

Report on the Panel's Scrutiny of the Tameside Library Service

March 2001

1. Terms of Reference

- (i) To consider the provision of Library Services in Tameside including opening hours, publicity, the operation of the mobile library, the school library service and funding including the Book Fund.

2. Method of Review

- (i) The Scrutiny Panel interviewed the Cabinet Deputy (Lifelong Learning), the Strategic Director Education and Cultural Services, the Head of the Learning and Information Service and Library Service Staff . Information was also obtained directly from the Head of the Learning and Information Services and library facilities, including the mobile library vehicles, were the subject of reality checking by Quality Auditors.
- (ii) The Panel also visited Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council to view Greatstone and Lostock Libraries where a self issue and return system had been introduced in joint library facilities in a recreation centre and a school.
- (iii) The Panel visited Hurst, Stalybridge, Dukinfield, and Droylsden Libraries together with the School Library Service. These libraries were selected because of the specific problems or innovations that were present in those locations.
- (iv) The Panel commissioned twelve questions on the Citizen 2000 Panel survey in January 2000 and received information from a focus group of library users. The information relating to the responses received is contained in the report.
- (v) The Panel through the Library Service received the report of an independent study in respect of lapsed users at Tameside Public Libraries, which was undertaken in March 2000, by Anne Littlewood from Manchester Metropolitan University. The aims of the study were to find out if there was a link between social exclusion and lapsed use and to discover why lapsed users had stopped using the library.
- (vi) The Panel was also informed of customer comments and suggestions that had been received in libraries about the service.

3. General Information

- (i) The public perception of the Library Service is very high and it is felt that it has served Tameside well for many years.
- (ii) There are currently, in Tameside, 15 libraries, together with the Mobile Library Service, the Housebound Library Service, the Hospital Library Service, the Special Services Mobile Library

and the Centre for the Visually Impaired. The Local Studies and Archive Service is located at Stalybridge Library but will be moving to Hegginbottom Mill and the main reference library is contained in the Central Library, Ashton-under-Lyne. The Central Library, Ashton-under-Lyne, Denton, Dukinfield and Hyde, Libraries have comprehensive IT Suites.

- (iii) In 1999/2000, Tameside Libraries were visited by 1,062,921 people and the total issues for that year were 1,368,257. The numbers of visits were likely to increase, although the number of book issues was falling. This reflected the varying use of libraries for purposes other than book withdrawal.

4. Library Opening Hours

(a) Information Received

- (i) The question of general library opening hours, not including Sunday opening, had last been revised by the then Leisure Services Committee in January 1992. This had followed a comprehensive review to ensure that opening hours met public demand, allowed maximum access to Tameside's libraries for all people regardless of age, sex or ethnic origin, maintained and enhanced the quality of the service and facilitated delivery of the service in accordance with the Council's policies.

Tameside provided 614 hours of library provision each week from its static services points. The Central Library, Ashton-under-Lyne, was open 57 hours per week which compared very well with main libraries in other Greater Manchester Authorities as follows:-

- (ii) Tameside (Central Library): 57hrs
Manchester : 54hrs
Bolton : 53.5hrs
Trafford (Altrincham) : 52hrs
Oldham : 50hrs
Bury : 49hrs
(Prestwich) : 50hrs
Rochdale : 49.5hrs
Salford (Eccles) : 46hrs
Stockport : 44hrs
(Reference) : 54hrs
Wigan : 47hrs
(Leigh) : 50.5hrs

- (iii) The opening hours of other libraries varied depending upon their size and status with larger libraries such as Denton, Droylsden, Hyde and Stalybridge being open 49 hours per week. Smaller libraries such as Audenshaw, Dukinfield and Haughton Green were open less hours namely: 43, 40.5 or 39.5 hours, with Newton being open 13 hours per week.

- (iv) The results of the Citizen 2000 Panel survey indicated that over half the people surveyed stated that library opening hours were adequate with a further 24% disagreeing and 18% not having an opinion. The results of the survey did indicate that there was a preference for access to a library on weekdays during the early evening between 5.00pm and 7.30pm.

- (v) Preferences for opening hours however, differed between types of residents. Retired people wanted access to a library during the morning (72% preferring 9.00am to 12noon compared

to 41% overall).

- (vi) The demand for hours between 5.00pm to 7.30pm was greater amongst employed residents (64% wanted access during this time compared to 54% overall). Residents who wanted access after 7.30pm were mainly employed people and students, 46% and 48% respectively compared to 37% overall.

- (vii) Residents were also asked about their preferences for weekend opening times. The most popular was 2.00pm to 5.00pm, closely followed by 9.00am - 12noon. There was little demand for evening opening at weekends.

- (viii) Libraries close on the days that they had traditionally been less busy and in order to operate within existing staffing levels whilst providing public access at other libraries. It is understood that the pattern of closing is currently under review and this action would be supported by the Panel. Currently there were 115.4 full time equivalent staff operating in Tameside's library provision ie $115.4 \times 36 \text{ staff hrs per library} = 6.76 \text{ staff per library hours opening}$.
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(b) Conclusions:

- (i) The Panel felt that in general, and having regard to the results of the survey, the opening hours of Tameside Libraries were appropriate. There seemed to be little demand for late night opening and this was only achieved at Trafford because the libraries in question provided an unstaffed and limited service.

- (ii) The Panel considered however, that a review should be undertaken of the customers using libraries at 9.00am with a view to opening slightly later. In addition, the days that some libraries closed because they had traditionally been less busy appeared to be based on old patterns and required to be reviewed. For example early closing for shops in Hyde was on Tuesdays whereas the library closed on a Thursday.

5. Sunday Opening

(a) Information Received

- (i) This matter was last reviewed by the Council in June 1995, when it was concluded that Sunday opening of libraries in Tameside would not be pursued.

- (ii) At the time it was felt that libraries were open for a total of 635 hours which gave adequate access to the facility. There had been no indication from the public that there was a demand for Sunday opening. Where this had been tried elsewhere in the country it had only had any success when located near to extensive shopping provision that was open at the same time. In addition it was felt that the cost implications could not justify opening libraries when there would be such little demand. In 1995 it was estimated that it would cost approximately £45,000 to open five larger libraries for three hours on a Sunday. It was felt that now, this cost would be considerably more than this sum. The only way that Sunday opening could be achieved without additional cost would be by closing at other times to compensate. There would inevitably be costs associated with heating and lighting.

- (iii) The Citizen 2000 Panel survey did not indicate any great demand for Sunday opening, although once again where it been a preference, it was felt that afternoons were the favourite.

- The only library in Greater Manchester that opened on a Sunday was in Prestwich and this specifically reflected the large Jewish community in the area, who, for religious reasons,
- (iv) were unable to visit the library on a Saturday.5(a)(iv) Nationally, a number of London Boroughs had introduced Sunday opening although there were significant reasons for each case, for example a large Asian community or a large retail development in the vicinity.

- It was noted, however, that the Department of Culture, Media and Sport was keen on extending library availability, access and opening hours. This would inevitably lead to more central pressure on local authorities to be more innovative in library opening hours
- (iiiv) including opening libraries on Sundays.5(a)(ix) The Cabinet Deputy (Lifelong Learning Services) in giving information to the Panel suggested that the Sunday opening of libraries could perhaps be combined with educational courses in a suitable location which had the appropriate access, sufficient space available and was near a retail development.

(b) Conclusions

- It was noted that there was very little Sunday provision generally and it required specific local conditions to justify Sunday opening. In Tameside, not many shops opened on a Sunday. If Sunday opening was to be made in Tameside, it would be necessary to make
- (i) innovative and attractive provision at a centrally placed library with good access, equipment and customer base. If Sunday opening was recommended it could initially be for a period of three months subject to review.

- The major focus for Sunday shopping were the shops on the Snipe Retail Park. Although it was recognised that many visitors to the site were not Tameside residents, it might be
- (ii) interesting to ascertain the demand and a mobile library vehicle placed in the car park could be an interesting experiment both in Sunday use and to attract non users to the Library Service.

6. Mobile Library Service (Including the Housebound Library Service)

(a) Information Received

- The policy associated with the Mobile Library Service was to provide a comprehensive library and information service to people in Tameside who lived either too far from a static service or who had difficulty in getting to one. The Service was available to any one who wished to make use of it. Emphasis was on adult leisure material with some basic reference and information material.
- (i)
 - (ii) The Leisure Services Committee last reviewed the Mobile Library Service in July 1997 following a report from the District Audit Service. The report had concluded that the Mobile Library Service was the most expensive unit to operate and it had been recommended that the Service be reviewed.
 - (iii) A complete review had been made of the number of stops and the amount of use of the Service. In addition the locations of some stops were proving to be hazardous both to traffic and people using the Service. The Director of Leisure Services had sought to reduce the service and redirect resources to more effectively target disadvantaged groups.
 - (iv) The Committee had considered revisions to the mobile library timetable and had examined

options for reducing the frequency of the service with a view to reallocating resources to the refurbished Central library.

- (v) Currently there were 50 plus stops made by two mobile library vehicles. This had been reduced from 61 stops, for practical reasons practical. This had been achieved by deleting some stops and merging others where they were thought to be underused or where there was suitable alternative provision in the vicinity.

Consideration had also been given to reducing vehicle and staff costs associated with the mobile library service. In 1997 the costs of a mobile library vehicle were:

	Vehicle leasing charge	17,600
	Fuel	2,100
(vi)	Supplementary Charges	1,700
	Driver	13,489
	Library Assistant (14 hours)	5,123
	Total	40,012

- (vii) These costs had undoubtedly now increased considerably. It had been suggested that any savings made could be reinvested in the Library Service.

- (viii) The Committee approved the revised timetable, but retained the existing arrangements of two vehicles undertaking a round on a weekly basis.

- (ix) Information received by the Panel raised questions as to why this was still a weekly service and why some stops were within 200m of a fixed library location. Observation of this service had also indicated that some stops had little or no demand and duplicated stops at residential homes. It also seemed that having two members of staff on the vehicle was excessive. It is understood that the mobile vehicle rounds were also currently under review.

- (x) The Housebound Library Service was the subject of additional enquiries and from the data supplied, taking into account overhead costs appeared to equate to approximately £4.50 per delivery. There seemed to be an overlap with the Mobile Library Service. In addition to the mobile libraries, a further van provided a mobile library service to old peoples homes and complexes. This van sometimes stopped within 50 metres of a mobile library vehicle stop. If duplication occurred between these operations, it should cease

- (xi) The two mobile library vehicles and the Housebound Library Service van operated from Audenshaw Library. The stock and new books went through the Central Library complex but there were reported difficulties manoeuvring the mobile library vehicle into the Central Library site, whereas Audenshaw was readily accessible, otherwise there was a potential for cost savings.

(b) Conclusion

- (i) The Mobile Library Service provides an important service to those people who do not have easy access to other library services. It was a comparatively costly service. It was felt, however, that better use could be made of the service. It could benefit from greater public awareness and a publicity drive could help achieve this, especially as the vehicle and staff was in the locality of their customers.

- The location of mobile library stops should be reviewed and where appropriate stops should be deleted in order that other areas of the Borough could be covered. (See attached map). It would seem advisable to introduce a fortnightly round in place of the existing weekly schedule, utilising a driver/librarian rather than two people. This could be enhanced by a free reservation service whereby books could be requested at one visit and provided at the next. People were still able to take up to eight books on loan at any one time.
- (ii)
- It was felt that the senior management of this service should consider innovative ways in reducing the costs of the Housebound Service perhaps by examining joint working with other services that already visited elderly people.
- (iii)

7. School Library Service

(a) Information Received

- This Service is based at the Education Resource Centre, Lakes Road, Dukinfield and was open during normal office hours. The Service offered help and advice to enable educationalists to cope with problems, purchase materials and other matters relating to the preparation of project and class work. The Service provided a project box loan service, arranged talks and exhibitions and organised the book purchase scheme. The Service also provided reviews on books and advice of the best material available to undertake the curriculum.
- (i)
- The Service had experienced a budget reduction of £90,000 in 1992/93 and this had resulted in a much more focused service. The result of this cut was that the matched funding ended for capital spend and the project loan scheme was reduced as was the purchase of new books.
- (ii)
- Following the delegation of the budget for the purchase of books to schools, schools continued to choose this service as the main source of the book purchase. The target for the number of Tameside schools entering into agreement with the Service was 93%. Currently it appeared that 100% of Tameside schools would sign up with the Tameside Service and interest was also being expressed by schools in neighbouring local education authorities.
- (iii)
- The current figure within the libraries budget was £171,450 with £105,000 being delegated direct to schools. Employee related costs were £66,000. This figure was totally separate from the Book Fund.
- (iv)
- In addition to the normal budget, a further £247,000, had been delegated to schools under government initiatives such as the literacy scheme in primary schools. The Service was currently receiving 350 to 400 enquiries per month.
- (v)
- There was huge interest from schools in cd roms and other IT equipment, but not so much was actually being purchased. An Advisory Group was taking a proactive interest in this subject and was contacting schools accordingly.
- (vi)
- The Service achieved a 6% commission (in the form of stock) on its purchases and took a commercial approach, but it was felt that it could not cope with greater business. Schools had always been regarded as customers and it was felt that there was not likely to be a change in the relationship. There were few direct competitors to the Service, but there was no intention to be complacent. The Service was marketed amongst schools and clearly provided much more than a simple book purchasing unit.
- (vii)
- The School Library Service was also visited by the Panel during its tour around certain library
- (viii)

locations.

(b) Conclusions:

- (i) The School Library Service was clearly well run and much appreciated by schools. It had benefited from the delegation of the school book purchasing budget to schools which had given it a degree of protection from further budget reductions. It was a measure of its success that virtually all schools in Tameside were using the service.

- (ii) It was far more than a simple book and other material purchasing service. This was one of its great strengths that it provided teaching project material on loan and advice on the most appropriate books to purchase. The Service was removed from the rest of the Library Service but had very close links with the Education Advisory Service and kept up to date with the latest trends and developments in education. It was small but flexible and gave the impression that it could adapt to market and political changes.

- (iii) The trend was that the government was providing funds direct to schools for individual initiatives allowing schools to spend on designated projects and not necessarily with the local education authority. This was unlikely to change whatever government in power and the current opposition had indicated that its policies would mean a reduced role for local education authorities. The School Library Service seemed well equipped to meet these challenges, but needed to keep ahead of the field.

- (iv) One way the Service could meet these challenges would be to provide more of an IT software loan service. As more information is included on the internet, possibly stronger links could be made with the IT support given to schools.

8. The budget and the book fund

(a) Information Received

- (i) According to figures published in the Best Value Performance Plan, the Tameside Libraries Service would appear to be one of the most expensive per head of population in the North West, with one of the lowest borrowing levels.

- (ii) During the course of the review, it became evident that staff remuneration levels in libraries were, in general, lower than those in surrounding authorities and that an extensive range of services existed. This was contrary to the performance data.

- (iii) Consideration of the information upon which the performance indicators are based indicated that considerable sums were included which were not part of the public library service. For example on a total expenditure of £3.25million, after the deduction of capital charges, it was found that approximately £80,000 was included for the Housebound Library Service, approximately £85,000 for the History of Tameside and £23,000 of senior management costs which related to the Museums Service. In addition there was also running costs of the School Library Service amounting to £160,000.

- (iv) Although some allowance has to be made for income, the cost of central establishment charges also fell on the public library service. The affect of these changes add up to approximately £200,000 and when divided by the population would indicate the cost of public libraries as being 20p cheaper per visit or a reduction of 6%.

(v) The Panel was informed that since 1989, the price of books purchased by public libraries had increased by at least 25%. Since 1989 there had been a reduction in the book fund of 12% (£340,482 in 1989/90 and £327,363 in 1999/2000). Effectively, taking into account the consequences of the ending of the Net Book Agreement, the Book Fund had lost 24.7% of its purchasing power during this period.

(vi) The Book Fund was also the source of funding for library bindings, spoken word recordings of the Centre for the Visually Impaired and material in electronic format. This accounted for about £37,000 of Book Fund expenditure.

Book fund budget allocation and expenditure since 1990/1991 was as follows:

- 1990/91 Budget - £385,000, actual expenditure - £234,000 - savings utilised to offset moratorium on expenditure, a shortfall in income and an overspend on employee costs.
- 1991/92 Budget - £419,000, actual expenditure - £385,000 - savings to off set a shortfall in income.
- 1992/93 Budget - £ 437,000, actual expenditure - £316,000 - savings as required as part of a moratorium on spending and to off set a shortfall in savings.
- 1993/94 Budget - £376,000, actual expenditure - £217,000 - savings required as part of a moratorium on spending, to off set a shortfall in savings and to achieve departmental savings to off set a cut in the overtime budget.
- (vii) • 1994/95 Budget - £400,000, actual expenditure - £304,000 - savings required as part of a moratorium on spending and a shortfall in income.
- 1995/96 Budget - £400,000, actual expenditure - £370,000 - savings required to offset a shortfall in income.
- 1996/97 Budget - £386,000, actual expenditure - £339,000 - savings used to fund the repair and maintenance of buildings and to offset a shortfall in income.
- 1997/98 Budget - £387,000, actual expenditure - £316,000 - savings to fund open learning software and other miscellaneous expenditure, and to offset a shortfall in income.
- 1998/99 Budget - £582,000, actual expenditure 503,000 - savings used to fund buildings repair and maintenance, the purchase of IT equipment and cd roms for the new Central Library and additional sound recordings. It was also used to offset a shortfall in income.

(viii) The increase in 1998/1999 had been a one off grant to replenish the stock at the newly refurbished Central Library, Ashton-under-Lyne. Book stocks had varied over the last ten years, but to meet the national standard of 250 volumes per 1000 population, the Book Fund would need to increased by one third. Earlier spending cuts had a damaging effect on book stocks and library use with issues currently only 70% of what they were at the start of the 1990s.

(ix) The Library Service was able to purchase all the titles that it wanted, however it could not buy sufficient copies to meet public demand for more popular titles. The Service had developed a set of standards for stock which would be used to monitor the effectiveness of the stock management processes and set targets for the activity of the stock and its renewal.

(x) The collapse of the Net Book Agreement in 1995 had enabled libraries to benefit from

increased discount received on book purchases. Prior to the ending of the agreement, the gross discount was limited to 10%, whereas Tameside's discount was 14% in 1996, increasing to 20.66% in 1998. It was anticipated that this would increase when contracts were next renewed. These discounts applied to two thirds of the Book Fund, with the remainder being spent on specialist publications, electronic sources and bindings. This discount had only partially offset the decrease in the budget.

- (xi) The need to make the best use of resources had necessitated the increased purchase of paperback editions and major investment in new stock would be required to meet the levels of stock renewal envisaged by library stock standards.

- (xii) Information was received regarding the necessity of applying VAT to the sale of second hand books, fines on recorded material and reservation fees. This has been drawn to the attention of the Library Service.

(b) Conclusions

- (i) The Book Fund is the only major budget for the Libraries Service which managers can change at short notice as staffing and buildings budgets are relatively fixed in the medium term. The service has in the past had both savings and income targets, both of which have from time to time not been achieved. The consequence of this together with no addition for inflation, has been a serious erosion of the Book Fund. This may cause major problems when government standards are introduced from April 2001 requiring additional expenditure on books. In general income targets for videos and tapes have historically always been grossly over optimistic

- (ii) The year on year decreases in book borrowing did not appear to be logically addressed. Alternative marketing and significant changes to library facilities and provision must be considered if the public are to continue to value the service.

- (iii) Whilst consideration was given to the budget, it appeared that there were inconsistencies in relation to public utility charges between libraries which should be investigated and carefully managed. This included the Central Library, where the cost of electricity perhaps for lighting in the Art Gallery or flood lighting, for example, would benefit from careful consideration. The reason for highlighting what would be regarded as basic "housekeeping", is to enable the Library Service to devote more resources to the key areas of provision to the people of Tameside.

- (iv) The Library Service has in the past been committed to commercial competition with the hire of videos, cds etc., and current budgets seem to have been determined without regard to the commercial realities operating at the time. Expenditure on this material seems to exceed the income.

- (v) The boom for video hire is long over, with DVDs and other sources that the service cannot possibly stock, becoming more popular. Consideration should be given to whether the video stock should be restricted to educational or information material.

- (vi) The term Book Fund is also outdated. The Library Service quite reasonably purchases new IT material through the Book Fund and increasingly this will be the trend as these new approaches to information facilitation become the norm rather than the exception.

- (vii) The Cabinet Deputy (Lifelong Learning) confirmed that every effort would be made to protect the Book Fund, but ultimately it was not possible to guarantee, in periods of

financial necessity that the Book Fund would not be adversely affected.

9. Buildings

(a) Information Received

- (i) Libraries were located in each of the nine towns comprising Tameside, together with branch libraries in parts of Ashton-under-Lyne, Hyde and Denton.

- (ii) The libraries at Ashton-under-Lyne (Central), Stalybridge, Hyde and Denton were built in the late 19th century, Droylsden and Waterloo were built in the 1930s, the Centre for Visually Impaired in Dukinfield, Hattersley and Mottram were built in 1970s and Dukinfield and Hurst were built in the 1980s.

- (iii) Some rationalisation had taken place with the closure of Ridgehill Library in 1996 and four smaller libraries during the mid 1980s. Further reviews had taken place following Audit Commission Reports. These, however, did not lead to any further reductions in the number of libraries. Compared with our nearest neighbours, on a population per service point, Tameside was an average library authority, although the hours of access per 1000 population was above average.

- (iv) There were however, increasing pressures on library buildings with reductions in repair and maintenance budgets, which had led to a deterioration in the fabric of library buildings. Although a full survey had not been undertaken, it was estimated that at least £300,000 would need to be invested in property maintenance. The budget in 1998/99 for planned maintenance was £60,000, which only allowed for essential health and safety repairs to be undertaken.

- (v) A number of changes had taken place to improve access for disabled people by the installation of automatic doors. Following a number of successful bids, capital resources of £2.4m had been raised for the restoration, refurbishment and extension of the Central library, Ashton-under-Lyne, which was a Grade II listed building.

- (vi) The opportunity had been taken to provide a multi media resource centre at the Central Library, which housed a number of workstations from which the public could access CD-Rom software, open learning packages and the Internet.

- (vii) Information had been gained from some other library Authorities in Greater Manchester and most had no capital programme for libraries with limited repair and maintenance budgets.

(b) Conclusions

- (i) The role of libraries as catalysts for community involvement and social inclusion, and as centres for lifelong learning, together with the growing role with ICT, will require consideration of the design and layout of many of the existing libraries and facilities within library buildings. This will probably cause accommodation problems at several buildings.

- (ii) New communication methods of the internet, intranet, world wide web, fax, etc., lead to the conclusion that in the future libraries as single function, purpose built, stand alone buildings may not exist except for one central depository for access to information services lifelong learning etc. It was felt that in the long term books would no longer necessarily be

the main source of recording civilisation's learning or as a mode of entertainment.

In the short term, it will be necessary to review the use of existing areas in libraries to determine whether limited but precious space could not be better utilised. Now that the

- (iii) Central Library is refurbished, consideration should be given as to whether the separate facility for the visually impaired is necessary and whether it could be accommodated in the Central Library building or another library building.

It is clear that libraries in common with so many other council buildings and assets such as schools and highways are suffering from a lack of maintenance and there is no obvious solution to this national problem.

10. Staffing

(a) Information Received

- (i) The Library Service comprises approximately 147 staff which represent approximately 115.4 full time equivalent posts. Thirty staff have professional qualifications. Turnover in 1997/98 was 4.13%.

- (ii) Reality check visits to libraries always found the staff exemplary in their helpfulness, courtesy and attentiveness to customers. The structure in libraries did seem too hierarchical and a greater emphasis on team working could lead to more effective working.

- (iii) The Service and the staff who work in it are facing many challenges. Apart from the demands of Best Value and modern local government faced by all local government employees, library staff are also having to meet the demands of new ways of working using the Internet and a full range of hardware and software packages. (See also Section 11 below).

- (iv) Premium wage payments amounted to £50,000. This was reported to be for routine Saturday opening. In contrast, it was understood by the Panel that such overtime payments in other services had been eliminated and incorporated as part of split rota/shift/part time working. One policy needs to be operated throughout the whole authority, both for fairness and with regard to legislation.

- (v) There was concern expressed when members of the Scrutiny Panel visited Hurst Library which is a modern pleasant branch library on a main road. The staff reported severe problems caused by the bad behaviour of some local school pupils and youths who were disruptive, rude and potentially violent. This problem had also been experienced at Haughton Green and Hattersley Libraries.

- (vi) Until recently security guards had been employed at Hurst Library and staff were very worried in case financial considerations meant that the security was removed. Hurst Library had also been the subject of considerable vandalism.

(b) Conclusions

- (i) With the rapid increase in new technologies with new ways of communication and learning, there are going to be greater demands on all library staff in new areas of operation.
- (ii) Recruitment and retention of well trained professional staff with the right mix of attributes is essential. Nearly all staff are front line staff and therefore, need the skills highlighted

above. This will require continued training which will need careful and creative management to balance the pressures of time and funding outlined above.

- (iii) The concern shown by staff about harassment from certain sections of the public was a worry to the members of the panel. It was clear that staff who were patently ill equipped to cope with these situations would be demotivated and very reluctant to continue to work in this library without regular, effective and consistent protection.

11. E-Government and New Technology

(a) Information Received

- (i) Information and communication technology is growing all the time and its use in the management of library services, retrieval of information and in methods of service delivery, requires staff who are able to grasp new technology very quickly. The Peoples Network, National Grid for Learning, digitisation, literature development, Lifelong Learning, University for Industry, Third and Fourth Age, school initiatives etc., demanded a fundamental reappraisal. There was a danger that the pace of development and new technologies were outstripping the ability to resource the technology and to adequately train staff and give them sufficient experience to provide a professional service. Training was also costly and time consuming. The New Opportunities Fund was also only likely to marginally affect the provision of training for ICT.

There was an increasing requirement for staff to be more specialist in areas of new technology and this will only increase as customers' expectations rise and greater ICT provision is made in more service points.

- (ii) The Council's Web First policy is resulting in more and more of its documents being available on the internet. This includes a great deal of information material and items such as agendas, minutes and reports for district assemblies, and scrutiny panels, together with their reports. It also includes forms and other material required in dealing with the Council. It is the future.

- (iii) The introduction of the National Grid for Learning means that over a four year period, a network of connections to the internet together with compatible hardware and software were being provided for all schools in Tameside. The intention is that libraries will become lifelong learning centres with the introduction of computers with compatible hardware and software to that in schools. The eventual aim being that school students will be able to access their school work on computers from libraries.

It was noted that with the benefit of SRB 5 moneys, access had been provided to enable the use of the computer equipment installed in the libraries at Haughton Green, Hurst and provision had also been made at Hattersley Library through SRB funding.

(b) Conclusions

- (i) Libraries are rightly seen as vital providers of information to the public about the Council and its services. The opening hours of libraries can also make them uniquely accessible to the public as points of information. It is vital in fulfilling this role that libraries contain public access to these services and that staff are fully aware of them and are fully trained in their

operation. This is currently not the case. Libraries and their staff are no longer just issuers of books but front line staff all of whom should be able to provide a range of information services.

Libraries have more than ever to recognise areas within the Service that are out dated and prioritise which areas of new technology are most important to future customers.

- (ii) Investment should be limited to areas of highest priority and at the same time undervalued activities such as hire of tapes curtailed.
- (iii) In view of this enhanced role of libraries as lifelong learning centres it was important that computer suites were in prominent positions in libraries to reflect the importance of this new service provision.
- (iv) Libraries will need to be adequately staffed by people who are sufficiently trained to supervise and monitor the use of this equipment and service.

12. Recommendations

The current library opening hours appear to meet public requirements and there is no evidence that current users require any amendment. They should however be kept under

- (a) periodic review and customer numbers assessed particularly at the beginning and end of each day. Consideration should be given to the possible later opening of 9.30am rather than 9.00am., which would probably be of no detriment

The Sunday opening of libraries raised several interesting points but the Panel came to no firm conclusion. It was felt that if the Council intended to trial Sunday opening an

- (b) appropriate venue, should have other uses in the same building and be adjacent to retail outlets that were also open. An example of this would be the exhibition room at Droylsden Library which could be converted into an ICT suite and courses or other facilities made available from that location. Opening the building, including the library, on Sundays could be trialled for a suitable period.

The Snipe Retail Park, whilst a focus for Sunday shopping, probably attracted too many people from outside the Borough for a library facility to be made available and Droylsden could be a suitable compromise.

- (c)

The Mobile Library Service is a relatively expensive mode of provision, serves a relatively small section of the population and represents poor value for money given that the Council also provides many other services including the Elderly and Housebound Library Services to the vulnerable in our community. The small geographical area of the Borough is also significant with some mobile library stops at locations less than one mile from a library. The location of mobile library stops should therefore, be reviewed.

- (d)

The Libraries Service cannot develop new services and provision without consideration of the current mobile facilities ie:-

- (e)
 - (i) The two mobile library vehicles;
The two house bound library vans;
The elderly persons home library delivery lorry.
 - (ii) Consideration should therefore, be given to changing the rounds undertaken by the

Mobile Library Service vehicles from weekly to fortnightly and perhaps allowing customers to borrow more books at one visit.

- (iii) The days and venues of stops should be reviewed with possible deletions and additions of stops. The service should also be further publicised with leaflets circulated in the vicinity of mobile library stops to increase use.

- (iv) Consideration should be given to single person operation utilising a driver/librarian for mobile libraries, similar to PSVs.

- (v) Consideration should be given to new and innovative ways of delivering the House bound Library Service where possible linking with and utilising existing services for housebound people or investigate the employment of a parcel delivery company for deliveries and returns.

- (vi) The procedure for dealing with overdue books requires to be reviewed with the current system employing two people to visit private addresses in evenings appearing to cost more than the value of the books collected.

- (f) That the Head of Libraries contacts the Tameside and Glossop Acute Services Trust with a view to reviewing the library services at Tameside General Hospital to ensure that it continues to meet the needs primarily of patients, together with others associated with the hospital.

- (g) That Mottram Library be connected to the library users computer system in order to produce a unified system.

- (h) That the School Library Service continues to be supported in the provision of books and materials to schools, especially as it is likely that there will be increased direct government funding to schools rather than through local education authority budgets. The service continues to operate in a commercial and competitive manner and maintain the high level of trusted specialist service as well as competitive price. The service will also need to provide increasing amounts of ICT materials. This will require closer links to IT Services with Help Desk and hardware provision. These links will require developing. Central establishment costs are not properly allocated to this service. The accounting processes require revision to measure true commercial viability.

- (i) That the opportunity for library provision in new leisure premises on a joint use basis be considered if the possibility arises and if appropriate consideration be given to the closure of some existing library premises.

- (j) That the appropriateness of income targets contained in the budget be reviewed annually and be made to realistically reflect the current market situation.

- (k) That urgent consideration be given, in consultation with the Borough Treasurer's VAT staff, to the treatment of value added tax in the Libraries Service, with the appropriate remedial action being taken and that the proper treatment of fines and fees income takes place within the accounts.

- (l) That detailed attention be given to the use of telephones, printing and services from utilities, which could lead to efficiency savings. It is recommended that both financial provision and the day to day management of these elements of running libraries be reviewed.

- (m) That consideration be given to the financial and qualitative management information to

ensure that national performance indicators are comparable with other authorities and are calculated strictly within the guidelines. An example being the costs for the Housebound Library Service which is very restricted, being part of the public library costs.

- (n) That the customer care/marketing strategy of the Libraries Service be reviewed to cater for more user involvement in the selection and purchase of materials. The presentation of services and staff activity becoming more customer orientated.

- (o) The utilisation of buildings used by the service appeared to be uncoordinated. There appeared to be spare capacity in the Central Library, Bibliographical Services were located in Heginbottom Mill with Community Care Services operating from Audenshaw Library. This required reassessment to endeavour to reduce accommodation needs and check the potential to rationalise.

- (p) The hire of tapes, cds and videos requires to be reassessed in view of the current lack of demand for these items compared with the relative cost.

- (q) That staff training continue to ensure that all staff are comfortable with new technology systems both in relation to library management and ICT systems available as a service to the public.

- (r) That the strategy to protect library staff from unruly, abusive and violent behaviour be reviewed to determine whether staff were adequately safeguarded.

- (s) That consideration also be given to the enhancement of security in library premises containing expensive new technology equipment.

- (t) That future business plans reposition the Library Service as the information learning centre of the community and reflect the changing needs this will have on staff resources premises and budgets.