

## **Advice to the Minister from the ACL**

### **PUBLIC LIBRARIES**

#### **As you know:**

- There are more library branches in the UK than branches of McDonalds or Boots;
- Ten times more people visit libraries than go to football league matches;
- The largest bookshop in Europe, Waterstones in Piccadilly, has just 130,000 books to choose from – many City libraries have many times this number of books on their shelves, an average of 700,000.

#### **Public libraries contribute to an exceptionally broad range of Government priorities:**

Covering the DCLG, DCMS, DCSF, DIUS, DoH and the Home Office, public libraries deliver national agendas into local communities. They provide everyone with a safe place to go, something to do and someone to talk to. For this reason, we see public libraries as trunk roads, not side roads.

Almost 300 million visits are made to public libraries each year. This engagement plays a significant role in:

- driving up literacy rates;
- increasing the number of people adopting healthier lifestyles;
- raising skills levels at all ages;
- providing diversionary activity to reduce crime;
- building bridges in the community to aid cohesion, reduce radicalism and improve integration;
- engaging people in local democracy and getting more people to vote; and
- increasing the business start-up rate and improving the small business survival rate.

#### **Investing in Libraries**

When investment has been made it makes a real difference. The People's Network brought a computer, email and internet to everyone and it is still the only successful government IT project delivered on time and on budget. We now need to invest in the last remaining public service not to have seen wholesale reform under this Government to create a 21<sup>st</sup> Century service which, uniquely, can be a key agent of change for a wide range of government departments.

Specifically we need to invest in:

- A 'Building Libraries for the Future' project;
- Pervasive self-service technology to improve efficiency and transform the customer experience;
- A world-class national digital library service, possibly through JANET;
- An enhanced range of digital content;
- Improved book-stock, especially for children, the vocations, science and health and well-being;
- National branding and marketing;
- Taking staff expertise into new dimensions; and
- Projects which convert pioneering innovation into lasting change for the whole public library system.

## **Leadership**

We welcome the strong leadership now being shown by the MLA and recognise that all Chief Librarians do themselves need to show leadership to bring about the necessary changes. Its new Action Plan is to be welcomed but intentionally focuses on the short-term.

We ask Government to show leadership and to prioritise the investment we have highlighted in the next Spending Review. We would suggest that the DCMS and the MLA be asked to work up a case for cross-departmental investment in public libraries and also to look into governance issues. Governance matters because we need to minimise the barriers to further transforming Public Libraries in the manner outlined above while retaining local accountability and because we need to maximise the potential for non-government contributions to this transformation.

The ACL is committed to playing the fullest possible role within its remit.