



What Makes A Good Library Service?

Guidelines on public library provision in England for portfolio holders in local Councils

Issued by CILIP: the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals

Good Libraries Change Lives & Help Transform Communities

Libraries are important. A good library service provides a positive experience for local people, and demonstrates the value a local authority places on its community. CILIP has produced these guidelines in the public interest to advise portfolio holders in local Councils what makes a good library service.

Libraries provide a popular and heavily-used service for everyone, allowing unbiased and unparalleled access to the world's knowledge. Libraries benefit everyone, whether they use their local library or not. They stand for intellectual freedom, democratic engagement, community cohesion, social justice and equality of opportunity.

Investment is Crucial

Investment in libraries is crucial, both in good times and bad. Because of their importance in our lives and our society, public library provision is a statutory duty for local Councils in their role as Public Library Authorities. It is also why the Government has the power to intervene if a local Council is thought to be failing in that duty.

Libraries give identity to a community and provide opportunities for everyone within it. Their role is to enrich lives, to play an important role in meeting the aspirations of local communities and engage in the Big Society. A good library service will deliver against key policy objectives and provide:

- A positive future for children and young people
- A fulfilling life for older people
- Strong, safe and sustainable communities
- Promotion of local identity and community pride
- Learning, skills, and workforce development
- Health improvements and wellbeing
- Equality, community cohesion and social justice
- Economic regeneration

The library service should also offer a programme of activities and events that reflect the important role of the library in the local community. These may include:

- Activities for parents and toddlers, children and young people
- Events to encourage the experience of literature through author talks, reading groups, storytelling and promoting the joy of books through imaginative selection and presentation of stock
- Programmes to support family and community learning
- Promotion and support of the study of local history
- Programmes to develop information literacy, ICT proficiency, and skills for life

Statutory Duty and Local Policy

The Public Libraries & Museums Act (1964) requires local Councils to provide a local library service which is comprehensive and efficient and that is available to all who wish to use it.

In order to meet these, and other, key legal requirements, a local library service must:

- Serve both adults and children
- Be available to everyone and meet any special needs required by members of the local community
- Encourage participation and full use of the service
- Provide materials in sufficient number, range and quality to meet general and specific requirements of those in the community
- Provide value for money, working in partnership with other Authorities and agencies

Resources and Provision

To meet the requirements of legislation and the aspirations of policy, a good library service needs sufficient resources:

- **Location and accessibility** Libraries should be conveniently located near local communities and transport links in order to be accessible. Opportunities for sharing facilities with other services should be explored. Opening hours should suit local needs and lifestyles. Library services should be available beyond the walls of the library, both online and via home delivery to vulnerable individuals.
- **Materials and resources** Library buildings, equipment and ICT facilities should be well designed and kept up-to-date. Library resources in all media (print, audio-visual, online) should be contemporary, provide a wide range of information, ideas and works of creative imagination, and be sufficient in quantity to meet the needs of library users. This includes those who borrow materials, use them in the library or receive them on their desktop.
- **Staffing and activities** Staff should be helpful, knowledgeable, welcoming and well-trained. They should be involved in a workforce development programme. Staff in front line customer service roles should be supported by specialists in service planning and promotion, leadership and management, and those areas of service delivery requiring specialist skills and expertise.

Service Planning and Continuous Improvement is Essential

Local library services need to be continually refreshed and improved to respond to the adapting needs of local communities, and to the changing opportunities for service development and delivery. This requires:

- A strategic approach to service planning across the area for which the local Council is responsible, aligned and contributing to the broader policy objectives of the Council
- A focus on efficiency and effectiveness through innovation, partnership working, shared services and assessment of different models of service delivery
- Engagement of local communities in the process of service planning through a carefully structured programme of community consultation
- A process by which service performance is monitored and assessed against key indicators of service delivery and outcomes; with the results of performance assessment made public
- Evidence that the local Council has received and acknowledged professional advice and judgement in these processes of service planning, community consultation, and performance assessment

Are You Providing A Good Library Service?

Here are ten questions to ask to find out. Does your library service:

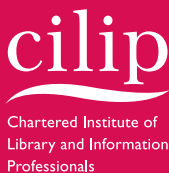
1. Have a library strategy which meets the needs of the local community?
2. Add value for local people and local communities?
3. Reach out to the “hard to reach” members of your community who are unable or unwilling to visit the library?
4. Provide what local people expect in terms of location, accessibility, materials, resources, staffing and activities?
5. Contribute to the key policy objectives of your local Council?
6. Make best use of the resources it receives?
7. Comply with library and other relevant legislation?
8. Provide professional advice and guidance on library matters to your local Council?
9. Have a clear service development plan?
10. Monitor, benchmark and assess its performance, and publish the results?

We recommend that you discuss these Guidelines with your Head of Library Service.

If you would like to find out more about what makes a good library service

Visit: **www.cilip.org.uk/goodlibraries**

Email: **policy@cilip.org.uk**



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