicators a compulsory process, and even a suggestion that it should be mandatory to include a library service target within Local Area Agreements.

Support through the collation and dissemination of performance information from the framework was also seen as an important role that could be performed by DCMS and MLA, along with the facilitation of local benchmarking groups and the sharing of good and innovative practice.

Finally, it was hoped that the launch of the national framework could be used to keep the library agenda prominent and to encourage other parts of local and central government to acknowledge and understand libraries' contribution to wider community outcomes.

## 4 The performance framework

### 4.1 Purpose of the framework

This framework has been designed to provide local public library authorities with a tool to help them to measure and improve the performance of their library services through understanding how aspects of library performance contribute towards desired community outcomes.

It should not, however, be seen as the one and only way of measuring the performance, and impact, of local library services.

Peer review has a continuing key role to play in helping local authorities consider how well library services (and others) are performing and we hope that this framework will help to provide useful information for those involved in conducting Peer Reviews.

It will also be important to consider the performance of local libraries within the wider context of the new performance framework for local government, as set out in the recent White Paper and which is currently being developed.

Equally, it is clear that the performance of local library services should not be measured on the issue of books or numbers of visits alone. It is the impact of the use of those services offered by libraries which provides a valuable contribution towards the achievement of wider local

communities' objectives. But whilst there is an increasing body of evidence which supports this, the reality is that there are no simple performance measures which clearly demonstrate how the activities of a library service impact on the achievement of a high level outcome.

Undeniably, use of a wide range of library services can contribute towards healthier communities, improved educational attainment, greater community cohesion, improved economic prosperity and many other social objectives. But, to isolate the contribution of libraries towards these objectives would be at the very least complex and expensive, if it is at all possible.

The performance of local public library services should then be considered within the context of the local library authority's community aspirations which are most likely to be set out within their Local Area Agreement.

Figure 1 on the following page provides an overview of the relationship between the inputs which local authorities put into their library services, the key aspects of service performance which lead to community and personal wellbeing, and the community outcomes that improved community and personal wellbeing creates.

The framework has been designed as a tool which can help local councils to consider the 'middle cog', ie the aspects of performance over which they have greatest control – both through monitoring key aspects of performance and through

comparing their performance with that of other public library services.

Figure 2 begins to break down the various elements of each of the three 'cogs' to show how they relate to each other and the key aspects of performance being measured by the framework.

The new national performance framework for local government is currently in the process of being developed and DCMS are currently working with Communities and Local Government and HM Treasury to ensure that a performance indicator is included in the national set of indicators which covers cultural services. We hope that we will be able to articulate a clear link between this national framework and the Libraries Performance Framework to ensure that the contribution of effective and efficient library services to the successful achievement of wider community outcomes can be recognised.

Figure 1 – Focus for a new libraries performance framework

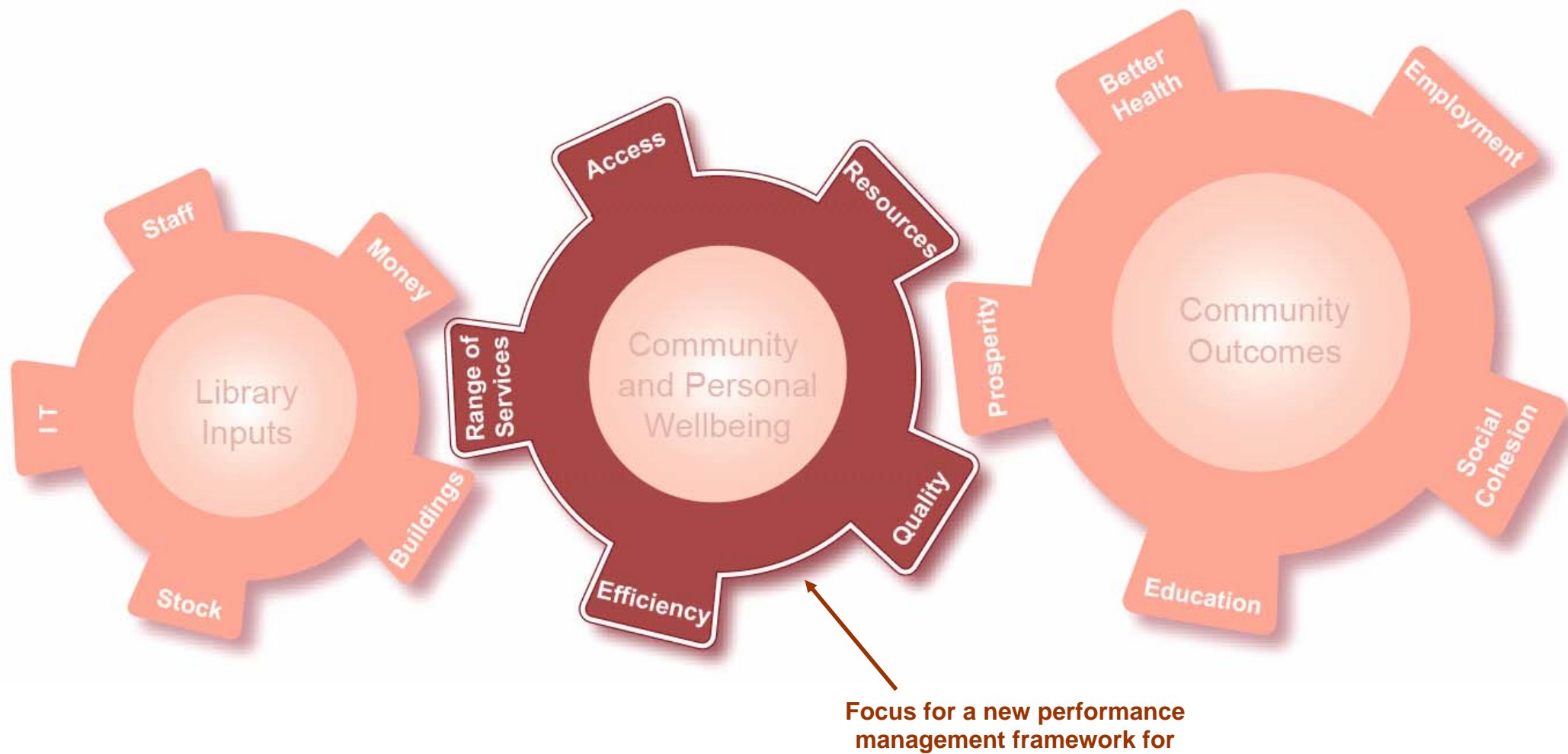
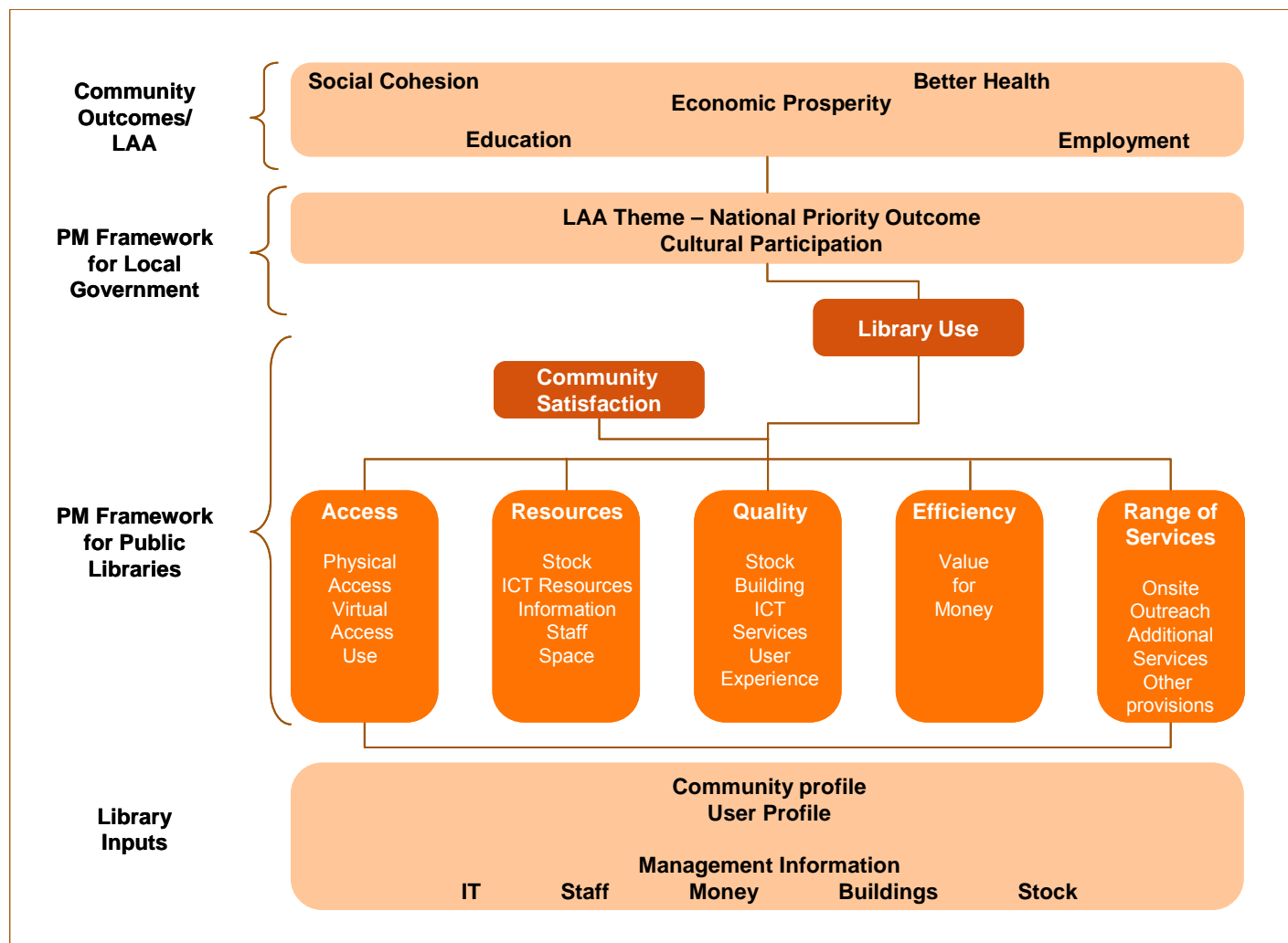


Figure 2 – The proposed libraries performance framework



## 4.2 A core set of performance indicators

In response to the views expressed by local authorities during the consultation period, the framework is supported by a core set of performance indicators.

The indicators included in the framework are those which were seen to measure the key aspects of performance which most authorities would be interested in measuring and which would have the greatest resonance with the public.

They are by no means an exhaustive list of all the measures which could be used, and some may feel that other indicators are more appropriate to measure certain aspects of performance. There may also be some discussion about which indicators belong in which 'aspect' of performance as it could be argued that in some cases the indicator measures more than one of the aspects.

However, with such a range of different stakeholders with different views, no one set of indicators will ever meet the requirements of all parties concerned.

What we have attempted to create therefore is a core set of indicators which meet many of the requirements of those stakeholders and which provide enough relevant information for them to make their own assessment of performance.

Authorities of course may choose to measure other aspects of performance, particularly if there are aspects of their own local

priorities for library services which they feel are not covered by those in the framework.

Indeed, we would expect library services to continue to collect and monitor key management information around both the inputs of the library service and associated community profile information in order to assist in understanding the basic context within which the services are provided and to ensure that it responds when those factors change.

Where possible, we have attempted to include indicators which are already in use and well understood in order to ensure more consistent calculation of performance and to allow authorities to measure trends over time.

However, in recognition of the fact that previous performance frameworks for libraries had not covered some important aspects of library services, there are a number of new indicators suggested. Those indicators will need further work to develop detailed definitions and to pilot them to ensure that they can be robustly measured.

The majority of the indicators included in the framework can be used at both an individual library level and at the level of the local authority. This should enable Councils to compare performance (a) between its own libraries and (b) with the performance of other local authorities.

Local authorities may also wish to break some of the indicators down not only on an individual basis, but also by

community / user group. Ensuring that services are equally accessible and attractive to different community and user groups is a key challenge for library authorities in order to deliver socially inclusive services.

Thus, authorities will want to understand levels of use and take up by different ethnic communities, or satisfaction with services between different age groups. Each local authority will face its own challenges in differing levels of participation between different local communities and therefore will need to consider how best to use the framework to help them monitor performance and understand what might drive improvement. The indicators in the framework are then split across the five key aspects of performance.

### **‘Outcome contributors’**

We propose to include two ‘outcome contributors’ in the framework which we believe provide the simplest ‘snap shot’ of public library performance, and perhaps make the most sense to the public, namely ‘community satisfaction’ and ‘library use’. The aim of this is not to reduce performance assessment to merely two measures but to ensure that there is a clear focus on those measures which most stakeholders felt gave the clearest indication of improvement in library services, and therefore to the contribution to the achievement of local community outcomes.

## **Community satisfaction**

### **Proposed satisfaction indicator**

1. Percentage of residents who are very or fairly satisfied with the library service (Best Value User Satisfaction Survey<sup>1</sup>)

People use libraries for a wide variety of reasons, and it is therefore difficult to identify one key indicator which measures whether individuals believe that their local library service meets their personal needs. However, we suggest that a measure of satisfaction is a good proxy measure as people are unlikely to be satisfied with the service if it does not meet their needs, at least to some extent.

There has been consistent agreement that whilst the satisfaction of library users is important, measures of satisfaction should also include the views of those who don’t use the service.

While it could be argued that non-users do not have the service experience on which to base their views of satisfaction we agree with the majority of stakeholders that ‘community’ satisfaction should be the highest level measure

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<sup>1</sup> The recent Local Government White Paper is likely to signal the end of the current Best Value User Satisfaction Survey and the introduction of a new set of citizen and user satisfaction and perception indicators. At present it is not clear how these will be collected or what they will cover. We will need to review this indicator in the light of the development of these new indicators.

of satisfaction. Of course, authorities should consider both community and user satisfaction to develop a more informed picture.

***Q1. Is 'satisfaction' the right measurement? Would a survey question phrased along the lines of 'have you benefited from your local library services' provide a more suitable indicator?***

### **Library use**

#### *Proposed use indicator*

2. Total number of 'interactions' per 1,000 population

Interactions =

- No of visits in person (PLSS 6);
- No of visits to a mobile library;
- No of electronic, telephone or mail reservations / enquiries handled;
- No of housebound reader visits;
- No of people attending library events outside of a library building; and
- No of visits to a library website.

In order to give a corresponding balance to the high level satisfaction indicator, some form of measure of use of the library's services is required. A high level of community satisfaction coupled with a high level of community use is likely to suggest that the library services are meeting the community's needs. But high measures of satisfaction and

low levels of use might mean that satisfaction is underpinned by a public predisposition to the value of library services, but that the services being provided are not really meeting all needs.

There has been much debate during this project about what a library is and what library services are. As such we are proposing the development of an indicator which attempts to look at a wider measure of 'use' of library services than just physical visits to a static library.

We are proposing a measure which is designed to consider 'interaction' between an individual and the library service. Thus it includes the traditional measure of physical visits, as these are obviously a key interaction for some service users, but also includes interactions which take place outside of the library building, such as through mobile libraries, visits to housebound readers, or other 'outreach' visits.

In recognition of the fact that some library services are now also provided via other means of access, in particular over the internet and phone, we suggest inclusion of on-line and phone interactions which relate to the provision of services, for example reservations or renewals, or the provision of information (other than basic requests such as opening times).

**Number of visits to a library website** – There has been much debate and discussion nationally and internationally about the measurement of virtual access to library services and to date it would appear that it has not been possible to

identify a simple measure that all parties can agree to in relation to visits to local library websites. One way to address this might be to consider what 'interactions' take place between a user and a library service via a website.

We have already suggested the inclusion of on-line requests, and renewals within the count of interactions. Further discussion is needed about the nature of other 'interactions' – such as downloading of reference material – and how these could be measured, in order to develop this idea. Potential indicators to measure such interactions have been included in the management information section for Access on page 27. These indicators will also be trailed through CIPFA in 2007/08. The areas covered by these indicators would also be used to describe the range of services available for the Library Framework Indicator 7, in this area, on page 26.

However, we would suggest that in the meantime the proposed measure of interactions, whilst not perfect, is a move towards measuring a wider definition of 'use' of local library services and could be used until stakeholders can agree a way forward for measuring other virtual use.

***Q2. What is your view of the proposed approach to measurement of 'interactions'? What are your views about the measurement of virtual visits?***

### **Addressing perverse incentives**

We are proposing a range of measures across the five areas, many of which provide a 'balance' against others to discourage 'perverse' behaviour from library authorities in order to improve performance against one indicator.

For example, many commented that PLSS 10, time taken to replenish the lending stock could lead to authorities reducing the size of the lending stock in order to meet the Standard target. However, balancing this measure with a measure of the total stock reduces the incentive to do this. Adding further measures around the number of acquisitions per year and the appropriateness of the stock then provides a more rounded picture of the authorities' performance on stock quantity and quality.

This allows authorities to demonstrate the impact of their own policies and decisions. A lower level of stock borrowing might mean that the stock does not meet community needs. The authority may wish to reduce its total stock size then to provide it with both space and income which might allow it to purchase more appropriate stock. One simple measure would not allow an authority to present such a picture.

### **Five aspects of performance**

In the following section we set out a set of performance indicators which we believe provide a comprehensive picture of the performance of public library services. As we have already stated within this document and in during the consultation the development of pure outcome measures for

library services and their impact on community outcomes is somewhat of a quest for the 'Holy Grail'. However, there is a growing amount of evidence that effective and well-used library services can contribute towards both personal and community well-being and the achievement of wider outcomes.

The measures in this framework are then designed to assess the extent to which an authority is providing effective and well-used services and the extent to which they are improving those services. Improvements in the quality and use of services should then be likely to contribute to improved local community outcomes.

A number of the performance indicators proposed below are drawn from the PLUS and Children's' PLUS Surveys. We suggest that the most recent survey is used on an annual basis. Whilst we acknowledge this still means that some figures will be dated, the satisfaction of different groups of users will be measured by the framework in different years.

### Access

Access to the provision of library services is fundamental to the levels of use of those services. But access is no longer just about buildings. We therefore propose a number of measures for access to libraries which will give a picture of the extent to which an authority is enabling residents to access library services both face to face and via on-line

mechanisms to reflect the increasing variety of access channels being provided by local library services.

#### Access – Library Framework Indicators

3. % of population living within 1 / 2 mile(s) of a library or within ¼ mile of a mobile library stop
4. Population per Service Point (IPF15)
5. Aggregate scheduled opening hours per 1,000 population (PLSS 2)
6. % of users who think Library Opening Hours are Very Good or Good (PLUS1a) / % of users under 16 who think library opening hours are Good (Children's PLUS 8i)
7. % of library services provided on line that can be provided on line (A list of services that can be provided on line will be made available)
8. No of workstations with access to internet & libraries catalogue per 10,000 population (PLSS 4)
9. % of residents who say they are frequent users of libraries (BV Survey - Everyday / once a week / once a month) / % of users under 16 who say they are frequents users of the library (Children's PLUS 4 – once a week / more than once a week).

Figure 2 presented earlier describes the entire framework and includes local management information as a key part of the framework. We would envisage that local authorities would collect a range of management information which relates to library access and use and include below some of the management information which we would suggest will support a full understanding of library performance

#### Access – Management Information

- No of active borrowers per 1,000 population
- No of library members per 1,000 population

- Breakdown of active borrowers / members by age group, ethnicity, disability group and other key demographics e.g.
  - Proportion of older people helped to live at home receiving an 'at home' library service (PLIM)
  - % of population aged 0-4 who are library members (PLIM)
- Estimated number of visits to the network resource per 1,000 pop.
- Number of telephone requests, renewals and enquiries per 1,000 pop.
- Number of requests, renewals and enquiries online per 1,000 pop.
- Number that gain mediated access to subscription based content through the network resource per 1,000 pop.
- Number of Searches of online databases (library catalogue, image library etc.) per 1,000 pop.
- Number of interactions undertaken as part of an interactive dialogue with the service or other users of the service (eg online reading group, but not emailed enquiries) on its website, per 1,000 pop.

**Q3. What are your views on the proposed Access performance indicators for the Libraries Performance Management framework?**

**Q4. Is Framework indicator 4 (population per service point) a better indicator than 3 (distance from service point) and could therefore 3 be moved to the management information level?**

**Resources**

What the library service has to offer was for most a key aspect of performance which needed to be measured. If the resources available are not those that the community want to

use, then they are unlikely to use the service. We are therefore proposing a number of indicators which measure the availability of library resources.

These resources were seen by stakeholders to be:

- stock – both book and non books stock (eg AV, Software etc). We propose a number of measures which cover not only the total amount of stock held by a library, which was seen by some as a measure of the range and diversity of stock, but also the number of acquisitions, which is a measure of the 'currency' or 'newness' of the stock.
- staff – seen by many stakeholders, in particular library users, as a valuable resource provided by libraries, in terms of their availability to help answer queries and provide information; and
- library buildings – seen as a valuable community resource in their own right as they provided a safe and secure place to meet. Whilst we do not believe that floorspace alone is a true measure of the value of the public space, we also propose the inclusion of a satisfaction measure on the quality of the space in the next aspect of performance.

**Resources – Library Framework Indicators**

10. Collection items per 1,000 population (IPF41/75)/1,000 population
11. Total collection acquisitions per 1,000 population
12. Ratio of FTE Library Staff to population

Again there will be a number of key areas of management information we would expect library authorities to continue to monitor which will inform their understanding of performance against the framework. These include:

#### **Resources – Management Information**

Total bookstock per 1,000 population (IPF42)  
Annual bookstock acquisitions per 1,000 population (IPF55)  
Net public floor space per 1,000 population (IPF28)

***Q5. What are your views on the proposed Resources performance indicators for the Libraries Performance Management framework?***

***Q6. Are there other key library resources which should be included within the framework?***

## Quality

The quality of the service provided by the library was one area which many saw as a gap in the current PLSS, being measured really only by high level proxy measures of satisfaction. While we believe that these are valid proxy measures we propose a number of other measures of the 'quality' of library service which provide more specific information about aspects of the service.

One aspect of performance which many stakeholders told us was important to them was does the library have available stock which users want to borrow, something not considered by the current PLSS.

We are therefore proposing to include two measures which relate to the appropriateness of the library stock. This will provide a good balance to the earlier measures on the 'quantity' of stock to ensure that libraries services are investing in those items which their users want and need, and not just investing in stock to boost quantity.

Not only should libraries be providing the resources that communities want, but those resources should also be of a good quality. We therefore propose to include measures relating to the quality of the resources of the library.

We also propose to include a measure of the time taken to replenish the lending stock as a proxy for a measure of the quality of the stock other than users' opinions to give an alternative perspective on quality. (This is based on the

assumption that the physical condition of new stock will be better than that of existing stock).

Computer provision within libraries is now a widely acknowledged key part of a library service so we propose to include indicators from the PLUS and Children's PLUS surveys on this.

As we mentioned in the previous performance aspect, the library building is seen by many as a valuable resource in itself and we therefore suggest that the PLUS and Children's PLUS questions on the quality and appearance of the library building and space are included in the framework, again as a composite indicator.

As outlined above staff within libraries are seen as a key resources for many and to provide a picture not only of the number of staff (covered above) we also propose to include indicators which measure users' views of the quality of the services provided by those staff.

Finally, whilst we are already proposing a measure of the overall community satisfaction with libraries we think it important to be able to consider performance against that indicator alongside the satisfaction of those who actually use the libraries, again as measured by the PLUS and Children's PLUS surveys.

<b>Quality – Library Framework Indicators</b>	
<b>Appropriateness of Lending Stock</b>	
13.	% of loan stock on loan
14.	% of users who think the choice of books is very good or adequate (PLUS4a)
<b>Quality of resources</b>	
15.	% of users who think the resources/service is good or very good (PLUS 4b/10a,b,c,d/14) / % of users under 16 who think the resources/service is good (Children's PLUS 8 a,b,c,d,f,h) <sup>2</sup>
16.	Time take to replenish the lending stock on open access or available for loan (PLSS 10)
<b>Quality of IT</b>	
17.	% of users who think the computer facilities are good or very good (PLUS 7) / % of users under 16 who think the computers are good (Children's PLUS 8e)
<b>Quality of buildings</b>	

<sup>2</sup> This indicator is a composite indicator created from responses to a number of questions in the existing:

- PLUS survey which asks library users to consider:
  - the physical condition of the books;
  - music CDs;
  - videos/DVDs;
  - talking books;
  - computer games; and
  - the quality of the information service.
- Children's PLUS, which covers:
  - books;
  - music CDs
  - story tapes or CDs;
  - videos or DVDs;
  - information to help with homework; and
  - storytimes or events.

18. % of users who think the design and layout of the library building or other service point (such as a mobile) offers a welcoming environment

#### **Quality of Service Provided**

19. % of users who think that staff helpfulness is good or very good (PLUS 1f) / % of users under 16 who think staff helpfulness is good (Children's PLUS 8 k,l,m)
20. % of users who asked for help in finding something out and found staff assistance good or very good (PLUS13)

#### **User Experience**

21. % of users who think the library is good or very good (PLUS 15) / % of users under 16 who think the library is good (Children's PLUS 8n)

### **Non-users**

During the consultation on the development of this framework many views were expressed about the need to elicit the views of non-users of library services. It is obviously important to understand why some sections of the community choose not to, or unable to use library services. Whilst it is currently possible for local authorities to breakdown responses to the Best Value Satisfaction question on community satisfaction with libraries to identify significant differences between users and non-users views, this is unlikely to provide detailed information about why people do not or cannot use a library.

However, while we would encourage library authorities to continue to engage with non-users to inform decisions around service provision, we do not feel it appropriate to include more measures of non-users views within the framework for two key reasons.

The first is that it is relatively straightforward and cost-effective to sample service users through survey such as the PLUS surveys when they visit a library. Surveying non-users is likely to be much more complicated and costly, as by definition they will not be found in a specific place (i.e. the library) and be readily identifiable. Any effective performance management framework must consider cost-effectiveness as a key criterion, i.e. does the value of the information collected outweigh the cost of collection. The library community, DCMS and MLA may wish to consider whether how best to measure user and community satisfaction and perceptions of local library services in the context of the new national performance framework and existing library focused mechanisms such as the PLUS, Childrens' Plus and E-Plus surveys.

The second reason is that authorities are more likely to want to engage with non-users in a wider variety of less formal ways than through surveys. This will make comparison between authorities much more difficult, if not impossible.

### **Quality of virtual services**

We acknowledge that the PLUS Surveys only capture the views of those who visit a library premise. As we have already said, a range of library services are now provided virtually through websites. Whilst the IPF's e-PLUS survey allows library authorities to ask users about the computing facilities available in libraries to date it has focused on those using computers within libraries, rather than using computers to access library services. This is one area where more work is required to develop an on-line survey for visitors to a library

website in order to gather their views on the online services provided.

***Q7. What are your views on the proposed quality performance indicators for the libraries performance management framework?***

***Q8. Should we group the quality framework indicators with the associated resources framework indicators in the section above?***

***Q9. Is 'helpfulness' a useful term for assessing the quality of staff or should another term be used? If so, what phrase would be better?***

***Q10. What are your views about the current survey mechanisms available for gathering many of these qualitative measures?***

***Q11. How might these survey mechanisms develop over coming years?***

***Q12. Indicator 19 is trying to measure how satisfied users are with the quality of the library space provided for them – does this indicator do that?***

### **Efficiency and value for money**

Another aspect of performance which many stakeholders felt was not covered by the existing PLSS was that of efficiency and value for money of the services provided. We are

therefore proposing that the framework considers two elements within this aspect which consider some key processes and costs.

The measures of process are designed to assess the effectiveness of the services being provided by the authority. Ultimately we suggest that a proxy measure for the efficiency of a service might be the percentage of users visiting a library (with the caveat mentioned earlier about the need to consider virtual library use in the future) who were 'successful' in their trip. That is that they found something out either from the staff, the internet or a book or other resource, or that they found a book or other item to take home. In other words that the library service was in some way able to meet their needs.

We also propose a number of indicators which are design to allow authorities to consider how efficient their activities are. This includes measures such as how long it takes to fulfil a request for a service and the effectiveness of the arrangements to ensure that new stock is available for library users.

The issue of comparison of costs has always been a controversial one in local government since the introduction of the Best Value Performance Indicators in the 1990s. Does a high spend on a service reflect investment decisions or high quality, or does it mean inefficient use of resources or excess service provision? Does a low spend mean cost-effective or does it mean poor quality? There is no simple answer to this – all answers in different scenarios may be true.

We therefore propose that the framework includes a number of measures which might give a more 'rounded' picture of financial performance an allow authorities to demonstrate the effect of policy decisions around investment and funding, whilst also keeping a focus on ensuring that resources are used in the most effective ways.

We therefore suggest some measures which consider the overall cost of the service, such as net expenditure per 'interaction' (as defined earlier) and net expenditure per 1,000 population. We also propose to include a measure of the % of expenditure available to spend on stock to provide a basic measure of the effectiveness of stock procurement.

Efficiency & VfM – Library Framework Indicators	
22.	% of users who got what they wanted from their visit (PLUS 2/3/5/6/8/9/11/12) / % of users under 16 who got something out of their visit (Children's PLUS 9/10/11/12)
23.	Average no of days taken to satisfy requests
24.	Net expenditure per 1,000 population (IPF146)
25.	Net expenditure per 'interaction'
26.	% of net expenditure spent on stock

Additional management information we would expect local authorities to consider measuring includes:

### Efficiency & VfM – Management Information

- Stock expenditure per acquisition
- Stock expenditure per 1,000 population
- Staff cost as a % of stock expenditure
- Stock supply chain cost as a % of stock expenditure
- Ratio of materials to employee costs
- No of 'interactions' per employee
- Number of items issued/requests/enquiries per staff hour
- % of requests not met (IPF108)
- Average time taken from receipt of new stock to it being available for loan / use.
- % of authority spend on library services

***Q13. What are your views on the proposed efficiency and VfM performance indicators for the libraries performance management framework?***

***Q14. Are there other key library processes which should be included within the framework?***

***Q15. Should we include a “cost per participant” indicator participants would be derived from the potential household survey question “have you used or benefited from your local library service” (See question 1 above)?***

***Q16. Are there other measures of value for money which should be included?***

### Range of services

The final area to be covered by the framework, and the area where there was felt to be the biggest gap in terms of existing performance indicators is around the range of services provided by local authorities.

There was a strong desire amongst many stakeholders to develop some mechanisms for measuring the performance of library authorities against a much wider range of services than those perhaps more traditionally associated with libraries, and the delivery of services in ways other than through static library buildings.

By their very nature local public library authorities, and indeed individual local public libraries are local. As such their strength lies in their ability to respond to local circumstances. This means that each library and each authority will deliver a wide range of services to meet different local community needs and aspirations. As such it is difficult to develop measures which are appropriate for all library authorities for benchmarking as they will all be involved in delivering a different mix of services to their communities. We have not, therefore included any Library Framework indicators for “Range of Services”, but we have attempted to identify indicators which cover the main aspects raised during the consultation stages of this project and placed these in the management information section for this area.

We hope that the proposed indicators may go some way to considering some of these aspirations and acknowledge the

different access routes being provided by authorities and different types of services being provided. These are new indicators, and as such will require some work within the sector to reach agreement on how they should be measured and on whether there are other aspects which should be measured.

Most libraries now run and facilitate a wide range of programmes aimed at supporting reading and learning within the community. Such programmes can play a significant part in helping local authorities to meet wider social outcomes.

The modern library service is not restricted to the boundaries of its buildings and many authorities provide services to the community in community locations. This may be at schools or community centres, in prisons or hospitals, or at individuals' homes for those who are unable to get out. We therefore propose the inclusion in the framework of two measures which provide some indication of the extent and take up of outreach work by local authorities.

Finally local authorities are increasingly working now with a wide range of partners, both other services within the authority, and with other local public bodies. The effectiveness of a local authority in working with a wide range of partners is likely to have an impact on the libraries ability to contribute to wider social outcomes, for example health or crime. The extent and effectiveness is partnership working is difficult to measure across different authorities as the need to work in partnership on different issues will vary from authority to authority.

However, we suggested that one measure might be how successful an authority is in securing additional funding from partners (internal and external) to support the provision, solely or jointly, of services for local communities.

In the area of partnership working we feel that more work is needed to better understand that nature of partnership working taking place within local library services and the aims and aspirations of those partnerships in order to develop better performance indicators for this area.

We recognise the work done by local library authorities on specific initiatives within the library service, such as Bookstart and the Summer Reading Challenge and would encourage authorities to continue to collect information relating to their success on these initiatives as part of their local management information.

Many authorities may also wish to continue to collect information in line with initiatives such as Inspiring Learning for All with the Generic Learning Outcomes. Such schemes will provide valuable outcome related information, but authorities will need to consider local circumstances in order to determine how best to collect and report such information. This means they are not readily suitable for inclusion in the wider benchmarking framework – but are still very useful.

#### Range of Services – Management Information

- Number of stage 1/2/3 Bookstart packs delivered to children (PLIM indicators)
- Percentage of the 4-12 year old population who start the Summer Reading Challenge.
- Percentage of 4-12 year old boys who start the Summer Reading Challenge
- Percentage of starters who complete the Summer Reading

#### Challenge

- % of starters who also join the library (Summer Reading Challenge)
- Adult ICT learning sessions, attendee hours per 1,000 pop
- % of users of the “at home” service classing the choice of materials as “very good” or “good”
- take up of available ICT time in libraries
- Aggregate hours of library service learning and development events and programmes per 1,000 population
- Number of visits to library service learning and development events and programmes per 1,000 population
- No of visits for other purposes per 1,000 population
- Aggregate hours of ‘outreach’ library service provided outside of library buildings per 1,000 population
- No of people interacting with ‘outreach’ services per 1,000 population
- Additional funding secured from partners as % of net expenditure.

***Q17. What are your views on the proposed Range of Services performance indicators for the management information section?***

***Q18. Are there other types of services delivered consistently by a majority of local library services?***

### 4.3 Benchmarking performance

The consultation responses indicated that many respondents would value the opportunity that the libraries performance framework would provide to compare performance between areas.

Whilst this framework is voluntary, it is hoped that many local councils will choose to use it to share performance information across areas. These indicators have been developed through consultation with both users and providers of library services to identify those aspects which are seen as most important to individuals and communities.

The framework should not be seen as a 'league table' of performance. Local authorities will make conscious policy decisions about which aspects of library performance they wish to focus on which will need to be fully understood before comparing levels of performance.

Equally, performance cannot be measured by the consideration of one performance indicator alone as many are related and high performance on one may well mean a lower performance on another. Again, this may well be the impact of specific policy decisions to meet local aspirations and circumstances.

An authority which has a higher expenditure per capita on library services may not necessarily be less efficient than one with a lower per capita spend. It may be that satisfaction in the higher spending authority is much higher than that of the lower

spending one, suggesting perhaps that a greater level of spending may be required for that authority.

Equally, it may be that the authority has made a conscious decision to invest in the service in response to community priorities or that the nature of the geography of the area means that economies of scale may not be achievable in some areas.

It is important therefore, that in using the framework to benchmark performance, a wider picture is considered which looks both at a range of indicators and at the context in which the service is delivered – both in terms of the policy context and the demographic and geographic context of the authority.

The aim of the framework is to provide a benchmarking mechanism for authorities to support and learn from each other so that it can aid improvement. Benchmarking tools should however not be seen as a way to identify the 'best performance' or the 'right answer' on their own. They can demonstrate what levels of performance can be achieved, but do not guarantee that they can be replicated elsewhere.

Therefore, in benchmarking performance using this framework, authorities should be careful when selecting which authorities' performance they are going to choose to benchmark themselves against. Equally they should consider a balance of measures to give a broader view of performance.

However, if used carefully, benchmarking can help authorities to identify areas where there may be opportunities to achieve service improvements or deliver greater value for money. But it

is only through gaining a better understanding of how other authorities have achieved their levels of performance can councils hope to improve their own.

#### 4.4 Target setting

The Public Library Service Standards were just that – expected standards of performance – and as we have said in other reports throughout this review they have stimulated improvement in the delivery of library services in many local authorities across the country.

However, they have also:

- focused the efforts of some local authorities on some specific, and nationally determined, areas of priority which may not always resonate with local priorities;
- not assessed performance of library authorities across a wide range of aspects; and
- created concern that some may have generated perverse behaviour in some authorities in order to meet them.

Over recent years there has been a growing debate about the use of targets in the public sector with a view that perhaps their time is now waning. Over recent years as local authorities have become more skilled in managing performance and more focused on securing performance improvement the stimulus of targets (and the threat of the ‘stick’ that often accompanied failing to meet them) may no longer be necessary.

We would suggest that the time for nationally set targets for all library authorities is now over. Targets are plagued by subjectivity – a view that one level of performance is better than another. As we say throughout this paper, we believe that performance must be considered on a number of aspects in order that authorities can reflect the impact of the policy decisions they take in order to meet local needs and priorities.

Whilst some of the PLSS may have stimulated unwanted practices, we would suggest that it was not the performance measure that stimulated this behaviour, but the target that was set to be achieved – at all costs.

Such a focus on nationally set priorities means that local authorities are ‘obliged’ to focus efforts on things which may not be important to their communities, and in the context of increasingly scarce resources for local authorities, and library services in particular, resources must be focused on those issues that matter most to local users and citizens.

However, that is not to say that we believe that local authorities should not set targets themselves, based on local knowledge of communities’ priorities and the resources and capabilities available to them. The targets should be stretching, but should be set in the context of the authorities long term plans and aspirations for its library services.

As we set out at the start of this report, this framework is part of wider set of arrangements for assessing the performance of

local authorities. We hope that the Audit Commission and other partners can use this performance in their annual risk assessment of local authorities and areas.

In those areas where performance of the public library service is seen to be unsatisfactory we would encourage the relevant partners, including the local authority, relevant Government Office and the MLA to develop and agree targets for key measures which could be included within their local area agreement, along with a package of support to help them achieve those targets.

We believe that DMCS/MLA now should not be to set hard and fast targets for authorities to achieve but to help share ideas and good practice about how to achieve their own targets for improvement and how to demonstrate the important role that local public library services can play in enriching the lives of local people and meeting wider community outcomes.

## 5 Questions for consultation

Throughout this document we have posed a number of specific questions on the indicators proposed for inclusion in the framework. We repeat these questions below for your convenience.

1. *Is 'satisfaction' the right measurement? Would a survey question phrased along the lines of 'have you benefited from your local library services' provide a more suitable indicator?*
2. *What is your view of the proposed approach to measurement of 'interactions'? What are your views about the measurement of virtual visits?*
3. *What are your views on the proposed Access performance indicators for the Libraries Performance Management framework?*
4. *Is Framework indicator 4 (population per service point) a better indicator than 3 (distance from service point) and could therefore 3 be moved to the management information level?*
5. *What are your views on the proposed Resources performance indicators for the Libraries Performance Management framework?*
6. *Are there other key library resources which should be included within the framework?*
7. *What are your views on the proposed Quality performance indicators for the Libraries Performance Management framework?*
8. *Should we group the Quality Framework Indicators with the associated Resources Framework Indicators in the section above?*
9. *Is 'helpfulness' a useful term for assessing the quality of staff or should another term be used? If so, what phrase would be better?*
10. *What are your views about the current survey mechanisms available for gathering many of these qualitative measures?*
11. *How might these survey mechanisms develop over coming years?*
12. *Indicator 19 is trying to measure how satisfied users are with the quality of the library space provided for them – does this indicator do that?*
13. *What are your views on the proposed Efficiency and VfM performance indicators for the Libraries Performance Management framework?*
14. *Are there other key library processes which should be included within the framework?*

*15. Should we include a 'cost per participant' indicator participants would be derived from the potential household survey question 'have you used or benefited from your local library service' (See question 1 above)?*

*16. Are there other measures of value for money which should be included?*

*17. What are your views on the proposed Range of Services performance indicators for the Libraries Performance Management framework?*

*18. Are there other types of services delivered consistently by a majority of local library services?*

In addition to these specific questions relating to the proposed indicators there are a number of other questions we would welcome your views on:

*19. How should this information be collected and coordinated and a national level?*

*20. What activities would you like to see the DCMS, MLA and other national partners engaged in to support sharing of best practice and innovation?*

*21. What tools would be useful to you at a local level to promote the contribution of library services to wider community outcomes.*

We would be grateful for your response to these questions and any other more general views you have on the proposed framework.

Please send your responses to:

libraries.performance@MLA.gov.uk; or Andy Birleson, Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, Victoria House, Southampton Row, London, WC1B 4EA

**Deadline for response: 4 July 2007**

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