

A Library and Lifelong Learning Development Strategy for Tower Hamlets

A joint accommodation strategy developed by the Customer Services and Education Directorates for the Arts, Leisure, Sports and Youth and Community Services Committees, April 1999

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CHAPTER 1

Summary

1.1 Introduction

The story of Tower Hamlets has become a tale of two 'hamlets'. Tower Hamlets is home to the startling revival of the Docklands. The borough hosts a large part of the media and financial services industry with some of the foremost international companies located in Canary Wharf. On the other hand, Tower Hamlets is also home to some of the most deprived wards in Britain with high levels of unemployment, low levels of educational achievement and inadequate employment skills.

That divide is now changing - and changing fast. The rate of improvement in educational achievement is rising well ahead of the national average. Companies are reaching out to schools and school leavers, building firm partnerships that are helping to raise expectations of what our young people can achieve and the jobs they can strive for. A huge programme of housing regeneration is underway, bringing in private capital to help transform our housing. Together, the public and private sectors are gradually helping to create one Tower Hamlets, one that is more prosperous, confident and harmonious.

Nevertheless, much remains to be done. Educational achievement remains well below the national average. Unemployment is high and is particularly acute among the Bengali and other ethnic minority communities. Literacy and numeracy levels in the adult population are below the national average in a nation which itself needs to catch up with other advanced economies. Poverty and overcrowding remain a reality for too many in our community. These problems cannot be tackled by Tower Hamlets alone – the Borough needs to take advantage of national support and the new national infrastructure to support learning and regeneration.

Successive governments have sought to stimulate economic growth and urban renewal. The current government has embarked upon ambitious plans to change the fabric of Britain. It has launched a series of initiatives designed to strengthen Britain's competitive position in the world market. Central to these initiatives are measures to raise educational standards and expectations within the school system as well as in adult education and employment training. In tackling the issues of employment and skill levels, successive governments have sought to encourage the regeneration of urban areas. The Government's focus on combating 'social exclusion' has encouraged a new approach to developing the capacity of communities to address long-term problems of disadvantage and lack of hope in declining inner city areas.

The national agenda for tackling employment skills, educational achievement and regeneration includes three important themes:

- Library renewal: the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is supporting local authorities in breathing new life into the library network, bringing them into the information age and connecting libraries to the new IT based learning networks
- Lifelong learning: the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) is encouraging the development of a national grid for learning, homework clubs and a national distance learning system through learndirect
- Community renewal: the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) working through the Government Office for London (GOL) is working to encourage a community-focused approach to regenerating inner city areas, tackling the problems dogging the housing estates.

The Idea Store proposals are designed to draw all three themes together in a way that captures the best traditions of the library movement and the education sector but presents them in an exciting way, one that draws in new users and retains existing users. The Idea Stores will also be located in a different way – at the heart of our neighbourhood shopping centres, near or beside supermarkets wherever possible. We want a visit to the library and lifelong learning centres to become a regular part of people's lives – to act as a focus as well as a resource for the whole community. The Idea Stores will engage people our current facilities don't reach.

Our existing facilities are made up of a number of separate elements:

- Council libraries: we have 7 'full-time' libraries (which open 5 days a week), 5 part-time libraries, a mobile library and an 'outreach' library service for housebound people
- Council adult education: there are 6 main centres and 40 smaller outreach facilities
- Further education: Tower Hamlets College has 6 main sites and dozens of smaller outreach sites

The Council's facilities share many problems. A large number are 'off the beaten track', often located in side streets or inside an estate. Many are fine Victorian buildings, but require substantial maintenance work and even more money to make them accessible to disabled users. The bill for basic maintenance, health and safety works and disabled access comes to £4.4M by 2004 for the library service alone. The image of our buildings is often unwelcoming. The interiors are largely dull and institutional and in the case of the adult education service, many buildings were formerly schools. The challenge of attracting new users is made even harder since many of them may have negative memories of their own time at school.

The problems with the buildings are contributing to the poor performance of the services housed within them. Use of libraries has been declining and user numbers are at a low level in both the library and adult education services. Changes to the services on offer are underway with the introduction of public access Internet terminals in libraries and plans to revitalise adult education in preparation. Increasingly, the methods used by both services are converging, brought together by technology. Equally, the services share many common aims and have common users and even more so since the launch of the new national distance learning scheme, learndirect.

Following one of the most comprehensive library consultation exercises undertaken in this country, a new concept was born. People wanted a quality library service but they would use it even more if they could combine a visit to the library with a visit to the shops. They also wanted to be able to have education support in the library as well as information. In Autumn 1998 the Council agreed to develop a strategy to house libraries and adult education together. Since then the partnership has expanded, joined by Tower Hamlets College, the borough's main further education provider. That partnership has produced the concept of the Idea Store and a set of ambitious plans to match our shared ambitions for the people who live and work in Tower Hamlets.

1.2 Market Research and Public Consultation

Many of the ideas that have gone into the Idea Store flowed from the intensive public consultation exercise carried out in early 1998. This has been reinforced by continuing consultation throughout the programme's development. An extensive consultation exercise was designed to give everyone a chance to give their views and to pick up detailed quantitative market research information.

The exercise generated an excellent response with views from the equivalent of one in ten households in the Borough and a rich supply of quantitative and qualitative data, with over a million separate data entries. Reassuringly, there were some very positive results. 98% of the respondents, both users and non-users, believed the library service was important or very important. Of the 98%, over 80% felt the service was very important. There was also very positive feedback on the help and customer care offered by staff.

However, most users and non-users felt that the service was run-down and old-fashioned. Most interesting were the responses of non-users - particularly since over 70% of the population are not regular library users. People either didn't have the time, felt the opening hours were inconvenient, found little of interest, a poor selection of books or didn't like the atmosphere. When asked what would make a difference, non-users wanted:

- Longer opening hours
- Access to shopping
- Council information services
- Sunday opening
- Art and exhibitions
- Video lending
- Better book stock

There was a very strong demand from both users and non-users to be able to combine a visit to the library with other activities, particularly shopping.

These results mirrored our research into other boroughs that have located their libraries in local shopping centres.

When Newham's Stratford library was opened, in a modern new building and close to the shopping centre, visitor numbers rose from 171,434 in 2000 to 409,000 in 2001, an increase of 239% (and compared with 1 million visits to the whole of the library network in Tower Hamlets).

Our research into the catchment areas of our libraries also suggested that having the largest number of libraries per head of population in London did not guarantee that the libraries would be used. Using digital mapping technology, the catchment areas of our existing libraries were plotted. The results showed that almost every resident lived in the catchment areas of at least two libraries. Many lived close to three and some four.

Our conclusions confirmed that time is precious, that people often cannot or do not want to make special visits to libraries even if the library is close at hand. If we want to make libraries and lifelong learning a part of everyone's life, we have to compete for their time and attention. We have to fit in with modern lifestyles. However, this does not mean that the traditional strengths of the library movement can be cast aside. Investing in IT was people's second priority. People's top priority for libraries was books and increasing the bookstock. Despite the interest in IT and the Internet, books are likely to remain central to libraries for many years to come.

Our conclusions indicate that location, design and access for people with disabilities are key to making libraries and lifelong learning a success. This means parting with some of our existing and often much-loved buildings if we are to realise the public's top priorities. Interestingly, in responding to the household survey, people chose to give the lowest priority to maintaining historic library buildings.

Nevertheless, in proposing such a change, it is important that existing users (many of whom may be satisfied with the services they are used to) are engaged and listened to. We could rely on the information we already have to support the need for change. Instead, further consultation will continue throughout the development of the Idea Store programme and the design of the Stores.

1.3 About the Idea Stores

The Idea Stores will be the first place that people will go to for information about any aspect of their lives and to gain new skills. They will offer library and lifelong learning facilities in an integrated and attractive way. They will become a focus for the local community, a place where people can come for a coffee, to meet friends, to take a break from shopping and to enjoy the many facilities. They will be designed to be attractive to look at and pleasant to be in, using the

best of modern architectural and graphic design. They will incorporate the best ideas from other councils and education bodies as well as the retail and leisure industry. They will also maintain the best traditions of the library movement and education sector.

The Idea Stores will have all the features of a lending library but will introduce a reference section, DVD and CD collection to every facility for the first time. In addition, the Stores will include:

- adult and further education classrooms
- open learning centres
- public access IT and Internet terminals
- homework clubs
- study space
- creche

However, it will not all be hard work. There will be entertainment with performances and art displays, video walls, shops and cafes. Health advice will be on offer in a relaxed and informal setting and voluntary sector groups will have access to prime space to give advice to local people.

The Stores will be located at the heart of our main local shopping centres, beside (or even inside) the supermarkets wherever possible. The Stores will be at:

- Whitechapel Road (near Sainsbury's)
- Isle of Dogs (near Asda)
- Bethnal Green (near Tesco)
- Watney Market in Shadwell
- Canary Wharf
- Chrisp Street
- Bow (near Safeways)

All seven Stores will be in prominent, convenient positions and will have a similar format and contents, while reflecting the local context. Each Store, attracting large numbers of users, would bring great benefits to their shopping centre,

breathing new life into local retail.

The Idea Store concept has been developed and refined as a partnership between the Council and Tower Hamlets College, with help from every Council Directorate, advice from around the country and from central government. As a result it reflects and integrates a wide range of national and local priorities, including:

- the National Grid for Learning
- learndirect
- the modernisation of local government
- best value
- lifelong learning
- healthy living
- local regeneration
- the Council's cultural industries strategy
- the Council's education strategy
- the Health Action Zone
- equal opportunities policies
- work to raise standards in literacy and numeracy
- voluntary sector partnerships and the borough's third sector strategy

The Idea Stores are designed to deliver some clear results. At a conservative estimate, they will double the number of visits to libraries and the number of people engaged in lifelong learning. There are much deeper and wider benefits and further research will allow detailed targets to be set, including increases in the standards of literacy and numeracy in the community.

1.4 Implementation

This ambitious relocation programme will require a significant capital and revenue commitment from the Council over the time frame of the strategy. The key principles for the implementation strategy are:-

- The development of each 'Idea Store' will only proceed only when the required funding has been secured.

- The adoption of the strategy will signal the commitment of the Council to increase the amount of money it currently spends on library and 'lifelong learning' provision.
- The 'Idea Stores' will move to seven day opening and will remain open in the evenings
- There will be a net increase in the number of library staff
- There will be a significant increase in the range and availability of 'lifelong learning' courses.
- Every 'Idea Store' will provide full access for people with disabilities
- Everyone in the borough will be within 20 minutes travel time of an 'Idea Store' in line with national Public Library Standards
- Existing outreach services will be retained and improved
- The Council will no longer persist with the provision of services in locations that are unable to provide a satisfactory standard of service or are duplicating services for the same catchment population as other nearby and better facilities.
- There will be a reduction of library service points from 12 to 7 on a programmed basis over 5 years.
- No library will merged until the new or improved facilities covering that local area are ready for use.
- Capital receipts from the sale of library and adult education buildings to be freed up by the 'Idea Store' programme will be reinvested in the community to fund the improved 'Idea Store' facilities.
- Subject to the financial demands of the programme every effort will be made to ensure that vacated buildings continue to deliver a direct benefit to the local community. To this end, the Council:
 - 1) has worked with Whitechapel Art Gallery, giving them the opportunity to purchase the existing Whitechapel library.
 - 2) will work with the Building Conservation Area Trust to give them reasonable opportunity to purchase the Bethnal Green Library for a National Museum of Conservation.

CHAPTER 2

Libraries and Lifelong Learning in a Changing World

2.1 Introduction

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n January 1998, the Council's Arts, Leisure and Sports Committee launched one of the most comprehensive market research and public consultation surveys ever undertaken by a library service. This formed part of a root and branch

strategic review that aimed to:

- find ways to reverse the downward trend in the use of the Borough's libraries
- ensure that the library service was contributing to the national drive to draw more people into 'lifelong learning'
- learn from the techniques used by the best of the public and private sectors to attract 'customers' - and keep them!

The library review followed the principles of 'Best Value': the Government's framework to ensure that councils provide value for money, quality services. 'Best Value' puts public involvement at the heart of change in public services. In that spirit, the library review set out to find out what our users liked about the service, what they didn't and what their priorities were for the future. Perhaps more importantly, given that almost three-quarters of the people of Tower Hamlets do not use our libraries, we talked to the majority of the population about why they didn't use the service and what would tempt them to use it.

The original objective of the library review was straightforward - to develop a strategic plan to make better use of the resources available. The results of our consultation exercise and our research into new developments across the country threw up an entirely new set of challenges and a host of new ideas. These suggested that a more radical programme of change was needed. Changes were needed not just in what the service was delivering but where and why. These changes could not be tackled alone. The library service would need to be part of a wider programme of change.

The Council's adult education service, which has much in common with the library service, was wrestling with similar issues. The publication of the Government's Green Paper 'The Learning Age' in 1998 focused on the need to develop services strategically in ways that would maximise participation. This led the Education Directorate to consider innovative ways of taking learning to where people are rather than expecting them to always turn up to where education buildings were located. The consultation results (showing a high demand for all sorts of education opportunities) pointed the way to a new joint approach to service provision. The possibility of achieving far more, simply by sharing facilities in better locations was seized upon.

In Autumn 1998, the Council's Arts, Leisure and Sports Committee and Youth and Community Services Committee decided to develop a strategy to house the two services together. Since then the partnership has grown. Tower Hamlets College, which provides the majority of further education in the Borough, was looking for ways to extend its reach into the local community. The idea began to take shape of bringing together the learning that takes place in

libraries with the learning that happens in adult and further education. Working together, three different services could achieve more towards the goal of making 'lifelong learning' and its associated recreational pursuits an integral part of the lives of everyone in Tower Hamlets. An 'Idea' was born.

This strategy brings together the results of that partnership. It is based on one of the most far-reaching and comprehensive consultation exercises ever undertaken for a service provided by Tower Hamlets Council. It sets out an entirely new direction for the way in which libraries and lifelong learning will be delivered in Tower Hamlets over the next five years. It aims to secure investment and donations to help expand the service. The strategy offers a period of dramatic growth - one that reflects the ambitions of the partners to transform the lives of people living and working in Tower Hamlets.

In this chapter, we describe the current services in Tower Hamlets before going on, in subsequent chapters, to describe how they might look in the future. The changes in Tower Hamlets are not taking place in isolation. They draw on excellent initiatives across the country by Councils and educational bodies. They also reflect strategic initiatives launched by the Government to improve skill levels as part of its commitment to improve the nation's competitiveness in a global marketplace.

2.2 A Changing Society: Changing Roles

Library and adult education services are at the front line of lifelong learning. In both rural and urban locations alike, they often provide the only realistic route back into formal education for many people. This is particularly so for people from disadvantaged communities many of whom had negative experiences of schooling and formal education.

In addition to supporting the learning that goes on in schools and colleges, libraries and adult education play a vital social role in providing places where people can come together and enjoy themselves. Reading or learning for leisure provides an important social outlet for a whole range of people from the very young to the elderly and can add greatly to their quality of life.

The UK public library service is one of the most heavily used and most cherished services offered by local government. Trusted by the people, it is ideally placed to play a central supporting role in education, training, and broader community

objectives such as promoting healthy lifestyles. The library service and adult education providers are, therefore, enormously powerful agents for change. They are uniquely well placed to foster the spread of vital new IT skills among the population by providing ready access to IT facilities and the informal support people need to build their confidence in getting to grips with new technologies.

There is an increasing realisation that, worthy though these services are, they cannot rely on past traditions alone if they are to keep people interested. They must now compete with the many seductive attractions and distractions of modern life for the interest and attention of the communities which they serve. Whilst millions of people still visit libraries regularly and participate in some form of lifelong learning activity, the use of libraries nationally is in decline. In poorer urban areas where there is a much greater need to engage the community in all aspects of lifelong learning, they often fail to reach the national average usage levels. It is clear that participation in lifelong learning in Tower Hamlets is nowhere near its full potential and that we need to attract many more adults into learning. Unless these services reappraise their role and priorities to take account of:

- the competitive nature of their environment
- the changing aspirations of their communities

they risk becoming increasingly irrelevant. Most people would agree that lifelong learning provision is a very worthy goal. However, such services are worthless if the communities they are there to serve choose not to use them. The challenge ahead is to make libraries and other forms of lifelong learning more relevant and attractive. Particularly interesting is the success of the private sector in stimulating interest in books. The new generation of book retailing chains has transformed the image of the bookshop. UK consumers are becoming used to the new style of provision offered by Borders, and copied by others. Each bookstore has its own distinctive style and has introduced new features such as cafés to encourage people to spend more time – and money! These retailers also have the effect of making municipal libraries look out-of-touch and old-fashioned.

2.3 A new direction nationally

Nationally, both the library service and adult education are at a cross-roads in their development. For the library service this has been recognised by Government with the publication of 'New Library, The Peoples Network' (1998, Department for Culture, Media and Sport) and the Public Library Standards: 'Comprehensive, Efficient and Modern Public Libraries – Standards and Assessment' (DCMS, 2001) For adult education the Green Paper 'The Learning Age' (1998) promised a more strategic approach to lifelong learning and set out a vision based on the development of a culture

of self-improvement and thirst for knowledge.

These reports acknowledge that there are dramatically changing social attitudes to the provision of information and the ability of new technology to sort and deliver information. The need for libraries and other forms of lifelong learning to identify and keep pace with these changing social attitudes and the technology that drives them is a key central message. At the same time, the Learning and Skills Councils aim to build on the strategic planning commenced by local lifelong learning partnerships, raising standards and increasing access to learning. 'Empowering the Learning Community' (DCMS, 2001) supported this agenda through a call for local library and education services to 'join-up' their planning and services.

With these reports and initiatives and a strong policy emphasis on education the Government has set out a clear agenda. At its heart is a commitment to effective education service delivery and personal self-reliance. Commitments have been given to a range of initiatives and both the U.K. library service and adult education services have been identified as playing a significant role in creating a "can do" society.

The publication of the Moser report highlighted the high level of basic skills need in the U.K. compared with other developed countries. It demonstrates graphically that the need for effective lifelong learning provision in poor urban areas has never been higher. In addition, the increasing influence of information technology in all areas of daily life presents challenges, particularly in areas affected by social deprivation.

Individual access to information and communications networks continues to be impeded not only by cost and lack of basic IT and information handling skills but also by the lack of basic language, literacy and numeracy skills. Unless these problems are constructively and urgently addressed there is every chance that the information revolution will deepen the level of social exclusion experienced by many.

In areas of high basic need such as Tower Hamlets there must be a focused and determined commitment to encourage more people to use our services. This means challenging cherished mythologies about what constitutes accessibility and having the courage and the imagination to challenge the established way of doing things. We should provide the kind of service that reflects the way in which people live their lives today. If we provide a service that reflects the needs of a society that existed at the turn of the last century we should not be surprised if the people of today choose not to use it.

2.4 Lifelong learning Needs in Tower Hamlets.

Tower Hamlets has some of the highest levels of social deprivation anywhere in Europe. It is not surprising, therefore, that the population has some of the highest basic skills needs in the country. The percentage of the UK population, expressed as an average at ward level, in need of basic skills support is 24%. In Tower Hamlets the average is 31%. In one Tower Hamlets ward the assessed level of need stood at 36% of the population (the highest level of basic skills need for a ward anywhere in the country).

At the same time, the Borough is host to some of the most successful media and financial services companies in the world. Jobs – good jobs – are available. But if the people in Tower Hamlets are to secure jobs in these firms and in all the other businesses in the area, they need to develop their skills and keep developing them. A new world of wealth and prosperity is on the doorstep. That door can be unlocked through lifelong learning and the confidence that comes with it.

Lifelong learning is not solely a route into employment or a better job. Learning just for the pleasure of it is particularly important to the Tower Hamlets communities because of their often high levels of social isolation and the stress that goes with it. These factors, in turn, affect the physical and mental health of the population. Both libraries and lifelong learning facilities play an important role in combating the effects of poverty. They encourage individuals to explore their own potential, build self-esteem and confidence. They also provide opportunities for social interaction and are a vital lifeline for the socially excluded. In addition, libraries provide significant educational support to infants, schoolchildren and students. This support is particularly important during school holidays, at weekends and after school hours.

2.5 Lifelong learning Provision in Tower Hamlets

2.5.1 Adult education in Tower Hamlets. A brief profile.

The Council's service network

The Council's adult education network has developed in a largely ad hoc way. There are 6 main Council run adult education centres in the Borough and a further 40 outreach sites. Most of the outreach sites depend on agreements with primary or secondary schools to make the space available. Inevitably, those adult education sites within secondary schools are often restricted by the operational needs of the schools and they can lack flexibility.

This network provides, each year, approximately 613 classes in a wide range of subjects to approximately 7,442 students. The main adult education centres are:

- Bethnal Green
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- Shadwell
- Saint Matthias
- Saint Paul's Way Community School
- Wessex
- Whitechapel

A number of the adult education sites are considered to be poorly located and/or present a poor image to the public. Almost all are Victorian/Edwardian institutional buildings. Many are redundant schools.

The Wessex Centre typifies the problems of the network. It is located in a maze of back streets which have very low levels of pedestrian activity. If you live more than four streets away you might never know it was there. The building itself is an Edwardian school located so close to a railway viaduct that a number of the classrooms are unusable because of the train noise. No part of the upper floors is accessible to people with disabilities.

Because of the way in which the provision of adult education in Tower Hamlets has developed over many years, provision is patchy. Some significant areas of the Borough have no adult education facilities (e.g. the Isle of Dogs).

Building Condition

The majority of the main centres are in a reasonable condition. However, as many are nearing 100 years old, the cost of maintaining these buildings is increasing. Costly major works are becoming necessary to keep them in reasonable order. All of the main centres have very poor access for people with disabilities. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and associated regulations require the Council to ensure that disabled people can use the services provided. As a consequence the adult education service must find ways to address its severe access problem. The cost of improving disabled access to the required standard for the adult education network will cost many hundreds of thousands of pounds.

Levels of Use

Whilst the Council's adult education programme attracts around 7,442 people per year, this user level is disappointingly low given a resident population of 184,968. This strategy focuses on increasing access and student numbers.

Tower Hamlets College

Tower Hamlets College is the main provider of post-16 education and training in the Borough. The College provides a range of academic and vocational courses leading to qualifications, higher education and jobs.

The College has grown and changed radically since it opened 10 years ago. Over 7,442 local people now study on full and part-time courses at the main centres and in over 30 community based venues. The College now opens on Saturday mornings and it is this flexible approach to lifelong learning that the College now needs to develop and expand.

Over the next ten years the College wants to reduce the number of large buildings it manages and offer more of its programme from locally based outlets. It would like its students to be able to follow entire courses from locations near to where they live as well as be able to progress to further training using the facilities in main college centres.

The voluntary sector

The provision of learning opportunities for adults in Tower Hamlets is distributed amongst a myriad of voluntary organisations, specially funded local authority initiatives and Single Regeneration Budget initiatives. Most of this provision is small scale and targeted at particular areas and estates. These initiatives are often valued highly but there are worries that people who are introduced to training through these routes are not offered ready-made routes to progress on to adult and further education. There is a danger that people make great progress only to be lost to the education system again.

2.5.2 Tower Hamlets Library Service: A brief profile.

The service network.

The primary service points of Tower Hamlets Library Service take the form of 7 full-time libraries. These are:

- Bancroft
- Bethnal Green
- Bow

- Cubitt Town
- Lansbury
- Watney Market
- Whitechapel

The three largest (Whitechapel, Bethnal Green, Bancroft) have some historic and/or architectural merit. Whitechapel and Bancroft are grade II listed buildings.

The existing network has developed in a piecemeal way over a period of 100 years. The buildings and their location reflect the variety of approaches to service provision taken during this period. These range from the high minded institutional values of the Victorians/Edwardians to more paternalistic impositions of the 60's and 70's.

In many cases, the factors that affected where the libraries were built are no longer relevant or appropriate to the modern communities they now serve. Tower Hamlets' existing library network has more libraries per head of population than any other London Borough. It has one library for every 13,212 residents-. This does not, however, mean that the network is very accessible to the people of the Borough.

The historic, ad hoc nature of library service provision in Tower Hamlets and the problems this is now causing, is highlighted perfectly by the 5 part-time libraries that supplement the Council's main full time branches.

These are :-

- Dorset
- Fairfoot
- Limehouse
- Stepney
- Wapping (St Peters Centre)

Two of these libraries (Dorset and Stepney) are housed in small buildings that, for all practical purposes have catchment areas that go no further than the estates on which they are built. Wapping Library is a room in a community centre. Limehouse Library (also grade II listed) once served a dense dockland community. It is now cut off from a much reduced residential community by the ceaseless flow of traffic on Commercial Road. The majority of people in the Fairfoot Library catchment area register with other nearby libraries that are closer to general shopping facilities (at Bow

and Chrisp Street). These issues are more fully dealt with in Chapter 3. ('Accessibility and changing patterns of use').

The Council also runs a home delivery service and a mobile library service which target specific groups within the community who are less mobile for physical, social or cultural reasons and so cannot readily reach a library. This strategy ensures that these client groups continue to receive a service.

Building Condition (briefly).

The existing buildings are generally in a poor state of repair and decoration. As part of the review of libraries a full stock condition survey was commissioned. This has highlighted a maintenance bill of £3.4M rising at an annual rate of approximately 7.5%. This money would need to be found by 2004 to prevent further deterioration and possible closure of some sites on safety grounds. In addition to this, none of the existing buildings meets the Council's criteria for disabled access. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 requires all public buildings to provide adequate disabled access. This required a minimum of £998,260 to achieve at 1999 prices.

Levels of use.

Current user levels of the existing sites are poor and in decline. The national average percentage of residents regularly using their library service is over 31%. In Tower Hamlets this figure is less than 20%. Whilst usage levels are in decline nationally they are declining faster in Tower Hamlets. This is despite having more libraries per head of population than any other inner London Borough. This is clearly unacceptable and the Council has already begun to address the issue by doubling the budget available for the purchase of new books and making a £400,000 investment in IT.

In order to meet the national Standards for Public Libraries Tower Hamlets needs to enhance its opening hours, to sustain the increase in the stock fund and to double the number of visitors per year. With the existing network of library facilities extended opening hours and improved stock would still not achieve the required outcomes due to the location, image and culture of service provision.

It was acknowledged at the start of the review process that Tower Hamlets Council must engage the community in large numbers if it is seriously to address the levels of need within it. A radical re-think of the way the service provision was delivered was necessary based on far more sophisticated knowledge of the community's aspirations for the service, their priorities and views on the existing service. A major market research and public consultation exercise was launched on a scale never before seen in Tower Hamlets for a single Council service.

CHAPTER 3

Consultation and Research

3.1 The Consultation Programme

The Council is well aware that the library service is generally held in high esteem. It is also aware of the declining use nationally and of the fact that, despite having more libraries per head of population than any other London authority, 70% of Tower Hamlets population are not using them. Contrary to popular belief, geographical distance from people's front doors was clearly not the only key factor in securing public interest and participation in libraries and lifelong learning.

The Council decided to embark on a massive public consultation and market research initiative to identify what users and non users thought of the existing service. Significant levels of participation were paramount if the research was to reflect accurately the priorities and aspirations of the community.

Councils have often been criticised in the past for relying too heavily on the opinion of organisations, pressure groups or other bodies when carrying out public consultation as it is often easier, cheaper and quicker to involve them. Unfortunately they tend to be dominated by the opinion of a few who claim, often wrongly, to be expressing the opinion of the majority. Such feedback is of little value when planning an effective library service. At the point of service delivery it is the opinion and perception of the individual that matters. For these reasons, the entire programme was targeted at the individual.

At the beginning of 1998 the Customer Services Directorate carefully planned and implemented a market research programme consisting of three separate but complementary market research initiatives, a road show and a publicity campaign which gave every resident and library user the opportunity to contribute to the review.

There were six key elements to the consultation exercise:

- Awareness raising: a 'teaser' campaign preceded the consultation with posters on sites around the borough and adverts in the Council's weekly newspaper delivered to every property in the borough

- Household survey: a questionnaire was delivered to every household seeking views and priorities for the service
- User questionnaires: every user over the period of a month was asked to comment on the service
- Market research: an independent market research company was commissioned to interview a cross section of the population including users' and non-users' views
- Roadshow: exhibitions and roadshows were held in libraries and the public's questions, comments and concerns recorded
- Minority languages: translations were available, a Bengali speaking hotline was advertised during the consultation period, Bengali and Somali speakers were available during the roadshows and interviews were conducted in appropriate languages.

Two self - completion questionnaires were distributed extensively throughout the Borough during January 1998. These consisted of

- a questionnaire delivered to every household in the Borough (and also available in the Libraries)
- a user questionnaire distributed directly to service users in the libraries.

These were designed primarily to identify differences in perceptions and priorities between different population groups. In addition to this, an independent market research study was commissioned to provide an accurate picture of the views of residents on a range of library related issues. This consisted of telephone interviews of non users and face-to-face interviews with library users.

The market research initiatives were supplemented by a touring exhibition and roadshow programme to pick up any issues that may not have been covered by the three questionnaires.

In addition every school in Tower Hamlets was informed about the consultation initiative and encouraged to ensure that pupils and staff participated.

Schools that regularly attend the libraries for book exchange, story telling and user education sessions were contacted by staff from the Children's Library Service. In conjunction with teachers, the Librarians talked to the classes and the questionnaires were distributed for completion and further discussion in class. Some schools integrated the library consultation exercise into their National Curriculum programme as an opportunity to introduce children to filling in forms as a life skill.

Campaign posters and questionnaires were also distributed by the Education Directorate's Professional Development Centre and Youth Workers to young people.

Careful attention was paid at every stage to ensuring that everyone in the Borough could participate in the exercise by the use of appropriate community languages.

The public consultation and market research exercise represented one of the most significant initiatives ever undertaken to empower a local community in setting the priorities for the future development of their library service. The major efforts to engage people directly paid off spectacularly with the equivalent of approximately one in ten households contributing detailed information on priorities, perceptions and aspirations for the library service.

3.2 What the Public Said

The vast database of research provided significant insights into the failings of the existing service and the direction in which it must develop if it is to reverse the decline in use.

Reassuringly, the whole community recognised the importance of libraries to the well-being of their society.

FIG.1. The overwhelming majority of respondents, regardless of whether they were users, considered the library service to be very important for their community.

However, many non-users (representing over 70% of the Tower Hamlets population) seemed to perceived the library service to be a Victorian relic of little relevance to them. Both users and non-users considered the Tower Hamlets library service to be outdated. 68% of respondents to the household survey used the terms 'tired and rundown', 'old fashioned' and 'average' to describe their perceptions of the current service.

Among non-users, the top five reasons cited as discouraging use were:-

- lack of time (50%),
- opening hours (31%),
- little of interest (30%),
- poor selection of books (30%),

- poor atmosphere(12%).

When asked what would encourage use of the library, the top 7 answers from non-users were :

- Longer opening hours (63%)
- Shopping (59%),
- Council information service (58%)
- Sunday opening (56%),
- Art and exhibitions (56%),
- Video lending service (54%),
- Better book stock (51%).

There was a very strong demand for the widest possible range of services to be delivered from all libraries. This is particularly significant in looking for possible ways in which to encourage increased take-up of the services from those who currently have no interest.

The survey indicated that there was a strong desire by significant numbers of users and non-users alike to be able to combine a visit to the library with other activities, particularly shopping. 65% of females and 45% of males indicated that they considered shopping and a visit to the library to be complementary.

This correlates closely with non-user feedback identifying lack of time as a significant inhibitor to use.

FIG.2. Shopping is the most popular activity to combine with a visit to the library.

The results also highlighted the desire for significant levels of study support to be integrated into the library environment. In particular, high levels of public IT were seen as a priority. 50% of non-users stated that public computer facilities would encourage them to use the library service. 47% stated that access to the Internet would do the same. The top five priorities for the service as identified by the people of Tower Hamlets were:-

- 1st. Buying books and increasing book stock
- 2nd. Investment in IT
- 3rd. Convenient opening hours
- 4th. Education support

5th. New lending services.

Surprisingly, the bottom priority was identified as maintaining historic library buildings.

The full detailed results are given in the report 'Your libraries your future' (February 1998) and supplementary report of the same title (June 1998).

3.3 Accessibility and Changing Patterns of Use.

The results of the public consultation called into question the previous preconception that services located close to peoples' front doors meant that they were accessible to the people that lived behind them.

As part of the research undertaken in support of this review, Geographic Information System (GIS) technology was used to determine the true catchment areas of the existing Tower Hamlets library network. This was achieved by plotting the address point of every registered library user with the library at which they registered. It demonstrated that almost every resident in the Borough lived within at least two library catchment areas. Many people lived within three catchment areas and some had the luxury of living within the catchment area of four local libraries. Given our poor user numbers this suggests that accessibility is not just a matter of distance from users' front door.

Clearly, other factors are impacting on the take-up of services and the research findings have given us a powerful insight into the true complexities affecting the issue of accessibility.

In Chapter 2 we saw how the incremental development of both libraries and adult education has left the Council with a legacy of poorly located, ageing buildings which reflect the locational needs and life patterns of a society that existed, in many cases, almost 100 years ago. Large buildings such as Bancroft Library are stranded in quiet low density residential locations, small buildings such as Dorset Library are firmly associated with a single estate and have a low use from nearby residents from other estates as a result. None of the main buildings is fully accessible to people with disabilities.

The consultation brought home in uncompromising fashion that time is precious to everyone. People are often unable or reluctant to make special visits to libraries even when the buildings are close at hand just to change a book. It is presumptuous of local authorities to assume that lifelong learning is not in direct competition with many other aspects of

people's lives.

The consultation process indicates that people want a building which will offer a whole range of possibilities on their arrival just as with the leisure industry or with shopping. It must also be located where it will best fit present day life patterns. This does not always mean 'on the doorstep'. It may mean for example :-

- where people meet their friends
- where people get their take away food
- where they go to get their general shopping or pension
- on the main bus route to school or work

3.4 Existing Locational Problems.

Given the evidence from our residents and experiences elsewhere in the country, we re-examined the entire network of libraries and adult education facilities. The weaknesses of the locations of our existing sites have been carefully examined. While a small number are reasonably well-placed, the vast majority are not.

3.4.1 Libraries

Watney Market Library

Watney Market library is located in a small shop unit within the market shopping area. It is located in a building with chronic design problems and has permanent difficulties with water penetration. Whilst it is located close to the local shops, the shopping economy is in severe decline. The whole area is currently the subject of a study to identify ways to regenerate and remodel the shopping facilities.

Whitechapel Library

Whitechapel Library is a very grand, grade 2 listed building and was the first public library to be built in Tower Hamlets. It is now stranded on the edge of the Whitechapel community it serves and is located very close to the boundary of the City. Indeed, City visitors were a significant element of its user base in recent years but this has fallen significantly since a new City library has been provided in Camomile Street. Whilst the building has good public transport links, it is cut off from much of the Whitechapel community by a complex and difficult system of wide and heavily trafficked roads. The building in its current form is inaccessible to disabled people and is not located in an area that represents the focus of the Whitechapel community. Access for people with disabilities is poor.

Bethnal Green Library

Bethnal Green Library is an imposing Victorian structure which once formed part of the Bethnal Green lunatic asylum which stood on the surrounding site. Located well back from the main roads and some distance from the shops in Bethnal Green Road, it is set in park land and has a low public profile for its size. Approaches to it through the park and the remoter back streets to the rear of the library are off-putting to potential users in the dark winter evenings. It is inaccessible to people with disabilities.

Bancroft Library

Bancroft Library is one of the biggest libraries in the current network. It is, however, located in a low density residential area in a quiet street and hidden from the nearby Mile End Road by the vast presence of Queen Mary and Westfield College. An imposing Victorian Grade 2 listed building, Bancroft Library currently houses the archive and local history section as well as much of the staff support facilities. The building has limited access for people with disabilities.

Bow Library

One of the most modern library facilities available to residents in the Borough, it benefits from being located within the Roman Road shopping area. A key economic contributor to the competitiveness of the local shopping economy it is, nevertheless, located well back from the main shopping street at the end of a cul-de-sac. Whilst it is one of the most well used of Tower Hamlets libraries, there is considerable potential to significantly raise the local profile of the building. Any move to relocate the library away from the Roman Road shopping area would be detrimental to the shopping economy of the area and would not be contemplated.

Lansbury Library

Lansbury is located within the Chrisp Street shopping area serving the Lansbury Estate and surrounding area. It plays a major role in maintaining the competitiveness of this shopping area. It is, however, located to the rear of the shopping complex. The library is well used during the day but has suffered from attacks and acts of intimidation from local youths in the evenings when visitor numbers to the area fall significantly. This has led to restrictions in opening hours. Opportunities for relocation within the Chrisp Street shopping area are problematic given the need to safeguard the few prime shopping locations for retail activity. Any move to relocate the facility away from the shopping area would have a disastrous effect on the Chrisp Street shopping economy and would not be contemplated.

Cubitt Town Library

Cubitt Town library was built at the turn of the Century and is located in a quiet residential street. It is the only library serving the entire Isle of Dogs Community. Its totally anonymous location, however, belies its important role. Of all of the full-time local libraries this has the lowest public profile and is probably the most difficult to find.

Wapping Library (St Peters Centre)

This is the smallest of all of the libraries and is no more than a room within the St.Peters Community Centre. User levels are very low and reflect the small catchment area of The Centre. The site is not under the direct control of the Council and the facilities are unable to sustain the modern range of library services and quality of environment identified as being demanded by the market research and public consultation exercise.

Limehouse

Limehouse Library is an Edwardian building built to serve a huge dockland population at the turn of the Century. This population has declined with the collapse of the dock industry. The library is now cut off from what remains of that community by the very busy dual carriageway of Commercial Road which is now one of the main East/West routes into the City.

Stepney

This is a small library built primarily for the use of residents on the surrounding estate. The building is unable to sustain the modern range of library services or deliver the quality of environment demanded by the people taking part in the market research and public consultation exercise. The library has a very localised catchment area and has always attracted low numbers of users.

Fairfoot

Fairfoot Library is a small local library located equidistant between Bow Library and Lansbury Library. Built in the Art Deco style it serves a relatively small community between Devons Road and Mile End Road. The GIS mapping exercise carried out to identify the extent of each library's true catchment area demonstrated that the majority of local residents served by this library use either Bow or Lansbury Library. Indeed the catchment areas of even these libraries overlap to a significant extent. Both of these libraries have the competitive advantage over Fairfoot of being conveniently located where the local community do some or all of their general shopping. Fairfoot is further disadvantaged by its restricted size and ability, therefore, to offer only a restricted range of services. It occupies a low profile position and is inaccessible

to people with disabilities.

Dorset

This is a small library built specifically for the use of residents on the surrounding Dorset Estate. As a consequence, the community in the immediate vicinity of the library who do not live on the estate tend not to identify with it. The building is unable to sustain the modern range of library services or deliver the quality of environment demanded by the people taking part in the market research and public consultation exercise. The library has a very localised catchment area and has always attracted low numbers of users. It is now recognised that such estate based service provision can help reinforce social isolation of the communities they were set up to serve whilst being unable to provide the quality of service enjoyed by larger less exclusive service points.

3.4.2 Adult Education Centres.

Bethnal Green

This is the largest of the adult education centres and is housed in a large redundant Edwardian school. Whilst the site has a frontage to Bethnal Green Road it is some distance from the main local shopping area.

Tredegar

This is a Victorian building offering restricted internal space. It is located in a low key residential area of Bow and provides restricted access to people with disabilities.

Shadwell

The Shadwell Centre is also an office location for Council staff. Somewhat cut off from the Wapping community by The Highway it has a low local profile and has limited access for people with disabilities.

Wessex

This centre is located within a redundant Edwardian School building located next to a railway viaduct and approached by a network of very quiet residential streets. The environment can feel isolated and threatening on dark winter evenings. Train noise restricts the space suitable for teaching. There is no disabled access to the upper floors.

Whitechapel

This centre is located within a redundant Edwardian School building in a semi commercial back street. This large building offers very little usable space due to its galleried design and it feels very institutional. The adult education centre forms part of a larger redundant school site which will shortly be sold to provide money for educational investment in the modern school network.

3.5 Key Issues

The existing network of buildings used to deliver lifelong learning is deeply flawed. It is characterised by inappropriate, ageing and poorly located buildings. They have many conflicting catchment areas and, as a consequence, high levels of duplication and inefficiency. Millions of pounds would need to be found over the next few years just to prevent serious deterioration of these unsatisfactory buildings and to make them accessible to people with disabilities. None of that money would address in a serious way the problems identified by the review and user levels would very probably continue to fall.

The majority of people in Tower Hamlets are currently disinterested in using the existing services provided by the Council. This is despite maintaining more libraries per head of population than any other London library service. This does not mean that they are disinterested in libraries and lifelong learning. The public consultation exercise has demonstrated that people want to use these services in much larger numbers provided location, opening times, the quality of environment and service specification are dramatically improved.

There is an acknowledged imbalance in spending given the levels of need (some of the highest basic skills deficiency levels anywhere in the U.K) and the levels of investment required to meet that need which must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Libraries and lifelong learning have to fight for people's attention in today's society. There is a need to develop new ways of delivering and presenting services that maximise their attractiveness to the local community and which are capable of successfully competing for people's time on equal terms.

Opening times of facilities must reflect more closely the times that people want to use them and obstacles to achieving this must be removed.

The market research demonstrated that, whilst respondents were reluctant to criticise existing services directly, both users and potential users were very sensitive about the quality of environment that they use. Old institutional buildings are generally an inhibitor to use, particularly to people lacking basic skills.

The people of Tower Hamlets have the highest aspirations for themselves and their services and they want the best. We must find ways of delivering the best without increasing expenditure unreasonably.

People want to have these facilities located in places that increase their opportunity to fit it in with modern day life patterns and time pressures. They need to be located where street life and activity is today. This is not necessarily where it was one hundred years ago.

Of course we must also value our existing users and any strategy must ensure that changes to the services delivered will bring sufficient benefits to everybody to compensate for the uncomfortable experience of change. But we must focus far more effectively on the 70% of the population of the Borough who do not use libraries and on those in the community who would benefit from adult education who never consider it. Only by finding ways to engage the majority and reverse the decline in use will we begin to address some of the wider issues of social exclusion, poverty and unemployment that exist in Tower Hamlets.

The information gained from this and other areas of research has led directly to the development of an entirely new and potentially highly effective generic building type. This strategy suggests that these buildings must replace the ageing, unattractive and poorly located building network of libraries and adult education centres in Tower Hamlets. To be known as 'Idea Stores', the new buildings will offer a comprehensive range of modern library and adult education services of a quality and at levels not yet seen in the Borough.

These 'Idea Stores' will be located in high profile locations within the communities they serve. All will be in areas of high accessibility with good public transport links. Some facilities will be remodelled (rather than relocated to a purpose built new site) in a way that will increase their visibility within the community. They will be supported by a sophisticated and long running advertising campaign promoting the buildings' locations, aims and services. As a result each store will be more effective than any of the existing facilities could ever be. Significantly, all the facilities will, for the first time, be fully accessible to people with disabilities.

This proposal represents a massive increase in investment in library and adult education provision in Tower Hamlets and flies in the face of current expenditure trends in London. It recognises the importance of libraries and lifelong learning to the future health and well-being of the community and seeks to deliver a lifelong learning system that will be one of the best in the country. The acute needs of the Tower Hamlets community justify it and the people expect it.

CHAPTER 4 The Idea Store

4.1 What is Idea ?

Idea is a new high street presence the like of which has never been seen in the U.K. It represents a bold new direction for libraries and adult education. Idea will be the first place that the local community will go to source information about any aspect of their lives and to learn and acquire new skills. They will truly be “street corner universities” offering far more learning opportunities in an integrated and co-ordinated fashion.

Although they will be presented to the public in a totally different way, these services will be delivered on the same social terms. The underlying principles of these services will remain the same. In particular, the same core library services will remain free at the point of delivery as now and adult education will remain heavily subsidised.

Idea will deal specifically in information in its broadest sense and will embrace all aspects of lifelong learning. At its core will be two distinct elements:-

- modern library facilities
- adult and further education

The primary objective of Idea Stores will be to empower individuals to help themselves, whether it be learning to read, pursuing hobbies, becoming more employable, learning about healthy living or seeking a job. They will also act as feeders to existing colleges and vocational training schemes and act as a base for outreach skills and training work.

Just as importantly, they will also be places where people go to have fun, participate in cultural activities, meet friends and relax. Idea is about the whole person. As much emphasis will be placed on bringing the community together in a stimulating environment as on information and learning. Idea is about getting people off estates and out of their houses

to meet others and experience a wide range of activities. They will become an essential and integral part of everyone's lives.

4.2 The Idea Store environment.

The Idea stores will be revolutionary in the way in which information and opportunities for self-development are presented to the public.

As the most heavily used council interface with the public (the Whitechapel Idea Store, alone, is expected to attract approximately 500,000 visits per year) it would be a unique environment using the architectural and interior design language of the retail and leisure industries. Strong retail style branding and image promotion will reinforce the total break with 'Victorian municipality' that so discourages participation and will help excite and re-engage the local community. It is these features that make the Idea concept unique.

The logic is simple, compelling and is derived directly from the specifications of an ideal library environment set out by the people of Tower Hamlets in the public consultation exercise.

The use of flexible space will ensure that maximum use can be made of the resources available. By merging lifelong learning and library facilities public access to expensive facilities such as IT will be maximised. In Idea, when an IT class has finished, walls will be rolled back and the computers will become part of the library for the public to use until the next class.

Different forms of learning space will merge and intermingle. Someone using the library for leisure will be able to see friends or family engaged in more formal forms of learning. People on formal learning courses will share the same environment with people who have yet even to consider formal learning. The results of people's endeavours will be showcased. Transparent 'ladders of learning' will be created by this environment where people will see friends and family learning, growing and achieving. Through this experience, and the nature of the Idea environment they will be encouraged to do so themselves.

Educational advisors will be on hand to guide and advise. As confidence grows people who lack basic qualifications will be encouraged to move on F.E. foundation and 'taster' courses offered within the same environment. Tower Hamlets College will also be able to deliver full-time qualification-based courses and distance learning opportunities within Idea.

4.3 What's in an Idea?

The Library and adult education service at Idea.

The libraries at Idea will take the best of the old and the best of the new and merge them into an exciting new experience. Books will remain at their heart. The stock will be renewed and enlarged over the lifetime of the strategy. The objective of the strategy, however, is to meet and, where possible, exceed the expectations of the local community. Idea will therefore offer the people of Tower Hamlets much more than a traditional library or adult education centre could. Of course there will be:

- A lending library
- Children's library
- Reference and information service
- Local studies and archives service

But there will also be:

- Classrooms and lecture space
- Adult education workshops
- Homework clubs
- Study space
- Public IT Suites/open learning centres
- Leisure, tourist, general information points
- Employment and careers information for people looking for jobs or training
-

A full and expanded range of classroom-based adult education courses will be offered by Idea. These will benefit considerably from their proximity to a public library facility.

Idea is also a place for people to come together and enjoy themselves. It will provide:

- Café
- Video wall
- Healthy Living information
- Art performance/exhibition space
- Childcare

These uses would be complemented by :-

- leisure promotion
- complementary retail
- general information points

There will also be voluntary sector communication areas where voluntary sector and external organisations can, on a programmed basis, use the building to target the local community.

These areas will be IT-wired and located at strategic points within the buildings. It is envisaged that the multi-media support within the building (e.g. Video wall/ TV screens) would also be available for the voluntary sector to use to promote their objectives.

The strategy will deliver all of the most desired services requested in the consultation feedback. In addition to the renewed and enlarged book stock, the new libraries will have access to a well stocked video, music, software and computer game collection for the first time. Each location will have a significant amount of public IT and public Internet access. The libraries will build upon existing relationships with surrounding schools to continue to provide study support and homework clubs for schoolchildren. New services will be developed to encourage parents to help their children learn within the library environment (and to learn from their children!).

Crucially the strategy includes the commitment to move towards 7 day opening and a standardisation of opening hours throughout the week. Where possible, this will coincide with the opening hours of surrounding shops.

4.4 The Idea Store locations

New Idea Stores would be constructed at:-

- Whitechapel Road (near Sainsbury's),
- Isle of Dogs (near Asda),
- Bethnal Green (near Tesco),
- Watney Market (as part of exciting new regeneration plans currently under development)
- Canary Wharf (as part of phase II of their retail plans) .
- Libraries at Chrisp Street and Bow (Roman Road) would need to be substantially remodelled.

These would form part of an essential relocation strategy to move service provision out of back streets into high profile locations close to shopping/leisure activity. All seven Stores will be in prominent, convenient positions and will have a similar format and contents, while reflecting the local context. Each Store, attracting large numbers of users, would bring great benefits to their shopping centre, breathing new life into local retail.

This new network would form a major plank of the Council's programme to modernise local government in Tower Hamlets and would act as access points for people to obtain much of their Council related information in future years.

4.5 The Idea Concept and National and Local Strategies.

There is much talk in government circles of 'joined up' thinking, i.e. avoiding the problems of public bodies 'paddling their own canoes', ie not co-operating, thinking together and acting together. The Idea Store concept has been developed and refined working closely with various parts of the Council, the College and taking advice from Government departments. As a result, it reflects and addresses a wide range of national and local priorities.

4.5.1 National Strategies.

National Grid for Learning

The Government is committed to the establishment of a nation-wide IT learning grid accessible to children and students via their schools and colleges and to the general public via libraries and other innovative learning spaces. The purpose

of this grid is to ensure the accessibility of quality learning resources to all and is a reflection of the central importance given to learning by this administration. The Idea Store concept is designed to deliver the National Grid for Learning to local communities in Tower Hamlets in a way that will maximise its impact on those communities. All of the Idea Stores will carry high levels of public IT giving direct access to the National Grid for Learning and the Internet. The content of the National Grid for Learning will be promoted throughout the building and will be fully integrated into the study support, homework clubs and adult education provision offered from the sites.

Community learning centres- UK Online

The Government has committed itself to promote the development of 1,000 community learning centres over the next few years. The Idea Stores are exactly that. They will deliver community learning to local areas throughout the Borough in a uniquely attractive way. More people than ever before will be encouraged to use the resources and experience the thrill and the practical benefits of learning. They will truly be 'Street Corner Universities' and provide access to distance learning through learndirect.

Modernising Local Government

It is increasingly acknowledged at both national and local level that Government has much to do if it is to increase the participation of the public in democratic processes and involvement in the decisions affecting their communities. The Idea Stores will promote self reliance and empower individuals to help themselves by giving them access to the information and guidance they need to take control of their lives. This will include delivering a wide range of information via IT and information points within the stores. IT will also provide exciting new opportunities for community involvement in and access to the decision-making process. Council surgeries, meetings and voting could all be based in and promoted by the Idea Stores which will be the focus of so much community activity. Video walls and a wide range of other multimedia technology will be deployed within the stores which will drive forward the Council's programme of community involvement and re-engagement with Local Government.

Promotion of lifelong learning

The Government is committed to the promotion and development of lifelong learning and is using the National Lottery and DfES Standards Funds to improve its strategic planning, participation and effectiveness (see also National Grid for Learning). The Idea Stores will provide a uniquely effective vehicle for the promotion and delivery of lifelong learning at a local level. The adult education and library facilities will be designed and delivered in an integrated way to exploit the obvious advantages of having the two functions located in the same building. They will 'hook' people into learning and

maximise use of available resources whilst creating a truly accessible, highly visible, attractive and exciting environment for the public.

Healthy Living

The Department for Culture Media and Sport recognises the importance of good health to the vitality and well-being of the community. It has launched a programme to promote the establishment of Healthy Living Centres throughout the land. The Idea Store will actively promote all aspects of healthy living, promoting programmed health campaigns in partnership with other services, the Health Authority, local hospitals and the voluntary sector. This will be supported by material and information for use in the store or for home loan.

4.5.2 Local Strategies

Local regeneration initiatives

The Council, in partnership with the Government and the European Union are aggressively tackling the high levels social deprivation in Tower Hamlets with a number of major regeneration initiatives. The Lower Lea Valley, areas of Bethnal Green, Whitechapel and Stepney are all currently the subject of funded regeneration strategies.

The Idea Stores will play a key role in the regeneration of the areas in which they are based. It is increasingly recognised that libraries can act as a significant contributor to the vibrancy of local shopping areas, often performing the same role as 'anchor' stores. The Idea strategy builds upon this economic potential and represents a deliberate policy of relocation which, as well as delivering greatly enhanced access to many more people, will also benefit the economies of the areas in which they are based.

Those services already located in local shopping areas will be improved whilst others will be moved to areas where the local community does its general shopping. The proposed Bow Idea Store in Roman Road and Chrisp Street (both serving the Lower Lea Valley communities) will help strengthen and safeguard the economies of these important, but stressed, local shopping areas. The Whitechapel Idea with its estimated 500,000 visits per year will provide a massive boost to the retail economy of the whole of Whitechapel Road. It will also link in strategically with the activities of the new Whitechapel Sports Centre, the programmed environmental improvements to the Whitechapel Road and the £250m redevelopment of the Royal London Hospital.

The promotion of 'Cultural Industries'

Tower Hamlets and the surrounding area is the home of one of the highest concentrations of artists anywhere in Europe. The proposed network of Idea Stores will provide an important showcase for local artists and a valuable resource for study and inspiration. The strategy also hopes to deliver an opportunity for the Whitechapel Art Gallery to develop a community art resource on the site of the current Whitechapel Library. This will be a regional and national facility focused on the needs of children, students and practising artists but will also have important local benefits.

Education strategy

Broadly the aims of the Council's Education Directorate are to increase the expectations, aspirations and achievement of all learners in the Borough. Strengthening opportunities for lifelong learning is key to these aims. Tower Hamlets is already the fastest-improving education authority in the country. Research has shown that high levels of participation in lifelong learning leads to increased educational attainment in schools. The Council must widen as well as increase participation in all levels and types of learning and respond to the depth of community need for basic skills, vocational skills and non-vocational education. There is a great need for skills for employability in Tower Hamlets to which the education service is anxious to respond. The Idea Store will make learning more accessible, exciting and attractive to potential learners who do not currently enrol in traditional adult education provision. Uniquely, it will bring together further and adult education providers to make best use of resources and expertise.

Basic skills

There is a very significant basic skills gap in Tower Hamlets. An extensive survey by the Basic Skills Agency in 1998 demonstrated the extent of the need for literacy and numeracy in the Borough. The Survey showed a ward by ward basic skills deficit. The average ward in England showed that 14% of the population needed basic skills. The average ward in Tower Hamlets showed that 24% needed basic skills. Tower Hamlets also contained the ward with the greatest need in the country, Spitalfields with 27%.

The Council is determined to raise the volume and quality of basic skills provision in the Borough to ensure that many more members of the community enjoy literacy and numeracy and with this foundation can progress to higher level skills and employability. Tower Hamlets College aims to double the current level of provision from within the Idea stores, providing the ideal learning environment which will be non-threatening to the new learner.

Equality of Opportunity

The results of the consultation exercise showed that the main ethnic groups in the borough held very similar views on the library service. Nevertheless, the Idea Stores will be used to address the employment and job skills of the whole community and will provide advice and information to communities such as the Bengali community which is more likely to suffer unemployment. Making all the Stores fully accessible will transform the opportunities for people with disabilities to use council facilities and gain access to lifelong learning.

Tower Hamlets Health Action Zone

The East London and City Health Action Zone is a Health Authority led partnership initiative involving health organisations, the private sector, the voluntary sector and the Council. Its main priorities are to improve health and reduce inequalities, improve access to health, open up opportunities for local people to take part in decisions about health and development of modern hospital and primary care services. The Idea Store strategy is perfectly placed to play a key role in helping to achieve all of these objectives.

As the first place people would think of to secure access to information on any issue, part of their function will be to promote healthy living. Each 'Idea Store' will have a healthy living awareness programme which will be targeted at the specific health needs of the particular community in which it is based. The programme will be used to promote targeted health issues and let people know where they can find help and information both on and off site. Health and voluntary sector organisations will be invited into the building to support the programme. Their message will be re-inforced with the use of the multimedia facilities within the building and display space.

The building will also contribute significantly to the well being of the community by providing a space within which people can relax, find company and read or learn for fun. As each building will be a major focus for local communities, they present an ideal location to involve people in the decisions about health provision. Preliminary discussions have already taken place with the Royal London Hospital as the first steps towards planning a support programme to promote the services on offer on their site.

The Voluntary Sector

Tower Hamlets has a diverse and dynamic voluntary sector. The Borough is in the process of developing new ways of harnessing the enthusiasm and skills offered by this sector. The Idea Stores will play a key role in this process. Because Idea is a model for local service delivery throughout the Borough it will provide a valuable opportunity for voluntary sector

organisations to engage large numbers of the local population in a cost efficient and effective way. Some sites are likely to attract in the region of 500,000 visits per year, almost all of whom will be from the communities within which they are based. Idea will offer dedicated areas for voluntary sector organisations to run programmes on targeted issues of specific or general importance to the community in which the Idea Store is placed. This space will be offered on a temporary programmed basis.

4.6 Idea Store Targets

The Idea Store network has been deliberately planned to maximise use. It is an aggressive plan to compete directly with the many attractive pastimes offered in our modern world. It is a plan which fights for the attention and time of the local community by using the same techniques as the leisure and retail industries and represents a major push to reengage them in all forms of lifelong learning and library use in ways that will benefit them personally and collectively. This ambitious plan has two simple but ambitious targets.

It is conservatively estimated that the completed network will double the number of visits to libraries to approximately 2m visits per year.

It is conservatively estimated that it will double the number of people engaged in lifelong learning to a minimum of 12000.

In addition, it is expected that the take-up of college-run courses will grow as part of the general expansion of lifelong learning. Further research will be undertaken into qualification levels and basic skills levels in the Borough so that detailed targets can be drawn up to improve the job skills and basic skills in the Borough.

Following one of the most comprehensive library consultation exercises undertaken in this country, a new concept was born. People wanted a quality library service but they would use it even more if they could combine a visit to the library with a visit to the shops. They also wanted to be able to have education support in the library as well as information. In Autumn 1998 the Council agreed to develop a strategy to house libraries and adult education together. Since then the partnership has expanded, joined by Tower Hamlets College, the borough's main further education provider. That partnership has produced the concept of the Idea Store and a set of ambitious plans to match our shared ambitions for the people who live and work in Tower Hamlets.

4.7 Conclusion

Following one of the most comprehensive library consultation exercises undertaken in this country, a new concept was born. People wanted a quality library service but they would use it even more if they could combine a visit to the library with a visit to the shops. They also wanted to be able to have education support in the library as well as information. In Autumn 1998 the Council agreed to develop a strategy to house libraries and adult education together. Since then the partnership has expanded, joined by Tower Hamlets College, the borough's main further education provider. That partnership has produced the concept of the Idea Store and a set of ambitious plans to match our shared ambitions for the people who live and work in Tower Hamlets.

CHAPTER 5

The Implementation Plan

5.1 The Principles

This strategy identifies the necessary measures to deliver the Idea Stores to the residents of Tower Hamlets over the period of the next five years.

The focus of the process of change will centre on an ambitious relocation programme designed to maximise the number of local people engaging in library activity and lifelong learning.

It is recommended that the Council move away from the under-performing and inappropriate buildings currently failing to engage the community for a whole range of complex reasons and relocate them to seven innovative new facilities. These will be sited and designed around the priorities and aspirations of the people of Tower Hamlets as identified by the public consultation and market research initiative.

The adoption of the strategy will signal the commitment of the Council to increase the amount of money it spends on library and lifelong learning provision. Far from being a cuts exercise it represents a significant investment programme to build for the future and is based on detailed analysis of the needs and aspirations of the Tower Hamlets community and the strengths and weaknesses of our existing network of provision.

The programme will move these facilities out of the shadows and into high profile landmark buildings in prime locations. These will be centred more effectively than at present on the communities that they serve. They will be sited in locations that reflect the way in which people live their lives today and existing road traffic conditions and public transport provision. This is a multi-million pound capital investment programme which will require all capital receipts generated by it as match funding.

Each store will provide a range of facilities, recreational and learning opportunities unmatched by any of the existing facilities. This will be delivered in an environment the quality of which could not be achieved in any of the existing buildings.

The programme will eventually result in the reduction in library service points as libraries and some adult education services will withdraw from the small part-time facilities which cannot deliver an effective service due to location and/or building type or cover the same population as other nearby facilities. However no libraries will be merged with 'Idea Stores' until the new facilities are in place. The existing outreach services will be retained and improved. There will be a net increase in the number of library staff.

The Idea Stores will be capable of delivering far more services to greater numbers of local people than the entire existing network. They will move to seven day opening and will extend their opening hours in line with nearby shopping. There will be no loss of full time library service points and every resident will be within twenty minutes of an Idea Store as laid down by the Library Association standards.

The development of the Idea network is dependent on the successful outcome of funding negotiations with Government departments and their agents. It will also depend on the ability of the Council to find and secure suitable sites. Much work has already been done with key land owners and identification of funding and potential partners. However, the development of the new facilities will only proceed when the required funding has been secured.

5.2 Summary of Key Principles.

- The development of each Idea Store will only proceed only when the required funding has been secured.
- The adoption of the strategy will signal the commitment of the Council to increase the amount of money it currently spends on library and lifelong learning provision.

- The Idea Stores will move to seven day opening and will remain open in the evenings
- There will be a net increase in the number of library staff
- There will be a significant increase in the range and availability of lifelong learning courses.
- Every Idea Store will provide full access for people with disabilities
- Everyone in the Borough will be within 20 minutes travel time of an Idea Store in line with National Library

Association Standards

- The existing outreach services will be retained and improved
- The Council will no longer persist with the provision of services in locations that are unable to provide a satisfactory standard of service or are duplicating services for the same catchment population as other nearby and better facilities.
- There will be a reduction of library service points from 12 to 7 on a programmed basis over 5 years.
- No library will merged until the new or improved facilities covering that local area are ready for use.
- Capital receipts from the sale of library and adult education buildings to be freed up by the Idea Store programme will be reinvested in the community to fund the improved Idea Store facilities.
- Subject to the financial demands of the programme every effort will be made to ensure that vacated buildings continue to deliver a direct benefit to the local community. To this end, the Council will work with:
 - 1) the Whitechapel Art Gallery to give them reasonable opportunity to purchase the existing Whitechapel library.
 - 2) the Building Conservation Area Trust to give them reasonable opportunity to purchase the Bethnal Green Library for a National Museum of Conservation.

5.3 Finance

5.3.1 The Capital Picture.

At the time of launching the strategy, the existing library network alone required a minimum of approximately £4.5m over the period of the strategy to bring it to a level where a maintenance programme could be initiated and basic disabled access provided. If none of this money was found during that time the capital required at the end of this five year period would have risen to just over £6m. None of this money would be available for service improvements but would disappear into the fabric of the existing buildings largely un-noticed. It would not address any of the key issues identified by the research as being of concern to users and non-users and would be unlikely to reverse the continuing decline

in use. Additional expenditure would also be required to improve disabled access to adult education buildings. Although this study is ongoing it is estimated that costs for this would have been in the region of £2.5m in 1998/9. Simply maintaining the status quo would cost the Council between £7m and £9m over the next five years.

The total build cost of developing all seven Idea Stores over the same five year period is estimated to be £25m.

Combined total capital receipts available from disposals of library and adult education sites was estimated to be in the region of £7m at 1998/9 prices.

This left a capital shortfall of £9.3m (excluding fitting out costs).

After a programme of discussions with a number of Government departments and agencies, to date nearly £10million has been raised for the construction of the first 3 Idea Stores, through a combination of external funding bids for regeneration and ICT learning programmes, planning gain, partnership funding and capital receipts from disposals of library and adult education sites. Tower Hamlets College has indicated its intention to review its current accommodation needs in the light of the Idea initiative and investigate the opportunity to dispose of sites to help fund the project.

5.3.2 Site purchase costs

The above figures do not include site purchase costs. Site purchase costs will not be necessary at Bow or Lansbury libraries which will be remodelled and refurbished. No site purchase costs would be incurred at Canary Wharf as they have offered (subject to ongoing discussion) to incorporate an Idea Store within Phase II of their retail development. Sainsbury's has agreed, in principle, to the sale of a site close to their Whitechapel store at a reduced rate (this is the subject of ongoing negotiations). Asda have agreed in principle to the development of an Idea Store on their Isle of Dogs store site as part of a store refurbishment programme (this is subject to ongoing negotiations). This could involve the Idea Store being housed inside the Asda Store. It is hoped that the Bethnal Green site can be secured via a land swap or also at a discounted rate. The future of Watney Market is under review and any comprehensive redevelopment of the area would present the opportunity to secure an Idea store via planning gain. It is anticipated that site purchase costs for the entire network will be unlikely to exceed £1m.

5.3.3 Revenue Implications

The adoption of this strategy will signal a realignment of Council priorities in response to the unprecedented levels of

local need and the clear policy directions set out by Government. It is based on the need to develop a modern network of buildings capable of maximising the number of people engaged in the use of libraries and lifelong learning. This must be achieved whilst maintaining the principle of locally focused service delivery. It will also mean keeping services open for longer and opening on Sundays. Its target will be to double current user levels across both library and adult education services over five years. The revenue implications of the strategy are, therefore, significant.

At the end of the five year development programme the additional revenue required to deliver the Idea based services on the basis of seven day opening (75 hours per week) will be £1.3m based on current estimates. To place this in context, however, this would still only rank the Council as fifth placed highest spender on library provision in Inner London per head of population. Nevertheless, such a programme represents a major increase and compensatory savings will need to be identified before all the features such as Sunday opening could be sustained. The Council has already embarked on the best value review process and efficiencies are already being identified which could be used to reinvest in key service priorities.

It is also the purpose of this strategy to commit the Council to a five year renewal programme of its bookstock. To achieve this, the stockfund must be maintained at around £600,000 per annum which will comply with acquisition levels required by the Public Library Standards.

5.4. Property Disposals and Timing

It is envisaged that the strategy would be implemented in two phases. Phase one would consist of the development of the Whitechapel, Bow and the Chrisp Street Idea Stores, with Bow completing in 2002, and Whitechapel and Chrisp Street in 2003. The development of the other four Stores would be phased over the five year implementation period.

The Watney Market and Canary Wharf Idea Stores would, in addition to the above, be dependent on the successful implementation of planned redevelopment initiatives. Bethnal Green would be dependent on the identification and successful purchase of a suitably located site.

5.5 Public Involvement

The Idea strategy has been brought about by one of the most successful consultation exercises ever undertaken by Tower Hamlets Council. 'Best Value' acknowledges an ongoing commitment to community involvement in strategy implementation. To this end the implementation process provides for a further round of consultation and the development of community panels to help shape the next generation library and adult education buildings. Should Idea progress, all sections of the community will be represented and consulted in the design stages of the new buildings and in the development of the remodelling of Lansbury and Bow Libraries.

5.6 Phase 1 Plans

5.6.1 Whitechapel Idea Store

Located as close to the Whitechapel Sainsbury's store and the Whitechapel Road shops as possible, the facility will be one of the largest Idea stores in the network serving one of the highest density populations in the Borough. A landmark building of striking design it will bring state of the art library facilities and lifelong learning to the heart of the Whitechapel community. Within easy reach of the Whitechapel Road market area will be located a café, retail facilities and multi media facilities including video wall. The high geographical accessibility of the area resulting from its excellent public transport links will give the facility the largest catchment area of all of the Idea Stores. Tower Hamlets College will be a partner in the provision of learning activities in the Store

Linked closely to this development are the future plans of the Whitechapel Art Gallery. One of the premier modern art galleries in Europe, 'The Whitechapel' has an enviable reputation for community focused arts programmes. As part of its future development it hopes to develop the existing Whitechapel library (located next door to the Gallery) into an exciting and ground breaking new community arts facility. The idea strategy aims to help the gallery deliver this facility by allowing the Gallery a reasonable period to raise funds for purchase of the site. The Whitechapel communities and wider population will, therefore, benefit from two major new public lifelong learning facilities as a result of the Idea initiative.

5.6.2 Bow Idea Store

The Bow Idea Store will focus on a major remodelling of Gladstone Place. The library will be moved from its current, largely hidden, location to be opposite the entrance to the Safeway supermarket in Roman Road. In Phase 2 of the development, it is aimed to construct a new frontage onto Roman Road. The Bow Idea Store will offer the full range of

facilities specified in the preceding chapters but will not include complementary retail facilities. The Bow People's Trust will be a partner in the provision of learning activities in the Store.

5.6.3

Chrisp Street Idea Store

It is imperative for the continuing prosperity of Chrisp Street Market Shopping Centre that a public library presence is maintained and enhanced. The Chrisp Street Idea Store will, through imaginative design, regenerate a podium space above the shopping arcade which is currently unused, to create a feature attraction in the area, bringing significantly increased footfall to the shopping centre. The Store will include open learning facilities, higher levels of public IT and a more spacious environment than currently enjoyed in existing library and learning services in the area.

5.7 Phase 2 Plans

5.7.1 Bethnal Green Idea Store

The Bethnal Green Idea Store will be located within the main shopping and market area of Bethnal Green Road. It will remain close to the tube and all main bus routes. It will be one of the largest Idea Stores in the Borough. Whilst it will be close to the Whitechapel Idea Store it will have a much stronger emphasis on lifelong learning as it will replace the existing centre currently located in a redundant Edwardian school at the far western end of Bethnal Green Road. It will still have a well equipped and well stocked Public library and the building will offer all of the facilities outlined in previous chapters, including some complementary retail facilities. However, it will be the largest lifelong learning facility for the Borough offering the widest range of course choice.

5.7.2 Canary Wharf Idea Store

This facility will be different from the other Idea Stores given its unique location. It aims to provide the Idea Store range of services, but will focus on lending facilities to encourage potential users (including business people) into the space. London Guildhall University will be partners in the provision of learning facilities in this Store, which will aim to establish links with the local business communities in order to develop employment and training opportunities for local people.

5.7.3 Isle of Dogs Idea Store

The Isle of Dogs Idea store will bring adult education provision to 'The Island' community for the first time in many years. General discussions are under way to locate the store in a high profile location close to the Asda supermarket

and Health centre. The building will be designed to meet local people's needs. Whilst it will reflect the relatively small size of the Isle of Dogs community, the building will, nevertheless, offer a wide range of 'state of the art' library facilities and learning opportunities not currently available to local people. The building will be in a high profile location, as close as possible to where the majority of local people do their general shopping. As a result it is anticipated that far more people than at present will be tempted to use the library facilities and will choose to participate in the new local lifelong learning programme.

5.7.4 Watney Market Idea Store.

This Idea store will probably be the last to be built in the five year programme. As it is likely to form part of a wider redevelopment initiative that has yet to be finalised it is not possible to discuss the likely context of the building. It is envisaged that it will provide the full range of Idea facilities (including a significant element of lifelong learning) as set out in previous chapters. It is also hoped that the facility will be able to offer a new purpose built local history and archive centre.

APPENDIX 1

Library Market Research and Public Consultation Methodology

The Programme

Market research is a key vehicle for understanding our customers' expectations and perceptions of any service and in particular for identifying the gap between customer expectations and the organisation's perceptions of those expectations.

No detailed market research exercise has ever been undertaken on behalf of the Library Service in Tower Hamlets. Whilst there are good feedback systems in place to pick up user concerns, there was a need for a far more systematic and rigorous investigation of the expectations and perceptions held by Tower Hamlets residents and library users.

At the beginning of 1998 the Customer Services Directorate carefully planned and implemented a market research programme consisting of three separate but complementary market research initiatives, a road show and a publicity campaign in an attempt to give every resident and library user the opportunity to contribute to the review.

Two self - completion questionnaires were distributed extensively throughout the Borough during January 1998. These were designed primarily to identify differences in perceptions and priorities between different population groups. In addition to this, an independent market research study was commissioned to provide an accurate picture of the views of residents on a range of library related issues. These were supplemented by a touring exhibition and roadshow programme to pick up any issues that may not have been covered by the three questionnaires.

Details of the questionnaires, their target groups and the roadshow are briefly set out below :-

Library User Questionnaire.

This questionnaire was targeted only at those people who used Tower Hamlets Library Service. 10,000 were distributed via the library network including the mobile library service. All those using the home delivery service were also provided with the questionnaire. It identifies where residents live, days, times and frequency of library visits, age profile, services used, mother tongue and service quality ratings. There are 13 questions offering a total of 101 possible responses. The questionnaire has been distributed to all library users by librarians at all of the local libraries.

Library Service Questionnaire.

This was distributed to every household in the Borough. It was targeted at both users and non users. It sought views on the relative attractiveness of potential new services and priorities for the future. There are 14 questions offering a total of 61 possible responses. The questionnaire was also available at the libraries.

Independent Market Research Questionnaire.

The market research company P.S. Martin Hamblin was commissioned to undertake a more in - depth study of 600 people. The questionnaire sought views on possible new services, things that discourage library use, public information provision, travel methods, service image and IT access. The respondents were carefully selected to reflect the social and economic mix of the Borough's residents and the mix of library users to non users. 200 users were interviewed face to face. 400 non-users were interviewed on the telephone. There were 30 questions offering a total of 180 possible responses.

Road Show.

The Road Show consisted of a touring exhibition of material and graphics designed to stimulate debate about priorities and possibilities for the future of the service. This was complemented by the showing of a looped video on the future of

libraries and a modern PC with C.D. Rom software. Staff, including the Head of Libraries, were on hand to talk to people in an informal setting and record any comments and concerns.

The purpose of the roadshow was to stimulate interest in the consultation exercise, promote completion of the questionnaires and to pick up on any issues that people considered important and which were not dealt with by the questionnaires.

Eight roadshows took place at four libraries across the Borough at a rate of two per week throughout January 1998. These roadshows were preceded at each location by the exhibition (Computer, Video/TV and Staff not present). The dates and locations of the roadshows appeared in East End Life (a local newspaper) throughout January, were displayed at every library and handed out as bookmarks to everyone borrowing or returning a book during that month.

The roadshows were staged to take place on one afternoon and one evening at each location to allow child carers, children, elderly and groups less able or willing to venture out in the evenings to visit and make their views known.

Participation of Children and Young People.

School involvement .

Every Head Teacher in Tower Hamlets was contacted at the beginning of January 1998 by letter, informed about the consultation initiative and invited to ensure that pupils and staff could participate.

School Class Visits.

Schools that regularly attend the libraries for book exchange, story telling and user education sessions were contacted by staff from the Children's Library Service. In conjunction with teachers, the Librarians talked to the classes and the questionnaires were distributed for completion and further discussion in class.

PDC And Youth Clubs.

Campaign posters and questionnaires were sent to the above and distributed by PDC staff and Youth Workers.

National Curriculum Support.

One of the life skill elements of the National Curriculum is filling in forms. Many teachers have used the library questionnaire

as a working document for this skill. Thomas Buxton School in particular has used the Library Consultation Exercise as an opportunity to talk to every class and assist children in completing the questionnaire.

Roadshow.

An afternoon session took place at every roadshow location to maximise accessibility for children. Every roadshow had a children's librarian present.

Equal Opportunities Considerations

Translations of the Library User Questionnaire and the Library Service Questionnaire were available on request.

A Bengali Telephone Hot Line was set up throughout January to deal with enquiries and provide translated questionnaires.

The Survey carried out by P.S. Martin Hamblin included Somali and Bengali translators.

The roadshows were attended by Bengali and Somali speaking library staff. All road shows were held in locations that had disabled access and were close to main transport facilities.

The roadshows were staged to include afternoon and evenings.

The poster campaign publicity for the initiative embraced people of different ages, sex and ethnic origin including Afro - Caribbean and Bengali people.

Press releases were sent to the ethnic press and were featured in minority languages in East End Life.

APPENDIX 2

Summary of Results of the Library Review Public Consultation and Market Research Initiative KEY LIBRARY USER QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Total number of completed returns. 2822.

Method: Self completion questionnaire offered to all library users over a period of 4 weeks.

TABLE.1 The majority of people use the library at least once every three weeks.

TABLE.2. Children and young people are the most frequent users of the library service.

FIG.1.

FIG.2. The user levels of the Bengali speaking group is high. This reflects the very young age profile of this group (see Table.2. FIG.1 and FIG.3.).

FIG.3. The Bengali speaking respondents are heavily concentrated in the younger age groups.

FIG.4. The age profile of the total sample is fairly evenly spread. Care must be taken when interpreting the results of the total sample as reflecting the priorities of the user group as a whole. There may be a bias in favour of the older age groups because they may be more likely to take the time to complete questionnaires. There may be a bias towards 10 - 15 year olds because of the active involvement of schools in the market research.

FIG.5 The majority of existing users still go to libraries to borrow books. However, other reasons score consistently well.

FIG.6. The most popular day for visiting the library was Saturday. Monday was the next most popular. This was followed by a gradual decline in popularity throughout the week.

Table .3. Customer satisfaction amongst existing users appears high and library staff clearly achieve a very high standard of customer care. However, the number of active users is falling. Possible explanations for this paradox are given below.

LIBRARY SERVICE QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Total number of completed returns 2210

Method: Self - completion questionnaire sent to every house hold in the Borough at the beginning of January. Also offered to all library users at libraries over a period of 2 weeks in January.

FIG.8. The age profile is similar to the "Library User" questionnaire.

FIG.9. Those stating Bengali as their first language were almost exclusively located in the younger age groups.

FIG.10. The majority of users visit the library at least once every two or three weeks.

FIG.11. Most people live within 20 minutes of their library.

FIG.12. There is a strong demand for a library based council information service.

FIG.13. People want to combine other activities with their library visit.

FIG.14. There is a strong demand for a video lending service.

FIG. 15. There is a strong demand for a computer software lending service.

Table.4. Improvement to the book stock is the highest priority of respondents.

Table.5. The Bengali speaking sample ranked 'development of new services' above 'convenient opening hours'. With this exception the ranking pattern reflected that of the total sample.

P.S. MARTIN HAMBLIN SURVEY RESULTS

Total number of respondents. 618.

Method. Telephone interviews (401 non library users) and face to face interviews (217 users). Ethical considerations prevented questioning of children given the interview methods used.

FIG.16. Note: people under 16 could not be interviewed as parental consent would be required.

Table.6 . Current opening times significantly discourage non users. Perceptions of the poor book stock discourages both users and non users alike.

Table.7. Potential service improvements were greeted with a high degree of enthusiasm from non - users in particular. Improved book stock, I.T. facilities, video lending, wider range of music recordings, longer opening hours, Sunday opening, Job/training information service, art/exhibitions and eating facilities were very popular with both users and non users and may significantly improve user levels.

FIG.17. The overwhelming majority of respondents, regardless of whether they were users, considered the library service to very important for their community.

FIG.18. Public perception of the image of the existing service is mixed.

FIG.19. Shopping is the most popular activity to combine with a visit to the library.

FIG.20. A surprisingly high percentage of the total sample had access to a computer at home. However, only a third of computer owners were connected to the Internet.

FIG.21. A very significant majority of respondents want an accessible system of remote information delivery for library and related information.

Table.8 . There is a very strong demand from both users and non - users for other service information to be accessed from the same system.

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