Report Commissioned by the Library and Heritage Services of the London Borough of Merton for a Project Supported by the L.I.C.

A Quality Leaders Project for
Black Library & Information Workers
- Final Report of Research Findings, Feasibility Study, and Proposals

By

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Executive Summary

Context

1. The Quality Leaders Project is an initiative that addresses the dual problems of ensuring that library services provide value for the black community and equal employment opportunities, and it does so within a best value framework. The key propositions of this initiative are that the meeting of unrecognised or under-recognised needs requires new or enhanced services, and new and enhanced services require new skills and know-how (including new management know-how). The Library and Heritage Services of the London Borough of Merton have developed the concept of the Quality Leaders Project.

2. This report summarises the findings of research, conclusions regarding the feasibility and suitability of the Quality Leaders Project (QLP), and proposals for the next phases. It is based on research study commissioned in December 1999 and completed in March 2000 by the Management Research Centre of the University of North London. Funding was provided by a grant from the Library and Information Commission.

3. Black, Asian, and other ethnic minority communities do experience benefits as a result of public library services, but they have also experienced problems. In particular there are problems regarding the composition of stocks of books, music, and videos. For example, there are deficiencies in addressing the Black British experience through the existing stocks. There are problems in terms of library service events for the Black, Asian, and other ethnic minority communities. There are also problems – such as customer care and service availability – that may well be problems for all members of the public.

Recommendations

4. Based on an identification of service user problems and the experiences and attitudes of professionals, the following recommendations are made.

5. Developments in public library services are needed urgently to provide more value to Black, Asian, and other ethnic minority communities.

6. Service developments should be sensitive to a range of needs related to leisure time, cultural development, and education and vocational studies.

7. There is a need for much more consultation of Black, Asian, and ethnic minority communities in relation to the content and delivery of services they receive from public library services.

8. Service developments should have a clear impact on the resources and use of libraries by Black, Asian, and ethnic minority communities.

9. Experiments with services offering book-fairs and cultural events should be used to create more consumer-oriented and dynamic interfaces between services and ethnic minority communities.

10. Managers of public library services will need to address the need for continuous improvements in the services to Black, Asian, and ethnic minority communities by overcoming barriers to change caused by cynicism and pessimism among users and providers.

11. Local authority best value performance plans and appropriate local performance indicators might be used to position services to Black, Asian, and other ethnic minority communities in the mainstream of efforts to modernise services.

12. Local performance targets for the percentage of members of Black, Asian, and other ethnic minority communities using key library services should be set and should reflect an ambition to make the services more relevant and accessible to these communities.

13. Increased investment in the data capacity of management information systems should be undertaken where it is necessary for accurate and timely reporting of performance against the local performance targets (for the use of library services by Black, Asian and other ethnic minority communities) and consequent improvement planning to eliminate performance deficiencies.

Next Steps

14. Our research discovered concerns about the recruitment of Black and Asian library workers, and their promotion within library services. This report recognises the possibility that equal opportunity employment initiatives can produce benefits for the black users of library services, but note that there has been almost two decades of equal employment opportunities policies within some parts of local government.

15. On the basis of the findings we have concluded that the idea of using the Quality Leaders Project (QLP) looks feasible. There appears to be scope to better exploit library resources and tailor solutions to the present deficiencies in the value of services for local black communities. This is important in terms of achieving the goals of social inclusion in respect of library services. The QLP programme, if effectively implemented, will be a worthwhile endeavour to better meet needs of

communities. The challenge of developing new services should help to develop black managers who can champion new services.

16. The QLP now needs to move to the next phases. Areas can now be identified for development projects. Individual library services will no doubt find different opportunities for projects depending on the make-up of their local communities and relative importance of leisure, culture, educational and vocation needs in those communities. Likewise there will be different opportunities for projects to develop services delivered through book fairs and cultural events. Top management commitment to ensuring social inclusion for Black, Asian, and other ethnic minority communities needs to be translated into a process that provides for fast paced development and a strong evaluation framework to ensure lessons learnt in development projects are recognised and disseminated.

Part 1 Research Findings by Dr A Anie

1 Aims, Methodology, and Samples

1.1 London Borough of Merton Library and Heritage Services commissioned from the Management Research Centre at the University of North London a 3-month feasibility research project. The aim was to assess the feasibility of the Quality Leaders Project (see Section 5.1) that had been formulated by the managers of the Library and Heritage Services of the London Borough of Merton. The core ideas of this project are, firstly, the need to address the dual problems of ensuring that library services provide value for the Black community (including Black, Asian, and other ethnic minorities) and equal employment opportunities simultaneously. Secondly, to do so within a best value framework. Thirdly, to focus in the first instance on meeting of unrecognised or under-recognised needs of the Black community. Fourthly, to then recognise and act on the fact that new or enhanced library services to the black community require new skills and know-how (including new management know-how). The feasibility research was to be exploratory in nature, creating propositions that could be thoroughly tested in development projects.

1.2 It was proposed that the research would take the form of a study using multiple methods, but concentrating predominantly upon interviews with various stakeholders. The main method of data collection was, therefore, to be in-depth, semi-structured interviews. All of the interviews and field notes were to be partially transcribed and other sources of textual information, including relevant documentation, were to be scanned into a computer. The data was to be analysed using qualitative analysis software.

1.3 The aim was to gain an understanding of how the stakeholders involved in the consumption and provision of library services view existing provision to the Black community. It further aimed to identify realistic improvements in this provision that these stakeholders would like to see happen. On the basis of this, it was aimed to develop conclusions about the Quality Leaders Project, an assessment of feasibility and proposals for the next steps (see Sections 6 and 7). The questioning within the interviews was to create a baseline in terms of the existing service processes. We were going to ask service users and professionals/managers what actually happens at the moment. And of course we were going to ask about their satisfaction with the current service.

1.4 The research was then partially to follow a service enhancement model. Thus interviews with service users would explore the needs of service users (what they want and why they want it). Then professionals and managers in the library service would be asked about the 'degrees of freedom' in service delivery (Ohmae 1982[1]). This would

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[1] Ohmae, K. The Mind of the Strategist. McGraw Hill. 1982

enable us to identify the variables that influence the value of the services to library users (e.g. building, skills of library staff, the range and depth of books of interest to users, Internet facilities, etc). Finally we would also make use of a 'programme planning rationale'. This involves interviewing service users to identify the problems they have with the current services and their priorities. Interviews with professional library staff were to follow on and explore how service users' problems and priorities could be addressed. This was to include looking at ideas for service developments. The professionals were to be asked about new types of solutions to the problems and priorities of the service users. Interviews with senior managers (who have to sponsor change and find resources) were to follow on and look for possible objections to ideas of professionals in terms of resource constraints and strategic goals of the service (Delbecq and Van de Ven 1976[2]).

1.5 The research design was followed quite closely in practice. Data collection was based on semi-structured interviews conducted in each of the three local authority library areas. On average, these tape-recorded interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour, and were conducted with:

3 members of the Black community
1 library professional.
1 senior-manager in the library
1 Black library worker

1.6 A group interview was also undertaken after the 6 interviews, but levels of attendance were highly variable.

1.7 Nine interviews were conducted within Merton libraries. Seven of these were with staff and users of Mitcham Library:

a) 1 library manager.
b) 2 library assistants – (African-Caribbean and Asian origins).
c) 1 sporadic library user (African origin).
c) 3 frequent library users (2 Asian and 1 African-Caribbean origin).

1.8 There was also a brief telephone discussion with a non-user (African-Caribbean origin), and an interview with the Raynes Park library manager (White). A focus group was also organised, which was attended by: a senior library manager, two library assistants, and Asian and African-Caribbean frequent users.

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[2]Delbecq, A L and Van de Ven, A H. A group process model for problem identification and program planning. In W G Bennis, K D Benne, R Chin and K E Corey (eds) The Planning of Change, 3rd edition Holt Rinehart and Winston. 1976.

1.9 Five interviews within Birmingham libraries were conducted, with staff and users of the Central Library. The interviews covered:

a) 1 senior library manager (White).
b) 2 library professionals (one White and one of Asian origin).
c) 1 frequent library user (African-Caribbean origin).
d) 1 sporadic library user (Asian origin).

1.10 A focus group was also organised and attended by only the library staff.

1.11 Six interviews within Bradford libraries were conducted, with staff of both the Central and local libraries, and users of the Central Library. The interviews were with:

a) 1 senior library manager (White).
b) 1 library professional – (White).
c) 1 library assistant (Asian).
c) 3 library users (African-Caribbean origin, Asian and Arabic origin), who all make frequent use of the library.

1.12 A focus group was also organised and attended by all staff and 1 library user (African-Caribbean origin).

1.13 In selecting members of the Black community to interview, the project originally aimed for one each of *frequent*, *sporadic*, and *non-users* of library services.

1.14 However, there were some significant delays in data collection because of the need to follow a sequence of interviews based on the Program Planning Model (PPM) method. Typically, the main impediment was the search for non-users (or lapsed users) and sporadic users of library services.

1.15 Due to the short (3 month) duration of the feasibility study, the project relied heavily on the assistance of senior staff in each local authority, in order to obtain the consent of Black library users to be interviewed.

1.16 With the relatively short notice provided for the project, library staff pointed to difficulties in identifying non-users and sporadic users.

1.17 Bradford and Birmingham library services preferred their users not to be contacted directly by the project researcher, to prevent a perception of 'cold calling.' Thus, the selection of interviewees relied on the knowledge and contacts already established by library staff.

1.18 LB Merton provided a list of lapsed users to contact. These were found to have either moved or declined to be interviewed.

1.19 Where possible, a snowballing technique was employed, i.e. using a user to identify other users, but this was unsuccessful in identifying non-users (lapsed users). Only in one case, (LB Merton) was contact made with a non-user through a frequent user. However, during a brief telephone conversation, the request for an interview was declined. The technique was of some use in identifying other frequent users however.

1.20 Hence, interviews with members of the Black community mainly involved frequent and sporadic users.

2 Users' Problems

2.1 Members of the public have many reasons for using library services including borrowing books, videos, and cassettes; seeking information; and reading periodicals. We found the problems of users of services clustered around three issues: alignment of library stocks with their preferences and interests, Black events, and customer care.

2.2 Alignment of book and other stocks with preferences and interests of sections of the Black community was a problem for some users, and was expressed in a number of ways.

2.2.1 Firstly, a female African-Caribbean user expressed dissatisfaction with the number and variety of Black interest books provided by the library, noting:

"Within the library, if you are specifically looking for Black, African, African-Caribbean books, there is just a small selection, which is just like a shelf. This is where you have Black literature, and this is mostly fiction."

2.2.2 Furthermore, the few books bought tend to focus mainly on popular authors, again as the female African-Caribbean user noted:

"[With] Black authors, some may not be famous because people have not started buying their books. Perhaps if libraries were prepared to buy their books they would become famous. Sure, they have books by Toni Morrison, but it depends how many they buy. If you look at a popular book, say in the Black section, they will order just one book. But say if you have the equivalent book [by a white author], there would be seven."

Thus, most African-Caribbean users would like to see their libraries doing more to help lesser known black authors. A male African-Caribbean user suggested that greater exposure of these authors could be achieved through the various programs of book readings held periodically in at least two of the libraries studied. There is a perception that these events have tended to focus mainly on literature by white authors.

2.2.3 Generally, African-Caribbean users called for more non-fiction material relating to black lifestyles, with the female user noting:

"Sometimes I am looking for factual books, on whatever interests I have at that point in time, could be cookery, hair and beauty, childcare or fashion."

In commenting on the provision of black-lifestyle related books, a male African-Caribbean user made the following three points;

1. That there should be greater recognition by libraries of the black community's interest in sports and music. More stock covering Black British as opposed to African-American sports and music personalities would be particularly welcome.
2. Since large sections of the black community are interested in religion, information about the various churches, their belief systems and methods of operation, would be useful. This should extend beyond the orthodox churches to cover the various black ministries, and charismatic churches if possible.
3. There should be more general information on hobbies, as well as vocational or educational activity in the local area of relevance to the black community.

The male African-Caribbean user emphasised that books on sports and music personalities, from a British as opposed to US perspective, could be an important way of attracting young black males especially into the library. He explained;

"There is a difference between Black British and Black American. We have different experiences. You cannot translate one to another. The US is more forward looking. We should get books on Ian Wright, Frank Bruno for example. Young black boys feel they can only see Michael Jordan on TV, that is their only link with him. With Frank Bruno, you have a chance of actually seeing him and getting his autograph. We should have more information on personalities over here. They are more accessible."

The US as opposed to British approach to black literature was a point which arose repeatedly. Another male African-Caribbean user wanted more books on the Black British experience. This was a very specific deficiency in the books available in the library:

"It is good that there is a Black focus section, but a lot of the books are really literature and fiction. When I say that it would be good if there were more books that related to the Black experience, I mean a lot of the books that are in the library on racism are good in some senses. But they reflect the times at which they were written, they do not really get to the heart of the problem."

On asking how the literature could more closely "get to the heart of the problem," the user replied:

"Really, we need to look at our own Black British experience. Obviously it is helpful, and important to look at the American experience. There are parallels, but there are also

quite a lot of historical differences. We need to see more Black authors and scholars here. There needs to be a body of literature by Black people here, rather than reading about Americans."

Furthermore:

"[A favourite book] was quite a good book. It went to the core of the problem, it went into the historical reasons why Black people, whether we are African or Caribbean, have a distorted picture of ourselves, through TV, books and so on. It presented the true history, which has been kept under cover. But I do not think the book had more than two editions."

It is important that libraries do not under-estimate the desire of many black users for an alternative and possibly non-traditional (in a Western context) view of racism and its effects through the generations, as a male African-Caribbean user commented:
"In terms of [perceived lack of interest in] reading [among black communities], it goes back to slavery. Because we were banned from reading, not allowed to read. That is something that has persisted to this present day. The legacy of not reading has been following us until the present day.

2.2.4 Another weakness in the various library collections, relates to the breadth and depth of coverage of black history, as a male African-Caribbean user explained;

"I have taken up black history studies, for example I tend to read Egyptian history. I have tried to use the library, but I am finding that there are not that many books on Egyptian history. On the Sumerian, Moorish, Songhai, Mali empires there is virtually nothing. So I go to a bookshop that specifically caters for black history. I think the library should invest more in the historical side of black literature. The history there is [mainly] about slavery. Where it does go into Egypt it is not in depth. It just talks about pyramids. I want [information on] religion, what they ate, why they rose and fell.

The response to questions about why this was so important was;

"So that I can grasp where I am coming from. My present situation. Where we are going."

2.2.5 In terms of children's books, the lack of role models for Black children in the literature was of concern. The female African-Caribbean user, who is also a parent, noted:

"It is a wider issue when you look at the lack of role models. I cannot think of any, at least when you are talking about pre-school. Well, I suppose in the Tele-tubbies, La-la or whatever, the green one, is supposed to be Black, the stupid one. Hence the wider connotations among Black children. So most Black children may not want to identify with that one because it is stupid. There are things to do with Black children. But say you are looking at something that would be specific to a Black child, I cannot think of anything."

2.2.6 Similar concerns were also expressed about the Asian collections in libraries with a male Asian saying:

"I think instead of always having Western authors, sometimes when you do have an occasional Eastern author, there is only 1 in a 100 of the publications. But I think that the author should be put in the library because I think the Asians will definitely read that, because they look at it and say yes he is from our own home country, even though it is in English. If an Eastern Publication hits the headlines it should be put into the library. Purely to even out the balance."

2.2.7 A male Arabic user also complained about the nature of Arabic books on offer in his library. These had tended to focus on learning how to write or speak Arabic instead of the lifestyles in places like Egypt. This comment seems to mirror that of the male African –Caribbean user in Section 2.2.4. Interestingly, this same issue arose in two different libraries. The point was also made that there were no audio CD's or videos in Arabic.

The Arabic user was asked why this was particularly important to him, and he replied;

"I am basically looking for anything which tells me something about the culture, so I can learn about it. Because I have not actually been there, so that is why I was looking in the library to see whether I could learn more. Anything will do."

2.2.8 In terms of Black music collections, the female African-Caribbean user argued that this tended to be rather one-sided:

"There is not that much of an emphasis on Black music. You have popular Black music, because we are in the charts. Because if they are going to do some sort of statistical information about music and Black artistes we will do quite well. You are going to have your Whitney Houston's and Puff Daddy, because we are quite well represented in popular music. But if you would like to go into the library and pick up something from Gregory Isaac you are not going to get it. Maybe you will get it now because of the Night Nurse advert, and adverts have that effect. You will only get the popular stuff."

2.2.9 This user also pointed to the lack of Black videos in the library, suggesting that the selection could be wider.

2.2.10 There was a call for a wider variety of Asian videos to be held by the libraries, and also more from an educational perspective, not simply dramas.

2.2.11 Most of the Asian users did welcome the fact that it is cheaper, relatively, to borrow CD's, and videos from the library. A male Asian pointed out:

" The good thing is that you can keep them for a week. Because you do not get time when you are a student, if you rent for less than a week, to return it. At most video shops you can only borrow for 24 hours."

2.2.12 There was a perception by the female African-Caribbean user that the quality of a library collection depends on the ethnicity of the ethnic minority librarian, as follows:

"On whether the books reflect the multi-ethnic nature of the area, well it varies because it had tended to depend on who they employed. At one time there was a whole heap of Asian material and this is what I think the reason for that was. I was quite aware that there have been specialist librarians who had responsibility for work with all ethnic minorities, but because she was Asian there was great representation. There were lots of newspapers, magazines, loads of books and it was constantly advertised when you walked in [the] library that she was the specialist librarian."

This refers to the previous ethnic minority librarian who has since retired, and was not replaced. Another member of staff, of Asian origin, deals with these collections on a part-time basis.

2.2.13 On the basis of this study, however, it is possible that library services vary significantly in their matching of ethnic community preferences or that individual service users vary a great deal in terms of the yard sticks they apply to evaluate what is available. In contrast to some of the negative comments above, a male African-Caribbean user, who is also a musician told us:

"I am quite happy with [the music collection]. I go to [another] library as well, but it is actually better than [that] library. This is surprising because [it] is a bigger city. This has got a very good music section, all round really, for whatever you are into. Quite up to date as well."

He also added:

"They have also got quite a good section which is not Black mainstream, it is indigenous African and Caribbean. This may be traditional. Or it may use the more Western approach like Fela Kuti or Youssou N'Dor. They are pretty well stocked up. And quite a good section on reggae."

The user's comments suggest that this section was quite well patronised by Black users:

"I would say it is better patronised by Black people than any other part of the library. Even though you do not see an abundance of Black people going in, I would definitely say there are more going in."

This last comment may suggest that a library service that succeeds in catering for the needs of the Black community will be well rewarded in terms of use of the services.

2.3 Another problem was the number and the design and implementation of events relevant to the Black community. A male African-Caribbean user told us:

"There need to be events, people should be brought in. There used to be a Black book fair, the last time it ran was 1990. Black booksellers came with various books, many of which you could not actually get here. That brought more Black people in, visibly more Black people over those 3 or 4 days that it actually ran. We need specific events, external things, people being brought in…."

The female African-Caribbean user said:

"Say for instance if the library is putting on a "Black event," which happened recently. It was not really a Black event but it was targeted at Black people. The literature was sort of hidden behind things, it was not that as soon as you walked into the library you knew what was happening."

2.4 Customer care was a key problem area in one case, with serious complaints being made. In the other two cases few complaints were made. In the author's opinion, it appeared to be an interesting combination of poor customer care, with elements of racism thrown in. A female African-Caribbean user noted;

"In terms of levels of customer service I do not think I am well treated, and I do not think it is a race thing. I think they need to be trained in inter-personal skills… I think they treat everyone badly."

She went on to comment:

"But I think it is a historical thing. The hostilities of staff are not aimed at you as a Black person; I have seen how they treat white people. Generally in…[the] library, it is the kind of place where you as the customer are always wrong. They do not know about customer service."

Furthermore, these difficulties are not a feature of all staff, as she described:

"I do not think that it is the majority [of staff who are rude], because there are new staff coming into the library who work much shorter hours. I think it is those long-term ones, the full-time contract ones [that are the problem]. But the short-term ones, and those that are part-time, they are different, and the younger ones. The problem is with the older lot who have been there for a long-time."

On being asked to describe particular examples of this behaviour, the user outlined several examples. As narrated during the interview, the following contained a racial element.

"I remember going in there for a book. Oprah Winfrey made it into a film, "Beloved." I could not find it on the shelf. So I went in to ask, and the person at the desk made a comment, "Well what do you expect, I doubt that it would be here". It was implied that it was a [Black interest] book, so someone had stolen it. Not that it could simply have been misplaced."

Another incident related to public access to planning applications, and this seems to be an issue of poor customer care.

"There was a planning application across the road from where I live, and it would have implications for my house. I wanted to see the plan. It said go to [the] Library. I work, so I am not going to get there till the evening. I got there at 6.30. What was [the response]? "No, you cannot see it, because the person who has the key has gone home." I think that is not good enough. The advertisement says, "go to [the] Library." It does not say "go to [the] library before this time, because after that the person with the key would have gone home." So she [member of library staff] decided that she was not going to bend over backwards, to get this plan out of the filing cabinet. It is just general rudeness."

2.5 A male African-Caribbean user felt that the extent to which black staff are visible in the library does affect the levels of customer care black users experience, and this is described below;

"If you want more black people using the library you need more black staff who can understand our way of doing things. With a white person they cannot understand what we do. I might come into a library and only have a vague idea of what I want. I may say, "Can you give me a book on African History?" A black person would say, "Slow down and be more specific, and even if you are not being that specific they would take the time." A Caucasian may not take the time and will say, "Here is a book. Now you try and look after yourself. A black person would be more receptive and listen to a black client more than a Caucasian counterpart. I have experienced this. There are receptive whites, but on the whole I like dealing with X [a black member of staff]."

Further questioning explored whether white staff could be trained to deal more effectively with black library users, and the following comments were made;

"It is not so much having ethnic minority staff as much as if Caucasian colleagues could be trained to understand our needs, then there would not be a specific need for black staff. But then they would have to change their whole perception of us, to understand why it is that we do not read a lot, why it is that we find these institutions frightening and scary. That could change our perceptions."

2.6 A male Asian user also stressed that perhaps only Muslim Asians would appreciate some important cultural practices concerning the handling of religious material such as the Koran in the library.

"There should be some Asian people in particular sections of the library. They have got some Holy Books here, [to] which we give a lot of respect. People from other communities do not really know what that means. Some people do not know that there is a lot of respect for these Holy Books. I have seen these books off the shelves. I think there should really be a section for these holy books. Anybody can read it, but it should not be left lying around, it is not just a book, it is just a holy book. The Koran, Bible anything

like that should be kept on the top shelf with respect. There should be somebody from the ethnic minorities in that section who can tell people what this is all about."

This issue was raised in the focus group. The senior library manager pointed out that notices had been put up about treating holy books with respect, and placing them back on the top shelf. Library staff also kept an eye on any books found lying around. Unfortunately, the library cannot police the section constantly. Community leaders have been consulted over whether these books should be withdrawn, but they had decided that the library should not withdraw the material.

2.7 Accessibility to the library was also a major problem, of particular concern to a female African-Caribbean user who noted;

"I am not happy [with opening hours] either. Those library hours were made when society was different. Society has moved on, and [the] libraries have not. Opening at 9.30! Libraries need to be considering opening at 8.30. I do not know of any of the Borough libraries that have a drop off service when they are closed. Every other borough I have ever worked in, if I have a video or book and I wanted to push that through a letter box I could do that, you can't do that [here]. [These] libraries close one day a week. You know in this day and age I expect a public service to be opened for a good chunk of the time, and also opening on Sundays."

Libraries in the area did have a drop-off service however both the frequent users who attended the focus group were unaware of this. The senior library manager present did concede that this was partly the library's fault, for not marketing these facilities.

2.7 Another problem was identified as caused by other users. A user complained about levels of noise in the library as follows:

"I think improvements are going to be very difficult because [the] library is very limited in space. If you want a quiet reading room for the reference section, students and newspapers generally occupy it, and I think what might be preferable is to keep newspaper reading away from the reference section. The only thing I find irritating in [the library] is that there is no separation of newspapers from serious reference work. This is not something that I have expressed to anyone because I do not go and do any serious reading [here]. "

The problem was seen as amenable to staff intervention:

"It [the noise that the kids make] depends on who is on duty, because in some cases the kids can run around and do whatever as long as they do not disturb those in the reference section."

This issue revealed a wide variety of opinions in the focus group. Some felt that libraries are a place where children should feel welcome, hence a degree of noise is inevitable. Thus it is for the library staff to diplomatically manage behaviour, such that older users

are not disturbed, while not alienating the children. However a member of the library staff did point out that staffing resources are often over-stretched during these periods, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to assert authority. The senior manager promised to look in detail at the events which often led up to this situation.

2.8 A problem that is very complex to analyse is that of the general image of the library within the black population. There is a belief among some of the users, that the library has a wider social mission, and failure to engage in that social mission means that some sections of the community lack the confidence to approach the library.

A male African-Caribbean user indicated that the library could be more original in finding ways of demonstrating its relevance to the lives of potential users. Thus, in order to attract young black youth that would benefit from visiting the library, he noted:

"With youth not using the library, it is because they cannot see any benefit. I work with black boys who are difficult. To get them into the library you have to get them a means of changing who they are. If you could show a black boy who has been excluded from school, how he can get his education back on track and get back into college, he would probably start using the library. I have had several successful cases where boys have been excluded, and they have not wanted to go to school. I have got them into the library, and I have got them into the Floor 4 Careers Section. I have shown them what they can do with their lives and the steps they can take in order to change their lives. They have tried, and now they are only 16 or 17, and they are on the path to changing their lives."

This perception was confirmed by a male Asian user who argued that the library could do more to involve itself in activities relevant to young Asians, in particular concerning more sensitive issues like Aids, and drug-related crime in the local area. The user argued;

"There should be leaflets telling people about what is going on. There are no leaflets talking about that. The only leaflets they have are about movies and so on. I am talking about religion and other things. There is a lot of crime happening here. One can make people aware about drugs and Aids. It is no good a bunch of people talking about what is going on at the cinema if people are dying of Aids, or dying from drugs."

This is said to be particularly important to young people in the Asian community as explained below:

"Asian people mostly do not talk about these kinds of things. They do not talk about things like Aids. They do not make people aware, like ladies. If it is just a bunch of old people sitting there talking it does no good. They should tell the little children. There are some old-fashioned people who do not talk about these things and I think that is really bad. I think what should be happening here is that young people should come here and talk about these things, about how Aids happens, you can tell them the procedures and stuff you can use, but people cannot say this in the Mosques or the Hindu temples, that is important."

Thus in this case the library is seen as an alternative forum to the traditional sites for discussing sensitive issues which are increasingly of more relevance to 2nd and 3rd generation immigrants.

2.9 The Internet is seen as a particularly positive development by most of the people interviewed as a male Asian user noted:

"For the average person they have just managed to get the Internet in here so that is helpful. I have just seen some other computers that you can do some work on, for £2.50 which is reasonable."

3 Service Development Ideas

3.1 Restructuring stocks through changed procurement policies. This idea is that the providers of library services need to be more proactive in identifying what the Black community needs and wants and then ensuring that stocks of books, music, and videos reflects these needs and wants.

3.2 Events as an important service-user interface mechanism. There is a need for a programme of events through which books, music, and video resources are organised around themes or topics to create an unfolding set of opportunities for local Black and Asian communities. Instead of concentrating only on attracting members of the Black and ethnic minorities to the library buildings to make use of the stocks, these stocks can be deployed through events to bring out their relevance and utility. This is analogous to the use of popular and high profile exhibitions in an art gallery to increase public attendance levels, rather than the traditional emphasis on year-round displaying of a gallery's collection for the benefit of its current clientele. Such events might involve partnerships with booksellers and libraries in other local authorities (again, just as exhibitions in art galleries depend on works of art loaned by other galleries).

3.3 Staff development. Training and staff development activities generally could be used to develop the capacity of library services for empowering the Black and ethnic communities in their use of library services and in influencing the continuous improvement of the services.

3.4 Recruiting and promoting more Black staff. This might be a critical implementation factor for improving the matching of services to the Black and ethnic communities' needs and improving customer care to them.

4 Feasibility Issues

4.1 It is possible to improve the match between the book and other stocks and the needs (preferences, interests) of ethnic minority communities. In one library service it was acknowledged that things had been better in the past.

"The Black collection was very nicely done by X who used to work here, who did a lot of events with Black people, enjoyed doing that and was successful as well."

4.11 Though not impossible, the matching of books to the community can be complex. In the case of one library, while the interviews suggest that there is greater scope for enabling library staff to research and recognise suitable material available for black communities, staff outlined some impediments to the provision of such material:

1. Staff point to the lack of time for research, particularly concerning material in the various community languages. This is one of several bottlenecks, preventing the

library from responding to requests from community groups for material in particular languages.

2. Another bottleneck is the difficulty in meeting demand for material that is not readily available in the UK i.e. particularly from other continents such as Pakistani and Bangladeshi writers. Current arrangements to provide a range of publications in both fiction and non-fiction have not always been successful.

3. In one library, a member of staff indicated that generally, procurement of community language material is not given as high a priority as it should be within the organisation. Although there seems to be an awareness that the library is not responding as well as it could, the organisation is still taking time to respond to this issue openly.

4. For these reasons, the library has often struggled to attract and maintain customers from these client groups because requests have been made for material, which the library is completely unaware of, and has difficulty in procuring, often from only a handful of suppliers in the UK.

4.12 Thus, there are real concerns that the ability to restructure stocks might be constrained by the situation in terms of booksellers, as an Asian library manager noted:

"I think the problem with declining interest, is that the books for Asians could be better targeted. What we need is more non-fiction. The main problem at the moment is the booksellers. They cannot seem to provide the kinds of books that users want. Not everybody wants to read frivolous novels. This is my personal viewpoint. You very rarely find any non-fiction books. If you find any health books they are ten or fifteen years old. What you want is more books on health, more books on childcare, more books on religion, cookery, and fashion. These are the things that will take their interest. This is how they will borrow, but unfortunately that has not happened."

"Obviously the librarians are totally dependent on these book sellers. There are not that many of them, there are certainly more of them than there used to be. There will be lots and lots of fiction, but not non-fiction. Even if they do provide non-fiction it is poetry. How many people will even come to borrow English poetry? So that is a problem here."

In the case of black literature, this has often led to the purchase of books from sources that then prove unpopular. Thus, the US is generally acknowledged as being more highly developed than most, if not all other countries, in terms of the quantity and variety of its publishing given the greater number of black writers and publishers. When the library service has imported some of this material, it has not been universally welcomed as a professional librarian noted:

"They [books from the US] are not as popular, and we get complaints about them. "Is this all you can find? This is not relevant to us! Why have you bought this? It is quite difficult to explain to people that we are trying to show that we are interested even though we know it is not ideal. We have not found the ideal."

It is not clear how much of a constraint booksellers are. There was a view that the supply of books by booksellers was becoming less of a constraint.

"When the system was set up you just got what the booksellers gave you. But the opportunities are better now. If you look hard enough you will find more booksellers to provide you with a variety, but it is difficult."

The feasibility of responding to the request for more Black videos could also be constrained by availability issues, but at least one manager thought it was worth trying to stock them.

"...This is just an opinion. Black people will watch English movies quite a lot. Also it is difficult to get Black movies. I do not even know if we will succeed in getting any, and if we did, whether it would be popular. But it is an idea worth experimenting with. To be quite honest I have not seen any of these even in Commercial video shops."

4.13 Even where black writers and publishers exist in the UK, their output may not be necessarily welcome, particularly by community leaders. Nevertheless there may be demand from young people, whose views may be at variance with the older generation. Again, the professional librarian noted:

"Young people are coming in a little bit more because we have got a couple of black publishers in this country that have opened up. There has been quite a lot of argument from the older generation about things like Express. These are explicit books, quite a lot of them involve drugs and crime. We have got some complaints about the books, and also some encouragement."

This seems to suggest that links with the community may be a valuable strategy for discovering the kinds of material the black community would like the library to stock. However libraries must often cope with different and conflicting views, while maintaining impartiality, as the comments of a professional librarian illustrate;

"Young writers like Quartey Newland, who talks about young black people on estates, and that drugs are just a normal part of their life. The books are quite upsetting really, and very genuine I think. But I suspect that there will be some black and white people who will say, "What is the point of presenting that image in the books?" But we are a library service, so we provide those books, it is not our job to say they are good or bad. We get both complaints and encouragement."

4.1.4 One senior manager described Asian language material, as "still quite an unknown area of demand". The reasons for this are quite complex. They sometimes relate to a general lack of skills and knowledge about these community languages. Often, there are also discrepancies between the "official line" from contacts in the community, and the library's own experience, as has been found with the African-Caribbean community. The senior manager described this as follows:

"We make contacts and discuss it [demand for Asian language material] in the community. But when we put them [requested Asian language material] in the libraries, no one wants to read them".

The interviews also point to another important issue, namely what do the vast majority of the Asian community actually use the library for? The library's experiences suggest that use of the library could be for no other different purpose, or no different range of material, than the rest of the general community. Thus the interest could mainly be in;

1. English language material i.e. aimed at the general population.
2. Romance, or any other area of popular reading, not necessarily "high culture" of Asian origin.
3. Access to study material or space i.e. the library is seen largely as a support or replacement for academic libraries.

Thus, in some community libraries with approximately 80% black population, there is significant use of facilities for homework support, general reading, Internet access, and other general queries.

For these reasons, it is necessary to separately identify the different needs and thus the different benefits (value) that might be offered by public library services to Black, Asian, and ethnic minority communities. Firstly, there are leisure needs. Secondly, there are needs in relation to cultural development. Thirdly, there are needs in terms of educational and vocational studies. So, the response and image of the public library services to their use by Black, Asian, and ethnic minority communities is capable of quite significant variations in order to create more value. This is a very important point.

4.1.5 Staff argued that the unsatisfactory breadth and perspective of Asian material should be seen in the context of:

1. An era of cuts in resources, which means that the library has often been unable to afford the newspapers and magazines, which if consulted in depth would provide some idea of which materials to supply.
2. The lack of time to undertake outreach work in the community, through for example church groups and other voluntary organisations.

Decline in funding seems widespread across the public library sector, hence the interviews focused instead on some of the impediments to successful outreach work. Here, the difficulty centres on translating the time spent working with typically half a dozen members of the community into service developments that have a positive impact on the wider population. This was attributed to:

1. Among some staff a lack of expertise in outreach work.
2. A lack of support for those staff who do have expertise in outreach work.
3. Mistrust of the library within the community, which makes building relationships with a person or group a complex undertaking.

4.1.6 Several people we spoke to made a critical connection between 'involvement fatigue' and the failure of local authorities to act on what the public says. One respondent reported that Black organisations had refused to be involved because of failures to act by library services:

"We have had various small projects going. There has never been a lot of money around. There have been meetings, conversations, and various community initiatives that the library has got involved in. But it waxes and wanes all the time. There are times when black organisations just say to us, understandably: "Just do not come here anymore, we do not want anymore consultation or discussion, if you cannot do anything." That has made us very sensitive, perhaps sometimes oversensitive to bothering people."

Essentially the community organisations are expressing a lack of trust in the public services to be responsive. Professionals reciprocate the lack of trust with pessimism and excessive caution. One respondent told us:

"They are fed up of being consulted, researched, involved, and promised…. We are now cautious about doing anything without the means of seeing it through"

The lack of trust and cynicism are perceived by professionals as barriers to the activities and initiatives of public library services. A professional librarian expressed this as follows:

"We try things and they are not as successful as we would like them to be. And they seem to be least successful in areas where people are disillusioned, do not trust us, do not think that we offer a fair service."

However, a senior manager did stress that mistrust within the community is not unique to libraries, and is an issue for the entire range of public services. Moreover, the problems of involvement fatigue are not inevitable. Sue Goss (1999 30) has written: 'One of the most depressing complaints is that people do not want to be involved…Anecdotal evidence suggests that the public are quite good at 'reading' the motivation and seriousness of a local authority which tries to involve them. A vague, poorly planned process, which looks boring and which may not lead to action, will get a poor response. A well-focused, well-organized process, where it is clear why it is happening and what will happen next, will do better. Best of all are those processes where prospective participants have had a chance to decide what they might want to get out of it, and how they want to take part, and the authority has made a prior commitment to act on the learning that emerges.' [3]

4.1.7 Mechanisms for the library services (in at least one of the three cases) to consult and involve ethnic minority communities appear to be underdeveloped or ineffective. A female African-Caribbean user noted:

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[3] Sue Goss (1999) Managing Working with the Public. London: Kogan Page.

"I am not aware of any user forum or committee. There is no dialogue with the library, unless something has been developed which I have not seen. The only reason why I got involved in this is because I made a complaint about the library service, and then X got into contact with me, talking about solutions." (African Caribbean, professional]

Some feedback occurs through social events held in the library, as a Black library worker noted:

"We had an event on the X, we call it the Family Event. All the performers were mostly Black. We had a problem with that because, mostly the catering and entertainment was said to be only for Black people, not really for other people. So 75 to 80 people turned up. X came and addressed the meeting, and people had an opportunity to come and talk to him and express their views about the books. We even bought some books from some of the entertainers. I think through the events we can get the feedback as well, and also if people write to him he will reply directly."

In one service, staff perceptions about modes of feedback from users to the library also centred on the role of an ethnic minority librarian.

"In terms of getting feedback from ethnic minorities on a regular basis, we have been unfortunate in that in 1998 our ethnic minority librarian retired. She was not replaced for quite a while. Nevertheless we have an ethnic minority library assistant, although this is not really her job, it is 17.5 hours a week. Her job is predominantly with the Asian books."

4.1.8 One professional raised some fears about more formal forums of consultation, particularly if these were based on community libraries reporting at some kind of local, or ward committee meetings. This view is illustrated by the following comment:

"My worry is, who is engaging in that political process? I am not casting aspersions on certain people that do engage in that process. It is just that when I have been to those meetings there is hardly anybody at those meetings. So in theory we can tick a piece of paper and say yes we have done it, and I think that will worry me, and that is why I think the informal [system] remains important."

This is, of course, a clear argument for the need to develop well-designed and well-organised involvement processes (Sue Goss 1999).

4.2 There is some outreach work being done, but it is important that necessary resources (expertise and time) are available for all sections of the ethnic minority community. This may be a problem at the present time. A member of staff noted:

"I haven't done as much outreach work with the Black community (as the Asian). I do go and see them, help them, with books and other things. I tell them what is going on in [local authority area]. X and Y started things with Black people so I do not really want to take over. X did a lot of work with them." (Asian, Black library worker].

A professional librarian also noted:

"You break barriers very slowly with some individuals, that you are able to work with in a small way. You scratch the surface, but you cannot go and knock on everyone's door. So you are very dependent on the whole profession, the whole image with the council, the image of your core service. You are just one piece of a bigger thing, and you are hoping you are doing your bit here."

4.3 Thus, general impressions about the wider council may have a significant impact on levels of public confidence in approaching the library. This is important to bear in mind in the course of the strategic development of library services. Hence, a highly public strengthening of links with the Education Service for example, may make the library even more threatening to certain sections of the community as a professional librarian noted:

"As we, as a service, link ourselves more closely to education, which is I think one of the problems that we have got, we are getting more linked up bureaucratically with the Education Service. Instead of that being a good thing for us, I think we are being seen as some sort of official thing that puts people off, in terms of "what will they think of us if we did not do very well at school"."

4.4 The idea of staff development to improve customer care was endorsed by one manager. As a basis for raising awareness of the need for better customer-care and cultural sensitivity among staff, an Asian library manager pointed to the need for clearer dissemination of the Macpherson and other reports on race-relations in Britain within the Council:

"In terms of dissemination of the Macpherson report within the council I do not think people have been attending enough courses here. Some people might denigrate the idea because you cannot suddenly become a wonderful person in a one-day course. But I think that is the first step forward, people should be asked to go to more courses. There might be a feeling of, "do you think I am a racist, is that why you are sending me on that course?", but it is not so. It should be almost compulsory, I think all members of staff should attend courses, which discuss this issue."

4.5 The need for greater recruitment from non-white communities identified by an Asian library manager:

"I think there should be more staff [non-white] who are not necessarily in just senior positions but at different levels in career. Although I do not think it is a drawback, nevertheless I am the only senior person in P libraries who is in a position like this, except for X who is more senior than me. I think it would be nice to have more people at my level."

Recent appointments of Black managers into one of the library services seem to have improved the customer care situation, with the user noting:

"If you had asked me this before X came to the library, I would have been very negative. But for the short time X has been there, he has had an impact on them, and I think recently they have got an Asian manager, Y. I think they have impacted [positively] on the blatant rudeness in the library."

4.6 In some library services however, this approach seems very complex to implement. One senior manager accepted that the library's staff profile does not currently reflect the balance of the community. This is not so much an issue at the lower grades i.e. library assistants, and in inner-city areas, because the majority, or at least a high proportion, of people who live locally to the community library are black. The problem is that there is little entry into posts above library assistant level, because there is no movement of staff in these posts i.e. a lack of vacancies, and the number of posts has remained static for a number of years. Hence, for these black staff, opportunities for rewarding progress are limited, and senior management were said to be "very conscious" of the imbalance above library assistant level.

These observations were confirmed by a black library worker, who noted:

"In recent years we have had a lot of black and ethnic minority people in proportion to the number that we have released. For example, where we have 10 vacancies released, 6 or 7 of them have come from people from black and ethnic minority communities. So at the bottom-rung, the recruitment figures seem quite good, at the entry levels. But in terms of the management structure, it will be interesting to see how many people from black and ethnic minority groups in the library service are Principal Officer and above, very few, probably one or two."

It was stressed that this is not due to a lack of qualified black staff available to enter at higher levels of the staffing structure.

4.7 Quite apart from limited opportunities for black library workers, the current staffing structure was also described as having an impact on the kinds of services existing staff may provide for black communities. Due to various cuts in resources and restructuring of the service, managers have had to be shuffled around. In a flexible staffing structure, managers tended to end up working with communities in which they had at least a basic level of interest and understanding, and hence some prior commitment. In contrast, more rigid staffing systems over recent years has lead to the allocation of staff to communities, with less consideration of where their particular interests may lie, and this may in turn contribute partly to poor service provision.

4.8 Secondly, pay and conditions are often better outside the public library service.

4.9 The library's response has been to give secondment and development opportunities to staff, including black staff, as and when they arise. Opportunities may arise in other

departments of the organisation, however this strategy may create its own problems of staff retention. The senior manager noted that the provision of secondment opportunities, and even outreach activity by black staff was difficult to co-ordinate, as the library is very "tight" in terms of general staffing, for example it struggles to provide a librarian for each community library. Faced with these problems, even black staff cannot get released to work in the community, because this has to be balanced with the delivery of the core service.

4.10 The interviews indicated that there are no African-Caribbean staff on the management team of a major Central Library or its community libraries. Neither are they found as community librarians or service heads within the Central Library. Thus African-Caribbean staff are found mainly as library assistants or at supervisory level, typically a couple of grades above the basic.

4.11 This problem of representation is also acute for other languages like Arabic, where there is a lack of staff with the appropriate skills, as a black library worker noted:

"Communities which it is difficult to provide services for include the Bangladeshi and Arabic. To my knowledge we do not have a permanent person (more than a few hours a week) who is a Bangladeshi or Arabic speaker, out of approximately 600 staff. Another issue is the Pakistani community. We have a very large Pakistani community, but this is not sufficiently reflected in the library's staffing structure."

4.12 The black library worker pointed out that the extent to which highly visible roles for black staff does affect use of library services varies by type of customer. However senior management could do more in recognising these differences in the policies it introduces. Thus, it may depend on:

1. Location – in some community or local libraries it is important that existing customers, and potential customers and staff see the promotion of their language and culture, through role models in the case of the latter. This increases confidence in using the library, as well as the likelihood of black people selecting librarianship as a profession. In contrast, in the Central library, although it is important to have a visible representation from the black community among staff, previous research suggests that what users want is information, and the premium is placed more on the competency of staff, rather than their ethnic background.
2. Age-group – the comments above are applicable to teenagers, but for the very young, 5 – 10 year olds, it is very important to see "similar faces" within the library.

4.13 Generally, there seems to be the awareness, at least among the staff interviewed, of the great scope for organisational learning about issues relating to service provision for black communities. A perception emerging from the interviews is that engagement with these communities is often marginalised, when it should be a mainstream issue. Thus the problem of service development is mainly one of changing the organisational culture to recognise new priorities. From one perspective this seems obvious, as if a large proportion of the children in the catchment areas of all the libraries researched are from

black and ethnic minority backgrounds, they represent the future of the library service. Hence developing a customer-focused approach to those customers, who feel for whatever reason that they have insufficient access to the service, is of vital performance. However, from the interviews the organisational culture seems rather difficult as noted by a member of staff.

"Our priorities in the service take us away from concentrating on some of this work [developing relations with black communities]. It can be very slow, hard work, and you do not always get brilliant results. You get a lot of criticism. I do not think [that works] in the environment we are in at the moment. Our core thing is trying to promote ourselves, and say we are wonderful because we have got to protect our back. We have to say that we offer a brilliant service to the council, so that they keep funding us. I think that is in conflict we have."

4.14 This implies that frameworks for assessing the library's performance do not currently emphasise work with black communities sufficiently. This may in turn lead to a sense of frustration, as a staff member expressed below.

"Some of us have to work hard for a discussion of equality issues, and if you give up, that is institutionalised racism, because you haven't pressed [the point] home to the nth degree."

The black library worker contrasted the rate at which the library has been pro-active in its introduction of information technologies to the slower pace on issues relating to ethnic minorities, and concluded that it was often simply a matter of organisational priorities.

"We have had lots of initiatives, for example ICT, and it is amazing how the culture of the organisation has changed. How much we have had to deal with new technology. I wish some of that energy had gone into developing some of the services here."

The most powerful way of ensuring that frameworks for assessing performance are aligned with the commitment to social inclusion is to include appropriate performance indicators and targets in the local authority best value performance plan. The community make-up of local authorities in England and Wales vary enormously. To the extent that there will also be enormous variations in the experiences and needs of such local communities, this must be an important argument for including local performance indicators for services to Black, Asian, and ethnic minority people in the annual best value plan. This would, however, not be enough. It emerged in the course of this study that at the present time local library services do not necessarily have the requisite data capacity. Effective management of improvements in services Black, Asian, and other ethnic minority peoples must be based on accurate and timely data on who is using the various library services. However, it was evident that some library services could not currently do this and some would need to investigate the possibilities of developing current ICT resources to deliver data on which services are being accessed by Black, Asian, and ethnic minority communities.

4.15 Furthermore, there is perception that issues of racism may have been diluted, again as the black library worker notes.

"For a while we were not talking about racism, we were talking about social inclusion and making it part of a wider debate about everything. Sometimes I think some of these things have got diluted a little bit, because I think there is all this social inclusion with everything. I think it could be that for some people they think racism does not exist and is not within the library service."

4.16 Regarding the wider social role libraries could play in the delivery of services to the ethnic minority communities, most professional librarians were typically aware of developments in this area, but felt these issues were not given a high enough priority in their organisations as a whole. A professional librarian noted:

There are some examples of such activity in place, for example a Black Family Reading project that the library has been running in conjunction with the X, a key black organisation in the area.

Despite these examples, the interviews point to a need for organisational leadership to enable staff in the communities to link up with existing and potential users. Thus a professional librarian noted:

"The African-Caribbean community in X, as far as I am aware, is trying to do quite a lot of things to move young people on. Setting up Saturday schools for young black men because obviously there is a big concern, mentoring for young black men, careers conferences, things for parents. These are not things which [the library] links up with. That is not a local manager issue, it is an organisational issue, and again as an organisation, the priorities are elsewhere.

"What happens is that if I find out about something and try and share it informally, nothing ever happens. You are talking to people who are running all over the place. That is how it feels. You cannot grab anyone and say, that is my picture of it."

On the related issue of social exclusion, the black library worker noted that social exclusion is a topic often raised within the library service. In response to these concerns, the library has for example:

1. Been developing Homework Help Clubs, where children who have been excluded from school can begin to rebuild their links with education, without the stigma.
2. The library is also involved in a project with the youth service aimed at tackling issues of social exclusion.

However what seems to be lacking is the library's ability or willingness to work with organisations within the Black Community, which are also searching for solutions to issues of social exclusion, particularly of youth, such as those working towards higher

standards of achievement among African-Caribbean boys. The black library worker noted:

"The lead really has to come from management in terms of giving direction. If our organisation is liasing with another organisation, sometimes it does have to be at a management level to approve it. As individuals we can go and say that we are a service and we want to work with them, but we need the resources to do that. Unless I am empowered to say you can come in here to use this, or direct staff to do things it is difficult, not having the power or resources to do that."

A male African-Caribbean user of the library pointed to activity he undertakes himself, tutoring mainly young black children, some of whom have been excluded, in English and Mathematics. As part of this, the children are periodically brought into the library, and shown how to use the library i.e. find books, use the computers etc. The user noted:

"They have got some wonderful story books on the ground floor on CD-ROM. That is wonderful and a lot of black kids would not know about this unless I had brought them in. I just have not had the time [to raise these issues with the library]."

On whether he would be willing to see these activities developed into some sort of formal link the user noted:

"I just bring them in here and show them what to do. Nobody in the library knows my community activities. It is a point. I could say that these are the students that I tutor, and can we strike up a relationship where I can send these kids and you show them how to use the library without me coming too?"

These links may be useful in enabling staff to re-examine their pre-conceptions, particularly regarding the degree of confidence customers are capable of exhibiting:

"Since we set up X project, parents have been coming on a regular basis. In some cases I have been surprised at their lack of confidence. I have been annoyed with myself really. Over the years, my impression, and this is a very stereotyped view, this is the problem, was that black people were very confident and quite forthcoming. They would tell me where I was going wrong. I always found that very useful. Yet with these parents, even when we took them on a trip to London to a black library supplier, they were quite nervous about going. I was surprised."

Part 2 Conclusions and Proposals by Professor P Joyce

5 The Quality Leaders Project (QLP)

5.1 Introduction to the QLP

There are concerns about the lack of equal employment opportunities within public library services. Acknowledging that "institutional racism does exist in our profession," Bob McKee reported that out of over 20,000 personal members of the LA, only 1.2% - i.e. 286 individual members - were of African, Caribbean, or Asian background. Also worrying, he revealed that only 3 Black members earned over £27,000 (Khan, 2000).

There are also concerns about the match between public library services and the needs of black people. With the advent of best value reviews and performance plans in 2000, it is very likely that the poor value for the black community offered by public library services will rise in visibility and gain more management attention and commitment.

The Quality Leaders Project is an initiative that addresses both the problem of value for the black community and equal employment opportunities within the library services, and it does so within a best value framework. The key proposition of this initiative is that the meeting of unrecognised or under-recognised needs (new needs) requires new services, and new services require new skills and know-how (including new management know-how).

Is it time to challenge the assumptions we make about how to achieve equality in service delivery and the assumptions that are implicit in the strategies we use to bring about equal employment opportunities? Challenging existing assumptions now could produce better value for the public and break some of the current sense of stagnation in the movement towards equality of employment opportunities.

The main assumption of the QLP project is that development projects are critical for developing the new know-how that a new service requires for its design and delivery.

Five key principles inform the Quality Leaders Project:

a. The need for each service to tailor service improvements to exploit its distinctive resources as well as the public's requirements, rather than blind copying of other library services' initiatives.

b. The need for the top managers of the service to provide the quality of leadership skills and commitment to make the success of development projects more likely.

c. The need to expand the experience and managerial expertise of Black and Asian library employees through the activities of development projects.

d. The need for the top managers to win the support of all sections of the library staff, and not just the managers and professionals who have an existing commitment and sympathy to greater equality in services and employment.

e. The need for the learning and growth of capability developed during development projects to be recognised within the organisation and become the basis of increased responsibilities for Black and Asian managers and staff.

5.2 Design of the QLP

The Quality Leaders Project consists of three stages:

I.   Feasibility Study
II.   Development Project (s)
III.   Pilot New Service

The Quality Leaders Project

Stage 1: Feasibility Study
The feasibility study involves interviewing members of the black and Asian community, library professionals, and managers. The intended content of this research was described in section 1 of this report, and the findings were summarised in sections 2, 3, and 4.

Stage 2: Development Project (s)
This should not last more than six months. A part time project team for the development of a new service will be established and led by a Black member of staff with potential for development. The development team will develop the initial idea and make corrections to it on the basis of more thorough appraisal of the Black community's needs and meticulous planning of operational processes, resources, and implementation steps. The development team will also appraise and correct the local best value performance indicators and targets suggested by the feasibility study. Following on from this, the development team would need to confirm that the new service is the best value option by considering alternative ways of delivering the new services (procurement, partnership working) and by benchmarking the performance and cost parameters of the new service. This is essentially a cost-benefit exercise. The output of the development stage would be a comprehensive proposal for service development ready for submission through the relevant channels for authorisation.

Stage 3: Pilot new service
It is envisaged that a new service proposal might take at least two years to implement and would require changes to procedures, structures, and staffing in the library service. A manager for the new service would be required. The job description and person specification produced for such a role would define the essential know how or expertise required of the new manager.

The Quality Leaders Project will test the assumption that development projects involving Black staff will be more effective in developing distinctive and valuable sets of know how and expertise. These new services are less likely to need standardised management competencies (managing people, budgets, information, and services) that are in any case more easily provided through conventional training. But the capabilities developed through development projects are harder to acquire through traditional training formats and more valuable as a consequence.

In summary, the Quality Leaders Project is an expression of the idea of a 'learning council' and might offer much more than off the job training courses in management ever could to Black and Asian staff. And of course this is all within a project offering to deliver better value to the public.

6 Feasibility and Suitability of the QLP

6.1 The most important finding that emerged on the feasibility of the Quality Leaders Project was the relative absence of management objections to developing new services on the grounds of resource availability. This no doubt reflects the management perception that the new performance management systems currently being introduced throughout local government are challenging existing patterns of activities and the existing effectiveness in the use of resources. Consequently, developing services that offer more value to the black community is seen as possible in a highly fluid situation that has been created.

6.2 It must also be noted that there was some managerial openness to experimentation with services and stock procurement policies.

6.3 Critically there was some evidence that where libraries had succeeded in providing stocks of interest to black library users that the library (or rather a particular section of its services) had attracted higher levels of use by black people. Likewise special events for the black community were known to have worked in the past in terms of attracting large numbers into the library.

6.4 Paradoxically, a negative finding – that mechanisms for consulting and involving the black community were under-developed – also suggests that the Quality Leaders Project is feasible. It shows that there is an under-utilised approach to correlating services and activities in public service libraries with the needs of the black community.

6.5 Our conclusion is that, in terms of the next stages of the Quality Leaders Project, there is most scope for progress in relation to two of the problems for black users. These are the problems of better alignment of stocks of books, music, and videos with the needs of Black and Asian communities and increasing the number and quality of special events. These two problems indicate important areas for possible service developments. Both

problems need more elaboration and precision. Issues of customer care and availability may prove to have specific implications for service developments to Black and Asian communities, but it seems likely that improvements in services in these areas could benefit all sections of users.

6.6 While recognising the importance of training and employment problems, it is hypothesised here that service developments might provide the most effective set of conditions for real and sustainable progress on training and employment. In other words, training and employment options should be integrated within service developments for the Black and Asian communities.

6.7 To sum up, the idea of using the Quality Leaders Project looks feasible. There appears to be scope to better exploit library resources and tailor solutions to the present deficiencies in the value of services for local black communities. This is important in terms of achieving the goals of social inclusion in respect of library services. The QLP programme, if effectively implemented, will be more than a worthwhile endeavour to better meet needs of communities. The challenge of developing new services should help to develop black managers who can champion new services.

7 Proposals for Next Stages

7.1 The QLP now needs to move to the next two phases. Two challenging areas have been identified for development projects. It is critical, if momentum is to be maintained that top management commitment is translated into a process that provides for fast paced development and a strong evaluation framework to ensure lessons learnt in the development phase are recognised and disseminated.

7.2 In Stage 2, lasting no more than 6 months, the evaluation would focus on three topics:
- the effectiveness of the development project(s) in developing capability and expertise in the Quality Leader(s),
- the robustness and suitability of local best value performance indicators (BVPI), and
- the quality of the proposals and plans for service development.

7.3 Methods appropriate to these research topics would be used:
- critical incident interviews,
- behavioural assessment rating scales to be completed by Quality Leaders and others,
- 360-degree appraisal,
- interviews with "experts" from outside the council on their evaluation of the BVPIs,
- evaluation of the BVPIs against normative criteria (e.g. Audit Commission Guidelines)
- evaluation of service development plans using general criteria
- interviews with external "experts" to establish if they think the service development plan is a high quality one

7.4 The research would also develop a proforma for a comprehensive and high quality proposal and plan. This might include sections on identifying the alignment with council policies, strategic goals, priorities, etc; description of service; rationale in terms of needs of community; estimate of numbers of public likely to use/benefit from new service; costs/budget; staffing implications, etc. It would be developed following contact with a sample of councils to see what proformas they use.

7.5 In Stage 3, lasting approximately 2 years, the evaluation would focus on three topics:

- factors that are critical in the development of a successful service and a successful new manager
- how new service was being implemented
- how difficulties were handled by new manager to achieve target level of performance

7.6 The costing of the evaluation research for stages 2 and 3 will depend on how many local authority library services are involved. Ideally, the Quality Leaders Project would benefit from the involvement of between 4 and 12 local authorities. This would allow systematic cross-case comparisons to be made with respect to the development projects, local factors, and implementation factors.

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