



# ACCESS TO PUBLIC LIBRARIES FOR MARGINALISED GROUPS

Fitzpatrick Associates

# **Access to Public Libraries for Marginalised Groups**

Fitzpatrick Associates

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## Foreword

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As part of its work to support the development of solutions to tackle poverty and social exclusion, Combat Poverty has been assisting local authorities to develop anti-poverty/social inclusion strategies, and to focus on the poverty and social inclusion impact in all functional areas. The recognition that local authorities are key stakeholders in progressing local anti-poverty strategies was the basis for the establishment of the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network (LGAPLN) in 2000. The network was established in collaboration with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) in the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

The Library Service delivered by local authorities plays a key role in addressing social exclusion in terms of the provision of information and resources. Significant gaps can emerge between those who have access to information and education and those who do not. The library service is well placed to provide access to publications, the internet, and a wide range of activities for those most marginalised across urban and rural areas, at a cost appropriate to their means.

Staff from libraries in local authorities have made a significant contribution to the activities and meetings of the Learning Network since it was established. Through sharing experiences at Learning Network meetings, it became apparent that there were differences in approaches regarding access to the library service for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion. Consequently in 2003, Combat Poverty contracted Fitzpatrick Associates to research what strategies are in place to ensure access. This report now presents the findings of that research.

One key finding from the research was that while many successful initiatives had been undertaken in City/County libraries, with many libraries pro-active in encouraging access, the focus on social inclusion tended to depend on the commitment and capacity of individual staff rather than a consistent approach across the library service in all local authorities. Consequently, local authority library staff need support in terms of:

- Training and awareness regarding poverty and social inclusion issues
- Research skills

- Establishing links, and working on initiatives, in partnership with relevant organisations, particularly those representing people living in poverty
- Information and public awareness.
- Guidelines on best practice in engaging with marginalised groups.

The findings are of particular relevance to City and County Librarians; Directors of Service with a remit in Community and Enterprise, Arts, Culture and Libraries; Social Inclusion Units; the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network; An Chomhairle Leabharlanna and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The findings and recommendations of the report provide the basis for shaping a consistent approach to an accessible library service in all parts of the country. In order to ensure that people experiencing poverty and social exclusion have full access to the services provided by city and county libraries it is essential that the recommendations in this report are progressed by the relevant players as soon as possible.

# Executive Summary

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## Overview

Access to information is a key element in ensuring active citizenship and promoting social inclusion. Significant gaps can emerge between those who have access to information and education and those who do not. Local authority libraries, through their extensive local network of library branches, are uniquely placed to promote access to information and learning particularly for those who are marginalised and at risk of poverty. However, very often these groups have a negative perception of the library service and do not view it as relevant to their lives. They therefore need to be encouraged to use their local library service.

**The objectives of this study are as follows:**

- To ascertain whether County/City Council Libraries have developed strategies to ensure access to public libraries for a number of potentially marginalised groups: Travellers, residents of local authority housing estates, refugees and asylum seekers, people with disabilities, older people, lone parents and the homeless
- To determine the mechanisms used to facilitate access, assess how successful they have been, and identify those who have responded to them.

The methodological tools used to conduct this research were desk research, consultations and a survey of all County/City Council Librarians. In total, twenty-one County/City Council librarians returned the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 66 per cent.

## Local Authority Library Service

The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has overall responsibility for the County/City Council library service and is responsible for reviewing legislation in this area and formulating national policy. An Chomhairle Leabharlanna (The Library Council) is the national agency charged with advising the Minister on all library related issues and supporting the development of the public library service. Individual County/City Councils are responsible for the day-to-day management and control of the libraries in their local areas, ensuring compliance with national policy. There are 32 separate library services – four City Councils, 27 County Councils and one joint libraries committee (South and North

Tipperary). There are, in total, 338 County/City Council library branches in the country and 29 mobile libraries, staffed by approximately 1,300 personnel.

The standard services offered by County/City Council libraries include lending, reference material, PC use and internet access, exhibition space, photocopying facilities and a schools library service. In addition to these, some authorities have meeting space for local community activity, lectures and reader workshops, cultural and arts programmes, creative writing classes, ICT courses and a homebound service. An Chomhairle Leabharlanna's most recent data on local authority library charges (2001/2002) show that 21 of the 32 local authority libraries charge for membership, while nine charge for use of internet services.

## Key Findings

The research shows that there is significant variation in the level of commitment to ensuring access by marginalised groups to County/City Council libraries. Some councils have been very proactive in developing strategies while others have not. Also a significant number of strategies have been developed for some socio-economic groups and very few for others.

- Just over half of County/City Council libraries (11) that responded to the survey have strategies in place for refugees and asylum seekers, people with a disability and older people. Eight local authorities have strategies for Travellers and local authority housing estate residents while four have strategies for homeless people and lone parents. However, this information should be interpreted with care. In some cases where local authority libraries indicated they have developed strategies this means they have undertaken some initiatives to encourage access rather than developing an overall strategy *per se*.
- The majority of local authority libraries in this study have not conducted any analysis of these groups or consulted excluded groups with regard to their needs.
- Many County/City Council libraries have been active in undertaking individual initiatives to encourage access to services. Again, although the mechanisms used differ, most involve liaising with local representative organisations or other state agencies in identifying the needs of marginalised groups and encouraging them to use the service. Such agencies include, among others, VEC, Adult literacy, CIC, FÁS, Traveller organisations and local development agencies. Libraries also carry out initiatives with other

functional areas within the council, for example Arts, Heritage, Social Inclusion Units, Environment and Community and Enterprise.

- Local authority libraries feel they have been most successful to trying to encourage refugee and asylum seekers and older people to use their services. They have not been as successful in engaging with Travellers, homeless people and lone parents. Other local authorities are unsure whether they are successful or not as they have not undertaken research on the socio-economic groups using their services.
- Limited research has been undertaken to date on the proportion of the general public using the public library service, and more specifically on use of the library service by marginalised groups. In 2002 the first national Public Library Users Survey (PLUS) was co-ordinated by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna. This study identifies the employment status and age of its users but not other socio-economic characteristics, e.g. Traveller, asylum seekers and refugees. However, the *Branching Out* Steering Group is commissioning research on library use by the general public and the results should be available in early 2005.
- Lack of knowledge/understanding of marginalised groups and limited staff resources are the two major internal constraints to engaging these groups. Many library authorities are not familiar with the needs of such groups or how they can be accessed at local level. There are also restraints on the staff time that can be allocated to planning and undertaking initiatives and conducting research. Lack of training is also an issue for about half of the local authorities that responded to the survey. There are other wider social, financial and institutional and physical barriers. From a social perspective many groups have a negative perception of the library service and its perceived irrelevance to their lives. In addition poor literacy levels deter people from availing of the service.

## Conclusions

As was the case in England prior to the publication of its guidelines for local authority libraries, the approach to ensuring access by all to the local authority libraries in Ireland is rather *ad hoc*. Many successful initiatives are being undertaken in County/City Council libraries but the focus on social inclusion seems to depend on the resourcefulness and capacity of the library authority itself rather than any consistent approach across authorities. Local authority library staff are willing to embrace this issue but need support in terms of understanding the needs of these groups, conducting research in their local area, establishing links with the relevant organisations, training, sharing

information on successful initiatives and raising awareness of the services on offer. Local authority libraries can move this 'access for all' agenda forward with the assistance of Combat Poverty and the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the Social Inclusion Measures Group and other functional areas within the local authorities.

## Recommendations

The Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network (LGAPLN) is a demonstration project, the first phase of which will end in 2004. It therefore cannot be responsible for implementing all the recommendations. Consequently some recommendations should be acted on by other relevant players, with Combat Poverty's assistance if required.

- *Establish Network meetings.* A Network meeting should be dedicated to 'Social Inclusion in County/City Libraries'. All County/City Librarians should be encouraged to attend. Meetings topics could include a review of social inclusion in County/City Council libraries, identifying and discussing initiatives that have been both successful and unsuccessful in engaging marginalised groups, presenting an example of a UK Council library that has successfully adopted guidelines and identifying ways of overcoming barriers and challenges to ensure access by marginalised groups to the library service.
- *Develop guidelines for County/City libraries.* With the assistance of Combat Poverty, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, County/City librarians and other key stakeholders should develop guidelines for County/City Council libraries to assist them in ensuring that their services are accessible to all marginalised groups. This would result in a more standardised and consistent approach to social inclusion across County/City Council libraries.
- *Undertake training.* A social inclusion related training programme, targeted at library staff (staff in all branches), should be designed and rolled out. This training programme should include information on the needs and characteristics of marginalised groups. It could be provided within the local authority itself and/or in co-operation with external agencies, e.g. through the Public Library Staff Training and Development Programme delivered by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna.
- *Follow good practice examples.* As established through the research, there are examples of initiatives that have been particularly successful in

ensuring access by excluded groups to County/City Council libraries. The Network, through its publications such as the Network Exchange or the Learning Brief or through its meetings, could disseminate information on these initiatives. Alternatively, some other forum or channels could be used to disseminate this information, e.g. *The Library News* produced by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, and/or its website [www.library.ie](http://www.library.ie).

- *Undertake survey of attitudes among excluded groups.* Research should be undertaken on the attitudes of excluded groups to the County/City libraries. The survey could be used to determine people's perceptions and attitudes to the library and the perceived relevance of its services to their lives. It could also investigate the barriers and challenges faced by these groups in using libraries and how these may be overcome. Any research conducted should link in with relevant research being conducted by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna.
- *Promote better links within local authorities.* Network members need to ensure they are feeding information from the Network across the relevant functions in the County/City Council. For example, library service information disseminated through the Network must be brought to the attention of the County/City librarian. The Network could also be used to highlight the benefits of strong links within local authorities and the methods they can employ to ensure that the functions link together to combat social exclusion in their local area.
- *Identify local agencies/organisations working with marginalised groups.* Local authority librarians should, with the assistance of the office of Community and Enterprise, identify and network with the local representatives of the agencies/organisations working with marginalised groups. These agencies could assist librarians in identifying the needs of marginalised groups, as well as developing joint initiatives aimed at encouraging these groups to use the library services.

# Chapter 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 Introduction and Background

The report has been prepared as part of Fitzpatrick Associates' role as evaluators of Combat Poverty's Local Government Work Programme, including the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network (LGAPLN).

**The overall objectives of this study are:**

- To ascertain whether County/City Council Libraries have developed strategies to ensure access to public libraries for a number of potentially marginalised groups: Travellers, residents of local authority housing estates, refugees and asylum seekers, people with disabilities, older people, lone parents and the homeless
- To determine the mechanisms used to facilitate access, assess how successful they have been, and identify those who have responded to them.

**The study seeks to examine the following:**

- Any research on the profile of library users that has been undertaken
- The barriers and challenges faced by libraries in engaging these groups
- The mechanisms used by County/City Council libraries to encourage marginalised groups to use their services
- How local authority libraries link with other functions in the authorities as well as other relevant external organisations, e.g. CIC, VECs, Partnership Companies
- How access to IT for marginalised groups is facilitated
- Examples of best practice in UK and Europe in ensuring access to library services by marginalised groups.

## 1.2 Rationale

The Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network is one of the main components of the Combat Poverty Local Government Work Programme which aims to support and build the capacity of local authorities to address poverty and social exclusion within the context of local government reform.

Given the importance of access to information on rights and entitlements as well as information to prevent educational disadvantage, public libraries are well positioned to make a positive and significant contribution to those at risk of poverty. It is hoped that the findings from this research can be used by both local authority libraries and relevant organisations to address, and assist in the promotion of, social inclusion at local libraries.

Within the current policy context, one of the functions of the extensive public library service is to assist those who are excluded to benefit from and move with the information age by enhancing access to information using ICT, and promoting life-long learning through library collections and services. This can be assisted through promoting adult education, improving literacy skills and encouraging life-long learning. Very often those who are marginalised do not view the library service as relevant to their lives. They need to be encouraged to use this resource. However, as outlined in later sections, certain challenges must be overcome in order to achieve this. In its submission to the National Policy on Libraries and Information Services, the Combat Poverty Agency shows how information is critical in the promotion of active citizenship and social inclusion. The three key types of information that Combat Poverty refers to are as follows:

- Information on people's rights and entitlements with regard to local authorities, all other state institutions and EU bodies
- Information to enable people to participate more actively in the democratic process through critical assessment of these institutions in order to ensure that they are more responsive to the needs of the people
- Information to surmount educational disadvantage and obstacles to involvement in cultural or economic life.

Significant gaps can emerge between those who have access to these three information types and those who do not. Therefore, every effort must be made by local authority libraries to engage marginalised groups.

## 1.3 Method

**Three main research tools were used to conduct this research.**

- **Desk-based research.** Desk research was conducted to gain an understanding of the background and context of the libraries study. Various publications by the Department of the Environment, Heritage

and Local Government, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna<sup>1</sup> (see Annex 1 for list of members), the Information Society Commission, and Combat Poverty were reviewed, including the following:

- *Branching Out: A New Public Library Service*
- *A Review of Branching Out, Conference Report*
- *Irish Library News*
- *Building Capacity: Formulating the Staff Training and Development Agenda for Public Library Service*
- *Public Library User Survey 2002: A Summary Report*
- *A Space for All* (2002)
- *eGovernment* (2003)
- *eInclusion: Expanding the Information Society in Ireland* (2003)
- *Local Authorities and Social Inclusion, Conference Report and Country Report, Setting the Context*
- *Combat Poverty's Submission on Libraries and Information Services.* (1998)
- *UK guidelines for local authorities, Libraries for All: Social Inclusion in Public Libraries.*

The following websites were reviewed: [www.librarycouncil.ie](http://www.librarycouncil.ie) (An Comhairle Leabharlanna), individual County/City Council library websites, [www.cilip.org/uk](http://www.cilip.org/uk) (UK Community Services Group), and [www.bs.dk](http://www.bs.dk) (the Danish National Library Association).

- **Survey/consultations with County/City librarians.** A questionnaire (see Annex 2) was emailed to each County/City Council librarian. In order to gather more comprehensive information than the questionnaire allowed and to follow up on some of the issues relating to the development of strategies and barriers/challenges, some 20 per cent of local authorities were consulted. Phone calls were also made to all local authorities that did not return the questionnaire. In total, 21 County/City Council librarians (66 per cent of all surveyed) returned the questionnaire.
- **Other consultations.** Consultations were held with An Chomhairle Leabharlanna,, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and LGAPLN Steering Group members involved in the library service.

## 1.4 Report Structure

This chapter outlines the background and general context of the study. It summarises the Terms of Reference requirements and the method employed to address these.

*Chapter 2* examines the role of libraries in promoting social inclusion. It provides an overview of the local authority library service in Ireland in terms of its structure, expenditure and current policy. The final two sections in the chapter summarise national and international research on local authority libraries.

*Chapter 3* presents the findings from the survey of local authority librarians and of the consultations. Issues covered include existence of strategies to ensure access to library services, access to IT facilities, links with other agencies and other functional areas within the council, mechanisms used to encourage access, and the barriers and challenges faced by local authorities in ensuring access to services by all.

The study conclusions are presented in *Chapter 4*.

# Chapter 2 Overview of County/City Council Library Service

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## 2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a synopsis of the County/City Council library service in Ireland. Section 2.2 includes an overview of the administrative structures of the County/City Council library service, the services generally provided by local authority libraries, current public library policy and expenditure by local authorities on library services. Section 2.3 describes the national initiatives undertaken by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna and the Equality Authority to promote social inclusion in local authority libraries. Section 2.4 summarises the existing research on who uses local authority library services, in an attempt to build a profile of library users. Finally Section 2.5 briefly describes how social inclusion in local authorities is promoted in the UK.

## 2.2 Overview of the County/City Council Library Service

### 2.2.1 Structure of the County/City Council Library Service

The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has overall responsibility for the County/City Council library service and is responsible for reviewing legislation in this area and for formulating national policy. The library section within the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government assists the Minister by monitoring the implementation of policy and administering funding to local authorities.

An Chomhairle Leabharlanna is the national agency charged with advising the Minister on all library related issues, supporting the development of the public libraries service and promoting co-operation in the Irish libraries and information services sector. The specific functions of An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, as set out by the Local Government Act 2001, include the following:

- The provision of advice, assistance and services to library authorities in relation to the public library service

- the making of such recommendations to and the provision of such services for the Minister in relation to the public library service as the Minister may request or as the council sees fit
- Action to promote and facilitate library co-operation
- The maintenance and operation of the central library established under section 2 of the Act of 1947.

There are 32 separate library services: four are run by City Councils, 27 by County Councils and one is a joint libraries committee (South and North Tipperary). The County/City Councils are responsible for the day-to-day management and control of the libraries in their local areas, ensuring compliance with national policy. There are 344 County/City Council library branches in the country and 30 mobile libraries. Approximately 1,600 staff are employed in County/City Council libraries throughout the country.

### **2.2.2 County/City Council Library Services and Charges**

The standard services offered by County/City Council libraries include lending, reference material, PC use and internet access, exhibition space, photocopying facilities and a schools library service. In addition to these, some authorities provide meeting space for local community activity, lectures and reader workshops, cultural and arts programmes, creative writing classes, ICT courses and a homebound service.

An Chomhairle Leabharlanna's most recent data on local authority library charges (2001/2002) show that 21 of the 32 local authority libraries charge for membership. The amount charged for membership varies from about €3 to €12.50, although, as shown in Table 2.1, some reduce or waive charges for older and unemployed persons. Twenty-three authority libraries offer free internet access, while a further three offer a free service to members. The remainder of the local authorities (six) charge for this service. Each individual local authority can decide whether or not it charges for library services.

**Table 2.1: County/City Library charges, 2001/2002**

<b>Authority</b>	<b>Membership/Borrowers (Adults)</b>	<b>Internet</b>
Carlow	€6.35	Free
Cavan	Free	Free
Clare	€4.60	Free
Cork	€2.60	Must be a registered member
Donegal	Free	Free
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown	Free	Free
Fingal	Free	Free
Galway	€5	Internet use free for library members
Kerry	€12.00	Free
Kildare	€6.00	€1.00 per session
Kilkenny	€15.00	€1.25 per half hour, €3.00 for non-members
Laois	€10.00	€3.50 per hour, €2.00 per hour
Leitrim	€0.25 p.i.	Free
Limerick	Free	Free
Longford	€2.50	Free
Louth	€6.35	Free
Mayo	€3.00	Free
Meath	Free	Free
Monaghan	€3.00	Free
Offaly	€10.00	€4.00 per hour
Roscommon	€3.80	Free
Sligo	Free	Free
South Dublin	Free	Free
Tipperary JLC	€5.30	Free
Waterford	€7.90	Free
Westmeath	€6.35	€1.25
Wexford	Free	Free
Wicklow	Free	Free to library members
<b>City Councils</b>		
Cork	€12.50	€2.50
Dublin	Free	Free
Limerick	€10.00	Free
Waterford	€3.30	Free

*Note: Reduction for unemployed and older persons in Westmeath, Offaly, Louth, Kilkenny, Kildare, Kerry and Galway*  
*Source: An Chomhairle Leabharlanna 2001/2002*

### 2.2.3 *Branching Out: A New Public Library Service*<sup>2</sup>

In 1997 the then Minister for the Environment and Local Government established a project team comprised of representatives of the library service in Ireland to review library policy. The project team's findings were published in *Branching Out: A New Public Library Service*. The Report includes a detailed analysis of the existing library service, a vision of the library service of the future and recommendations as to how change in the library service may be achieved. Some recommendations from the Report that are particularly pertinent to this study are listed in Annex 3. For example the project team recommends: '... each library authority should develop and implement a strategy to improve access to the library for everybody. The strategy should seek to overcome physical barriers to library use, social barriers to library use and financial barriers to library use.'<sup>2</sup>

A Steering Group chaired by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is responsible for monitoring the implementation of *Branching Out*. In 2002 An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, on behalf of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, organised The Branching Out Review Conference to assess the progress of the programme at this mid-way stage. It was attended by County/City Librarians, Directors of Services and representatives from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and An Chomhairle Leabharlanna. The attendees discussed progress and ways forward under four headings:

- A better service in public libraries
- The human resource in public libraries
- Library infrastructure: Buildings and ICT
- Library resources and co-operation.

The delegates felt that, in order to broaden the range of library users, priorities needed to be set in terms of facilities, equipment, marketing and targeting. They recommended that library authorities should draw up community profiles as a first step in tackling social inclusion. Delegates also felt that the role of libraries as a key local government resource needs to be exploited and that a survey of non-users' views and requirements needs to be undertaken.

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<sup>2</sup> *Branching Out: A New Public Library Service*, Department of the Environment and Local Government (1998)

## 2.2.4 Expenditure on the Local Authority Library Service

The total local authority library expenditure in Ireland in 2003 is approximately €81.2 million, an increase of around 72 per cent since 1998 (publication year of *Branching Out*). Overall, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna feels that the increases in expenditure on the library service are generally in line with the recommendations made in *Branching Out*, the eight-year programme initiated by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government.

As shown in Table 2.2, the 2003 percentage increase (7.8 per cent) in total local authority expenditure and expenditure on libraries is lower than that of the previous three years (16.5, 15.6, 10.3 per cent). However, the 2003 percentage spend on libraries as a percentage of the total local authority spend, at approximately 2.5 per cent, is consistent with previous years. This figure varies between authorities. Comparing 2002 and 2003, nine authorities have increased library allocations; six remain the same, while seventeen have reduced the libraries' share of the overall local authority budget.

<b>Table 2.2: Change in expenditure on libraries as a percentage of total local authority expenditure</b>				
<b>Year</b>	<b>Expenditure on libraries (€)</b>	<b>Percentage increase on previous year</b>	<b>Total local authority expenditure (€)</b>	<b>Spend on libraries as a percentage of total local authority budget</b>
2003	81,232,793	7.8	3,235,025,490	2.5
2002	75,341,144	16.5	2,914,479,095	2.6
2001	64,682,920	15.6	2,589,588,233	2.5
2000	55,963,552	10.3	2,199,006,227	2.5
1999	50,745,619	7.6	1,968,844,311	2.6
1998	47,154,513	7.2	1,760,493,900	2.7

*Source: Public library authorities annual estimates of expenditure, 2003, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna*

The variation between local authorities in terms of financial commitments and allocations of library budgets is also evident in the stock figures (i.e. figures relating to books, other materials) per head of population. The *Branching Out* Report recommends a stock target figure of €3.17 per head of resident population. To date, three local authority areas have reached, or exceeded, this target, with a further three spending around €3.00. Six local authorities spend less than €2.00 per head of population. Also the 2003

average expenditure per head of population is €20.74 (based on the 2002 Census), compared to €13.00 in 1998. There are again, however, significant variations in the per capita expenditure across local authorities and between County and City Councils, with generally higher expenditure in City Council (see Annex 4). For example, the total County Council expenditure per capita is €18.27 compared to a total City Council expenditure of €31.73.

An Chomhairle Leabharlanna acknowledges that in the last number of years there have been many challenges within the library service in terms of increased commitments in the context of the Information Society and ensuring a more socially inclusive service. The organisation feels that local authority libraries have responded well to the challenges, but it notes that the improvements in services and infrastructure must be matched with a higher level of commitment to the stock budget.

## 2.3 National Social Inclusion Initiatives in Libraries

In recent years, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, in conjunction with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, has played an active role in promoting greater access to local authority library services. They have been involved in a number of initiatives aimed at ensuring increased access to library services by people with disabilities, isolated rural dwellers, and the general public. In 2002, at the conference reviewing *Branching Out*, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna launched a booklet entitled *A Space for All*. This booklet highlights how the library can be used by all to source information, access the internet and email, and learn about other cultures. It also emphasises the specific benefits libraries have to offer to children and young people.

More recently An Chomhairle Leabharlanna and The Equality Authority jointly launched *Library Access*, a publication that examines how services within the library are best delivered to include people with disabilities and it provides guidance on how to make reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities. *Library Access* promotes a systematic method of developing the library services to accommodate people with a disability. In addition to the booklet, the initiative involves developing and piloting a training programme with staff in four library authorities, namely Cavan County Council, Dublin City Council, Kildare County Council and Mayo County Council.

An Chomhairle Leabharlanna is also involved in a pilot research project, Taobh Tíre, in Donegal County Council. The aim of this project is to improve services to isolated rural communities. So far the project has involved an extensive research phase during which target areas and potential models were identified. A combination of ICT, inter-agency partnership and community partnership will be used to implement the project. For example, activities to date include the ordering of books on-line which are then delivered to the nearest collection point for residents in remote areas, collection/delivery service to housebound readers using the community transport scheme (Rural Transport Initiative) and co-ordinating services with agencies already operating in isolated areas (such as Fanad and Rosguill) where there is an exceptionally high proportion of older people. It is hoped that, if successful, this initiative will be mainstreamed in other local authorities.

## **2.4 The Use of Local Authority Libraries**

### **2.4.1 Overview**

The aim of this section is to examine existing research to determine who is using the local authority library service. Overall there is limited information available on the proportion of the general population using the library services and on the characteristics of library users, e.g. social class, income etc. Section 2.4.2 summarises the available data on frequency of public library usage by age and socio-economic group, drawing on an Irish Marketing Survey Omnibus Survey (1997) and a report prepared by Fitzpatrick Associates (2003). The available data show low usage of the library service generally but even more so among people on low incomes. Section 2.4.2 presents data from the 2002 national Public Library User Survey (PLUS), undertaken by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna and local authority library staff. PLUS provides some interesting results on employment status of library users but it does not gather data on users from many of the groups under review in this study.

### **2.4.2 Use of Local Authority Libraries**

In 1997 as background research for the *Joining Forces*<sup>3</sup> report, Irish Marketing Survey (IMS) was commissioned to gather the data by including specific questions in one of their omnibus surveys. The results show that approximately 75 per cent in the DE category (working class and families on very low incomes) never use the library, compared to 54 per cent in the AB category (upper middle and middle class). Farmers (category F) are another group with low usage, 80 per cent stating they never make use of the

library service. Indeed, averaging across all socio-economic groups, a relatively low percentage (24 per cent) of the public use the library service monthly or more often.

<b>Table 2.3: Frequency of public library usage by socio-economic group (AVG)</b>						
<b>Frequency</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>C1</b>	<b>ABC1</b>	<b>C2</b>	<b>DE</b>	<b>F</b>
Monthly or more often	20%	36%	34%	21%	19%	14%
Less than monthly	17%	7%	10%	10%	5%	6%
Never	54%	57%	56%	69%	75%	80%

*Note: A=Upper Middle Class, B=Middle Class, C1=Lower Middle Class, C2=Skilled Working Class, D=Other Working Class, E=Lowest Level of Subsistence, F=Farmers*

*Source: Irish Marketing Survey Omnibus Survey, 1997*

Table 2.4 shows the frequency of public library usage by age. The most frequent users of the library are those in the 15-24 age bracket, 32 per cent of whom use the library monthly or more often. This could be due to the fact that people in this age bracket are more likely to be studying either at school or university. Those aged 35-49 years are second most frequent users of the library service, with just over one quarter using the library monthly or more often. People in this age category (35-49 years) may be bringing children to use the library service. Only 19 per cent of those over 65 use the library on a monthly or more regular basis.

<b>Table 2.4: Frequency of public library usage by age</b>					
	<b>15-24 yrs</b>	<b>25-34 yrs</b>	<b>35-49 yrs</b>	<b>50-64 yrs</b>	<b>65+</b>
Monthly or more often	32%	21%	26%	18%	19%
Less often than monthly	7%	9%	9%	9%	5%
Never	61%	70%	65%	73%	77%

*Source: Irish Marketing Survey Omnibus Survey, 1997*

In response to feedback from the conference in 2002 and recognition of the need for research on non-users, the Branching Out Steering Group has commissioned research on public library usage. The results from this research should be available in early 2005.

Fitzpatrick Associates recently undertook a study for the Department of Communication, Marine and Natural Resources to establish the need for a new locally based network of public information services centres. The study involved a detailed analysis of local public information service supply and demand in three rural sub-county areas. A detailed questionnaire was sent to a random sample of 1,000 adult residents in each of the three study areas and an average response rate of 27 per cent was achieved. Respondents were asked to indicate the local public offices they personally visit and how often they do so. As shown in Table 2.5, after the post office, the library is the most frequently visited office in these rural case study areas, with around one-third of respondents visiting the office at least once a month. The percentage (37 per cent) using the library service on a monthly basis in these case study areas is significantly higher than the average percentage (24 per cent) found to use the library service in the IMS survey. This would indicate that libraries are a relatively important and frequently used resource in these rural areas.

**Table 2.5: Local offices visited at least once a month**

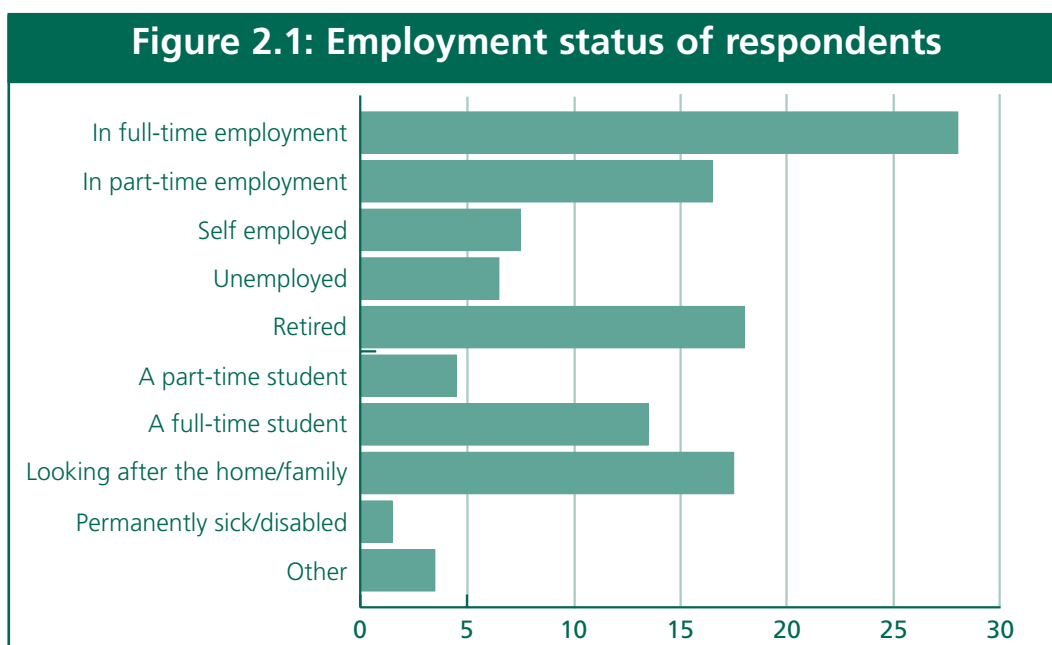
Office	% visiting at least once a month			
	Westport RD	Birr RD	Cahirciveen RD	Avg of three areas
FÁS	4.5	5	10	6.5
Public Representative	6.8	1.6	7.5	5.3
Post Office	93.2	94.6	93.4	93.7
Citizens Information Centre	3.6	3.5	6.6	4.6
County Council Office	6.3	5.4	13.3	8.3
Social Welfare Office	8.6	3.5	11.2	7.8
Library	35.7	35.3	39.8	36.9
Local Health Centre	27.6	25.2	19.9	24.2
Garda Station	5.9	3.9	2.5	4.1

*Source: Fitzpatrick Associates, 2003*

Respondents were also asked which offices they contact for public service information. Although the library is the second most frequently visited office on a monthly basis, it seems rural residents do not view the library as a resource for public service information. Instead they source information from the post office, relevant service provider, or public representatives.

### 2.4.3 Profile of Local Authority Library Users

Until recently little was known systematically of the characteristics of local authority library users. In an effort to fill this information gap, in 2002 An Chomhairle Leabharlanna co-ordinated the first national Public Library User Survey (PLUS) in co-operation with the local authority libraries. Both phases of work were undertaken by local authority library staff. The first stage involved counting visitors to all public library service points over a one-week period, while the second involved distributing questionnaires to a proportion of the total number of visitors. Some 28 of the 32 local authorities participated in the survey and a high response rate was achieved in most local authorities.



Source: *Public Libraries User Survey, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna 2002*

Figure 2.1 shows the employment status of library users. Approximately 50 per cent are in employment (part-time, full-time or self-employed), a further 18 per cent are retired and 17 per cent are looking after the home/family. About 1 per cent of users are permanently sick/disabled and 6 per cent are unemployed. With the exception of the percentage retired, these figures are more or less akin to the national profile. There is, however, no information on users from many of the groups under review in this study, e.g. lone parents, Travellers, refugees and asylum seekers, migrant workers and homeless people. Wexford County Library<sup>4</sup> undertook some analysis of PC users in its libraries and found that 40 per cent of those using this service are non-Irish, perhaps confirming the view held by most

<sup>4</sup> Submission to Fitzpatrick Associates, Wexford County Council Library, 2003

libraries on the high percentage of non-nationals using this service. They also found that 44 per cent of PC users are unemployed. This figure is significantly higher than the unemployment figure from the PLUS survey. However, unemployed users and non-Irish users are not mutually exclusive and it may be the case that many of the unemployed are refugees or asylum seekers.

## 2.5 International Practice

### 2.5.1 UK Library Policy on Social Inclusion

Ireland can learn from the experience of library councils in other countries in terms of engaging marginalised groups and developing strategies to ensure access to the library service. In 1999 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in England published *Libraries for All: Social Inclusion in Public Libraries*. The document provides broad guidelines for local authorities to ensure that all groups in the community have equal access to libraries. While acknowledging that many library authorities had already taken steps to ensure their services reach the socially excluded, it was felt the response had to a certain extent been 'piecemeal'. The report makes recommendations to public libraries to combat social inclusion (Table 2.6).

The report also outlines a plan that library authorities should adopt in implementing a social inclusion strategy. This involves conducting research to identify the socially excluded groups and their geographical location, consulting groups to determine their needs, reviewing current procedures and practice in the library, developing a strategy and prioritising resources accordingly. Examples of authorities that have adopted the guidelines in developing strategies include Gloucestershire County Library Service and Southwark Council. Section 2.5.2 provides information on Southwark Council's Social Inclusion Strategy.

Following on from this the same department published *Framework for the Future* in 2003. It is a statement of how public libraries in England should serve communities in this century and the services they should be offering their communities in ten years' time. One of the objectives of *Framework for the Future* is that every library achieves this potential for the benefit of the community. Central themes include community and civic values, books, reading and learning, especially for the under 5s, and digital citizenship.

**Table 2.6: Recommendations to public library authorities to help combat social exclusion**

- Social inclusion should be mainstreamed as a policy priority within all library and information services.
- Library authorities should consider what specific services need to be tailored to meet the needs of minority groups and communities.
- Library authorities should consult and involve socially excluded groups in order to ascertain their needs and aspirations.
- Libraries should be located where there is a demand, but should build upon existing facilities and services wherever possible.
- Opening hours should be more flexible and tailored to reflect the needs and interests of the community.
- Library and information services should develop their role as community resource centres, providing access to communication as well as information.
- Library authorities should consider the possibilities of co-locating their facilities with other services provided by the local authority.
- Libraries should be the local learning place and champion of the independent learner.
- Libraries should be a major vehicle for providing affordable (or preferably free) access to ICT at local level.
- Library and information services should form partnerships with other learning organisations.
- Library authorities should consider whether some services aimed at socially excluded people might be more effectively delivered on a regional basis.

*Source: Libraries for All: Social Inclusion in Public Libraries Report, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 1999*

### **2.5.2 Southwark Council – Library Policy in Practice**

Social inclusion is a key priority in Southwark Library and Information Services and this is reflected in its Social Inclusion Strategy. The Strategy brings together strands of existing good practice as well as identified goals and objectives and a detailed action plan for staff and the local community. The concise 20-page document firstly details Southwark libraries’

understanding of social inclusion and of the factors leading to exclusion. Using existing data, the library service identifies its priority groups as early years, youth, basic skills, unemployed people, people with disabilities, Bangladeshi community, Black African community, Chinese community, Travellers, asylum seekers, older people, children in care and people with dyslexia. The Strategy also records the work already underway by identifying current provision to meet the needs of socially excluded groups. The second part of the Strategy is a detailed action plan for 2003-2006. There are sixteen themes in total. Examples of themes include consultation and involvement, research, staff training and skills and targeted services aimed at specific groups and needs. The objectives, timescale, resources, lead and actions are recorded for each theme. The strategy applies to all of the library branches within Southwark Council.

The Peckham library is one example in Southwark that embraces the idea of a 'library for all'. Peckham library building was completed in late 1999 as part of a collaborative programme for regeneration and community growth for the local area. With this in mind, the architects responsible for the new building consulted extensively with the local community to determine the nature of the building local residents wanted. The completed building won the building of the year Stirling Prize 2000. In developing the new library the aim was to reach out to the local community, encourage access to knowledge and embrace the diverse local population. The most distinctive physical features of the library are the three wood pods which house the children's library, the Afro-Caribbean literature centre and a meeting space. The library also has full disability access. Other initiatives to encourage use of the library include baby and toddler sessions, teenage reading groups, family reading groups and homework help clubs. Overall, Peckham in Southwark is an interesting example as it firstly shows the benefits of engaging the local community from the initial stages of development and secondly shows how a Social Inclusion Strategy assists in driving this agenda forward.

## Chapter 3 Social Inclusion Actions in County/City Council Libraries

### 3.1 Introduction

This analysis is based on responses from 21 County/City Council librarians who cover 203 library branches and 11 mobile libraries. This equals half of all the County/City council libraries in the country. The questionnaire responses are representative of the local authority library service as a whole as there is a good regional spread, with responses from both City and Council librarians giving a good mix of rural and urban counties. A list of the librarians who responded to the questionnaire is listed in Annex 5.

### 3.2 Strategies on 'Access to Libraries'

County/City librarians were asked if they have strategies in place to ensure access to public libraries by marginalised groups. Therefore the results in this section are based on respondents' perceptions as to whether there is a strategy in place, rather than objective evidence. As shown in Table 3.1, 11 of the 21 respondents indicated that they have strategies in place for refugees and asylum seekers, people with disabilities and older people, while four have strategies for homeless people and lone parents. Meanwhile, eight have strategies for Travellers and local authority housing estate residents.

**Table 3.1: Strategy in place to ensure access to public libraries by groups**

Target Group	Strategy to Ensure Access		
	Yes	No	No Response
Travellers	8	11	2
Local authority housing estate residents	8	10	3
Refugee and Asylum seekers	11	7	2
People with a disability	11	7	2
Older people	11	7	2
Homeless people	4	14	3
Lone parents	4	14	3

Although a number local authority librarians indicated that strategies are in place, in some instances this should be interpreted with caution. It may mean that initiatives have been undertaken to encourage these groups to use the library service, rather than a separate strategy *per se*. For example, the library development plan for an individual authority may outline that authority's commitment to social inclusion and the broad actions needed to address this issue. In other cases a local authority library may not have an overall strategy in place but it may have some mechanisms in place to encourage access by certain groups.

Table 3.2 shows how successful local authority librarians feel they have been in encouraging these groups to use their services. Twelve local authority librarians feel they have been successful or quite successful with refugees and asylum seekers, while 11 feel they have been successful in the case of older people. Overall County/City librarians feel they have not been as successful in attracting Travellers, homeless people and lone parents. As shown in Table 3.2, 11 are unsure how successful they have been in encouraging homeless people to use their services, eight in the case of lone parents and seven in relation to local authority housing estate residents. Many of the librarians are unsure as they have not conducted research to determine library user characteristics (using these categorisations).

Reasons for the variation in success rates with marginalised groups include difficulty engaging some groups that are not immediately identifiable and the higher level of resources required to determine the needs of certain groups and to encourage them to use the services. Also library staff are not as familiar with the needs of some marginalised groups, e.g. Travellers, homeless people or lone parents as they are with others, e.g. older people. Many marginalised groups perceive the library service as being irrelevant to their lives. Therefore it is hard for library staff to engage these groups. To some extent, there is also an urban/rural issue. In rural areas, marginalised groups are dispersed throughout the county and are more difficult to identify and target.

**Table 3.2: Success in ensuring access to public library service by group**

Target group	Number successful /quite successful	Not really successful/ not successful at all	Don't know/ unsure	No response
Travellers	2	6	5	8
Local authority housing estate residents	6	3	7	5
Refugee and Asylum seekers	12	2	2	5
People with a disability	8	6	5	2
Older people	11	2	3	5
Homeless	2	3	11	5
Lone parents	4	3	8	6

Some local authority libraries have undertaken an array of initiatives in an effort to engage these groups while there is little activity in other authorities in this regard. Details of the mechanisms used by authority libraries are presented in Section 3.5.

### 3.3 Access to Information and Information Technology

#### 3.3.1 Access to Information

Of those who responded to the survey, all but one local authority provides some level of information on citizens' rights and entitlements. The information available varies between local authority libraries but includes national and local information on consumer affairs, information on social welfare and tax entitlements, the register of electors and government publications and voluntary bodies. This information is accessible through leaflets and booklets, information display boards, the promotion of specific websites and trained staff. A few local authority libraries prefer to refer queries on citizens' rights and entitlements to the local Citizens Information Centre (CIC) and sector-specific queries to the relevant agency. As reflected in the Fitzpatrick Associates study (Table 2.5), in rural areas library users do not necessarily view the libraries as a source of information.

### **3.3.2 Access to Information Technology**

Internet access and email is available in most local authority library branches. In 13 of the 21 local authority libraries internet access is assisted. In four library authorities access is unassisted while the remainder is a combination of both assisted and unassisted. Some libraries offer short courses in computers and web access. Most librarians indicated that there is a high level of internet usage by refugees and asylum seekers. Wexford library authority undertook research on ICT users in its library and it was found that 40 per cent of its PC users are non-Irish.<sup>5</sup>

## **3.4 Links with Local Authority Functions and External Agencies**

### **3.4.1 Local Authorities**

Sixteen of the 21 library authorities indicated that they liaise with at least one other functional area within the authority. The functional areas mentioned are Arts, Heritage, Social Inclusion Units, Environment and Community and Enterprise. The Library service tends to undertake joint projects with Arts, Heritage and Environment. The relatively newer functional areas of Social Inclusion Units and Community and Enterprise play a more supportive role in terms of training, information and raising awareness of the need to adopt socially inclusive policies and practices.

### **3.4.2 External Agencies**

The VEC is the most frequently mentioned external agency with which library authorities consult. Fifteen local authorities specifically mention the VEC as an organisation with which they regularly collaborate. Joint initiatives tend to focus on adult education and literacy and ICT development. Of those who responded to the survey, about six library authorities appear to have good links with a broad range of organisations in their areas. Organisations specifically mentioned include CIC, FÁS, Travellers' groups, local development agencies (LEADER Groups and Partnerships), National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and Age Action. Some library authorities expressed difficulty in identifying the relevant local organisations with whom they should be liaising to ensure access by certain groups to their services.

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*5 Submission to Fitzpatrick Associates, Wexford County Council Library, 2003*

## 3.5 Mechanisms Used to Encourage Access

As mentioned, the emphasis on social inclusion varies considerably across local authorities. While public libraries policy has always ensured that the library is a 'service for all', many local authority libraries now realise that a pro-active approach is needed to engage marginalised groups.

### 3.5.1 Older People

Libraries have generally undertaken more initiatives targeted at older people than any other group. It is probably due to the fact that library staff are more familiar with their needs and that as a group older people are easier to access through long-established organisations. Almost all local authority libraries are involved in at least one initiative aimed at encouraging older people to use the library service. Such activities include local history workshops, reader evenings, table quizzes, mobile stops to daycare centres and hospitals, and ICT development and internet courses. About 12 local authority libraries seem to have quite good links with organisations representing older people while the remainder have not indicated whether there are links or not.

#### Initiatives targeted at older people

- To celebrate the annual Bealtaine Festival, Mayo County Library organised 'Introduction to Computers' courses in a number of libraries. Courses are aimed at Active Age groups and senior citizens. The courses give participants the necessary time and space to become familiar with computers and help break down people's fear of computers. It enables active age communities to play a dynamic part in the active revolution.
- 'Reading down the Ages' in Wexford local authority is an active reading, research project for older adults, many of whom may have poor literacy skills. Starting with people's school-day experiences, the group also discuss contemporary literature and music. A local writer working with the library and health care services facilitates this process. Six groups have been established and each group meets every week or fortnight. At the thematic meetings, the participants read aloud and discuss literature in the context of their own experiences and current affairs. The project is part-funded by the County Wexford VEC.

### 3.5.2 Travellers

About five local authorities provided information on mechanisms used to encourage Travellers to use library services. These include provision of exhibition space for local Traveller workshops, library tours for Traveller groups, class visits and employing Travellers in the library on work experience which encourages other Travellers to use the service. These initiatives were established by liaising with Traveller representative organisations or Traveller support workers in the Department of Education and Science (DES).

#### Initiatives targeted at Travellers

- In Louth, Mayo and Kildare County Council, Travellers have been employed in the library either on job initiative schemes or as part of a summer project. While very beneficial for the Traveller employed, it also encouraged use of the library by other Travellers, particularly pre-school groups and adult Travellers working in pre-schools.

### 3.5.3 Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Most library authorities feel refugees and asylum seekers are frequent users of the library internet and email service. Information on library services seems to have filtered quite effectively through refugee and asylum seeking communities. Initiatives targeted at these groups include visits to refugee centres to explain the service available in order to encourage use of the library and to get suggestions for new collections; promotion of literacy, ICT and English classes through representative organisations and community groups; design and production of multicultural library posters and brochures; and multi-cultural days promoting alternative cultures and traditions.

#### Initiatives targeted at refugees and asylum seekers

- Meath County Library, in conjunction with the CIC and VEC, undertook the 'Supporting a Changing Community' initiative. The purpose of this initiative was to celebrate world cultures. The project built on the GAA culture in Meath. People from all different nationalities wore Meath jerseys and the 'team' was photographed. The photograph of the team was subsequently used on postcards and bookmarks on the back of which the services of the three agencies were advertised.

- A course certification programme is in place in Dublin city's ILAC Centre. The programme recognises hours of studious application to the various courses provided. To date, the 1,412 students are drawn from 84 countries of origin.

### 3.5.4 People with a Disability

In relation to people with a disability, a variety of initiatives were mentioned, with some focusing on physical access while others focus on appropriate reading material and equipment. About nine local authority libraries mentioned that they have been reviewing physical accessibility within and to library buildings. The four authority libraries involved in the 'Library Access' project with An Chomhairle Leabharlanna and The Equality Authority are examining this issue in depth and preparing strategies. Some local authorities have optical scanners installed for the visually impaired, a project funded by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Other attempts to encourage access include large print and audio books, work experience for trainees from the National Training and Development Institute (NTDI), a pilot homebound service for people with a disability, group visits to supported/sheltered and residential accommodation and appropriate PC services.

#### Initiatives targeted at people with a disability

- The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government provides grant aid for the provision of optical scanning equipment and software in public libraries and many local authorities have availed of this opportunity. Through magnification software and text-to-speech facilities, the system provides access to the full range of available library material, books, newspapers, maps and photographs. A number of authorities consulted feel the scanner is not being used to its potential and that the service must be actively promoted.

### 3.5.5 Local Authority Housing Estate Residents

Three local authority libraries identified specific mechanisms they use to access local authority housing estate residents. They include provision of resource collections for residents groups, activities through the schools programme and location of the library service. On the 203 branches covered by this study, 50 per cent (102) of the libraries are located near or in local authority housing estates. However, as previously mentioned, the problem is

more often people's perception of the service rather than its physical location. In six authorities the mobile unit visits local authority housing estates. A few library authorities prefer not to identify local authority housing estate residents as a separate group as they feel these residents should be targeted within the whole community rather than as an individual group.

### **3.5.6 Homeless People**

Homeless people, as a group, have not been specifically targeted by libraries. Very often this group is not easy to identify and/or access. This is particularly the case in rural areas where the group is dispersed. Dublin City Public Library (DCPL) has been identifying initiatives to engage this group. The general perception among its staff is that the library is occasionally used by long-term homeless people as a comfortable warm place in which to spend time.

### **3.5.7 Lone Parents**

Limited information has been provided on initiatives targeted at lone parents. However, it must be noted that most library authorities are active in promoting children's activities such as reading groups, workshops, open days and after-schools programmes. Most local authority libraries try to target all children through the mainstream schools support programme. A small number of local authorities have initiatives targeted specifically at lone parents. Examples include a storytelling workshop held in Dundalk library in conjunction with Dundalk Employment Partnership for parents and playgroup leaders and a 'Dads and Lads' initiative in Coolock library.

### **3.5.8 Other Groups**

Library authorities themselves identified two other groups with which they are involved – adult learners and prisoners. For example, the majority that responded to the survey are involved in literacy projects in conjunction with the VEC. Dublin and Cork city libraries identified prisoners as another group. Both councils provide a prisoner library service. Dublin City Public Library provides a library service to seven prisons. More recently, it also provides specialist library and learning services to:

- Dóchas prison for women at Mountjoy serving predominantly young female lone parents
- Cloverhill remand prison, equipped with a unique multi-cultural collection (educational material on different cultures) in recognition of the diversity of nationalities within the prison population.

### 3.6 Research and Consultation

Respondents were asked whether they have undertaken any analysis of the socio-economic groups who use the library service and if they have consulted these groups with regard to their needs. As shown in Table 3.3, most have not conducted any analysis or indeed consulted groups on their specific needs. Two of the six who have undertaken research referred to the Public Library Usage Survey (PLUS). Two local authority libraries use information sources such as the Central Statistics Office, Comhairle, The Economic and Social Research Institute, National Institute for Spatial Analysis and Government reports, as well as commissioning research to find information on the numbers in these groups and their geographical location.

**Table 3.3: Analysis of and consultations with socio-economic groupings**

	Yes Number	No	No Response
Analysis of socio-economic groups	6	14	1
Consult excluded groups with regard to needs	7	12	2

Dublin City Public Libraries (DCPL) has employed a staff member to focus on Social Inclusion and Life-Long Learning in an effort to specifically address the barriers to access and to determine alternative ways of designing and delivering an inclusive and relevant library service to meet the changing needs of all people. This person is responsible for identifying groups of people who, for whatever reason, are not accessing the library service on a regular basis; consulting with the relevant statutory, voluntary and representative agencies and with individual models where appropriate; identifying models of good practice in other library services and running and evaluating pilot projects designed to address barriers to access.

### 3.7 Library Staff Training

Some form of social inclusion related training has been undertaken in eleven County/City Council libraries. The training is generally an introduction to social inclusion and lasts between half a day and one full day. The nature of the training varies considerably and includes general training on social inclusion, literacy awareness and equality issues. Five local

authority libraries (a total of nine library staff) availed of the training offered by the LGAPLN. In total 88 library staff received some social inclusion related training (out of a total of 1,300 staff). The in-house training tends to be led by the Director of Community and Enterprise and/or the library authority and in some cases is assisted by an external organisation. The external organisations mentioned are the Equality Authority, Orbis and the VEC. DCPL has a well-developed social inclusion related training programme for its staff. The training undertaken recently is outlined in the text box.

#### Social inclusion related training in DCPL

DCPL undertook an extensive staff development and training programme that included the following training:

- **Customer Care** with content focused on targeted client groups
- **Let's Focus on Children**, a child-centred approach to library resources and services for children delivered at entry, supervisory and management levels
- **Dublin, Diversity and Difference**, a participative workshop format exploring and challenging perceptions
- **Sign-language**. Staff in one branch have completed a course in sign-language because of the concentration of schools for the deaf within the library's catchment area.

### 3.8 Challenges to Inclusion

Local authority librarians were asked to indicate whether the factors listed in Table 3.4 were constraints to getting certain groups involved in using the library service. Lack of understanding/knowledge of marginalised groups is the main internal constraint for local authority librarians in accessing these groups. While the library has always been open to all, it is now recognised that efforts need to be made to engage certain groups who do not typically use the library service. However, some libraries are not familiar with the specific needs of the groups or the channels that could be used to access these groups. Limited staff resources are also a major constraint for many public libraries. They feel they do not have the resources to undertake the necessary research, promotion and initiatives needed. This is a particularly dominant issue in the smaller, more rural, local authorities.

**Table 3.4: Internal constraints to getting certain groups involved in the library**

Internal Constraints	Yes	No	No Response
Limited staff resources	15	3	3
Restrictive budgets	10	7	4
Staff training	11	5	5
Lack of equipment	7	8	6
Lack of understanding/ knowledge of these groups	16	3	2

The survey also asked respondents to list the wider external challenges preventing groups at risk of poverty from using local authority library services. These can be grouped into three broad categories.

- *Social barriers.* These were the most frequently mentioned and include a negative perception of the library service, low literacy levels, poor language skills, lack of confidence and perceived irrelevance of the library service.
- *Financial and institutional barriers.* These include factors such as charges for services, e.g. membership and use of the internet, limited or unsuitable opening hours especially in smaller branches, lack of staff awareness of the needs of these groups, restrictions on staff time and limited promotion of the library service.
- *Physical barriers.* Although improvements have been undertaken in many libraries to make them more accessible, further work is needed especially in the case of older buildings.

### 3.9 Role of the LGAPLN

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they are familiar with the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network. Thirteen County/City Council librarians stated yes while a further six were not aware of the Network. The County/City Librarians made many common suggestions as to how the Network may assist local authority libraries in ensuring access to public libraries by certain groups. These include the following:

- Disseminating information on library service initiatives that have been successful in accessing certain groups as well as highlighting initiatives that did not work
- Training of library staff on social inclusion related issues and specific training on the characteristics and needs of the groups. One or two individuals in each County/City library authority could be trained to subsequently train the other library staff in their area, i.e. 'training the trainer' concept.
- Networking facilitation between service providers and client representatives. In many instances, the library staff do not know the representatives from the relevant organisations or even what organisations they should contact. The Network could assist in identifying relevant organisations for local authority libraries.
- National marketing and awareness campaign of the public library service and the services on offer. This campaign should be targeted at those who currently do not use the library.
- Campaigning for free services for these groups where they are currently being charged.

## Chapter 4 Conclusions

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### 4.1 Key Findings

One of the specific objectives of this study is to determine whether local authority libraries have strategies in place to ensure access to library services for certain socio-economic groups. The research shows that there is significant variation in the level of commitment to this issue by County/City Council libraries. Some have been very proactive in developing strategies while others have not. Also a significant number of strategies have been developed for some socio-economic groups and very few for others. Just over half of County/City Council libraries (11) that responded to the survey have strategies in place for refugees and asylum seekers, people with a disability and older people. Eight local authorities have strategies for Travellers and local authority housing estate residents while four have strategies for homeless people and lone parents. However, this information should be interpreted with care. In some cases where local authority libraries indicated they have developed strategies this may mean they have undertaken some initiatives to encourage access rather than having an overall strategy in place. Also as the majority of local authority libraries in this study have not conducted any analysis of these groups or consulted excluded groups with regard to their needs, it is difficult to see how a comprehensive strategy could be developed.

Nevertheless many County/City Council libraries have been active in undertaking individual initiatives to encourage access to services. Again, although the mechanisms used may differ, most involve liaising with local representative organisations or other state agencies in identifying the needs of marginalised groups and encouraging them to use the service. Such agencies include among others the VEC, Adult literacy, Citizen's Information Centres, FÁS, Traveller organisations and local development agencies. Libraries also carry out initiatives with other functional areas within the council, for example Arts, Heritage, Social Inclusion Units, Environment and Community and Enterprise. Some local authority libraries offer free internet access (which is generally assisted by a staff member) and lending facilities to encourage people to use the services. Local authority libraries feel they have been most successful in trying to encourage refugee and asylum seekers and older people to use their services. They have not been as successful in getting Travellers, homeless people and lone parents to use their services. Other local authorities are unsure whether they are successful or not as they have not undertaken research on the socio-economic groups using their services.

Limited research has been undertaken to date on use of the public library service. In 1997, as part of its public libraries research Irish Marketing Survey (IMS) was commissioned to undertake research on frequency of library usage by socio-economic groups. This research shows that people on lower incomes and farmers use the library significantly less than those in the upper middle and middle class category. In 2002 An Chomhairle Leabharlanna co-ordinated the first national Public Library Users Survey (PLUS). This study identifies the employment status and age of its users but not other socio-economic characteristics, e.g. Travellers, asylum seekers and refugees. Arising out of a need identified in the Review of *Branching Out*, the Steering Group is commissioning research on library use by the general public. The results from this research will be available in early 2005.

Lack of knowledge/understanding of marginalised groups and limited staff resources are the two major internal constraints to engaging these groups. Many library authorities are not familiar with the needs of these groups or how they can be accessed at local level. There are also restraints on the staff time that can be allocated to planning and undertaking initiatives and conducting research. Lack of training is also an issue for about half of the local authorities that responded to the survey. There are other wider social, financial and institutional and physical barriers. From a social perspective many groups have a negative perception of the library service and its perceived irrelevance to their lives. In addition poor literacy levels deter people from using the service. There are also issues around physical accessibility and financial barriers such as charges for services.

## 4.2 Conclusions

County/City Council libraries feel the Network could help by addressing some of the challenges they face in ensuring access to libraries by certain groups. Initiatives could include circulating information on activities that have been successful and those that have not; training library staff on the characteristics and needs of certain groups; supporting authorities in identifying relevant organisations; assisting with national marketing and awareness campaign of the services offered by the library to these client groups; and campaigning for free services for all disadvantaged groups.

As was the case in England prior to the publication of its guidelines for local authority libraries, the approach to ensuring access by all to the local authority libraries in Ireland is rather *ad hoc*. Many successful initiatives are being undertaken in County/City Council libraries but the focus on social inclusion

seems to depend on the resourcefulness and capacity of the library authority itself rather than any consistent approach across authorities. Local authority library staff are willing to embrace this issue but need support in terms of understanding the needs of these groups, conducting research in their local area, establishing links with the relevant organisations, training, sharing information on successful initiatives and raising awareness of the services on offer. Local authority libraries can move this 'access for all' agenda forward with the assistance of Combat Poverty and the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the Social Inclusion Measures Group and other functional areas within the local authorities.

## Recommendations

The Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network (LGAPLN) is a demonstration project, the first phase of which will end in 2004. It therefore cannot be responsible for implementing all the recommendations. Consequently some recommendations should be acted on by other relevant players, with Combat Poverty's assistance if required.

- *Establish Network meetings.* A Network meeting should be dedicated to 'Social Inclusion in County/City Libraries'. All County/City Librarians should be encouraged to attend. Meeting topics could include a review of social inclusion in County/City Council libraries, identifying and discussing initiatives that have been both successful and unsuccessful in engaging marginalised groups, presenting an example of a UK Council library that has successfully adopted guidelines and identifying ways of overcoming barriers and challenges to ensure access by marginalised groups to the library service.
- *Develop guidelines for County/City libraries.* With the assistance of Combat Poverty, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, County/City librarians and other key stakeholders should develop guidelines for County/City Council libraries to assist them in ensuring that their services are accessible to all marginalised groups. This would result in a more standardised and consistent approach to social inclusion across County/City Council libraries.
- *Undertake training.* A social inclusion related training programme, targeted at library staff (staff in all branches), should be designed and

rolled out. This training programme should include information on the needs and characteristics of marginalised groups. It could be provided within the local authority itself and/or in co-operation with external agencies, e.g. through the Public Library Staff Training and Development Programme delivered by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna.

- *Follow good practice examples.* As established through the research, there are examples of initiatives that have been particularly successful in ensuring access by excluded groups to County/City Council libraries. The Network, through its publications such as the Network Exchange or the Learning Brief or through its meetings, could disseminate information on these initiatives. Alternatively, some other forum or channels could be used to disseminate this information, e.g. *The Library News* produced by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, and/or its website [www.library.ie](http://www.library.ie).
- *Undertake survey of attitudes among excluded groups.* Research should be undertaken on the attitudes of excluded groups to the County/City libraries. The survey could be used to determine people's perceptions and attitudes to the library and the perceived relevance of its services to their lives. It could also investigate the barriers and challenges faced by these groups in using libraries and how these may be overcome. Any research conducted should link in with relevant research being conducted by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna.
- *Promote better links within local authorities.* Network members need to ensure they are feeding information from the Network across the relevant functions in the County/City Council. For example, library service information disseminated through the Network must be brought to the attention of the County/City librarian. The Network could also be used to highlight the benefits of strong links within local authorities and the methods they can employ to ensure that the functions link together to combat social exclusion in their local area.
- *Identify local agencies/organisations working with marginalised groups.* Local authority librarians should, with the assistance of the office of Community and Enterprise, identify and network with the local representatives of the agencies/organisations working with marginalised groups. These agencies could assist librarians in identifying the needs of marginalised groups, as well as developing joint initiatives aimed at encouraging these groups to use the library services.

## **Annex 1 Members of An Chomhairle Leabharlanna**

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An Chomhairle's members are appointed by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The current council have been in office since 2003 and include:

**Chairman:** Seán Ryan

### **Members**

Nominees of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government: Cllr Denis Bourke, Cllr Cora Long

Nominees of the Association of the Municipal Authorities of Ireland: Cllr Laurence O' Neill

Nominees of the General Council of County Councils: Cllr Luie McEntire

Nominees of the Higher Education Authority: Beatrice Doran, John Fitzgerald, Richard Lennon

Nominees of the Library Association of Ireland: Deirdre Ellis-King, Ruth Flanagan

Nominees of the Local Authority Members' Association: Cllr Michael Abbey

Nominees of the Council of Trustees of the National Library of Ireland: Donal Ó Luanaigh

Nominee of the Board of Trinity College: Robin Adams

## Annex 2: Questionnaire

### Local Authority Library Study

Local Authority:

#### A LIBRARY SERVICES

1 How many library branches are in your local authority area? \_\_\_\_\_

How many of these are located near/in a local authority housing estate? \_\_\_\_\_

2 How many mobile library vans operating in local authority housing estates? \_\_\_\_\_

What areas do they serve? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3 What services do you offer in your branches?  
(eg borrowing, internet access, schools library service)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4 Is there a charge for the use of these services? Yes  No   
If yes, for which services? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Is there any reduction in charges for people on low income, elderly etc? Yes  No

5 Is there access to internet and email in the libraries? Yes  No   
Is this assisted access or unassisted access? \_\_\_\_\_

6 Is the library used to provide information to people on their rights and entitlements? Yes  No   
If yes, on what? \_\_\_\_\_  
How is this done? \_\_\_\_\_

**B ACCESSIBLE LIBRARY SERVICES**

7 Do you have a strategy to ensure access to public libraries for the following groups?

- |  |                              |                             |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Travellers                               | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Local Authority Housing Estate Residents | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Refugees and Asylum Seekers              | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| People with a disability                 | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Older people                             | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Homeless                                 | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Lone Parents                             | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (Please state)                     | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |

\_\_\_\_\_  
If yes, what mechanisms (activities) have you used to try and include these groups? \_\_\_\_\_

Travellers \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Local Authority Housing Estate Residents \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Refugees and Asylum Seekers \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

People with a disability \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Older people \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Homeless \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Lone Parents \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8 How successful do you feel you've been in accessing these groups?

	Very Successful	Quite Successful	Not Very Successful	Not Successful	Don't Know at all
Travellers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local Authority Housing Estate Residents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Refugees and Asylum Seekers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
People with a disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Older people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Homeless	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lone Parents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (Please state)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please Explain \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

9 What are the internal constraints to getting these groups involved in the library?

- Limited Staff Resources Yes  No
- Restrictive Budgets Yes  No
- Staff Training Yes  No
- Lack of Equipment Yes  No
- Lack of understanding/knowledge of these groups Yes  No
- Other, (Please state) \_\_\_\_\_

List the challenges to these groups getting involved \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

10 Are you aware of any examples that have been particularly successful in ensuring access by these groups to public libraries? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

## LINKS WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

11 What, if any, links (eg joint projects) do you have with functional areas within the county/city council and other agencies (eg. Citizens Information Centre, Vec, Travellers Training Centre)

Functional areas within your council \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Other agencies \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## RESEARCH AND TRAINING

12 Have you undertaken any analysis of the socio-economic groupings who use your library service? Yes  No

If yes, please provide or attach details \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

13 In developing library services, were excluded groups consulted with regard to their needs? Yes  No

Please explain the process \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

14 Are you familiar with the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network? Yes  No

15 Have you, or any, of the library staff undertaken training on social inclusion within the local authority? Yes  No

If yes, how many library staff? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the nature of this training? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

16 Who provided this training? (please tick)

- (a) The Local Government Anti Poverty Learning Network
- (b) IPA
- (c) In House Training
- (d) Other

Please state \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

17 Please list suggestions as to how the Network can assist local authority libraries in ensuring access to public libraries by certain groups (eg Travellers, local authority housing estate residents, refugees and asylum seekers, people with a disability, older people, children, homeless people and lone parents)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Please return completed questionnaire by email to:  
[gallagher@fitzpatrick-associates.com](mailto:gallagher@fitzpatrick-associates.com)

Johann Gallagher  
Fitzpatrick Associates  
10 Lad Lane  
Dublin 2  
Telephone - 01 6763200  
Fax - 01 676 7972

Thank you for your co-operation

## Annex 3: Recommendations from *Branching Out*

### Selection of recommendations from *Branching Out*

#### Strategic recommendations

- The project team recommends to the Minister that the investment in library infrastructure and service should enhance equity of access to information and it should form part of the Government's National Anti-Poverty Strategy.
- The project team recommends to the Minister that there should be a national commitment to information access through public libraries. This should link to issues relating to information technology access, public information and freedom of information. It might take the form of a charter whereby the State guarantees that every citizen should be able to access all information at, or through, the local public library.
- In order to promote equality of access to the public library service, the project team recommends that each library authority should develop and implement a strategy to improve access to the library for everybody. This strategy should seek to overcome physical barriers to library use, social barriers to library use and financial barriers to library use.

#### Financial recommendations

- The project team recommends that a review of library charges should be undertaken by each library authority during 1999. This review should focus on the structure of charges, the scale of charges, the level of services provided in respect of charges, and the equity of membership charges taking into account ability to pay.

#### Service delivery recommendations

- The project team recommends that library authorities should carry out a fundamental review of how it serves isolated communities, whether rural or urban. Library authorities should be prepared to use innovative solutions to meet identified needs.
- In order to address the need to provide access to library services to people with disabilities, the project team recommends that library authorities should include in their access strategies, measures to bring all of their libraries into compliance with Part M of the Building Regulations by 2006.
- In order to market library services effectively, the project team recommends that each library authority carry out a programme of research into what their users and the public in their area want from the library.

Source: *Branching Out: A New Public Library Service, 1998*

## Annex 4: Estimated Total Library Expenditure per Capita, 2001-2003

<b>Estimated total library expenditure per capita, 2001-2003</b>			
<b>Library Authority</b>	<b>Year</b>		
<b>County Councils</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2001</b>
Carlow	19.11	19.36	17.07
Cavan	16.69	16.63	13.47
Clare	27.71	24.61	20.72
Cork County	17.51	16.42	14.12
Donegal	13.41	12.66	10.67
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown	18.49	20.05	17.15
Fingal	28.15	28.89	21.18
Galway	13.55	13.93	11.80
Kerry	17.16	17.43	14.58
Kildare	19.22	19.08	15.46
Kilkenny	20.22	18.54	17.15
Laois	16.27	17.14	14.82
Leitrim	30.25	35.19	24.64
Limerick	17.76	18.99	15.66
Longford	24.77	21.47	19.46
Louth	16.69	15.65	17.44
Mayo	21.65	21.66	17.49
Meath	11.82	14.55	10.88
Monaghan	18.42	17.89	12.77
Offaly	16.28	14.98	12.04
Roscommon	18.66	18.96	16.98
Sligo	18.29	17.59	14.70
South Dublin	21.00	22.00	18.73
Tipperary JLC	14.81	14.87	13.53
Waterford County	20.43	21.65	17.73
Westmeath	16.89	19.27	16.29
Wexford	12.87	12.57	11.34
Wicklow	15.40	14.63	12.50
<b>Total County</b>	<b>18.27</b>	<b>18.40</b>	<b>15.42</b>
<b>City Councils</b>			
Cork	26.66	25.12	22.33
Dublin	34.87	34.62	30.98
Limerick	22.36	20.10	18.15
Waterford	22.14	23.21	21.31
<b>Total City</b>	<b>31.73</b>	<b>31.14</b>	<b>27.89</b>
<b>All Authorities</b>	<b>20.74</b>	<b>20.85</b>	<b>17.84</b>

## Annex 5: List of Respondents

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County Tipperary Joint Libraries

Meath

Offaly

Louth

Dublin City

Monaghan

Leitrim

Waterford City

Mayo

Kildare

Kerry

Cavan

Laois

Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown

Longford

Wexford

Cork City

Limerick City

Sligo

Limerick County

Kilkenny



**Bridgewater Centre, Conyngham Road, Islandbridge, Dublin 8**

Tel: 01 670 6746 Fax: 01 670 6760 Email: [info@cpa.ie](mailto:info@cpa.ie) Website: [www.combatpoverty.ie](http://www.combatpoverty.ie)