Recent developments to the national framework to evaluate public library performance in the UK

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Abstract

IPF is the executive arm of CIPFA, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and is involved in the development of public library performance in the UK in a number of ways. On behalf of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS] it has developed the framework for the submission and evaluation of annual public library plans and has evaluated the plans submitted to DCMS for the last 3 years. It has provided the secretariat to support DCMS in developing public library standards for England, which were published and adopted in early 2001. It supports the Committee on Public Library Statistics to specify what statistics will be collected for UK public libraries and publishes the results. It provides the PLUS [Public Library User Survey] service, which constitutes a de facto national standard in user surveys for public libraries. It operates a sophisticated network of metric and process benchmarking clubs to which a high percentage of public libraries subscribe.

Introduction

In the time since the Annual library plans were described to the last Northumbria Conference two years ago, there have been a number of highly significant developments towards the provision of an integrated suite of inter-related performance enhancing tools which are of significant importance nationally and internationally. Whilst the public library planning framework first introduced 3 years ago encouraged public libraries to plan carefully and to have regard to significant policy initiatives, and gave DCMS a formal framework in which to raise concerns with service provides, the lack of agreed standards for service provision was perceived by all to be a significant handicap. In early 2001 this gap was filled by the publication by DCMS of public library standards for England. These standards are of international interest. They depend heavily on data provided by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Public Library Statistics and the PLUS user survey. Both of these are described.

The United Kingdom (UK) Government has selected Best Value as a key tool in improving local government performance. One of Best Value's key con-cepts is comparison [benchmarking]. To achieve economies of scale in this field and to allow ALL library authorities to participate, CIPFA has created benchmarking clubs for many local government services, including libraries. The metric benchmarking club has just completed its second year of operation and the process benchmarking club its first year. The methodologies could be adapted for use outside the UK.

Taken together, all these recent developments at national level in the UK, provide an increasingly coherent framework for improvement of public library performance, many elements of which could be adapted for use outside the UK.

THE ROOTS: "CIPFA STATISTICS"

In 1885, the Institute of Municipal Treasurers in the United Kingdom initiated the first formal exchange of statistics covering the operation of the "Free library service". With the one exception (in 1942), the series of statistics has been collected annually, and enjoys the participation of every library authority in the United Kingdom. The activity is, perhaps, unique in that the canvass represents the cooperation of two professional bodies – accountants and librarians – whilst government is content to observe and support the function by endorsing the independent Committee on Public Library Statistics. Thus, the survey has no statutory basis and therefore the participation of each library authority is based on their recognition of the benefits deriving from the database. Upon this traditional base, much has been built, so that the United Kingdom public library service now has an efficient mechanism for producing consistent performance indicators. This paper seeks to describe what benefits this established base has brought to the development and application of performance indicators.

The surveys described above are known colloquially as the "CIPFA statistics" [The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. This is the parent body of the Institute of Public Finance Limited, of which the author is Executive Director.], and they include two annual canvasses, respectively covering the intentions assumed in the budget for the year of account ("Estimates"), followed by a second request for data on the outturn ("Actuals"). Consequently, there is a rich source of information for each library authority to keep

track of its own activities compared with the current plans made by other authorities and within the national trends. Further, context is derived from the availability of similar data collated by the Library Council for the Republic of Ireland. In all, the statistics represent a complete picture for 240 library authorities, describing the activity of 4,525 static service points in five countries comprising the UK and RoI. Despite this, the statistical archive shows that there is still as much variation in the expenditure on public library services now, as there was more than a century ago.

Table 1: Distribution of authorities' expenditure on public libraries

		1885		2000
		Per 1,000 population	*excluding zero rated councils*	per head of population
less than	£10	38%	4%	26%
	£10 < £15	27%	42%	53%
	£15 < £20	23%	35%	15%
	£20 < £25	8%	13%	3%
	£25 < £30	2%	3%	2%
	£30 or more	2%	3%	1%

Given the accountancy interests, it would be easy to gain the false impression that the compilation is heavily weighted towards financial measures. However, the Committee on Public Library Statistics (CPLS) boasts only one finance professional out of a membership of 18 other librarians and the development priorities are focused on a mixture of outcome and output rather than input measures. Furthermore, the professional cooperation leads to both activity and financial data being collected on the same form, so the resultant unit cost measures have a degree of consistency which otherwise would be missing if drawn from different sources. Whereas, the standardisation of the forms of account was the main concern in past years, the major interest of the CPLS now lies in developing tighter activity definitions and extending these over the digital agenda. The CIPFA statistics therefore provide a database to service the continuously developing national and local research agenda.

Measures of accountability

The voluntary participation in the open survey method adopted by managers of public library services has certain advantages; the most noticeable of which is the profession's influence over the choice of headline performance indicators. In recent years (since 1980) the government has placed emphasis on the publication of measures which can be reported to the public at large thus inviting a closer scrutiny of the services they are entitled to receive. However, public librarians in the UK can justifiably take pride in the fact that such measures were already available and that the various auditing bodies could benefit from a long established and tested framework of statistical survey definitions.

Furthermore, such headline indicators (which provide a rather crude analysis of overall performance) can be placed in context by a whole series of explanatory indicators on the public record. The resulting system produces statistics which demonstrate accountability as bi-product of the normal management information system.

Even so, just as there are different views expressed by different audiences on what constitutes the best measure of performance, there are equally divergent views on how to interpret such measures. In 1980, after a period of substantial growth in public expenditure, being high on the league table of public library expenditure per head exposed the managers of the authority to more intense pressure to make reductions. More recently, local authorities at the bottom of this league table are under the same sort of scrutiny to increase their spending on materials to redress a prolonged period of "under-investment". Even the crude measures can be turned on their head. So with a wider audience (public and government as well as management) scrutinising the so called "performance indicators" there has been a tendency to develop more specific measures to cater for the different circumstances in which such performance is reported. These have met with mixed success.

There is a hierarchy of indicators, so to speak. At the highest level are the measures of account to the public. The current name for these in the United Kingdom is the "Best Value Performance Indicators". For Public Library services there are three:

BVPI 115   *The cost per visit to public libraries.*
BVPI 117   *The number of physical visits per head of population to public libraries.*
BVPI 118   *The percentage of library users who found the book / information they wanted, (or reserved it, and were satisfied with the outcome.)*

The first two ratios are simple measures of volume, whilst the third seeks to quantify the success of the service in meeting the expectations of users. However, if these are meant to be "easy to understand", they defy easy interpretation. We have already seen that the first measure may indicate parsimony or profligacy. Consequently, it may be assumed that the public for whom this measure is provided will tend to believe that the correct level of investment equates to the norm (i.e. best to be average in this situation). Furthermore, if the service is meant to be "free", as the legislation insists, and if a standard level of service and choice is to be made available to all users, then the fixed cost of provision will be shared amongst a variable number of visitors. How can the user reasonably judge whether or not they are getting value for public expenditure in such circumstances? To help answer (or perhaps avoid) this question, the Best Value regime

suggests that better value is located at the top quartile point rather than the average. However, at which end of the distribution is the top?

As the number of visitors increases, then the unit cost per visit decreases. So if the number of visits decreases, then it is necessary to reduce expenditure by a larger proportion, constraining choice for the remaining visitors.
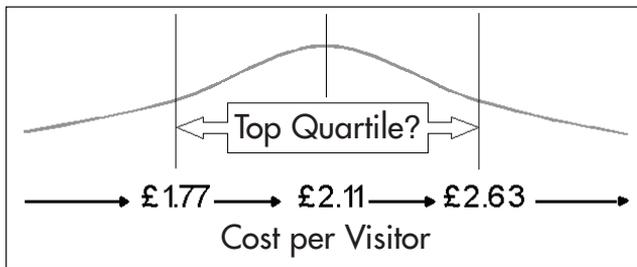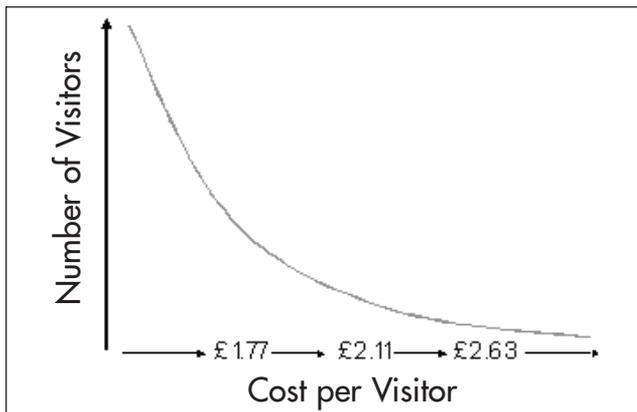
Figure 1:

Figure 2:

The last indicator (BVPI 118) suffers from indistinct definition. Typically, two out of every three persons immediately find the book they were seeking. Some argue that if users need to reserve books, then the library has insufficient stock. However, the public library services in more rural areas argue that they need to spread the same amount of stock over a larger number of smaller libraries than those serving more urban populations of the same size. Consequently, the choice available to users is more limited. All in all, it will be clear that even the most simple measures are imperfect, and it is probably true to say that many service practitioners regard the Best Value performance indicators with a degree of cynicism simply because they reduce the opportunity to give proper account of the quality and depth of the service.

For this reason, it is possible that there has been considerable activity in recent years in developing alternative performance measures. These include:

1. New marketing indicators (users' views and catchment population characteristics) – these are being developed within an agreed framework known as PLUS (Public Library User Surveys);

2. In-depth management indicators where comparisons are made in benchmarking clubs; and,

3. A new national planing framework with performance indicators defining target standards of service.

The remainder of this paper seeks to describe these developments.

PLUS

In the early 1990s, the profession were seeking a key indicator of service quality based on the success or otherwise of library visitors being able to borrow the books of their choice. [This performance indicator is known as the "Needs fill rate", and was developed from earlier surveys undertaken in Higher Education libraries in the United States.] This led the CPLS, with the joint assistance of the Audit Commission and the Office of Arts and Libraries, to undertake a sample survey of users in a number of authorities to test the questionnaire. [The Audit Commission in England and Wales is the body appointed by government to scrutinise the accounts of local municipal activities including locally delivered health services. The body supervises the audit of local authorities' accounts and has powers to undertake inspections of the manner in which such services are managed.] The approach required that the question to be asked in a consistent way by all authorities and it was soon realised that further benefits would derive from the specification of a standard set of questions to be used in local surveys. Nationally consistent data sets would add value to local survey results, and the system offered the prospect of comparing service points of similar type in different parts of the country. After several tests of the extended questionnaire a national standard was agreed, and a standard survey methodology agreed. PLUS was born.

From the outset, postcodes were sought and hence the survey results can be used for mapping catchment areas and cross referencing to small area population census characteristics. [The Government Office now known as the Department for Culture Media and Sport.] The standards recommend all authorities mount the survey in all libraries although for larger administrative units it is suggested that the survey is phased such that a representative number of service points are included in each of three successive years. The methodology recommends good practice in statistical approach, and to date 185 of 208 possible UK public library services have adopted the guidelines and implemented the survey recommendations. Thus in 2000, approximately 350,000 users of public libraries completed the standard questionnaires and in the current year (2001) the expectation is that at least 500,000 users will be included. A central database has been assembled, from which it is possible to monitor national and regional trends and the PLUS activity produces an annual report highlighting the summary results each year.

One unforeseen but significant outcome of the PLUS initiative is that the Public Library Service can demonstrate the highest user satisfaction rates of all the public services in the United Kingdom. [Based on pre-publication draft results of user satisfaction surveys compiled by the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions. (Summary results due for publication in late 2001).] Despite this the profession is seeking to extend the portfolio of survey instruments: A survey standard exists for Children and new surveys are currently being tested on the use of electronic services. Indeed, the development of PLUS highlights one of the more successful outcomes of performance indicator research, in that the initial objectives simply sought to generate information capable of monitoring whether or not library users were provided with sufficient choice, whilst the final outcome is complete marketing system which now includes a protocol for undertaking surveys in the community. All in all a satisfactory outcome for a framework which also underpins the demand for high level performance indicators specified by government.

Benchmarking

Given the long tradition for generating comparitive statistical data in the United Kingdom, one might be forgiven for wondering whether even more detailed "benchmarking" could add further value to the research activities undertaken by library service managers. Indeed the term means different things to different people. For some time there has been an active interest in making more of the established and available databases by exploring trends and restricting the comparisons within similar groupings of administrative units. However, the concept of forming clubs to dictate the common research agenda and collect new data specifically to inform a particular review has only recently evolved. In this connection, there are two main types of club activity: One concentrates on "Metric" or statistical comparison of service activities; The other, examines "Processes" for delivering the services, comparing methods and practices. Both are complementary, and now that the clubs have been operating for three years there is a tendency towards merging the interests of these approaches.

Thus, the aim of the benchmarking clubs is to combine the benefits of networking through groups such as quality circles with a set programme of investigations into processes and methods of service delivery. The research is founded on statistical or process analysis between library authorities. The enquiries lead to an examination of management processes and the effectiveness of policies. Regular exchange of information and a continuous cycle of research topics provides the appropriate forum for all authorities wishing to support their best value initiatives. The emphasis is

directed towards how best to 'add value' to efforts and the menu of supporting research is debated at meetings and workshops. The groupings or "Clubs" range in size with as few as 6 library services and as many as 100 members.

Benchmarking informs all rational management and is a major tool for improving performance. It can both act as a diagnostic tool and give a steer towards the medicine needed to ensure improvement. Because of its potential power as a management tool, it is making the most practical use of performance indicators in public library authorities in the United Kingdom. In this context, "Benchmarking" is key to:

• The "Best Value" regime;
• Annual (Public) Library Plans;
• Public Library Standards.

Figure 3:
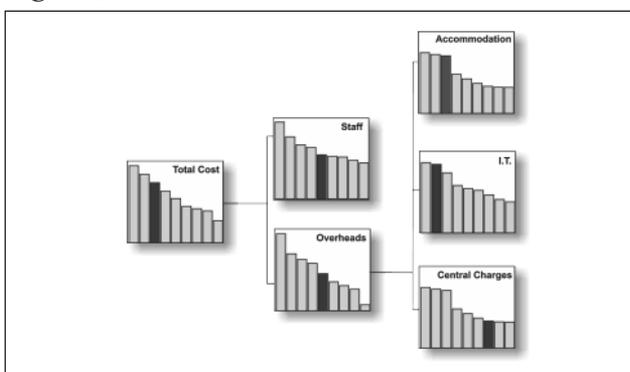
The Committee on Public Library Statistics is overseeing the approach and is keen to maintain and develop standardisation in the framework of library performance indicators for the benefit of all the stakeholders. The club's methodologies often offer ready-made tools for internal benchmarking between libraries in the same authority, however, external benchmarking (between public libraries and other types of organisations) is not part of the programme. The approach concentrates on diagnosis. Local management remains, as always, responsible for initiating and managing change and improvement on the ground. To this end, current topics have been selected for their importance and feasibility in consultation with club members in earlier years:

1 – Metric Benchmarking of Services
2 – Best Practice in Stock Management
3 – Best Practice in ICT Service Applications
4 – Best Practice in Social Inclusion
5 – Marketing Practice in Public Libraries
6 – Best Practice in Reservations and Inter Library Loans Service
7 – Statistical Profiling

All benchmarking involves networking of interested individuals and to assist potential contacts with com-

mon research interests, a "Nearest neighbour" tool can be used to identify other library services with common characteristics. This model allows users to select relevant characteristics (e.g. scale of enterprise, staffing ratios, book fund investment) and the most similar other public library services are identified.

A key point concerning the benchmarking approach is its technical focus. Participants are assured that all the information they pool will be restricted to the club, and details about any single library service are kept confidential – the option being given to use code labels rather than names of organisations. Given the traditional open exchange within the profession, the option to remain anonymous is rarely requested and this demonstrates a healthy interest in maintaining a transparent and open approach where best practice can be transferred efficiently. In practice the UK benchmarking activities also provide a useful framework for researching the more detailed performance measures.

Annual Library Plans and Service Standards

The requirement to produce and review an annual library plan is the single most important process determining the use and definition of performance indicators. Public Library services have been required to submit their plans to the responsible Secretary of State since 1998. [The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport is the responsible Government Minister for Public Libraries in England.] Each Public Library service is administered by a municipality, or local authority which is required to formulate proposals for investment three years ahead. The emphasis is placed on practicable plans and hence the limited planning horizon. The first three year cycle of planning was completed in 2000 and the process was particularly successful in drawing attention to the paucity of investment in the public library services in recent years. Indeed, this attention has been influential in ensuring that a framework of service standards were defined and linked to the future planning process.

The first real attempt to define national standards for the public library service were set out in the the Bourdillon report, published ahead of the Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964. This set out some basic standards against which it is interesting to see how local authorities perform today:
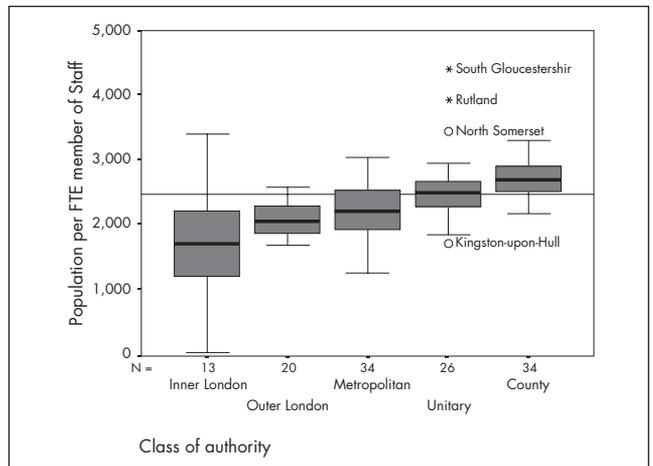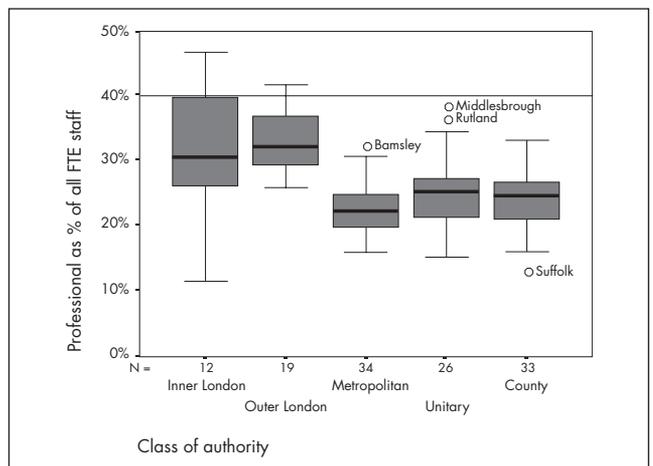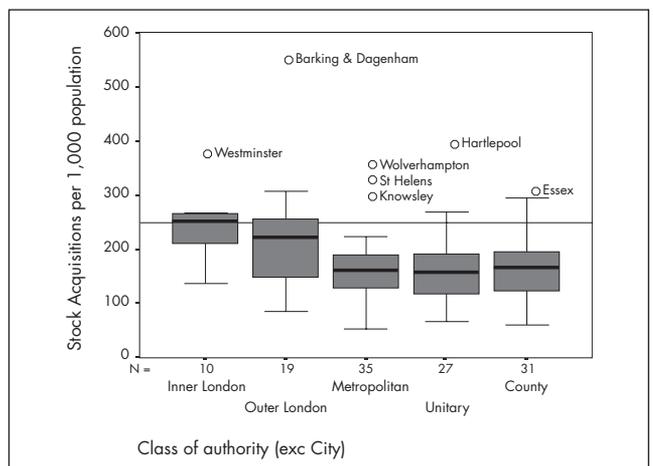
Figure 4:

**Figure 5:**

Figure 6:

Explanation:
These figures are representations of the distribution of values recorded for each local authority. These are shown by class of authority.

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The distributions are represented by bar charts where the median (the value for the authority half way down the distribution) is represented by a broad band.

The shaded box about this median represents about two-thirds (68%) of the authority values, and the thinner line enclosed within the bars shows the limits for nearly all other authorities (95%) in the distribution.
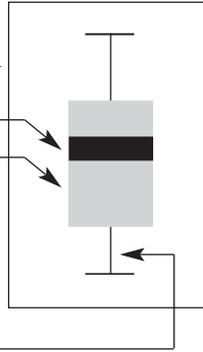
The positions of "outliers" (i.e. those authorities which occupy an extreme position beyond the normal range), are shown individually relative to the main distribution.

(*The 68% and 95% proportions referred to above respectively represent one and two standards deviations about the mean.*)

- Staffing was to be set at the rate of one member of staff per 2,500 resident population. Figure 4 shows that this ideal is mainly only met in the urban authorities.

- Furthermore 40% of these staff were meant to be professionally qualified, which is an aspiration which is rarely met by any authority to-day, as demonstrated in figure 5.

- Annual stock acquisitions were set at 250 per thousand population to sustain the service, but this level of stock investment is only met by about 10% of authorities outside Inner London, as shown in figure 6.

Plainly, if any new standards were to be set, they would need to be specified in a regime which might allow such targets to be met. However, many of the trends in the statistics describing investment and output were showing a decline. The link between opening hours and visitor counts to UK Public Libraries is undeniable and so it is difficult to avoid the connection between the reduction in overall hours of access experienced in recent years and a fall-off in the overall number of visitors to libraries. Whilst it is difficult to establish whether the fall-off in visitors to public libraries is a direct consequence of the reduced hours of access, the sustained reduction in the number of service points makes this very likely. With reduced access, the opportunity for libraries to react to customer demands is limited. So economies may have been made in expenditure (10.4% in real terms since 1994/95), which have been realised in staffing reductions (-4.8% since 1994/95) and a decline in annual additions to stock (-13.6%). Therefore, there was a pivotal reason for introducing standards to defend against the diminishing "opportunity for access" to a public library service which has gathered pace in recent years.

Figure 7:
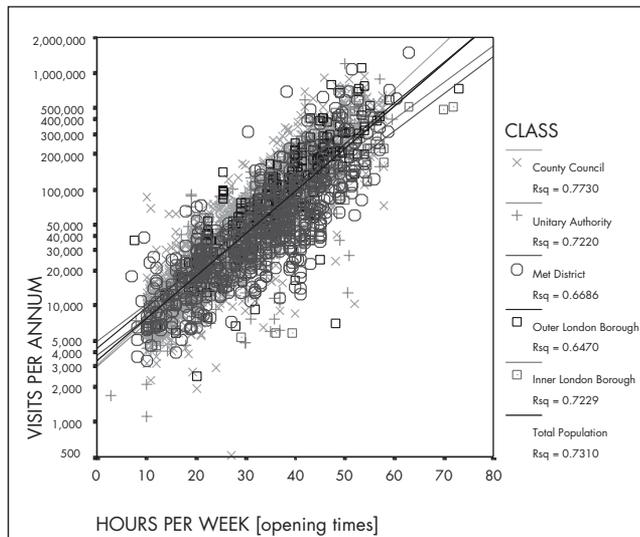
The debate over the formulation of the revised national service standards was inclusive and involved several iterations of consultation and discussion. Systems adopted in other countries were studied and an initial model specified, which might be measured as follows:

Deployment of the service:
- Proportion of the population resident within 5 kms of a public library.

Service availability:
- Average branch opening hours which extend beyond normal business hours.
- Visitor weighted average opening hours per week.

Servicing special needs groups:
- Proportion of the resident population with access to a mobile library.
- Proportion of the registered disabled population who hold library membership.
- Proportion of children resident in the authority who hold library membership.
- Proportion of the elderly resident in the authority who hold library membership.

Satisfaction with the service being provided:
- Proportion of users satisfied with requests for information (PLUS).
- Composite needs fill rate (PLUS).

Utilisation of the service by the community:
- Proportion of members who have visited the library(ies) in past twelve months.
- Stock available for borrowing divided by annual loans.
- Book stock per head of resident population.
- Count of visits to the library in the year divided by the resident population.
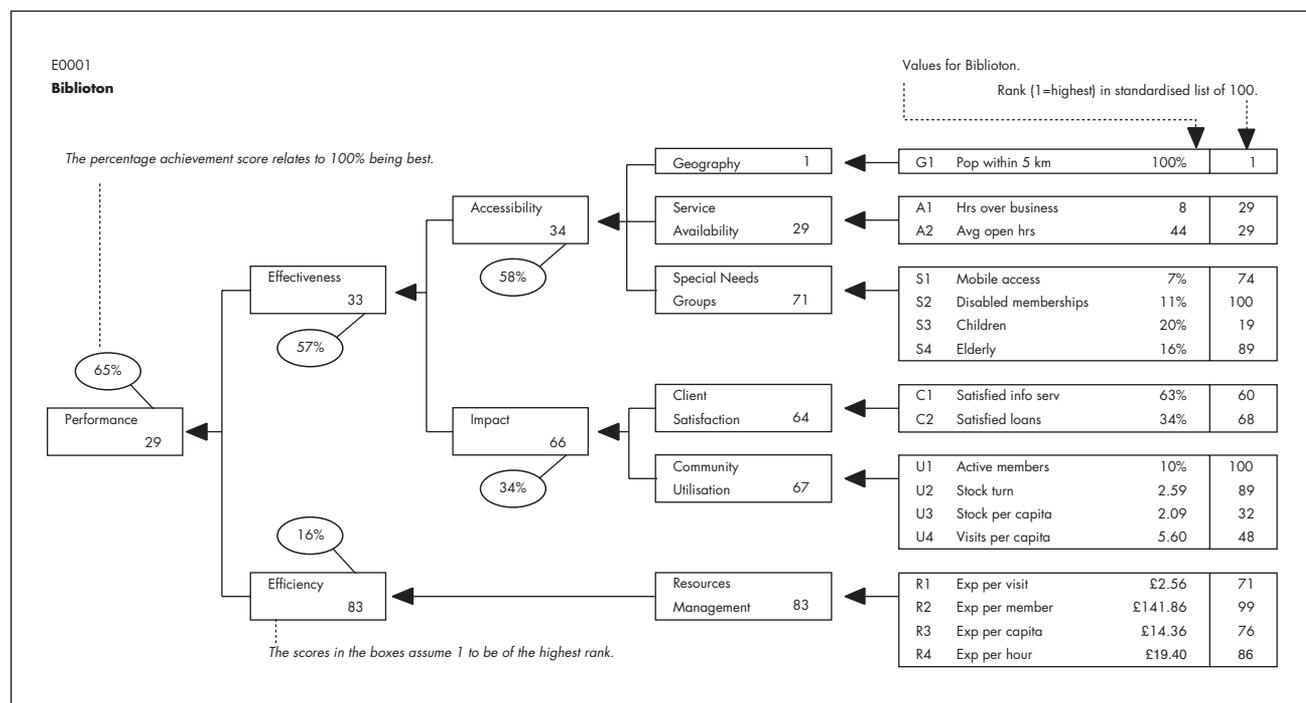
Resources management in support of the service:
- Net expenditure on the library service divided by annual visitors.
- Net expenditure on the library service divided by registered members.

- Net expenditure on the library service divided by resident population.

The indicators were acceptable, but the overall model was thought impracticable.

Figure 8:

A simpler approach was sought and it was eventually agreed to specify target levels of service in accordance with the "Best Value" framework where all authorities should strive to meet the value occupied by those at the top quartile position in the statistical distribution. The overall objectives were specified and published under the title "Comprehensive, Efficient and Modern Public Libraries – Standards and Assessment" in the 150th year since the passing of the Public Libraries Act, 1850 (DCMS). In the following list "LAs" stands for Library Authorities:

LAs must enable convenient and suitable access for users of libraries
PLS 1. Proportion of households living within a fixed distance of a static library.
PLS 2. Proportion of the planned time that service points were not available to visitors.

LAs must provide adequate opening hours of libraries for users
PLS 3. Aggregate opening hours per 1,000 population for all libraries.
PLS 4. Percentage of larger libraries open at least 45 hours per week.

LAs must enable electronic access for library users
PLS 5. Percentage of libraries open more than 10 hours a week that have access to on-line catalogues.
PLS 6. Total number of electronic workstations available to users per thousand population.

LAs must ensure satisfactory services for the issuing and reserving of books
PLS 7. Authority's normal book issue period (in weeks)
PLS 8. Number of books that library users are normally allowed to borrow at one time.
PLS 9. Percentage of requests for books met within: 7 days; 15 days; 30 days.

LAs must encourage the use made of the public library service
PLS 10. Number of visits to the library website per thousand population.
PLS 11. Number of library visits per thousand population. (Virtual visits to be phased-in).

LAs must ensure user satisfaction with the services provided
PLS 12. Percentage of library users reporting success in borrowing a specific book.

PLS 13. Percentage of library users reporting success in gaining information as a result of a search or enquiry.

PLS 14. Percentage of library users rating the knowledge of staff as "good" or "very good".

PLS 15. Users rating the helpfulness of staff as "good" or "very good".

LAs must provide choice in books and materials made available to users

PLS 16. Quality index for adult fiction; adult non-fiction; children's books; reference materials; large print books and books on tape.

PLS 17. Annual items added through purchase per thousand population.

PLS 18. Time taken to replenish lending stock.

PLS 18i. *Fund for purchasing library items per thousand population*.

PLS 19. Staff per 1,000 population with appropriate management and ICT qualifications.
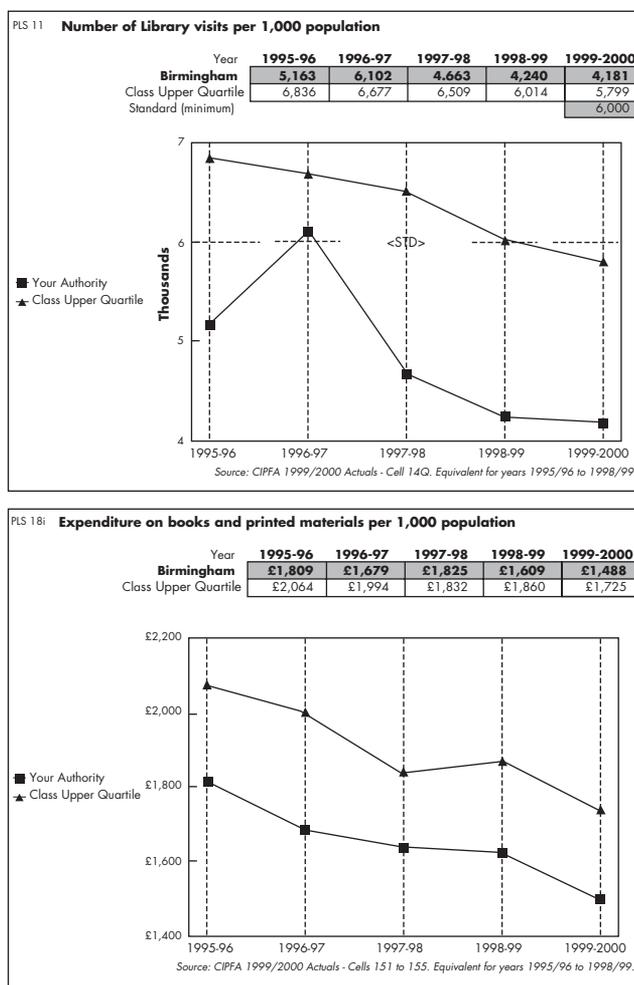
The final stages of consultation brought the overall resource implications of the national standards into sharp focus. After all these defined service levels which by definition 3 out of 4 library services would need to improve. To do so they would need to set out plausible and practicable strategies in their Annual Library Plans (ALPs). In this connection, it does not necessarily follow that improvements in service levels under all the objectives require increased investment. Also the options exist to take a more flexible approach to meeting the requirements. For instance, an increase in the provision of mobile access to the population not at present living within the specified distance standards of a static service point. Therefore, not including capital charges, the overall estimated full year revenue cost consequences of raising all public library services up to the standard levels would be to increase the national budget by between +9% and +13%. This in part explains the reason why there are no explicit standards specifying the minimum expenditure levels each authority should invest. Hence the measure PLS 18i, listed above, is a simply a contextual indicator which the auditor or inspector would regard should the authority show insufficient improvement under the other standard headings. Even so the potential resource impact of implementing the standards argues for a phased and planned approach, and the relevance of the Annual Library Planning process and the performance indicators that inform their review take on added significance.

The planning cycle starts each year with the publication of overall guidelines followed by the provision of a statistical profile for each Public Library service. The profile is unique to each authority – i.e. the data are specific to the authority and the group of other authorities with which the comparisons are made. However, the indicators and presentation are consis-

tent across all the profiles. The presentation falls into two parts: One reporting the progress of the authority in meeting the standard levels of service; The second set out more general statistics on financial performance and related input and output measures.

Full profiles for each library service are available on the web-site devoted to supporting the Annual Library Plans process: (www.LibPlans.ws)

Figure 9 - Extracts from a "Planning Profile" provided to inform the review of the plan.

PLS 11	**Number of Library visits per 1,000 population**				
Year	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000
Birmingham	5,163	6,102	4.663	4,240	4,181
Class Upper Quartile	6,836	6,677	6,509	6,014	5,799
Standard (minimum)					6,000

Source: CIPFA 1999/2000 Actuals - Cell 14Q. Equivalent for years 1995/96 to 1998/99.

PLS 18i	**Expenditure on books and printed materials per 1,000 population**				
Year	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000
Birmingham	£1,809	£1,679	£1,825	£1,609	£1,488
Class Upper Quartile	£2,064	£1,994	£1,832	£1,860	£1,725

Source: CIPFA 1999/2000 Actuals - Cells 151 to 155. Equivalent for years 1995/96 to 1998/99.

To assist both the assessor of the plan and the authority in preparing their submission, an overall checklist is provided to summarise the performance of the authority in meeting the standard service levels. An example is shown over leaf.

Figure 10 – Extract from a "Planning Profile" provided to inform the review of the plan.

Public Libraries Standards Checklist

Standard Number	Standard	Standard met or exceeded	Standard figure	Authority figure
PLS 1(i)	Proportion of households % residing within 1 mile of static branch	✗	95%	92%
PLS 3(ii)	Aggregate opening hours per 1,000 population for all libraries	✗	128	77
PLS 4	Percentage of larger libraries open at least 45 hours a week	✔	100%	100%
PLS 5	Percentage of libraries open more than 10 hours a week that have access to on-line catalogues	✔	100%	100%
PLS 6(i)	Total number of electronic workstations available to users per 1,000 population	✗	0.600	0.332
PLS 6(ii)	Percentage of static service points providing public internet access	✔	100%	100%
PLS 7	Normal book issue period (weeks)	✔	3	4
PLS 8	Number of books that library users are allowed to borrow at one time	✔	8	8
PLS 9(i)	Percentage of requests for books met within 7 days	✔	80%	75%
PLS 9(ii)	Percentage of requests for books met within 15 days	✔	70%	81%
PLS 9(iii)	Percentage of requests for books met within 30 days	✔	85%	89%
PLS 11	Number of library visits per 1,000 population	✗	6,000	4,181
PLS 12(i)	Percentage of adult library users reporting success in obtaining a specific book	✗	65%	57%
PLS 13(i)	Percentage of adult library users reporting success in gaining information as a result of a search or enquiry	✗	75%	71%
PLS 14(i)	Percentage of adult library users rating the knowledge of staff as "good" or "very good"	✗	95%	90%
PLS 15(i)	Percentage of adult library users rating the helpfulness of staff as "good" or "very good"	✗	95%	91%
PLS 17	Annual items added through purchase per 1,000 population	✗	216	204
PLS 18	Time taken to replenish the lending stock on open access or available for loan	✗	8.5	13.9

Relevant web-sites:

www.ipf.co.uk

This site covers the spectrum of public services in the United Kingdom, including statistics on their diverse services (alphabetically form "Archives" to "Waste Management"). Public Library Statistics for individual library authorities relating to the budgets for the current year of account (Estimates) and outturn data for the latest financial year completed (Actuals) are available to subscribers – commentaries and summary statistics are available to all site visitors.

This site also houses the information about Public Library User Surveys – PLUS.

The Benchmarking activities are also served by this site.

www.LibPlans.ws

This is the administrative site for supporting the Annual Library Plans in England. The plans for each Public Library service are lodged here. Individual Planning Profiles (Reports setting out a number of performance measures for each Public Library service are also available).

Copies of planning guidance, administrative materials, an interactive "Nearest neighbour" model and FAQ facilities are provided.

www.LibEcon.org

The site for international library statistics – the existing coverage is confined to European Countries but surveys are at present being undertaken across many more. Participation is not restricted. Volunteer coordinators for any country are invited to contact the web-site to initiate the inclusion of as wide a community of interests as possible.