**Further response from the Arts Council to:**

**William Sieghart and the Advisory Panel commissioned to produce a report on public libraries by the Department of Culture Media and Sport and the Department of Communities and Local Government.**

**April 2014**

1. **Context**

The Arts Council has been asked by William Sieghart to set out the benefits that could follow if its role in relation to libraries were to be further developed.

1. **How we got here**

Arts Council England (ACE) adopted the library development function for England in 2011. The idea of an agency to undertake this role was conceived in 1995 with the creation of the Library and Information Commission. It passed in 2000 to what became the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council until transferring to ACE.

Our own perspective is reflected in our response to *‘Envisioning the library of the future.’* We have integrated our development work with libraries into our goals and strategic plans, and have invested in libraries as described in our original submission of evidence.

1. **Challenges, expectations and potential**

In a tough financial environment, the public sector is adapting and the impact this is having on public libraries is frequently in the news. Solutions are most likely to emerge from a mix of local design and delivery of services that meet the needs of communities, and service developments that can be achieved most effectively on a national scale, and in clusters that create economies of scope and of scale.

Public libraries need stronger national leadership, of a kind that facilitates, prompts and enables, equipped with the means to make change happen. Defining expectations of an agency and those who deliver the service, and holding them to account are tasks that rest most appropriately with central and local Government. To meet these expectations, the development agency for libraries will require a strengthened mandate, resources to incentivise change, and a broader skill set.

1. **What would this look like?**
	1. **Mandate**

A stronger library development agency would be able to procure digital services for all libraries, broker national partnership arrangements where added value can be gained such as support for health and well-being and enterprise. It could also coordinate support for emerging community-led libraries not supported by local authorities. To succeed, increased expectations of leadership would be acknowledged by Government and partners who have an interest in how this will work. The current Post Envisioning Partnership has made a promising start and could provide the basis for continued engagement. This should be discussed with DCMS and other key stakeholders to secure a way forward that provides the best approach for driving library development. Activity related to statutory functions is best retained by the Secretary of State.

* 1. **Resources**

Stronger, more pro-active leadership of policy, partnerships, programme and product development would require a more potent engine room than currently exists.

As important in galvanising change would be the creation of a new ‘Renaissance for Libraries’ programme to incentivise the development of improved services for users, and more efficient models of management/governance/delivery. It would provide a vehicle for supporting initiatives that are most effectively resourced nationally. It is a model that we know works for museums and there is experience in managing such an approach. An indicative framework might look as follows:

1. A *Major Partners* funding programme to complement local authority funding of 10-15 clusters of library services that include major central libraries. Like *Major Partner Museums* (MPMs) they would enable those libraries to take on a leadership role across a cluster of other library services – providing workforce development, encouraging shared services, professional standards, and better networking. Clusters would be identified through application, possibly based around *Core Cities* and the *Enterprising Libraries* network – thus securing future of the latter. They would be our partners on the ground and play a key role in helping to deliver the strategic development programmes identified under ii) below. As with MPMs, we would welcome independent sector expertise in selecting the clusters.

**Indicative cost: £20m**

1. *Strategic development* funding programme for the sector as a whole – this would focus initially on the 4 development priorities set out in ‘*Envisioning.’* **Indicative cost £10m**
2. An *open fund* available for all libraries outside the Major Partner clusters to bid into to enable them to undertake particular programmes/initiatives – this could build on the Grants for the Arts fund for libraries, but could be applied to the full range of library service activity.

**Indicative cost £10m**

* 1. **Capacity**

The development agency model described above would embed expertise in the sector by working closely in partnership with the Major Partners to provide the extra skills and knowledge than are currently in place. These might include digital leadership, entrepreneurial approaches, and procurement. The agency would require additional capacity for the Renaissance for Libraries programme management, and strengthened local engagement to support services across the country, but the strategic leadership skills and experience required are in place.

**4.4 Costs**

Translating the ideas above into costs requires more development work but the £40m would benefit the sector directly, and would be supplemented by only a small amount to cover the costs of administering a programme of this scale, and deliver the kind of requirements shown.

**4.5 Benefits**

By working together, the development agency, national and major partners could:

* engage communities in the design and delivery of their local services
* focus programmes on priorities for people and places – a literate, reading nation; a creative nation; and hubs around which communities can grow
* incentivise service collaborations that are more efficient, effective and sustainable
* create the future digital public library
* re-imagine the next generation of public librarians
* support and sustain initiatives which emerge through the enterprise of others
* commission research that reveals library trends, demonstrates what works (or not), and which informs future development

With an enhanced mandate to act on behalf of the sector for the benefit of those who use and need libraries, the capacity to open up new ideas and drive forward programmes, and the capability to develop ideas and negotiate deals on behalf of the whole sector, the strengthened library development agency could deliver on these expectations and potential.

1. **Models elsewhere**

Other countries adopt a wide range of approaches to the oversight of library development without any single type offering a compelling transferrable model.

**Scotland**: Scottish Libraries and Information Council is an independent advisory body to the Scottish Government covering academic and special libraries, as well as public libraries

**Wales**: CyMAL is an agency within the Welsh Government reporting to the Minister of Culture with a responsibility for developing and supporting non-national museums, archives and libraries.

**Northern Ireland:** A single NI Library Authority sits within the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (not as part of local government)

**Ireland**: Local Government Management Agency (includes public libraries) is part of the Department of Environment, Communities + Local Government with both developmental and income generating activity

**Denmark:** Danish Agency for Culture appears similar to the England model but holds much wider functions: eg it directly funds larger central libraries and commissions a Danish Digital Library

**Sweden:** Swedish Arts Council holds the development function for public libraries but this, and any grant awards are limited in scope.

**Netherlands**: National Library has a loose coordinating role in a context where libraries are not a statutory function and innovation is locally driven

**USA**: the Federal Institute of Museum and Library Services leads national policy and development activity, and provides development funds for State Libraries.

**Germany, Australia + Canada**: public libraries are led at individual state level