THE ELECTED MEMBER AND THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

BY

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SUMMARY

This study reflects the perceptions of elected members responsible for public library services. It presents their views on the mission, management and organization of public libraries, and examines the factors that can influence their attitudes and behaviour.

Education, recreation and information are perceived to be important aspects of the public library's work. Members inform themselves on library matters by using the service and by seeking the opinions of constituents and library officers. Most respondents possessed a reasonable knowledge of the aims and scope of the service and were supportive of it, although many

doubted if most elected members held the library
service in high regard.

Respondents expected the Chief Librarian to possess
both managerial and professional skills. He or she is
perceived to have specialist knowledge and can be a
major influence on their decisions. Members saw it as
their own role to decide and direct policy in line with
political priorities, and to act as a conduit for
complaints. The committee Chairperson is expected to
be a spokesperson for, and an advocate of, the
service. Few respondents saw an unambiguous dividing
line between the role of elected members and that of
library officers. While most members did not want to
be involved in the day-to-day running of the service
there were exceptions to this general rule particularly
with regard to stock selection and displays.

The library committee is not regarded as the most
important of members' commitments and is perceived to
be less political than most other council committees.
There is little support for the idea of 'political
appointments' to the library service. Political
allegiances do however produce differences when it
comes to elected members' views on funding, the use of
volunteers, contracting out and the provision of a
'premium service'.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

"All municipal and county libraries should be
managed, one would think by committees alike in
constitution and function. But the illogical
British try all ways of doing a thing, without
troubling to make up their minds about the best
way." (Savage 1942 p9).

The opening paragraph of Ernest Savage's idiosyncratic
but highly readable book on the librarian and his
committee is, in essence, as true today as it was
nearly five decades ago. In fact the variation in
committee structures is now rather greater than it was
in the past, and public library services are subject to
many different patterns of control. The effect of
different committee structures on the public library
service has already been investigated to some extent
(Lomer & Rogers 1983) and it is not the intention of
this work to replicate that research. This study is
concerned with those elected members who serve on local
government committees responsible for public libraries
whatever the local name for such a committee.
Throughout the text the term "library committee" will
be used, unless otherwise indicated, as convenient
shorthand for all these committees. In particular the
study considers elected members' individual and

collective perceptions on the management and functions
of the public library service and how their attitudes
and perceptions might influence decisions taken about
the operation of that service.

There have been a number of academic and other studies
(e.g. Committee of Inquiry into the conduct of Local
Authority Business 1986) that have examined the views
and roles of elected members in general, or those
serving on particular councils, but none to date has
concentrated on the perceptions of those members
responsible for public libraries. In 1974, trustees
from Californian Library Boards were asked to respond
to a questionnaire designed to ascertain how they
perceived their duties and responsibilities (Hess
1974). However, because of the differences between
the British and American systems of local government,
that work is of only limited relevance to the present
study.

The lack of published material is perhaps surprising
because, as Shavit (1986 p22) says, albeit in the
American context:

     Local politics are crucial to public libraries
     because they can affect their quality, if not
     their very existence. Local governments decide

whether or not to support a public library and the
level of support that it will receive from local
sources when they decide on the local government
priorities and the revenue to be raised for public
services."

Indeed it is no longer possible, if it ever was, to
discuss the workings of a public body such as a library
committee without taking politics, often party politics
into account. As Newton has written, "In voting
Labour or Conservative the elector is choosing not only
between different party policies but between people
with different conceptions of what politics is about
and what elected representatives should do." (Newton
1976 p144).

The research for this study was carried out between
1984 and 1989. Most of the interviews with members
were carried out in the Summer of 1989. This was a
time of great change in local government. It was a
period that saw, among other things, significant
changes in the relationship between central and local
government (Butcher, Law, Leach and Mullard 1990), the
abolition of the metropolitan counties, the Widdicombe
inquiry, the promise or threat of the community charge
or poll tax (Paying for Local Government (Cmnd. 9714)
1986), legislation on competitive tendering (Local

Government Act 1988) and increasing "encouragement of
contracting-out of services - often less correctly
termed privatisation" (Knowles 1988 p164).
Specifically on library matters it was also the period
in which the government's Green Paper (Office of Arts
and Libraries 1988) on public libraries was discussed
and debated by library committees up and down the
land.   From time to time therefore this study in
reflecting the views of elected members will refer, as
did the members interviewed, to the national as well as
the local political context.

A thematic approach has been adopted so that each
chapter deals with a particular aspect of elected
members' perceptions and interests.   Each chapter
contains an analysis and synthesis of data gained from
interviews, previous research and the literature.
Where extended quotations have been taken from
monographs the precise page number is given in the body
of the text.   Where a quotation is taken from a
journal or a collection of papers the page numbers of
the paper concerned are given in the bibliography.

After a brief review, in Chapter 1, of the methodology
used, Chapters 2, 3 and 4 describe the different actors
in the local political drama.   Chapter 2 looks at the
personal and political backgrounds of elected members

and their satisfactions and dissatisfactions resulting
from service on 'library committees'. Chapters 3 and 4
examine members' perceptions of the role and function
of committee chairpersons and chief librarians.
Chapter 5 considers the dividing line, if any, between
the functions of officers and the functions of elected
members.   In Chapter 6 particular attention is paid to
members' perceptions of their involvement in stock
selection and the choice of library displays.

Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10 are concerned with various
aspects of the decision making process. Chapter 7
investigates how local politicians keep themselves
informed about the needs and attitudes of the public
regarding library services while Chapter 8 looks at the
matters that influence members when they are taking
decisions about the operation of public libraries.
Chapter 9 describes the perceived importance of
"library committees" and Chapter 10 considers the
operation of such committees and members' views as to
the quality of officers' presentations, and their
perceptions of what should be discussed "in committee".

The next section deals with politics and the public
library service. Chapter 11 considers to what extent
the 'library committee' is a political committee whilst

Chapter 12 reports members' views on the vexed question of "political appointments". Chapter 13 is concerned with the extent to which party politics influences attitudes and opinions on the public library service.

Chapter 14 considers elected members' views on the function of public libraries. The matters they regard as important, their hopes and fears for the future.

The concluding Chapter 15 looks at the lessons for library professionals arising from the views of members, and includes some suggestions for further research.

"The existence of elected representatives is a distinguishing feature of local government as a form of public administration" (Stanyer 1971) and it is they who are the focus of this study. In particular it is concerned with the relationship between members' beliefs and perceptions regarding politics, libraries and librarians and the decisions they take with regard to the functioning and delivery of public library services. The aim is to see the public library service through the eyes of elected members. This is an important perspective because although "local politics do not hinge upon council members alone,...it is impossible to understand the system without also understanding how council members see it." (Newton 1976 p114).

CHAPTER ONE

METHODOLOGY

According to John Lofland (1971 p13) "social inquiry and social theory reduce basically to the attempt to provide answers to... three questions. "These are:

1   What are the **characteristics** of a social phenomenon, the forms it assumes, the variations it displays?

2   What are the **causes** of a social phenomenon, the forms it assumes, the variations it displays?

3   What are the **consequences** of a social phenomenon, the form it assumes, the variations it displays?

In looking at elected members serving on 'library committees' this study will deal primarily but not exclusively with the first and last of these questions. The approach throughout has been qualitative rather than quantitative although where qualitative understanding can be supported by data this is done as in Chapters 8 and 13.

A literature search revealed that very little had been written specifically on the subject of committees or

elected members responsible for public library
services. For this search a large number of manual
sources was consulted and in addition an on-line search
of DIALOG's PAIS (Public Affairs Information Service)
file was conducted. The main sources used included the
INLOGOV Register, Library Literature, LOGA (Local
Government Annotations Service), LISA on CD-ROM and in
hard copy, and Social Sciences Citation Index.
Extensive use was also made of the Sheffield University
Library Catalogue and the catalogue of The Library
Association Library.

As a starting point it was necessary to rely on the
general literature of local government; monographs and
memoirs which contained bibliographies were of
particular use. Even so, in that literature, the
library committee or library committee member is rarely
little more than a footnote. There is a reasonable
amount of material that deals with the role of North
American library trustees and or Library Boards (e.g.
Baker, 1984; Burson, 1987; Clubb, Lormer & Dutton,
1979; Hall, 1937; Joeckel 1935; Prentice, 1973; Young,
1976 & 1978) but this is not directly relevant to the
present study. To quote Harrison (1962):

"It is doubtful that there is any area of public
library administration in which British and

American traditions and practices differ as widely
as that of local government."

Savage (1942) remains the only substantial work on the
British library committee and committee member although
there is a small number of pamphlets and journal
articles (e.g. Corbett, 1953; Harrison, 1962; Sayers,
1935).   All these are written from the librarian's
perspective and papers by elected members themselves
are restricted to a few presentations to conferences
(e.g. Brown, 1985; Dell, 1980; Nicholson, 1987.) Many
such presentations, although not all, have often been
written in close consultation with the member's
librarian.

However, the extensive literature concerned with local
government in general did suggest a number of themes
worthy of investigation at the micro as well as the
macro level.   This literature is identified in the
chapters that follow, each of which deals with a
particular theme.   These general themes were examined
in the context of the provision of public library
services via a series of semi-structured interviews
with elected members serving on "library committees" in
12 local authorities.   In addition the interviews also
included a large number of questions on more
specialised library matters such as stock selection

and proposed government policy for libraries. The
full interview schedule is set out in Appendix 3.

In some authorities, Leaders or Chairmen of the Council
were also interviewed. In all some 72 members were
written to requesting an interview and of these 50
agreed to be interviewed. This was a pleasingly high
response given that some of the literature had tended
to suggest "that councillors were extremely busy and
interviews with them would be both more difficult to
arrange and of shorter duration than meetings with
officers". (Harrington, 1984 p241). In fact all of
the interviews ran their full course even when they
were carried out as late as ten o'clock in the evening,
as a significant number were: a fact which testifies to
the heavy work load experienced by most members serving
on local authorities. Far from being difficult,
elected members treated me with great courtesy and
responded very positively to the interview.
Throughout the entire period of the research just one
member refused to answer just one question.

Of the 50 elected members who agreed to be interviewed
19 were members of the Conservative Party, 17 were
members of the Labour Party, 12 were members of what at
the time was known as the SDP, and 2 were
Independents. While the total number of interviews is

not large it is in line with many other individual
studies of local government functions (e.g. Dearlove,
1973; Kogan & Van Der Eyken, 1973), leaving aside large
externally funded research projects such as those
mounted alongside the Maud (Committee on the Management
of Local Government 1967) or Widdicombe (Committee of
inquiry into the conduct of local authority business
1986) committees. To quote a recent document from the
Local Government Training Board (1987 p3):

"Any event which draws upon the experience of a
group, of nearly forty senior councillors and
chief officers must contain within itself lessons
of (sic) the future."

The results of this study are then not without
significance for the politicians and professionals
involved in the provision of public library services.

In common with Brown and Sime (1981 p166): "The
principle adopted in the research is that the
individual is the primary authority on his own actions
and experience." The interviews with individual
elected members were carried out in three County
Councils, three Metropolitan District Councils, three
inner London Boroughs and three outer London
Boroughs. As the prime interest of the investigation

was politics and politicians the councils were chosen
on the basis of the nature of their political
composition. Three councils were studied in each type
of authority. One council was selected that was under
strong (in terms of numbers) Conservative control and
one under strong Labour control. The third council
was either controlled by the Democrats, "hung" or had a
fairly even balance between the major political
parties.

The Chief Librarian of each of the chosen authorities
was contacted before individual elected members were
approached. Every one of the twelve librarians
contacted responded positively although one or two
warned that members were extremely busy people and
might not be willing to take part. The letter to the
Chief Librarians (reproduced as Appendix 1) was sent to
alert them as to the nature of the research and also to
check information (acquired initially from the
Municipal Yearbook) regarding the composition of the
"library committee" and the council. Most of the
interviews were planned to take place in the Summer of
1989 following the County Council elections and
therefore it was especially important to check the
composition of councils and committees in County
authorities.

In each authority the Leader or Chairman of the
Council, "library committee" Chairperson, the major
opposition spokesperson, and back-bench members picked
at random from each of the political parties
represented on the committee were approached with
requests for an interview. Interviews were carried
out either in person or by telephone. All respondents
were guaranteed anonymity and all readily agreed to the
interviews being tape recorded. The text that follows
therefore makes considerable use of direct quotations
taken from the recorded interviews. As is the way
with such interviews they are conversational in style
and sometimes ungrammatical.

Research on interview methods suggests that data
collected via personal interview and telephone
interview are "practically interchangeable when
compared according to rate of return, completeness of
return, comparability of findings and validity of
responses. Only cost varied substantially from one
strategy to another" (Hochstim 1967). Sudman (1967
p.67) in a review of uses of telephone methods in
survey research also concluded that, "In none of these
experiments was there any indication that the telephone
results were less satisfactory than those obtained from
personal interviews". Slater (1990 p.117) refers
specifically to the advantages of telephone interviews

in her recent work on library and information
research. Writing from her own experience she
describes how:

> "a strange rapport developed, in which two
> disembodied intelligences, sharing a mutual
> interest, communicated quite spontaneously. In
> doing so, they were undistracted by appearance,
> physical mannerisms, age, surroundings and the
> other incidentals that can influence a
> face-to-face interview... In short, I found the
> telephone an excellent medium for a long interview
> in depth, of loose structure, on a complex topic."

Groves and Kahn (1979 p222-3), on the other hand,
argue that telephone interviews can lead to a "lack of
rapport between interviewer and respondent" and suggest
that there is a need to translate:

> "into verbal messages the visual cues that fill
> the interaction in a face-to-face interview: the
> smiles, frowns, raising of eyebrows, eye contact,
> etc. All of these cues have informational
> content and are important parts of the personal
> interview setting."

This absence of visual cues, they argue, also leads to
a lower response rate to telephone surveys. This was

not a problem in the present study and neither was
there a problem in developing a rapport with
respondents.   The introduction to the interview
schedule (see Appendix 3) may have helped here.   As
Groves and Kahn (p219) also indicate:

"One promising approach may be to replace the

respondent's visual inspection of the interviewer,

his or her credentials, and material that occurs

in the personal interview, by lengthening the

acquaintance procedure on the telephone".

It should be added that the elected members chosen for
interview were selected without reference to their
ownership or otherwise of a telephone so there is no
chance of bias in this respect.

The semi-structured interview schedule had been piloted
in two local authorities and in questionnaire form at
the Public Libraries Group Conference held in 1986.
Some of the responses to the pilot questionnaire have
been incorporated in the text that follows.

The interview schedule was divided into four main
sections, A, B, C, and D.   The first section was
designed to provide information on the respondent's
political background and motivation.   This information
was sought to ascertain if there might be a

relationship between a member's personal and political background and his or her view on the operation and role of the library service. With one exception this section, like the rest of the schedule, caused few problems. The exception that proved the general rule was provided by just one member . Asked "why did you decide to enter local politics?" he replied:

"I prefer not to answer questions about my motives for why I have gone into local government - the politics of it is, for your enquiry, unimportant." (Conservative member, Labour controlled Outer London Borough).

This respondent seemed a little on edge throughout the telephone interview and in fact checked my home number and my university department in order "to make sure people are who they say they are". It is fair to say that this respondent was a member of a local authority that had received harsh treatment at the hands of the press and this may have influenced his behaviour. On the other hand, other members of the same authority did not exhibit the same degree of suspicion when interviewed.

The first part of section B of the interview schedule was concerned with the perceived role and importance of the 'library committee' and with various aspects of the

relationships between members and officers. The aim
here was to examine members' perceptions of the roles
of the various actors on the local government stage and
to seek their views on the nature of the relationship
between library officers and members. To consider in
the context of the public library service who does
what? To discover the politicians' perceptions of the
dividing line between the work of library officers and
that of elected members. This question was looked at
particularly in terms of stock selection and the choice
of library displays as the literature (e.g. Malley,
1990; Savage, 1942; Thompson, 1975) indicated that
these might be important areas. The perceived
relationship of the professional and the politician was
an integral part of the investigation; in particular
the study set out to discover respondent's views on the
much discussed question of 'political appointments'
(e.g. Baker, 1984; Goodson-Wickes, 1984; Liddle, 1985).

In the second part of Section B respondents were asked
how they kept themselves informed on library matters
and to indicate on a four point scale (cf Green 1981)
the degree to which different factors influenced their
decisions about the operation of library services.

The specific factors (Questions 21-27) had been
identified in the literature (e.g. Dearlove, 1973;
Green, 1981; Jones, 1969) as potentially influential

ones and the interview schedule was also designed to discover whether or not members of different parties were influenced by different factors (cf Silverman, 1954).

In Section C elected members were asked to give their views on public library services in general. These views were obtained by means of a Likert scale and by a number of more open questions. All the specific issues covered in this part of the interview (Questions 31-38) had been the subject of some debate in the local government and library press, some specifically in the government's Green Paper Financing our public library service: four subjects for debate. In order to enable some comparison between the present study and other work on elected members the fourth section of the interview asked respondents for information on their personal background.

The concluding question asked, "Do you think there is anything of importance about libraries or library committees which I have not asked, or to which I have not given enough attention?" The vast majority of answers to this question suggested that most respondents had found the topics covered in the interview "very comprehensive". A minority used it as an opportunity to elaborate on, or clarify points they had made in response to earlier questions.

Many of those who felt additional topics could or
should have been covered commented that they "had not
been asked about individual services". Others felt
that more should have been said about the place of the
library service in the local authority structure, its
relationship to the arts and heritage being cited as
particular examples. Such questions were not included
for the reasons indicated in the introduction. One
respondent felt there should have been questions on
staffing and another suggested the need for questions
on the use elected members themselves made of library
services.

In fact an early draft version of the schedule had
included questions on elected members' reading and
other tastes but these were finally excluded on the
basis that while they might provide interesting data,
it would not be directly relevant to the main purpose
of the study.

The interview schedule was designed largely to yield
qualitative rather than quantitative data. This was
felt to be the most appropriate approach given the
objectives of the study, for as Saunders (1979, p336)
has argued, the exercise of power and influence in
public policy making is "inherently unquantifiable."
Moreover as Carr (1990) has suggested:

"Over time, qualitative knowledge of the
communities, cultures and learners who use and
sustain libraries... can be more important in the
construction of a responsive setting and the
formation of nurturant practice.   It is essential
to know this kind of information first, in order
to provide the contextual knowledge that alone can
give quantities significance....   This contextual
knowledge gives structured meaning without which
cadres of numbers cannot count for very much at
all."

This researcher also has some sympathy with the
Newsons' (1976) view that:

"having... undergone... the cramming or twisting
of our own attitudes to fit into a number of
Procrustean five point scales, and having seen
them served up as limp processed distortion of the
living breathing beliefs that we thought we had,
we could not seriously have considered subjecting
real people to a measurement technique which so
deftly seemed to excise reality."

Where a scale was used (questions 21-28 and 32-36)
respondents were always invited to add to their
answers.   Statistical analysis has been used, where
appropriate to complement the qualitative material and

vice versa. It should be noted that the figures given in the tables do not always add up to exactly 100% because of rounding up or down. Generally the relatively small number of respondents and comparatively large number of cells over which they are distributed means that the differences observed cannot be tested for statistical significance using Chi Square. However where it has been used this has been noted in the text. On this occasion it is not possible to go all the way with Savage (1942 p47) himself who in his book on the librarian and the committee, albeit in a different context, stated, "Statistics are scientific fairy tales; arithmetic has significance only to accountants, comptometers, and other inhumanities."

That having been said, the methodology used is that advocated by Sayer (1984 p220). As a result:

"Much of the information is qualitative and concerns processes, activities, relations and episodes of events rather than statistics on particular characteristics. By looking at the actual relations entered into by identifiable agents, the interdependencies between activities and between characteristics can be revealed".

This is perhaps especially true of local government for
as Rosenberg (1989 p216) says, "each local government
has its own specific culture and understandings while
sharing a national network of political and
professional cultures... an analysis which eliminates
such 'soft' data and 'subjective understandings'
eliminates much else".

The use of participants' accounts to explain causes and
consequences of actions has a long history in the
social sciences.   As long ago as 1928 Thomas (1928
p572) wrote "if men define situations as real they are
real in their consequences."   Analysing the way 'men'
define situations can help us understand the situation
better.   As Young and Mills (1980 p4) argue, "Any
fruitful explorations of the patterns of public
policy-making must pay attention to the values,
perceptions or beliefs of the participants."   In the
present study the respondents' views of the library and
local government world have been incorporated with
those found in other studies of local government
politics and services.   In addition some effort has
been made to analyse the actions and opinions of
members and to introduce, with due qualification, some
causal assertions.

Of course, in dealing with interview material it is
necessary to be aware that respondents' recollections

may not always be entirely accurate. In addition,
people differ from each other in their construction or
reconstruction of events. The same situation may mean
different things to different people. Thus, strongly
held political viewpoints can result in the same action
being quite genuinely perceived in different ways by
people of different political persuasions. It is also
possible that politicians when giving opinions may be
tempted, in an interview, to simply rehearse the party
line. There were, however, enough occasions when
respondents expressed some disagreement with the
actions of their party at a national level to suggest
that this did not happen to any great extent during the
course of the interviews on which this study is based.

When expressing 'deviant' views one or two respondents
did re-check that they or their authority would not be
identified. A number also suggested that in a more
public forum it would be necessary to support the party
view. As Savage (1942 p15) said all those years ago,
"in private meetings councillors sometimes forget party
politics, and decide questions on their merits, and in
public meetings they hardly ever do, more's the pity".
A view that may have found some support from the Chair
who indicated that one of the least satisfying aspects
of the work was, "Having to front up a political line I
disagree with - that's extremely difficult". (Chair,
Labour controlled Inner London Borough).

The interview schedule (Appendix 3) was designed to encourage a rich response from interviewees. It was considered important not to antagonise, or for that matter encourage, respondents and at all times a strictly neutral political attitude was adopted by the interviewer. In today's local government climate the use of some words and phrases is perceived as value laden. For instance, prior to the replacement of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister, it was generally possible to tell a local politician's political persuasion by whether he, or she referred to the "poll tax" or "community charge". For that reason the local terminology, and/or that likely to be preferred by the respondent was adopted so far as it could be ascertained. One major area of concern was what term should be used to describe the Chair, Chairperson or Chairman of the "library committee". One Chief Librarian anticipated this problem and in his letter replying to the initial request to approach members advised, "Incidentally ****... uses traditional terminology so people who chair meetings are called 'Chairmen'". One respondent, perhaps picking up the interviewer's doubt as to what term to use in a particular case, offered the opinion that, "In Conservative councils it is always a chairman" (Labour member, Conservative controlled outer London Borough).

Except for these minor differences in nomenclature all
respondents were asked the same questions in the same
way in order to ensure uniformity and to avoid any
possibility of interviewer influence.   Some of the
more radical researchers in the field (Rosenberg 1989,
Sayer 1984) it should be said have rejected this
approach.   Rosenberg for instance in his study (p244)
found himself, "becoming the advocate of a particular
spending department in interviews with certain
influential politicians".   Such an approach can cause
problems of bias and this author adopted a strictly
non-interventionist, neutral stance whilst having some
sympathy with the view that, "we should try to learn
from such situations; what do they tell us about the
interviewee and about our own preconceptions." (Sayer
1984 p224).

Although the local authorities that were chosen were
selected to reflect a broad political spectrum with
only 12 authorities examined the study makes no claims
to represent the whole population of elected members
serving on "library committees".   However as Moser and
Kalton (1971 p488) state, "sometimes it is more
profitable to study intensively a handful of available
cases rather than a representative sample."   Likewise
Sayer (1984 p226) is of the opinion that:

"there is no reason why an intensive study should
be less objective (i.e. uncorroborated) about its
particular subject matter than an extensive study.
And although at the level of concrete events the
results may be unique, in so far as intensive
methods identify structures into which individuals
are locked and their mechanisms, the abstract
knowledge of these may be more generally
applicable... In some cases the unusual,
unrepresentative conjuncture may reveal more about
general processes and structures than the normal
one."

The perceptions of the members of twelve local
authorities will not necessarily be representative, but
representative of what?   In any event given the
diversity of local authorities and 'library committees"
it would be surprising if any number could be said to
be representative.   "Each... council is unique; it has
its own environment, its own problems and evolves its
own conventions to enable a bare legal structure to
operate and produce solutions." (Jones, 1969 p348).
Even in more clear cut cases too much concern for
representativeness can provide potentially misleading
results; for example where a statistical average is
found that does not correspond to any real
individual.   Of course in statistical analysis it is
never intended that the mean should represent a person

but there remains the danger that a researcher will "sacrifice explanatory penetration in the name of representativeness and getting a large enough sample." We must writes Sayer (1984 p226) "avoid the absurd dogma that no study of individuals in the broad sense, is of interest except as representative of some larger entity." The methodology used in the present research has sought to avoid that absurdity.

It is intended, therefore, that the results of this study will be illuminative rather than representative of, or generalizable to, all local authorities. According to Shils (1961, p1441):

> "The proper calling today of sociology is the illumination of opinion. Having its point of departure in the opinion of human beings who make up the society, it is its task to return to opinion, clarified and deepened by dispassionate study and systematic reflection..."

What follows is based on the opinions of the human beings who serve on public library committees.

ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

"At the heart of the British system of local government
lies a delicate and subtle relationship between the lay
elected councillor and the full-time professional
adviser/manager.   That relationship works well in
times of stability and mutual understanding, when the
boundaries of the respective roles are accepted.   At
times of rapid change and political polarisation, it
comes under strain, and its inherent ambiguities and
tensions come to the fore. We live today in such
times".

Young, K. "Politicians and professionals" 1987 p1

CHAPTER TWO: ELECTED MEMBERS

It can be argued that the most important decision
makers so far as the public library or any other local
government service is concerned are the elected
members.   This chapter is concerned with their
background, their political motivation and the things
they have found most and least satisfying with regard
to their work on public library committees.   By
examining their own perceptions of their role this
section seeks to examine, in the context of the library
service "the sheer intangibility of many of the
qualities which might reasonably be required of a good
councillor.   Such qualities as integrity, political
nous, will power, judgement, local knowledge and so
on."   (Sharpe 1962)

Elected members are at the formal centre of the local
decision making process.   They are empowered to take
decisions as the people's representatives yet, over the
years, a number of studies, for example Robinson
(1977), Hampton (1987) and Widdicombe (1986) have shown
that, as a group, they are not representative of the
population as a whole. Hampton, for instance suggested
that "a thumbnail sketch of the average councillor
would present him as male, middle class and with a
higher than usual level of education" (Hampton

1987 p115).   If the figures from the present study are
compared with those presented in the Widdicombe Report
it would appear that those members serving on library
committees are likely to have a higher level of
education and are more likely to be in professional
employment than their fellow councillors.

It is interesting to observe that, although they are
appointed in quite a different way from British elected
members, much the same comments have been made on the
personal characteristics of American library trustees.
Joeckel (1935), Prentice (1973) and Young (1976) all
found library trustees to be older, better educated and
more likely to be members of a profession than the
population in general. Baker (1984) in a more recent
survey of Illinois public library trustees found that:

"the average Illinois trustee was well educated,
age fifty or more, and upper middle class...
However, many of the trustees who were
professional workers had been replaced, at least
in part, by increasing numbers of homemakers,
retirees and administrators.   One other change
was that female trustees now outnumber their male
counterparts."

Another American study appears to confirm this trend.
Burson (1987 p134) in her study of library boards found

that 63% of the members were female and 37% male.
These American figures are not in any way reflected in
the composition of the 'library' committees that were
the subject of this study.   Of those members serving
on such a committee less than 18% were women, although
one committee had women serving as both Chair and Vice
Chair.

In many respects 'library' committee members do have
much in common with other councillors.   They may not
be representative of the general population as a whole
but with the exception of length of service, the
educational and employment differences noted above,
'libary' committee members are typical of the
population of elected members as the following figures
indicate.

TABLE: 2:1		AGE OF ELECTED MEMBERS		
	Under 30	30-44	45-64 ·	65+
	%	%	%	%
'Library' committee	2	30	50	18
Widdicombe	26*		52	22

* This is a total of three age ranges identified by
Widdicombe.   These were up to 24 (0); 25-34 (7); and
35-44 (19)

TABLE: 2:2   EMPLOYMENT OF ELECTED MEMBERS

	EMPLOYED	UNEMPLOYED	RETIRED
	%	%	%
'Library' committee	78	0	22
Widdicombe:	60	4	2

TABLE: 2.3   EMPLOYMENT OF ELECTED MEMBERS BY SECTOR

	PUBLIC	PRIVATE
	%	%
'Library committee'	35	62.5
Widdicombe	36	61

Widdicombe (1986 p38) reported that:-

"The profile of socio-economic group for the
different parties gives an almost stereotypical
picture for the two major parties. Over half of
the Conservatives were employers, managers and
professionals compared to just 26% of Labour
councillors. In fact, one in three Labour
councillors were covered by the semi skilled and
unskilled manual groups."

The figures for 'library' committee members indicate a higher proportion of professionals and employers than those reported by Widdicombe. All of the Conservative members interviewed could be described as professional and/or employers while 76% of the Labour members also come into those categories, 35% of the Labour members serving on library committees were, or had been, either teachers or lecturers.

TABLE: 2:4   EDUCATION OF ELECTED MEMBERS

(By last institution attended)

	SCHOOL	OTHER HE	POLY/UNIVERSITY
	%	%	%
'Library' committee	48	14	38
Widdicombe*	56	13	31
General + population	85	8	5

* These figures are based on the Widdicombe table which refers to education qualifications. (Table 2.8 Vol II p24)

+ General Household Survey 1983

TABLE: 2:5   ELECTED MEMBERS LENGTH OF SERVICE

	0-3 years	4-9 years	10-20 years	21+ years
	%	%	%	%
'Library' committee	38	22	24	16
Widdicombe	25	40	32	3

Table 2:5 suggests that 'library' committees have a greater proportion of members with a relatively short experience of council work and a greater proportion of members who may be toward the end of their political careers than the population of elected members as a whole.   This may reflect the perceived importance of the library committee by the power brokers of local government.   Robert Atkins' (1985 p1) comments regarding the chairmanship of such committees may be more generally applicable.   In his view:

> 'Too often in local government... the Libraries Committee, or whatever its title, has been looked upon as a suitable haven for the long serving councillor past his or her best or as a 'teethcutting' spot for the bright but inexperienced youngster where mistakes made in the learning process would do little harm."

Howard Matthew made a similar point when he wrote in 1988 that, "all too often library committees consist of members who are either on their way up the political ladder or on their way down". (Matthew 1988 p4).

Elected members in general have been perceptively described by journalist Stephen McClarence (1989) as:

> "...men and women trying desperately to act like politicians. They are trying to put themselves forward in a convincing role, whereas an actor just tries to play some other role they are actually trying to play themselves." (Every First Wednesday 1989).

It was not the prime intention of this study to undertake a detailed analysis of the personal characteristics of elected members serving on library committees but in order to compare this work with others on elected members respondents were asked a number of questions on their personal background.

Nearly a quarter of the members interviewed had a history, often a family history, of political activity.   This is in line with Elcock's view (1982 p66) that local political activity "is often the result of being born into a family in which parents or siblings are themselves politically active".   Among

those interviewed for the present study this was
especially true of Labour members who often spoke in
quite emotional terms about what had led them to a
political career.

Speaking of his own background one respondent said:

> "My family were the initial socialists in the
> area, my education into the political field was
> through my parents... one of the dominant
> features... is my trades union background. Things
> had a lasting memory from school days, during the
> 30s the depression was very evident. I believe
> that socialism is a way of life - my socialist
> background comes from Methodism and most of the
> people I worked with - such as railway guards were
> very ardent socialists." (Chair, Labour
> controlled County Council).

He was a very experienced older councillor but much the
same kind of motivation was expressed by a newly
elected member:

> "I had to do it. I believe in socialism as others
> believe in religion - it is the most important
> thing after my family." (Labour member,
> Conservative controlled Outer London Borough).

Another Labour member said:

"I have long been a political animal, it has been
my main involvement since coming to ****** 35
years ago.   I come from Scottish working class
stock.   I used to listen to, and argue with, Lord
Soper.   My socialist belief emanates from my
understanding of the New Testament and tutorlage
of Donald Soper. My upbringing in the Scottish
Central lowlands led to an awareness of struggle
and poverty." (Labour member, Conservative
controlled County council).

Yet another spoke of a

"Personal brand of socialism dedicated to public
services - hoping to raise the level of everyone
to a better standard of life."   (Labour member,
Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

As will be demonstrated in a later chapter this
ideological commitment does appear to influence a
significant number of Labour members when they take
decisions about library matters.

A few of the Conservative members interviewed also had
a history of political activity but they tended to view
it in a less emotional way.

"I was a young Conservative, an active campaigner
in my youth - knocking on doorsteps (sic). I
decided to do it for myself. I am pragmatic -
based on experience - reacting to things around
me." (Chairman, Conservative controlled Outer
London Borough).

A Democrat member spoke of his

"Family background of politics and public
service. I have been steeped in it since a boy."
(Democrat member, Hung County Council).

Another Democrat had "a father who was a local
councillor in a party which I am not a member of."
(Democrat member, Hung Metropolitan District).

The same kind of family and personal background can
however apparently lead people in quite different
political directions. Two members started their reply
to the question as to why they entered local politics
in exactly the same way, but their personal conclusions
were quite different:

"It's a long story. I am Jewish. I became a
Labour Zionist. My background always led me
towards Labour." (Labour member, Conservative
controlled Inner London Borough).

"It's a long story. I am Jewish. The local MP
said Zionism was equal to racism. I do not
believe in equality for all because it does not
work." (Conservative member, Conservative
controlled Metropolitan District).

Many of the Democrats placed a great emphasis on
community involvement describing themselves as
"community politician" (Democrat, Labour Controlled
Inner London Borough), "community orientated
politician." (Democrat, Conservative controlled County
Council), "a political person in the community sense"
(Democrat, Conservative controlled Metropolitan
District) or, "a community man" (Democrat/Independent
Hung County Council). The latter who now stood as an
Independent described his "political" background in the
following way:

"I did a great deal in my own village - no
ambition eight years ago to enter elected office.
I was approached and asked to stand. I am not a
politician - Independent now, I don't like the
term politician. I am a local representative".

The 'non political' stance was reflected in the views
of another Democrat who said:

"I am non-party political as far as local politics
are concerned I am concerned with community
politics, practical politics." (Democrat
Chairperson, Inner London Borough).

Another common reason for entering the local political
arena appears to be a dissatisfaction with the actions
of the local council.   Conservative and Democrat
members are most likely to have been motivated in this
way. As one respondent said:

"I was unhappy about the present political set up
- instead of moaning about it I decided to do
something about it". (Democrat, Conservative
controlled Metropolitan District).

Another was:

"appalled at the way that **** was being run."
(Democrat, Labour controlled Metropolitan
District).

Yet another Democrat had,

"spent years complaining about how the Borough was
run. My husband said if you don't like it do
something about it. I stood in a very solid
Conservative council and my party was swept to

power." (Democrat, Democrat controlled Outer
London Borough).

For the Conservatives, high rates, or a concern over
single issues were cited as reasons for standing for
election. Describing himself as "to the Right but
extremely Green", one member described his entrance
into politics thus:

The London Borough of **** was extremely left
wing. We bought a house. I was concerned about
the rates and the way things were run, decided to
get involved. Strongly involved when we moved
here - I had no chance of being elected in ****."
(Conservative member, Democrat controlled Outer
London Borough).

Another became,

"appalled about a single issue in the Borough
where I lived... educational provision being
comprehensive education... what I regarded as a
first class system of grammar schools was being
sent to the wall without a word of opposition from
people I felt should have been opposed to the
scheme. I was extremely keen to get in there and
kick up a fuss. I was almost a single issue

politician at that stage." (Chairman,

Conservative Controlled Metropolitan District).

Another Conservative had had a,

"planning problem with the local council. I felt
local people were not being properly represented
by the Council." (Conservative member, Democrat
controlled Outer London Borough).

The literature suggests that elected members have to
fulfil a number of roles. (Corina, 1974; Darke &
Walker, 1977; Dearlove, 1973; Elkin, 1974; Newton,
1976). They are representative of the electorate, of
their party, their community and the committees on
which they serve. They may see themselves as
watchdogs, managers, policy makers and/or problem
solvers. According to the former Chairman of Suffolk's
library committee, "a local politician operates in
several different contexts - the constituency context;
the Council context; and the party context." (Monroe
1987).

Sir Humphrey Appleby, the world weary Permanent
Secretary at the Department of Administrative Affairs
in the television series Yes Minister once said of
local councillors that "half of them are self-centred
busybodies on an ego trip and half of them are only in

it for what they can get out of it". While that
opinion may be close to the popular view it is not an
accurate one. The lasting impression gained from the
interviews with members of 'library committees' was, in
the words of Skellern (1985 p274) that "with few
exceptions, those who seek election to local government
are inspired by the best of motives - a desire to be of
use."

Most of the members interviewed obtained personal
satisfaction from getting things done,. Asked,
"Looking back on your time on the 'library committee'
what things have you found most satisfying?" Many
replied giving details of individual projects, or
developments in the library service in general. One
Labour Chair spoke of the pleasure involved in the,

> "introduction of innovations, like a container
> library which did give a much better service. The
> promotion of branch library buildings as cultural
> centres outreach for the community. I helped to
> innovate. I was the guiding spirit. Work for
> housebound readers, provision of large print
> that's the kind of thing that has pleased me."
> (Labour Chair, Metropolitan District).

A Conservative counterpart spoke with pride of:

"the fruition of a new library in my own home town
in a listed building up for loss/demolition. I
managed to achieve a bigger, better new library,
persuaded colleagues to deal with objections and
put in new library - that has to be the single
most satisfying thing I have achieved."
(Conservative Chairman. County Council).

Perhaps reflecting the Democrats' interest in community
matters a Democrat member cited "The introduction of
community information into the library system."
(Democrat Chairperson, Outer London Borough) as his
most satisfying experience.

As well as introducing new services, members were also
pleased when they could afford, or persuade the
majority party that they could afford to reinstate
services. For one member this took the form of:

"The replacement of cuts in opening hours - they
came back after pressure. The rescue of [from]
closure of one particular library." (Democrat
member, Labour controlled Inner London Borough).

A Labour opposition member spoke of his:

"success in increasing the book fund - it had a
very poor position - I played a big part in

getting the matter remedied, a lot lot better."
(Labour member, Conservative controlled County
Council).

Political victories were often cited as a source of
satisfaction. As one Labour Chair put it:

"I like winning political battles on behalf of my
department - that is very satisfying". Sometimes
that meant "winning battles in Labour Group to
keep more money." (Labour Chair, Inner London
Borough).

Opposition members savoured their occasional victories
over the majority party. A Labour member on a Tory
controlled council said that her best moment was:

"about competitive tenders when all members except
for the Chairman and Vice Chairman were in
accord... that a particular tender should not be
accepted. Pleased to get agreement. I appreciate
that as a member of a permanent minority... it is
frustrating not to get one's ideas put into
policy. It is satisfying when other members on
the other side agree on the kind of thing that is
important and you can all move forward for the
general good for the public as a whole and for the

service." (Labour member, Conservative controlled Outer London Borough).

A Conservative member finding himself, for the first time, in opposition was rather less magnanimous. His greatest satisfaction was:

"Having been proved right on a lot of occasions regarding some of the opposition's policies and their expected impact on the public."
(Conservative member, Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

A number of members found satisfaction in the public's regard for the library service. Regard that might be expressed through:

"letters thanking you because the libraries have been good to her, an unsolicited letter or 'phone call." (Conservative member, Hung County Council).

Another spoke of:

"The recognition by the council that man does not live by bread along. It is all very well to provide highways, roads and education. The library provides a relationship with matters of

the spirit - matters of the mind. I feel at last

the community is starting to see there is

something - for too long we have been ignored."

(Conservative Chairman, Metropolitan District

Council).

The response from a significant number of members

suggested that they obtained much pleasure from their

involvement with libraries. While some, as will be

shown later, felt that their council colleagues did not

share their enthusiasm, those serving on "library"

committees generally found it a satisfying experience.

As one member said:

"To be able to devote my time as a councillor to

that which I enjoy... the whole lot's a joy."

(Labour Chair, Outer London Borough).

That is not to say there are not dissatisfactions

because there are. These, however, are often the

result of not being able to do things, or seeing a need

which the council cannot, or will not, satisfy.

Perhaps not surprisingly these kinds of views were

expressed most often, but not exclusively, by members

belonging to parties opposed to the policies of central

government. There is a general feeling among members

of these parties that the public library service is not

being financed adequately. Asked what things they had

found least satisfying during their time on the library committee many respondents mentioned lack of finance. The general problem being:

> "That we can't find finance, can't offer the services we would want to". (Labour member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District), and: "seeing need but being unable to fulfil that need." (Labour member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

Lack of finance was seen as the cause of "Reducing hours, closing smaller branch libraries." (Labour Chair, Metropolitan District) and "The need to impose charges and increase charges on people less able to afford them. The bookstock is ageing and run down." (Labour member, Hung County Council).

Another Labour Chair spoke of:

> "The frustration of having to cut by 30%, spending time defending the cuts you did not want to make, simply on the basis that you had no choice." (Labour Chair, Inner London Borough).

The lack of choice for local government formed a recurrent sub-theme. Another Labour Chair speaking of the:

"Lack of money and the fact that we can no longer
operate as a local authority but have to use
partnership with private enterprise to raise the
capital necessary to do what is required.   That
is a big stumbling block." (Labour Chair, Outer
London Borough).

A Conservative member, while loyal to the national
government was worried by:

"constraints because of inflation and controls on
local government expenditure - book fund does not
have as much money as we would like."
(Conservative Chairman, County Council).

Another Conservative took a rather tougher line.
Financial matters were a source of dissatisfaction for
him too, but in this case it was the spending plans of
the controlling party. These were described as:

"The pipe dreams we have for a very large
programme. There is no money available
whatsoever. The amount of committee time that has
gone into those things for which there is no
finance available... was a very frustrating
episode."   (Conservative member, Democrat
Controlled Outer London Borough).

Political differences and the amount of politics
involved in library matters are the subject of another
chapter but it is worth noting here that about one in
ten of the members interviewed indicated that he or she
found the introduction of party politics into library
matters one of the least satisfying aspect of his or
her work. That is the introduction of party politics
by the other parties. For instance one Conservative
member said:

        "My side do not bring politics in. The other side

        do. I find it very irritating when Labour

        politicians raise their heads in things that are

        not political at all, like exhibitions, like

        fines, that kind of thing." (Conservative

        Chairman, County Council).

Labour politicians appear less worried about this
aspect of the work but one did state:

        "Some of the Conservative members are difficult to

        deal with - but we have had agreements which has

        been nice but there are times when the prejudices

        of the other side come out. I do find that

        frustrating I must say. (Labour member,

        Conservative controlled Outer London Borough).

To sum up. The elected members that are the subject of
this study often had a family background in politics.
The Labour members tended to express their motivation
in more emotional terms than those of other parties. A
substantial number of Democrats and Conservatives had
entered local politics as a reaction to the wrongs as
they perceived them in the local political scene.
Labour members were motivated by issues of social
justice and the Democrats by community welfare. The
Conservative members were less easy to classify; a fact
which perhaps reflects their pragmatic approach and
relative lack of ideological commitment. This latter
point is discussed further in Chapter Eight.

Most of the members interviewed found the work on the
library committee satisfying. Satisfaction being
obtained by getting things done for the library service
and/or in winning political battles. Labour and
Democrat politicians in particular were frustrated by
the lack of finance available for public library
services and by the increasing lack of local autonomy.
The introduction of party politics into library matters
was found dissatisfying by about one in ten of the
members interviewed. As later chapters will
demonstrate, the vast majority of members interviewed,
had thought quite deeply about the library service and
were generally supportive of it.

CHAPTER THREE: THE CHAIRPERSON - ROLE AND FUNCTION

In legal terms the Chairperson of the library or any
other committee has little more power than back-bench
members. His or her exact role will vary from local
authority to local authority and may or may not be set
out in the standing orders of an authority. Standing
orders can "give the chairman a particular decisive
role in committee meetings." (Dearlove 1973 p134). In
Kensington and Chelsea, according to Dearlove's study:

"The Chairman of a meeting of a committee shall

decide all questions of order and his ruling on

all questions of order or upon matters arising in

debate shall be final and shall not be open to

discussion. He shall be entitled to vote on any

question in the first instance, and in case of an

equality of votes shall have a second or casting

vote."   (Dearlove 1973 p134)

Where an authority is organised on a party political
basis, the Chairperson will be drawn from the majority
party. In some Hung authorities, "there is an 'all
things equal' assumption that the largest single party
should hold the chair and vice chairs" and "a number of
authorities have agreed 'conventions' to facilitate the
operation of council business". (Leach & Stewart

1988b), but the precise position varies greatly as the literature demonstrates. (Carter 1986; Leach & Stewart 1986, 1988 & 1988b; Rallings and Thrasher 1986; Wendt 1983 & 1986).

It is "the duty of the chairman... to ensure that order is preserved and that proceedings are conducted in a proper manner in order to ensure that the sense of the meeting is properly ascertained." (Turner 1986 p26-7). However to quote Byrne (1983 p152), "Chairmen of committees do not merely control the conduct of committee meetings." This is a view that found support from one chairman responding to the present study:

> "If the committee chairman simply thinks it is his business to get through the agenda of the meetings then that committee is not going to function very well." (Chairman, Hung Metropolitan District).

In fact, most commentators suggest that the Chairperson can be "an influential figure, leader and spokesman, co-ordinator, and with his officers and members, a decision maker." (Hill 1974 p84).

That having been said, many respondents did stress the importance of the Chairperson's role in running the meeting. One member in fact:

"never regarded the office of chairman as to be much more than the person who conducts the meetings".

However this was very much a minority view and may have been conditioned by the fact that the speaker was an Independent member of a hung council. He went on to explain:

"In the political context that we have there are dangers in having Chairmen who wield a lot of power. I prefer the democratic process whereby decisions are made by committee." (Independent member, Hung County Council).

While the majority of members did see the Chairman as "much more than the person who conducts the meetings" they also emphasised the need for the Chairman to:

"ensure that the actual committee meetings proceed properly - quickly - not with a view to stifling debate but so that they don't drag on and go round and round in circles." (Labour member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Not surprisingly those members in opposition felt that the Chairperson should encourage all views to be heard. He or she:

"should be as fair as possible to all sides of the
argument, to give everybody their share of the
time and to be listened to." (Labour member,
Conservative controlled County Council).

This view was endorsed by a Democrat member who said:

"the most important function of the Chairman is to
enable members of the committee as a whole to have
input - so that everybody's opinions are taken
into account." (Democrat member, Conservative
controlled County Council).

"Chairmen", said another respondent:

"do well to note the comments of all opposition
groups - where there are sensible proposals which
are not at odds with the ideology of the ruling
group then they should be taken on board and a
pragmatic approach as possible taken by the
Chairman." (Conservative member, Democrat
controlled Outer London Borough).

The reality of the situation is perhaps summed up by
one member who initially felt that the Chairperson:

"should be as impartial as possible... and take a
balanced view - use his or her powers to lead
discussion in a balance way."

but then quickly discovered that she had been:

"naive at first to think that the Chairperson was
going to be an objective person...without any
political leanings." (Democrat member,
Conservative controlled Metropolitan District).

In fact, most members recognised the chairpersons'
political role. One Chair described himself as "the
political arm of the professional." (Labour Chair,
Metropolitan District Council). Another said "you are
fronting your area in politics" (Labour Chair, Inner
London Borough) while another respondent described the
Chairman as the "political head of his department."
(Labour member, Conservative controlled Inner London
Borough).

The Chairperson's function is "to give a political
voice to the library service" (Conservative Chairman,
Metropolitan District) and that voice has to be heard
in a number of arenas. In the party group for instance
it is important:

"To make sure that your area of involvement does not get ignored when there is political debate because when there are major political decisions about where to put growth and where to cut back a weak Chair is always in danger of losing out in terms of resources etcetera.... A Chair with a grasp of what is going on makes sure that the claims of her area are always remembered when there is political debate going on within the ruling group." (Labour Chair, Inner London Borough).

The Leader of a Conservative controlled council expected the library committee chairman:

"to push his own little patch, to be a voice for his particular service when arguing for funding and so on. I think within the council the main role of the Chairman is to put the voice of the libraries forward so that members don't think all we do is social services, teach children and mend potholes in roads." (Leader, Conservative controlled Metropolitan District).

This role is sometimes perceived as being harder for some than for others. A Labour member speaking of his Conservative chairman said:

"He must defend the service amongst his
colleagues. Some of the Conservatives are
reactionary and diehard - they make Margaret
Thatcher look like a political moderate - he has
to promote the library service to his colleagues."
(Labour member, Conservative controlled Inner
London Borough).

The Chairman referred to saw himself as "The focus of
the political direction of the service." As the Chief
Education Officer interviewed by Kogan and Van Der
Eyken (1973 pp151-2) said, "If the chairman is to
retain his authority within his own party he must know
everything of significance that is going on."

If it is the role of the Chairperson to promote the
library service in political circles many also see it
as their job to promote the political viewpoint to the
professional. One Chairperson said that he would:

"go out and represent [the Director of Libraries']
point of view, that is his professional
judgement. There will be other times when I will
say I recognise your professional view but my
political judgement tells me the time is not right
- come and see me again when the political climate
is better suited." (Labour Chair, Metropolitan
District Council)

Sometimes that viewpoint might be overtly party
political. One Chair said:

"My first function... is to make sure that the
policy laid down in our manifesto is developed
through the committee by the officers... The Chair
is responsible to make sure that the policies are
adhered to on behalf of the committee... It is my
duty to make sure that they are radical and
progressive and are carried through - that is my
first duty". (Labour Chair, County Council).

Another said:

"It is my job to feed my party's views into what
is a bureaucratic structure - to push Labour Party
policy into Libraries and Arts both short-term
decisions (for example a site for a library) but
also in terms, for example, of the importance my
party gives to equal opportunity. It is part of
the role of the Chair to make sure that that kind
of priority is not forgotten - and goes on making
sure it is picked up until it becomes part of the
organization itself. It is not enough to say
there is our manifesto, give it to the Chief
Officers and expect them to completely get on with
it - you do have to make sure that things that are
important to your own political party are

happening. You have to check up." (Labour Chair,
Inner London Borough).

The same kind of view was also expressed by a
Conservative Chairman. He saw his role as:

> "To lead the officers and the committee and to
> focus what is the general policy of the council on
> the issues which the committee deals with... If a
> committee starts taking wrong turnings and
> embarking on policies which are inconsistent with
> the overall policy of the council then that is
> because the Chairman has failed... Equally if the
> officers start, as it were, running away with the
> service that's because the Chairman has failed to
> see things aren't going as the committee wants."
> (Conservative Chairman, Inner London Borough).

The dislike of officers running away with the service
was repeated by another Conservative member.   He
thought that the Chairman needed:

> "To keep his tabs on what is happening in the
> department and to try and guide it in the way his
> committee want it to go and to stop it from
> running out of control." (Conservative member,
> Hung Metropolitan District).

The relationships between elected members and officers
is the subject of another chapter, but many of the
views expressed by members in this survey tend to
suggest that, in many authorities, it is no longer
true, if it ever was that "officials... use the
chairman as little more than a rubber stamp." (Cutler
1982 p76). At the same time two of the respondents who
were most strongly in favour of communicating political
objectives would also, if necessary, take steps to
defend the officers. As one Chair said:

> I am not one of those Chairman who say you will do
> this... that is no way... We pay a man a lot of
> money to give his professional expertise and my
> job at the end of the day is to back it, and at
> times I have backed him in the Labour group, when
> I think he has been wrong and I have told him so
> afterwards." (Labour Chair, Metropolitan
> District).

Another Chair said that it was sometimes necessary to
defend the staff from attacks in the press and in
committee:

> "If you can't cope with the press... you get
> reported badly and that can reflect badly on your
> area and that is unfair on the staff because it is
> difficult for staff to write to the press.

Equally, when staff are criticised they can't
always defend themselves, for instance in
committee meetings.   It is sometimes the role of
the Chair to defend the staff." (Labour Chair,
Inner London Borough).

The Chairperson is generally regarded as the
spokesperson for the service. "He acts as spokesperson
for the committee in Council." (Labour member, Labour
controlled Metropolitan District). His job is "to
gather support for what seems to be the best way
forward." (Conservative member, Hung County Council)
and "to argue the case for money... in the face of
other competing demands." (Democrat member, Labour
controlled Inner London Borough). He has:

"a big role in making clear to the whole County
Council how important, as a visible service, the
libraries are... and getting resources allocated."
(Chairman of Conservative controlled County
Council).

Several Chairpersons described the role in terms of
public relations and promotion. A Chairperson who is
successful in promoting the library service is likely
to be appreciated by members of his/her own party and
those in opposition alike.   In one of the councils
surveyed a chairman had just retired.   The Chairman of

the County Council concerned spoke of her in glowing

terms:

"Our last Chairman... did a very good job for the

service - got it into the newspapers, always got

**** Library publicised. In the last four years

libraries in **** got a very high profile. That's

an important part of the Chairman's job - the PR

side of the service as well as working on a day to

day basis with the CO." (Chairman of Council,

Conservative controlled County Council).

The same Chairman was also remembered warmly by the

chief opposition spokesperson on libraries as:

"a very shrewd and able woman - very highly

educated herself and conducted the Chairperson

role with fairness, crispness which the whole role

of Chairperson demands... this woman was rather

exceptional... it made her Chairpersonship

something quite unusual." (Labour member,

Conservative controlled County Council).

The late Roger Walter (1983), the former editor of The

Library Association Record, has also provided an

example of "a library committee chairman with a real

gift for publicity" in his American tale of Alderman

Bullwinkle's memorial mop:

"The Director of libraries has complained about
lack of cleaning equipment. She was supported in
her plea by an alderman with the improbable if not
unbelievable name of Bullwinkle. The chairman
replied with the excellent suggestion that the
obstreperous and somewhat disagreeable critic
should endow an Alderman Bullwinkle Memorial Mop.
That was good for headlines. This chairman was
also instrumental in the imposition of a local dog
tax, but made sure that the proceeds went to the
book fund. Good idea, good for headlines."

A respondent to the present study described a different
aspect of the PR role:

"There is a PR job fronting public meetings ...
acting as an intermediary between the officers and
the public... that's a very important role. The
officers and public talk different languages. I
have to interpret officer-speak to the tenants and
tenant-speak for the officers." (Chairman, Labour
controlled Inner London Borough).

Another London Chairperson made much the same point.
He said that he had:

"to bring the views of the public to the knowledge
of officers to ensure that the service is

delivered in a way the public like." (Chair, Labour controlled Outer London Borough).

Chairpersons, in fact, are perceived as performing a number of such "linking" functions. As has been indicated above, they very often provide a link between officers and the public and between officers and elected members. The Chairman, said one member, should:

"liaise effectively between the committee and the officers and to provide perhaps a breeding ground for new ideas with the officers." (Conservative member, Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

Chairpersons are also responsible for what the Maud committee (1967) described as the "co-ordination of the work of the committee with other committees, departments and agencies." The Chairman said one respondent:

"has to maintain the links with the other committee chairmen, and the party leader - so that the whole of our group understands what we are trying to do." (Democrat member, Democrat controlled, Outer London Borough).

Maintaining links, sharing information and ideas means
that modern Chairs cannot afford to be too autocratic.
In the words of Jones and Stewart (1985b p20), "they
have to share power, first with members of their
committees and secondly with other chairmen and members
of the policy and resources committee."

He or she also has to maintain these relationships:

> "between meetings... he has to chair meetings but
> that is a relatively simple part of the task...
> the important thing is bridging the gap between
> meetings." (Labour member, Conservative
> controlled County Council).

A number of the councils surveyed as part of this study
were "hung" or "balanced" and this can alter the role
and function of the Chairperson. In one authority the
post as such did not exist but was shared by the
spokespersons for the different parties. As one
spokesperson explained:

> "It's a situation where we don't have a regular
> Chairperson so we take it as a spokesman angle -
> giving the officers someone they can get speedy
> decisions from. The running of the meetings is
> important but it is incidental to the fact that
> the Chief Officers have instant contact for

instant decision and support for their policies."

(Democrat spokesperson, Hung County Council.

In another hung council the Democrats took the Chair.
The Chairperson concerned described his role as
follows:

"To keep the committee reasonably disciplined, I
do have a pre-look at the Capital programme and
because we are on cash limit basis I do discuss
fairly regularly with the Director how we are
staying within budget.   Being a balanced
committee, as we are, I often as not try and get a
concensus on the committee." (Democrat
Chairperson, Hung Metropolitan District).

There was some agreement on this approach from the
Labour spokesperson on the library committee. She
said:

"In a hung council the role of the Chair is very
much shared with the spokespersons and it is the
spokespersons and the Chair in conjunction with
the officers who are involved in deciding policy
and promoting that policy." (Labour member, Hung
Metropolitan District).

Such views are very much in line with those obtained

from a pilot project for the present study which was

carried out in 1985.   Then the Conservative Chairman

of an outer London authority said:

> "The council is hung. The Chairman should hold a
>
> balance and allow all parties full expression at
>
> committee. He should also, through contact with
>
> the Chief Librarian, be aware of any 'fireworks'
>
> in the day-to-day running of the department and of
>
> any proposed developments or contractions."
>
> (Conservative Chairman, Hung Outer London
>
> Borough).

The Chair of the 'library committee' in another hung

council has set out his views on how to handle the

situation.   In a recent article (Bartlett 1990) he

states, "The art of chairmanship, I contend, is the

ability to control, direct and actively promote

discussions on real issues, not merely to act as a

biased referee in a political slanging match."

The members interviewed for this study identified the

following as the main functions of the Chairperson:

    (i)   To be a spokesperson for, and an advocate,

           of the library service.

    (ii)   To run the library committee meeting.

(iii) To act as the political arm of the service.

(iv) To provide direction for the service.

(v) To liaise between officers and members and between officers and the public.

(vi) To maintain links with the chairpersons of other committees.

Such findings have much in common with those of the Maud Committee which set out the role of the local government chairperson as follows:

(i) Keep discipline within the meeting.

(ii) Act as spokesman for the committee as a whole.

(iii) Giving a lead to the committee.

(iv) Making policy.

(v) Controlling the agenda and the reports.

(vi) Taking decisions (e.g. Chairman's action).

(vii) Acting as advocate for the service provided by the committee.

(viii) Co-ordination of the work of the committee with other committees, departments and agencies.

Such a listing whilst useful does not perhaps reflect the reality in any one authority or for any one chairperson. For as Dearlove (1973 p136) discovered:

"In a very real sense, the individual chairmen are
free to behave in the way which they consider
appropriate: 'There's no real drill on what the
chairmen should do; it's what you make it.' This
freedom does not, however, mean that the chairmen
will behave in a totally unpredictable and
idiosyncratic manner - quite the reverse, for
there is an absence of specific behaviour rules
precisely because they are not needed to ensure
that behaviour is held within certain limits."

The Chairperson is in a potentially powerful
position.   Bealey et al in their study of Newcastle
under Lyme observed that "a strong-willed and capable
chairman who is well advised on the technical and legal
aspects is likely to get his way." (1965 p369).

What emerges from the members' perceptions of the
Chairperson, and the work of the Maud Committee, is a
description of the Chairperson's role which appears to
be closely related to Mintzberg's (1980) analysis of
the manager's working roles. By observing five chief
executives Mintzberg identified ten roles which he
grouped as follows:
INTERPERSONAL: Figurehead, Leader, Liaison
INFORMATIONAL: Monitor, Disseminator, Spokesman
DECISIONAL: Entrepreneur, Disturbance handler,
Resource allocator, negotiator.

While these "ten roles form a gestalt [that] is not to
say that all managers give equal attention to each
role." (Mintzberg 1989 p22). Indeed Mintzberg found
that different types of manager spent relatively more
time in one role or another.

A similar study observing library committee
chairpersons could provide valuable insights into their
work. Certainly the literature of local government
provides a few references to chairing 'library
committees' and the qualities required. In his memoirs
Skellern (1985 p47) refers to a colleague in terms that
suggest that it is not a job for the politically
ambitious:

> "Jim made a first rate chairman of the art gallery
> and library committee, a job that suited him down
> to the ground. His ambitions in local government
> were I think quite limited."

However, as some of the comments set out above suggest,
a good chairperson can give the library service a high
visibility which can lead to improvements in the
service. The literature does provide some limited
evidence of this. An early example is cited by Jones
(1969 p255) in his study of Wolverhampton Town Council
in which he describes the efforts of Stephen Craddock,

Chairman of the Library Committee and Mayor from
1896-7. Craddock:

> "had pressed for some time for a new Free Library,
> but to no avail, since agreement could not be
> reached on a site. He cut through the
> obstructions by buying personally a plot of land
> and offering it to the council... The site was
> accepted and the town built a new Free library...
> Craddock was renowned as the 'father of the Free
> Library'."

Savage (1942 p25), as might be expected, has provided
some other examples. One was:

> "Alderman Keatley Moore, chairman at Croydon for
> 12 years, ... a lively personality of great public
> spirit, with a high but genial sense of duty. He
> investigated the open shelf system incidentally at
> the time librarians were quarrelling about it, and
> heartened the committee to whistle away bogies
> stuffed by the indicator makers; took an active
> share in book selection, particularly in relating
> it to local cultural movements."

An extract from the obituary for Councillor Wells (Vann
1964), who was Chairman of the Redditch Library
Committee for twenty five years, provides another

professional perception of the difference a chairman

can make.

"When he became Chairman the library was a

collection of old books housed in a small, dingy

room, with a staff of two. When he died the

library had been modernized and extended, a mobile

service introduced, and issues had reached 400,000

a year from a stock of 50,000 modern books. The

staff numbered thirteen. Councillor Wells

deserves the credit for much of this improvement.

He was passionately interested in the development

of the library service, and never ceased pressing

its claims on the town council."

Well over a decade later Joe Hendry (1977) told a group

of professional colleagues, "Show me a good library

service - and I'll show you a very good library

committee chairman."

Such a chairman is likely to be welcomed by the

officers. Corbett (1953 p73) argues that a chairman

should be interested and efficient where library

business is concerned. He goes on to say "Such a

chairman can be a tower of strength to the librarian;

he will be 'au fait' with all important aspects of the

work and yet will never attempt to usurp the position

of the librarian himself." The extent to which today's

councillors agree with the latter part of that
statement will be discussed in the next three chapters
which consider members' perception of the job of the
Chief Librarian and the relationships between library
officers and members.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE ROLE OF THE CHIEF LIBRARIAN

In his pamphlet <u>What the public library boss does</u>,
David Liddle (1985) provided a personal, if brief,
assessment of the role of the Chief Librarian. By way
of contrast to the officer's view, this chapter reviews
elected members' perception of that role, and is
concerned with what the public library boss is expected
to do and the qualities that are thought to be required
to carry out the job successfully.   A question that
was addressed over half a century ago in Winifed
Holtby's saga of local government life, <u>South Riding</u>:

"Mr Drew... turned his attention to the public
libraries. In his mind a librarian's duty was
mainly that of moral censor. Repeatedly he called
the harassed Mr. Prizethorp's attention to volumes
which he found 'stinking with sex'. 'Public
incinerator's proper place for them', he would say
of all modern novels... According to Mr. Drew,
Aldous Huxley was 'a disgusting pervert', Virginia
Woolf 'a morbid degenerate' and Naomi Mitchison
'not fit for a lunatic asylum'. "No, I've not
read it all through, but I know <u>enough</u>" was his
favourite condemnation". (Holtby 1972 p245).

In responding to the question "What in your view is the
most important function of the Chief Librarian?" the
majority of members interviewed for this study took a
rather wider view than Mr. Drew's. They often referred
to more than one role. In considering their opinions
on the job of the Chief Librarian it is important to
make a distinction between the work of the officer so
far as it relates to the elected members themselves,
and his or her role as a service manager.

There was some recognition amongst members that the job
of Chief Librarian was far from an easy one. Although
it is a little disconcerting, if not surprising, given
their own range of responsibilities, that some Leaders
or Chairman of Councils had "never really thought about
it." (Leader, Conservative Metropolitan District), or
felt unable to answer questions about the librarian's
role because "I don't know enough about his work."
(Chairman, Hung Metropolitan District).

It is clear that, at the personal level, the vast
majority of members look to the Chief Librarian and
other officers for professional advice and expertise.
They want and expect their officer to keep them fully
informed. This fact was recognised by one of Kogan
and Van Der Eyken's (1973 p90) respondents who said
that, "the chairman should know much more than any
member of the committee, and it is the job of the

officer to keep him informed." At the organizational
level they expect him or her to manage the service,
although there are a variety of opinions as to what
such management involves. They also expect the Chief
Librarian to communicate and promote the value of the
service politically, nationally and locally. The
planning and development role of the librarian was also
stressed by many respondents, while other mentioned the
importance of liaison and coordinating functions.

Within these general categories there is, as one might
expect, a difference of emphasis between different
respondents. For instance, it is interesting to note
that the old, "should the librarian be a manager or
bookperson argument" is not entirely dead. The view
held by a substantial minority of members is well
summarised by the comments of the following
respondents.

For them the function of the Chief Librarian is:

"First of all to have an overall view of the book
selection for the libraries. I refer to libraries
as places for books generally speaking not to
ignore the other bits and pieces - let's be
honest, libraries are about books. [The librarian
has] to make sure the best purchase is made in

terms of finance available." (Conservative
member, Hung Metropolitan District Council).

A member from a London Borough also expressed much the
same point of view. For him the main job of the Chief
Librarian was:

To maintain the number of books we have, the
quality of books we have and to be aware of what
authors are producing, newly producing. To keep
the stock in good order, up-to-date and of
sufficient quality and quantity to respond to
local needs." (Conservative member, Labour
controlled Outer London Borough).

For some, though, the idea of the Chief Librarian being
primarily concerned with books was very much a thing of
the past. As one Council Leader said:

"We have in the past had librarians who were very
knowledgeable about books - [I am] not sure that
is the requirement for a chief librarian - really
he is a manager of the authority, he has to manage
the particular branch efficiently, effectively,
economically to give a good service to the
customer. So I see all our Chief Officer's posts
as managers rather than providers. I look upon
him very much as a manager - more knowledge of

management practices, keeping to budgets and so on
- than just to know what author goes on which
shelf." (Conservative Leader, Metropolitan
District).

This view was echoed by another member who said:

"The Chief Librarian is a manager responsible for
the management financial and organizational of the
service as a whole - he performs the function of a
general manager: that seems to be his proper
function." (Conservative Chairman, Metropolitan
District).

Other argued that a Chief Librarian needed a
combination of professional and managerial skills
because there are:

"two arts to running an organization - knowing
your subject and being able to manage it. If all
you do is know your subject you get channel [sic]
vision, if you are too commercial a manager you
miss some of the detail: you've got to get the
fine balance between the two." (Conservative
member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Some were rather more succinct about their
expectations:

"I expect an officer who is paid a high salary to be able to run his department." (Labour Chair, Labour controlled County Council).

Members had a variety of views as to just what running a service involved. One respondent, himself a retired retail manager, said that the Chief Librarian should be:

"like a good storekeeper, should see that the library is kept clean, well kept and the books up-to-date and returned correctly. He should deal with complaints - chase them up." (Conservative member, Labour controlled County Council).

Members also expect the Chief Librarian to "run his department" within the political and economic realities of the local council. It is his or her job "to see that the service - the policy as the members decided - is actually carried out." (Labour member, Conservative controlled Outer London Borough) and:

"to run the most efficient and effective and economical service within the scope of the policies of the committee." (Conservative Chairman, Inner London Borough).

A distinct variation on this theme was expressed by one member who felt that a Chief Librarian might sometimes need to circumvent council policy because:

"the Chief Officer has a loyalty to the public as well, to mitigate the worst excesses of a bad council - the officer should interpret wishes." (Labour member, Hung County Council).

Politics clearly is something that the Chief Librarian cannot afford to ignore.

"Any professional at that level has to be political with a little 'p' - if he ain't he don't last long. He has got to know how people work and think. I pride myself on having some professional understanding into libraries, museums and so on... I have a view into the professional way of thinking, just as the professional must have a view into the way politicians think." (Labour Chair, Metropolitan District).

This same respondent saw the librarian's main function as "to give us [the elected members] the professional expertise, to advise the committee and the council." Such advice should be given in layperson's terms, or, as one member said, it is "a case of explaining to non-specialists... what the professional concerns of

the library are." (Labour member, Labour controlled
Metropolitan District). As will be further
demonstrated in Chapter 8, the professional advice of
officers is highly valued by members. The librarian is
seen as:

"the professional adviser to the committee so that
we are aware of what is professionally possible."
(Conservative Chairman, Inner London Borough).

Some members felt that this role was not just the
responsibility of the Chief. For instance one
respondent was:

"committed to the idea of teamwork". [and
believed that] "officers below the level of Chief
Officer ought to be able to attend committee and
be trusted with that purpose." (Labour member,
Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

Another echoed this point saying that the librarian
should "gather information from his staff." (Labour
member, Democrat controlled Metropolitan District).

A number of members mentioned the importance of staff
management. The Chief Librarian said one should:

"make certain that he not only recruits staff but
retains staff capable of giving the best service."
(Labour member, Conservative controlled County
Council).

Another said that he should "make sure the staff are
trained adequately." (Conservative member, Conservative
controlled Metropolitan District).   For one Chairman,
the Chief Librarian:

"has to be the main fount of ideas [about] future
policies and forwarding the service... he is the
mainspring around which it all revolves for the
future." (Conservative Chairman, Conservative
County Council).

The librarian as a source of ideas and innovation was a
common theme in the responses of members.
Interestingly too, and perhaps against some of the
conventional wisdoms sometimes heard at professional
gatherings, members were interested in ideas from
outside their own locality, and expected the librarian
to bring them to their attention.   In the words of one
Chairperson:

"We are politicians not librarians, we won't
necessarily know a brilliant library idea that has
come up at the other end of the country and I

would expect a professional officer to be on a
constant look out for that kind of thing."
(Labour Chair, Inner London Borough).

The views of this Labour politician were echoed almost
directly by her Conservative counterpart who wanted his
librarian to ensure:

"that our attention is brought to professional
developments which we might, having then become
aware of them, think them worth pursuing and
implementing." (Conservative Chairman, Inner
London Borough).

Such statements would appear to contradict the view
expressed by a County Librarian at a recent conference.
He felt that:

"Decisions about the future of the library service
are rapidly becoming more and more localised and
have less and less to do with national perceptions
where even 'local' comparisons using Cipfa or the
Audit Commission's 'family' are becoming
irrelevant." (Saunders 1989).

Members appear to value the pro-active approach. The
librarian should:

"never think, 'That's it, that is the service',
and rest on their laurels, [but] think 'What else
can I do, what things can be brought forward to
committee'." (Conservative member, Conservative
controlled County Council).

In this area, as elsewhere, the librarian's political
antenna is expected to be well tuned. He or she is
expected to:

"bring ideas that would further our known
political priorities. To come up with positive
suggestions for change and improvement within the
council's general ethos." (Labour Chair, Inner
London Borough).

This reflects Self's (1972 p161) observation that
politicians attempt to establish "an atmosphere in
which administrators will continually be aware of
political guidelines and constraints".

These days the constraints are often seen as financial
and Conservative members in particular stressed the
importance of financial management. For one respondent
the job of the Chief Librarian is:

"to ensure that the libraries offer the services
that people want at a price the borough can

afford." (Conservative member, Democrat
controlled Outer London Borough).

Another argued that he or she should:

"see that the library section runs efficiently
within the budget laid down by the main
committee." (Conservative member, Conservative
controlled County Council).

Labour and Democrat members were more likely to see the
financial constraints as coming from outside local
government but they too emphasised the importance of
this aspect of the librarian's role.   This, according
to one respondent, was to:

"preserve as good a library service as possible
given the pressures and cuts in resources
generally prevailing in local government."
(Democrat member, Labour controlled Inner London
Borough).

David Rosenberg (1989 p224) in his study of local
government treasurers summarised nicely the political
and financial role of service heads when he wrote, "A
chief officer... has to be an able politician and to be
able to use the strength, and minimise the weaknesses,

of his committee and chairperson in negotiations over resources".

While, as is indicated above, information about innovation outside their area can be a source of interest and satisfaction for members, lack of information about what is happening in their own library authority is a cause of serious dissatisfaction. Most elected members, especially chairpersons, do not like being surprised. As one told me:

> "If there are rumblings, problems, I don't expect someone else to tell me about them... The first thing I tell any Chief Officer is that I don't expect to hear about the problems in the corridors of County Hall - or outside - if you've got problems I expect him to come and tell me and not hear it from someone else." (Labour Chair, County Council).

Another said the Chief Librarian's job is:

> "to forewarn the councillors of problems and decisions that are going to have to be made and not spring them on us at the last minute."
> (Labour Chair, Inner London Borough).

A Democrat member echoed this view:

"The Chief Librarian's main job as far as the
committee is concerned is to keep us informed of
the particular - where we are running out of money
and where there are needs which we are not
addressing." (Democrat member, Hung Metropolitan
District).

The literature suggests that Chief Officers are well
aware of the importance of keeping members, especially
Chairpersons in touch. For instance the Chief
Education Officers interviewed in Kogan and Van der
Eyken's (1973) classic study County Hall had expressed
the view that:

"if the chairman is to retain his authority within
his own party he must know everything of
significance that is going on. I thought,
therefore, that it was essential that my chairman
should be informed of everything that he felt was
important for this purpose." (George Taylor,
Former CEO Leeds, p151-2).

A slightly different view was put by the Chairman of
one 'library' committee interviewed for this study.
Speaking of his Chief Librarian he said:

"If I ask him if there are any problems the answer
should be no." (Conservative Chairman, Outer
London Borough).

This Chairman expected the librarian to sort out any
problems without reference to him.

Most members, however, felt that it is the function of
the Chief Librarian to "make sure that members are
informed as to what is happening to the service."
(Democrat member, Labour controlled Metropolitan
District). Very often this is, as indicated above, "a
case of explaining to the non specialist what the
professional concerns of the library are." (Labour
member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).
This, of course, requires a special set of skills. It
was described by one member as:

"a PR role... keeping the councillors sweet so
that they can implement his [i.e. the librarian's]
work." (Democrat member, Hung County Council).

Many members mentioned the importance of the
librarian's PR function both at the local and national
level. For one respondent "Getting the support of his
council who are his bosses in his endeavours and works;
that is his [the librarian's] most important
function." (Democrat member, Hung County Council). A

Conservative member of the same council spoke of the
librarian's need "to be a good lobbyist for extra
finance or support." From a different political
perspective the task was seen to be "to defend the
library service." (Labour member, Conservative
controlled Inner London Borough). Another respondent
wanted to see his librarian:

> "keep himself in the forefront of what is going on
> nationally and to be looking at new and innovative
> ways to raise the profile of libraries."
> (Democrat member, Democrat controlled Outer London
> Borough).

In addition to possessing managerial and professional
skills, members wanted the Chief Librarian to have an
outgoing personality, diplomatic skills and what might
be termed political nous. These last two qualities
were nicely encapsulated in a response from one
member. The Chief Librarian's job, he said, is:

> "a diplomatic job. To support the Chairman, to
> provide information to the minority leader... he
> has to be diplomatic about doing that." (Labour
> member, Conservative controlled, Inner London
> Borough).

As Lomer and Rogers (1983) discovered in a different
context, the personality of the Chief Librarian can be
an important factor in the success or otherwise of a
library service in attracting resources. Such a view
seems to be widespread throughout local government.
Laffin (1983), for instance, in his study of
professionalism and party concluded, that the qualities
chairmen regarded as most desirable in chief officers
were "leadership" and a strong personality. To quote
Cross and Mallen (1987 p136-7),

> "as in any situation involving human
> relationships, the precise way in which local
> authorities work depends very much on the
> personalities and interests of the individuals
> concerned."

Likewise Parkinson (nd p29) in discussing the politics
of urban education suggests that personality can be
important. He describes the impact of the appointment
of a new officer:

> "his policy of expansion... his ability to
> convince a previously reluctant committee to spend
> money, are key factors. It is not intended to
> suggest that the impact of personality alone can
> transform policy itself, but it would be unwise to

ignore the effect of single individuals at

critical points in the decision making structure."

Evidence from the present study also suggests that the

personality of the Chief Officer plays a part in

elected members' perception of the library service. It

so happens that in two of the authorities examined

there had been relatively new appointments to the post

of Chief Librarian. In both cases, and without any

prompting from the interviewer, respondents compared

the personalities of the old and the new appointees.

The following quotes are indicative of the impressions

of members in the first authority:

"I was not very impressed with the previous

librarian. We have a much better bloke now - the

previous one was a whinging, moaning kind of bloke

who did his best to reduce staff morale. I had a

few words with him." (Leader of the council).

"the reports we now have are, without failure,

excellent. The reports we did have were a great

deal less than satisfactory; they lacked

imagination, lacked precision and were short on

vision." (Committee Chairman).

In the second authority the comparison between the old

and the new was far less odious:

"We've got a first class Chief Librarian at the

moment... he seems to be carrying on in the same

manner as the former Chief did, which is first

class. The initiatives still seem to come from

the library service". (Committee member).

[For obvious reasons the types of authorities have

not been identified]

In many respects the perceptions of the elected members

interviewed in this study support the conclusions of

the Local Government Training Board report (1987 p14)

which stated that, "the credibility of the chief

officer comes to rest on...personality and competence:

the ability to communicate effectively within the

authority and to a wider public, the ability to defend

his or her staff and budget."

Elected members expect the Chief Librarian to operate

"within the council's general ethos." (Labour Chair,

Inner London Borough). To take account of political

and economic priorities. Within this framework he or

she is seen as the source of professional advice and

expertise, and expected to keep members informed about

the local library scene and the profession in general.

Respondents also felt that the Chief Librarian should

plan and promote the service. He or she is

increasingly seen as a manager of human and material
resources although some respondents still emphasised
the importance of his or her role as a bookperson.

Kouses and Mico (1979) in their study of human service
organizations (H.S.O.) observed that:

"People who occupy roles in... different domains
view the HSO from different vantage points and
have different perceptions of the reality of
HSOs."

Outside the parameters set for the present study, but
worthy of future investigation, is the question of how
far the views of members on the role of the librarian
coincide with the professional view of that role.

Having introduced elected members' perceptions of some
of the major players in the drama of local government;
the members, the chairpersons and the officers, we are
now in a position to consider respondents' views
regarding the nature of the relationships that exist
between them.

CHAPTER FIVE: ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS - WHO DOES WHAT?

There is some evidence to suggest that the relationship between officers and members has been changing over recent years. (Alexander 1982; Blunkett 1985; Gyford, Leach & Game 1989; Knowles 1988; Stewart 1988b). David Blunkett, for example, has spoken of the "radical shift in relationships between officers and members in the early 80's". (Blunkett 1985). The present research suggests that these relationships vary, not only over time, but also between local authorities and even between different departments in the same authority. Libraries for instance were seen as a special case by one member. In his authority he thought the function of the library committee was:

> "to encourage and support the professional librarian in a way that doesn't happen in other committees. I have often felt that the other business of the council is too serious a matter to be left in the hands of professionals, like war should not be left in the hands of the generals - but this [the library service] seems to be a case of letting the professionals get on with the job with encouragement and support." (Labour member, Hung County Council).

The tone of the interview suggested that this was
intended more as a vote of confidence in the
professional skills of the librarians than a
denigration of the importance of the public library
service.

The traditional or formal definition of the
relationship between officers and members is that
elected members make policy and the officers administer
it.   This present research indicates that the dividing
line between the work of the library officers and that
of elected members is not always thought to be as clear
as the formal/legalistic position might suggest. Some
of the elected members interviewed for this study, when
asked "What in your view is the dividing line between
the job of the library officers and the work of elected
members?" found it difficult to provide a clear
distinction. As one respondent said, "there is quite a
large blur[ring] between the two roles." (Labour
member, Conservative controlled Outer London Borough).
Another replied to the question by saying:

> "That's very difficult: on the major policies I do
> think that the members are there to say what they
> want done, but the officers are clearly the
> experts, so I think their job is to put up - not
> the ideas, it's the members who should put the
> ideas - I think the officers are there to put up

the ways our policies can be carried out - to be

able to look in more than one direction."

(Democrat member, Democrat controlled Outer London

Borough).

Another said the question was:

"a bit of a floorer to be able to sort out. The

Chief Librarian is responsible for the day-to-day

running of the libraries and he ought not to be

interrupted with on too big a scale by members."

(Labour member, Hung County Council).

Yet another respondent found the question:

"An awkward one. I suppose in theory the officers

are there to do the bidding of the elected

officers [members?], though in fact there is so

much power that has been delegated to the

officers, that in fact they just run the Borough."

(Conservative member, Democrat controlled Outer

London Borough).

Some respondents were quite happy for the Chief

Librarian to run his or her part of the Borough. As

one said, after describing the division between

officers and members as "incredibly blurred":

"How he runs the service is a matter for the
Borough Librarian after he gets approval.   If you
pay somebody £32,000 a year you don't expect to do
the job yourself."   (Labour member, Conservative
controlled Inner London Borough).

The salary paid to, and the perceived expertise of, the
Chief Officer was a recurring theme: a point of view
that was nicely summarised by one member who said:

"The officer is the paid man, he is the
professional.   The County Councillors are elected
not by their ability but by their availability.
In other words I always take the advice - or
listen to the advice - of the professional man.
If I wanted his job I would apply for it."
(Conservative member, Hung County Council).

The importance of the relationship between elected
members and local government officials is emphasised
throughout the literature, (e.g. Byrne 1983; Knowles
1988; Mellors & Copperthwaite 1987).   As two recent
writers suggest "Any examination of local authority
organization must have a clear understanding about the
respective roles of elected member and the paid
officer."   (Mellors and Copperwaite 1987 p183).   The
precise nature of the roles and relationships involved
is much more difficult to define and the work carried

out for this study suggests that the library
officer/member relationship is no exception.

As has been indicated above, the traditional or formal
definition of the relationship is that elected members
make policy and officers administer it.   In the real
world of local government, as the Bains Report (The New
Local Authorities: Management and Structure 1972)
acknowledged, and as a number of commentators have
argued, that distinction is far less clear. (e.g. Darke
& Walker 1977; Dearlove 1973; Knowles 1988; Morris
1990; Newton 1976; Seeley 1978; Taylor 1989). Morris,
for instance, has written:

> "The classic analysis, that councillors make
> policy and officers carry out that policy and
> administer generally, was never accurate, and
> always far too simplistic, whether as a
> description of what does happen or what ought to
> happen."   (Morris 1990 p20).

Be that as it may, a number of the elected members
responding to the present survey did consider it the
role of members to decide the overall policy of the
service, set the political direction, decide priorities
and allocate resources.   In the words of one Council
Chairman:

"The elected members must work out policy, decide levels of expenditure, the officers must get on and manage and operate the service - there is a clear dividing line between what members and officers should do." (Conservative Chairman, County Council).

In fact, a significant number of respondents placed great emphasis on the politicians' role in setting policy. One stated that:

"The pat answer is the correct one. The elected members decide overall policy and direction, decide financial schemes overall, and should rely on the professional officers to implement those broad guidelines." (Conservative Chairman, Outer London Borough).

The Chair of another committee argued strongly that:

"The dividing line is the policy. The policy is ours - the running of the department is his [the Librarian's]. He is paid to advise me on those policies - he may not think those policies are the right ones but when you have nailed your colours to the mast and go ahead with those policies because you were elected on a manifesto... we want our policies carried out, we expect that to be

done... we cannot, an authority should not, allow the officers to alter policy... I believe that the people outside believe we are there to carry out their wishes not the wishes of professional officers." (Labour Chair, County Council).

In the words of one respondent:

"Elected members are there to promote their ideas, their political philosophy." (Labour member Conservative controlled County Council).

There will be times when this political philosophy is paramount. "There are", said one member:

"cases where the policy of any local authority would have to be adhered to, for example Equal Opportunity Policy, non-sexist policies. The librarian should choose stock which adheres to that policy. If I knew that policy was not being adhered to I would ask why." (Democrat member, Democrat controlled Inner London Borough).

Another maintained it is:

"the members' function is to set the priorities, determine where improvements to services can be

made." (Democrat Chairperson, Outer London
Borough).

Resource allocation was identified by a number of
respondents as a responsibility of elected members. As
one said:

"The decision has to be taken about how much money
we have got and therefore the size of the bookfund
- the overall decision about resources is one for
members." (Conservative Chairman, Inner London
Borough).

Another, from a different party was of the opinion:

"that the buck stops with the members as far as
actually taking decisions on money... the decision
making process is vested quite clearly with those
who were elected." (Labour member Conservative
County Council).

One respondent saw it as the members' role to decide
between the competing financial claims of officers
within the authority. He summarised the role as
follows:

"The work of elected members is to sort out
between various competing claims for financial

priorities those which they themselves deem to be
the most important - the job of each officer in
each department is to put in what he considers to
be reasonable bids for his department and on the
political side the councillors determine between
these priorities. The councillors give effect to
those areas where they want to see enhancement and
those areas where they want to see things put on
the back burner - that is a political decision.
It is for the politicians to choose between the
competing demands for funds and deciding where
they want to spend their money - those areas where
they want to increase service and those where they
wish to decrease them - and those where they feel
service could be provided in an alternative
fashion such as privatisation - and those which
they feel are better left in the council's
service." (Conservative member, Democrat
controlled Outer London Borough).

A Democrat member made a similar point, saying that:-

"The elected members have to try and find the
money to keep the service going, to keep the
libraries open, to provide new and better services
and facilities where we can. To decide what is
important, useful, desirable... Depending on how
much money we have got we must look at criteria to

see if it is urgent, necessary or merely
desirable."   (Democrat member, Hung Metropolitan
Council).

Those advising new councillors suggest that "probably
the most important factor in a member's ability to
influence the work of the council is his relationship
with the officers." (Freeman 1975 p26).   A number of
the members interviewed for this study referred to the
relationship between officers and members as a
partnership. One said it is "a partnership and needs to
be seen as that, a partnership where the roles most
certainly overlap." (Labour member, Hung Metropolitan
district). Another said:

> "It may sound a bit trite to say so but it should
> be team work between members and officers - I
> believe it is teamwork and the balance between
> professional advice, judgement, professional
> opinion... balanced by the fact that
> democratically elected members make the final
> choice of policy matters - that is the right
> balance - that's how it should be in libraries and
> elsewhere." (Conservative Chairman, Metropolitan
> District).

A County councillor expressed much the same view but emphasised the role of officers in providing information:

> "They [the officers] leave it to members, with the information, to make the decision and then abide by them. I see it as a kind of partnership." (Labour member, Conservative controlled County Council).

Perhaps nowhere is this partnership more important than in the relationship between the Chair and the Chief Librarian. The quality of this relationship is crucial to the effective running of the library service. With the advent of corporate management and multi-purpose directorates and committees many chief librarians have ceased to be chief officers. Some within the public library world have felt that this places them at a considerable disadvantage. For instance Corbett (1979) was of the opinion that "one of the less agreeable results of a directorate may be his (i.e. the librarian's) diminished contact with the chairman of the committee and other members of the council." Similarly the writer of an INLOGOV report observed, "chief officers competing with each other before committee attempting to build up good relations with the Chairman to get his ear." (Greenwood et al nd p186). The importance of this has been summed up by a

former leader of Birmingham Council who has said "the close working relationship between the Chairman of a committee and his Chief Officer (represents) a partnership of immense value from which policy was often initiated." (Bosworth quoted in Haynes 1980 p184). The importance of the Chair's relationship with the Chief Librarian was highlighted by a respondent to the pilot study who described his main function as, "to enter into team work with the librarian and bring about progressive change even if it meets with opposition from senior councillors and officers." (Labour member, Hung County Council).

In three of the twelve authorities covered by this study there had been a serious breakdown in the relationship between the elected members and the library officers. In the first the Chief Librarian had apparently ignored a decision of the Council. The Chair of the 'library committee' described the situation as follows:

> "We closed a library down. I as Chair and the
> members felt that there should be a mobile library
> opened for those residents in our Borough who were
> affected... having made the decision we then found
> that the Chief Librarian, for reasons he decided
> he thought were valid, didn't provide it. There
> was a clear clash and in the end he had to be

instructed in no uncertain terms to do as he was
told which was to provide a mobile library for
those areas." (Labour Chair, Outer London
Borough).

The second instance involved the previous librarian of
a Metropolitan District. From a number of the
respondents it was clear that he had not been popular
with the politicians. He had clashed with politicians
first:

"over budget cuts. The library had been asked to
take its share but the Chief Librarian argued
vehemently, that is the previous librarian, that
it was not the proper course of action."

The second area of disagreement was:

"Over the question of soft pornography, where
myself and the vice-chairman took one view and the
librarian and his deputy took another."
(Conservative Chairman Metropolitan District).

In the third authority the Chief Officer found himself
very much at odds with the major opposition group. So
much so that at the local elections the local press
were forecasting his professional demise if the
Conservatives gained control. A Conservative member
described the sharp difference of opinion:

"Between the Director and the members of my party
- not the ruling group. The Sunday opening of
libraries caused a dreadful fuss in the Borough.
When the ruling group wanted to open on Sunday, we
opposed it. Some members of the ruling group also
opposed it and the vote in Council rejected it.
The Director actually came out and had a go at
some of our councillors - there were quite a few
apologies flying about after that." (Conservative
member, Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

One can compare this action with Savage's advice to the
librarian who fails to persuade a committee on some
course of action. According to Savage, "he will never
show disappointment, still less anger, but will smile
if he can (and not sourly), and blame himself, perhaps
unjustly rather than his opponents, who will approve
the spirit in which he takes punishment." (Savage 1942
p44). Just how far the Conservative group on this
council would have "approved the spirit in which he
takes his punishment" must remain an open question for
according to a member of the controlling party:

"With the Conservative opposition there are always
sharp differences of opinion. They don't like
anything the officers do. They do accuse the

officers of being partial". (Democrat member,
Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

In three authorities respondents described ways in
which the members and officers kept a good working
relationship. Asked if there had "ever been a sharp
difference of opinion on any matter between library
officers and elected members" the Chair of one
committee replied:

"I would say not - we never let it get to that
stage. He [the Chief Officer] would not bring it
[to committee] in the first place. I would say
let's till the ground a little bit first. We do
have differences of opinion, not so much in
committee but the Director and myself have
discussions, debates, arguments, whatsoever - but
to bring them into committee is very very rare.
He is political with a small p." (Labour Chair
Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

Another respondent indicated one officer's particular
technique:

"The current Director is quite good at providing
an umbrella of words - he did it last night...
Sometimes it is difficult to know if we are
disagreeing with the officers or not... I wasn't

quite sure what the officers were recommending."

(Democrat member, Hung Metropolitan District.

In the third authority a comparison was made between the techniques of the current and previous Chief Librarian:

"We have a new librarian this year - we are going along with his ideas - We had sharp differences with the last librarian who wanted to spend more money on the library service and theatre.   The new librarian, he is getting a better deal from the **** department than our last librarian did." (Conservative member, Conservative controlled Metropolitan District).

In all authorities surveyed there had been, not surprisingly, some areas of disagreement between the officers and members.   As one respondent argued;

"If there was no differences of opinion the whole affair would be boring.   It is healthy that there are differences."   (Labour member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

Healthy or otherwise, debates arose over a number of issues. As the next chapter demonstrates in a greater

detail, there are several variations on the censorship
theme. Thus in one council:

"From the Conservative side there have been very
strong objections raised to homosexual displays."
(Conservative member, Labour controlled Outer
London Borough).

Whilst in a few Labour controlled Councils the library
officers had disagreed with members of the ruling group
who wanted to stop taking News International
newspapers.

Budgetary measures were also cited as an area where
disagreement could be found. In one authority:

"We had to cut the budget by £m55, the officers
had to go away and produce decisions with members
on how we were going to cut each service and the
problem was because the library service is one of
the more efficiently run departments. The effect
of a 30% cut on libraries was considerably worse
than a 30% cut on, for example, parks and gardens.
I think the librarians came up with a number of
different ways we could make cuts but they were
not happy about it. They felt the council was
being unfair to them and what the Chief Officer
was particularly concerned about was the decision

to close... libraries.   This was very upsetting
to the library staff who felt the council had been
unfair to libraries - most of the members of the
committee also felt that the library was punished
for being efficient." (Labour Chair, Inner London
Borough).

In a Conservative council there had been disagreement
regarding:

"The administrative structure and staffing of the
library service. Requests for extra posts to
bolster the administration do not go down well
with members who feel that they have to look after
the ratepayers." (Conservative Chairman of County
Council).

There were also disagreements between officers and
members regarding service roles and priorities. When
one librarian apparently:

"abolished the traditional form of reference
library, there was a difference of opinion. Many
councillors felt that this produced a lack of
research facilities for the general public... the
silence rule was abolished. I think the officers
thought we were fuddy duddy and old fashioned."

(Democrat member, Conservative controlled County
Council).

In another authority it was apparently the officers who
were being old fashioned. Here:

"There was some discussion on Feminist Book
Fortnight. An initiative started by some members
and taken up by library workers. There was strong
division between top management and members. The
elected members felt it should go ahead; the
officers felt it not appropriate despite the fact
that it was a national thing." (Labour member,
Hung Metropolitan District).

Another disagreement was over policy for video
collections:

"We have an alternative video service of films not
in video shops... The officers have now decided
they can make money on this expanding into a video
shop to sell [rent out?] everything except
pornography. A lot of members oppose this."
(Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan District).

In another authority the Labour group had vehemently
opposed the transfer of the library's business and
information service to the local polytechnic. The

Labour Party's perception of the issue is seen from the
following story that appeared in the ***** Labour
News:

>"In spite of Labour protests, the County Council's
>Library Information Service for Business and
>Industry has been handed over to the Polytechnic.

>Labour took up staff protests that neither they
>nor the users of the service had been properly
>consulted. Labour members, remembering the Poly's
>acquisitive attitude over the **** and their
>attempts to take over the Small Firms Centre, are
>afraid that, after a few years of running the
>service, the Poly will effect a full takeover and
>the County Library and Information Service will be
>left out in the cold.

>An attempt by Labour to defer a decision pending
>further consultation in order to give us a chance
>to promote a true joint venture or 'arms length'
>organisation, was lost. We wonder why council
>officers were so keen to offload this very
>important and prestigious service."

A clear majority of the councillors interviewed
expressed the view that elected members should not be
involved in the day-to-day running of the library

service. Although most of them, as will become clear later, could think of exceptions to this general rule.

A number of respondents felt that they did not have the necessary expertise. As one explained:

> "If I don't know much about a car engine I don't interfere with it. I am not an expert... I wouldn't question a librarian who we employ as to the depths of a situation, 'cause I don't know more than he does." (Labour member, Labour controlled County Council).

Others felt that elected members simply did not have enough time. As one respondent explained:

> "I know what councillors have to do in the way of ward work. I just can't visualise any elected member could have the time to interfere in the day-to-day running of any department of the council." (Chairman of Hung Metropolitan Council).

This view was echoed by another member who said:

> "Elected members mostly have to work and I can't see lots of employers just allowing willy nilly time off for you to attend to the day-to-day

running of libraries... professionalism has to
come into it and not elected members... the
day-to-day running of libraries is a professional
job." (Labour member, Conservative controlled
Metropolitan District).

Other commented on the effects such actions could have
on officers:

"The Chief Officer should not have their hands
tied... it's counter productive, it creates a
degree of uncertainty not to say apprehension by
officers of the authority to have the feeling that
their every move is watched or looked at - or
overseen by elected members. It would be wholly
wrong." (Conservative Chairman, Metropolitan
District).

A Labour member who contrasted showing an interest in
the service with being involved in the day-to-day
running said that, "library workers have responded very
much to that interest." (Labour member, Hung
Metropolitan District.

A minority of respondents felt that councillor
involvement was to be encouraged. One felt that
elected members:

"should know what is happening in the day-to-day running and only intervene if they disagree or feel the committee would disagree with what is happening - should be aware even if they don't intervene." (Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan District).

A recent example of the overt involvement of a member in the day-to-day affairs of a library service is provided by Lady Porter, erstwhile Leader of Westminster Council who was reported in the Library Association Record to be "ripping notices that she didn't like off library noticeboards". ('Our people', 1990). Westminster also provides an example of an elected member becoming involved in the "professional management" of a library service. Robert Davis, a one-time member of Westminster's Policy Review Sub Committee and General Purposes Committee (the committee which at that time was responsible for libraries), spent some five months reviewing and producing a substantial report on the library service. (Davis 1983). In this he observed, "If one visits the various branch libraries, too often the attendants are seen doing very little, and in fact at ****** library... several complaints were received when one particular attendant was often seen fast asleep." (Davis 1983 p22). His experience is echoed in a report from a City Council Budget meeting at Oakland, California.

Here "Councilman Binns complained...'I walked into Jack
London Square Branch once and found the employees
outnumbered the patrons. They invited me to sit down
and play bridge with them." (Quoted in Levy, et al 1974
p.205).

This kind of negative attitude to library employees did
not feature to any great extent in the responses of
members interviewed for the present study. Most had a
high opinion of library staff and their contribution to
the service. For instance as one Labour member
explained:

> "Obviously, running libraries is a professional
> business. As such it should be left to
> professionals... rather than being involved I
> would say that members should be interested in the
> running of the library service because the more
> interest they have, the more knowledge they gain
> about how libraries ought to be run... I think
> members can pick up an enormous amount of
> information from library workers at all levels."
> (Labour member, Hung Metropolitan District).

A Democrat member felt that it was:

> "a good thing from the electorate's point of view
> if they can feel that people making decisions are

in on the ground floor and can see what is going

on to some extent." (Democrat member,

Conservative controlled County Council).

More felt that the councillor had a responsibility to

take up complaints on behalf of constituents. It was

argued that members "are responsible to the electorate

should there be any complaints." The speaker went on

to explain:

> "if I had a complaint about my local library I
> would refer first to the local librarian, or area
> librarian, perhaps to the County Librarian. I
> would not have it as an item on the committee
> straight away, not unless it was recurring."
> (Conservative member, Hung County Council).

The Chairman of one authority said:

> "There will be occasions when a Chairman gets a
> complaint about the conduct of the library in some
> way or another, it is up to the Chairman to
> investigate that - but that is reaction to
> day-to-day operation of the library, not routine
> involvement." (Conservative Chairman, Inner
> London Borough).

A backbench Labour member felt that it was, "the job of

the councillor to receive complaints and the librarian

to investigate them." (Labour member, Labour controlled County Council).

These responses reflect, to some extent, the advice given to councillors in Freeman's (1975 p26) standard text for new council members. This advises that:

> "the way the administrative work is done is very properly the concern of a wide-awake councillor. He should never hesitate to look into criticisms of local services or complaints from the public about the treatment they receive and to follow up cases when prima facie action seems justified."

A similar point has also been expressed from the officer's side. Matthew (1988 p5) feels that "it is certainly the duty of council members to investigate and discuss the service provided for their constituents. Those who comment only on the colour of the curtains will be of little value, but the member with a genuine interest should be kept aware of service developments."

Quite clearly it is the function, and perceived to be the function, of an elected member to ask questions on behalf of those who pay taxes. He or she is expected to act as a watchdog to prevent obfuscation and to express doubts. Although the literature provides one

alternative view of the member's function vis-a-vis his or her constituents. The former Chairman of Bury Library committee, in his autobiography, reveals that he thought it was sometimes his job to complain about the habits of library users. He writes "In my newly appointed position as chairman of the library committee I chastised book borrowers who used them as jam jars and tea-pot stands." (Skellern 1985 p107).

Few of the members interviewed for this study saw an unambiguous dividing line between the role of elected members and that of library officers. Rather they related the functions of each to the expertise that was seen to reside in each group. The librarian, the professional, was widely perceived to have special knowledge and professional abilities, whereas the politician was elected on a political position. The librarian was seen as the expert, whereas the members generally recognised their "amateur" role. In general terms the officers were perceived as a source of advice and professional expertise while the members saw it as their own role to decide and direct policy in line with political priorities and to act as a conduit for complaints.

Elected members inhabit what Kouses and Mico (1979) called the Policy Domain while senior library staff

operate in the Management Domain. In their study of
service organizations Kouses and Mico found that:

"The Management Domain is ultimately accountable
to the Policy Domain. Yet frequently managers
perceive policy makers encroaching upon their
domain, attempting to administer programs, not
just make policy."

The results of the present study suggests that there
was a considerable blurring of these functions. In
many ways the respondents echoed the Bains Report which
stated that, "a rigid interpretation of the roles of
one or the other defeats any attempt to create a sense
of unity of purpose within an authority." (Bains Chap
3). Most, but not all, members did not want to be
involved in the day-to-day running of the library
service but there were exceptions to this general rule,
particularly when it came to discussing stock selection
and the content of displays and exhibitions; and it is
these that are the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

POLITICIANS, STOCK SELECTION AND LIBRARY DISPLAYS

"The Chairman slowly reads through the list [of
books bought] and the books are passed one by
one. This is common practice, but sometimes the
list is taken as a whole or page by page; it
depends upon the mind of the committee and its
attitude towards the chairman and librarian.   If
the committee is a congenial one and has faith,
the process is a simple one; often on the other
hand, it may be an ordeal for the librarian."
(Sayers 1935 pp16-17).

Sayers' graphic description of the elected members'
involvement in stock selection provides, one might
think, little more than an historical snapshot of past
library practice.   Yet the practice of the book-list
continued well in to the 1940s. Savage (1942), for
instance, devotes a whole chapter of "The Librarian and
his committee" to discussing the procedure.   Later, in
the 1970s, Thompson (1975) also demonstrated that
elected members and library committees still took a
considerable interest, some might argue a censorious
interest, in the material that public libraries should
or should not provide.   He concluded that, "the vast

majority of cases of attempted censorship result from
the actions of council members. Although these cases
include some in which councillors have acted on behalf
of individual readers or groups, the vast majority show
the motivation for censorship as deriving from the
personal opinions and tastes of individual
councillors". (Thompson 1975 p212). Our present
research suggests that some fifteen years later elected
members still take more than a passing interest in the
material stocked and displayed in public libraries.

Asked "Do you think that the 'library committee' should
concern itself with the selection of library stock?"
only 26% of the members interviewed for this present
study answered with an unequivocal, 'No'. The vast
majority replied in terms of, 'No, but...'. However,
it is true to say that not all of the 'buts', as will
be seen later, were about restricting access to
material.

Elected members believe that stock selection like other
library activities has to take place in the overall
context of the policies of the local authority
concerned. This view is reflected across the political
spectrum. As one member put it, the selection of
library stock:

"should adhere to the general policies that the
local authority has laid down." (Democrat
Chairperson, Inner London Borough).

Members, said another respondent:

"Should have an input into the philosophy as well
as, perhaps, the practice. It is a sensitive
area. If the policy of the council is that
certain types of literature should not appear on
its shelves... then it is a matter of
consideration by a members' body to set a line of
policy, debated and decided upon, to indicate to
the Chief Librarian how the selection of books
etcetera should be followed." (Conservative
member, Conservative controlled Metropolitan
District).

In recent years stock selection and related matters
have been considered by members serving on other than
'library committees'. Wares (1989) has described how,
in Camden, the Race and Community Relations and Women's
committees, the Policy and Resources Committee and Full
Council, in addition to the committee responsible for
the library service asked for reports on and/or debated
book selection, exhibitions, arts events and the like.
The conclusion of the debate, "was that Camden
Libraries would maintain their long tradition of a NO

CENSORSHIP policy. Any book that is sold openly and
lawfully, and for which a demand exists may be found in
a Camden library."

Wares goes on to say that, "on this matter, as in most
other things, it is essential that we get our local
politicians to spell out clearly and publicly what
their specific objectives are." The importance of a
debate amongst members was echoed by a Labour Chair who
said:

> "It [the 'library committee'] should have basic
> principles. The policy behind book buying should
> be thrashed out in committee." (Labour Chair,
> Inner London Authority).

The views as to just what these basic principles are,
or should be, varied. One member was quite clear:

> "There are general overall principles I would like
> to see followed. Selection of books is a
> professional matter but I would like to see
> certain principles applied. For example, a
> balance of writers: I am unhappy to see racist
> books, I want to see books that reflect the nature
> of a multi-ethnic society. I do not like to see
> sexist books, especially in children's stock. The
> dangers of stereotyping, boys and girls, men and

women should be taken into account." (Labour

member, Hung Metropolitan District).

A member of the opposite political persuasion felt
that:

"There are certain sensitive issues that members

have just got to be involved in; for example, the

extremes of publications, political or moral.

Here there has to be a political judgement."

(Conservative Chairman, County Council).

However, such political involvement can in itself have

dangers. In the words of a Democrat Chairperson:

"We may end up with too much bias in a particular

direction rather than have an overall selection of

material which is of value to the local population

as a whole." (Democrat Chairperson, Hung

Metropolitan District).

A number of respondents were aware of the dangers of

censorship. One felt that it was the job of the

committee, "to allow the Chief Officer to stock things

which religious or political activists may object to."

(Labour member, Hung County Council). Some recognised

the contradictions in their own position. "We don't

call it censorship, but selection." (Labour member,

Hung Metropolitan District). Others perhaps did not, for instance the respondent who felt that the 'library committee': "Should have basic principles, No censorship..." and then went on to say, "The officer should not censor without committee endorsement." (Labour Chair, Inner London Borough).
Or the member who wanted the committee to have "a right of veto rather than a right of positive selection." (Conservative member, Labour controlled Outer London Borough).

Contradictions appear to abound, too, in what is seen as the role of the librarian and the role of the elected member with regard to stock selection. Many members admit that stock selection is "a professional job to be done by professionals". (Labour member, Conservative controlled County Council) and that "elected members don't have the knowledge." (Democrat Chairperson, Hung Metropolitan Council). One member confessed:

> "I have often wondered how books are chosen...
> often wondered about the balance, who decides
> about what is on offer. We are outsiders as far
> as that is concerned." (Labour
> member, Conservative controlled County Council).

Yet, when the difficult decisions have to be taken, members feel that they should most definitely be involved. For instance:

"with something particularly controversial it would be best for the committee to give a decision." (Labour member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

"[Elected members] should be involved if any of the content is controversial, for example pornography, then it's a matter of judgement for members to make a decision... Only contentious issues, comics or Simon (sic) Rushdie book... the rest is for the professionals." (Conservative Leader, Metropolitan District).

"We could have an input on certain books that might inflame people." (Independent member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

The reason why many elected members felt that they should be involved in these difficult decisions was clearly expressed by one respondent:

"If a particular book was controversial, or the subject was controversial, members have to carry the can if anything went wrong. The decision to

stock Salman Rushdie or not was definitely one for
the members." (Labour Chair, Outer London
Borough).

This attitude supports the theory posited by Jones
(1973) that the roles of officers and elected members
are divided on the basis of what is publicly
controversial, or potentially publicly controversial,
and that which is not. Members, said Jones, should be
concerned primarily with the former and the officers
with the latter. A similar point was made by the Bains
committee which indicated that officers should seek the
advice of members "on the sensitive issues which
inevitably arise in the course of day-to-day
administration."

Just one respondent expressed a contrary view saying:

"if a book receives notable publicity I prefer to
leave the decision to the Borough Librarian,
National Front, the speeches from Ghengis Khan
it's up to the Borough Librarian - up to him to
decide if to refer it to committee." (Labour
member, Conservative controlled Outer London
Borough).

In days gone by, as the former Mayor of Bury recalls,
some librarians were only too happy to leave the

difficult decisions to the Chairman. (Skellern 1985 p40). He describes, somewhat wryly, his own experiences as chairman of the 'library committee':

"Philip [the Chief Librarian] had a bookcase in his office where he kept the books that he had withdrawn from the public shelves as not being fit for general reading. Occasionally he would whisper to me, getting up from behind his desk with a clandestine air and reaching into the bookcase, 'I think you should take a look at this, chairman.' It always struck me as somewhat odd; there he was protecting the public from such offerings whilst at the same time trying to corrupt his chairman!"

A few members took a more bullish attitude so far as controversial material was concerned. A Labour Chair felt it:

"A responsibility of the library committee to ensure, irrespective of what the political spread is, the development of people's minds. You do not isolate people from the realities of life but make sure the literature is there. People can make up their own minds, it is our responsibility to promote that." (Labour Chair, County Council).

Many members saw it as their role to be involved in stock selection in a very general way. For example to point out deficiencies in the stock. One member would become involved:

"Only if there were some suggestions that the stock was insufficient in some way - in broad general terms not selection. For example, country and western music is very popular and not represented." (Labour member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

Another would:

"Comment on subject matter that may be under-represented, but no more detailed than that." (Conservative member, Conservative controlled Inner London Borough).

Similarly members saw it as their role "to tell the professionals about books that the public are demanding." (Labour member, Conservative controlled County Council). A variation on this theme was expressed by one respondent who was of the opinion that:

"Librarians should not decide on our views but take cognizance of public requests, demands for

what is not in our library. Professional librarians are not representative of the general public." (Labour member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

Some councillors felt it their duty to argue the interests of particular groups of constituents. Here they were unconsciously following the advice of former Prime Minister Clement Atlee who, in 1925, advised library committee members to "try to bring the library up-to-date, not by endeavouring to fill it with highbrow or propaganda literature, but by aiming to meet the needs of readers." (Atlee & Robson 1925 p117). One Conservative member would inform the librarian of:

"various trends, demands for books; for example, for the partially blind we should supply large print, cassette music perhaps." (Conservative member, Hung County Council).

A Democrat member had become concerned:

"in broad policy terms, for example, there was a shortage of ethnic minority stock, Asian material". (Democrat member, Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

Political allegiance appears to make little difference
with regard to elected members' views of their role in
stock selection. In responding to the question "Do you
think that the 'library committee' should concern
itself with the selection of library stock?" most
members replied initially with a 'No'. However, it
took less than a moment's thought for many of them to
start refining their answers. These answers tended to
suggest that they were aware of the dangers of
censorship, and indeed of the dangers of being
perceived as censors.

From the point of view of elected members stock
selection does not take place in isolation. The
policies of the local authority are taken into
account. This may lead councillors to adopt
contradictory positions.

Although most members felt that stock selection was a
professional task, and one that should routinely be
left to professional librarians, they also felt the
need for member input on decisions regarding
controversial books. As one Chairman explained, "At
the extreme edge local councillors may need to get
involved in book stock policy." (Conservative Chairman
County Council). In addition, many felt that they had
a role in articulating what they perceived as their
publics' demands. While our survey provides little

evidence to suggest widespread interference in the day-to-day selection of library materials, there is an ambivalence about many of the responses and it would be interesting to ascertain how supportive, or otherwise, professional librarians find their elected members when they have to deal with controversial selection issues. A research project at the University of Sheffield (Curry 1990-1993), which is looking at public library Directors' views on intellectual freedom, is currently addressing this matter.

Many of the issues discussed above were also raised when members were asked to consider if the 'library committee' should concern itself with the type of displays or exhibitions held in the library. However, the discussion of the topic was rather more clear-cut and there was greater evidence of political differences. Displays and exhibitions in libraries were seen as important because:

"Libraries are in the forefront of the County Council. They are visible. The public relations image can do good and can offend people." (Conservative Chairman, County Council).

"Displays could be abused with the wrong sort of exhibition - political exhibitions. If we had a one party majority the Labour Council might think

it a jolly good idea to publish their policies."
(Conservative member, Hung County Council).

"We could control the way displays are laid down
for political reasons." (Conservative
Chairman,Metropolitan District).

"There should be no political exhibitions in the
library." (Conservative member, Conservative
controlled Metropolitan District).

"Displays should be monitored to ensure that the
appropriate groups are using library facilities.
If some political group used facilities... it
needs to be monitored by the elected members."
(Conservative member, Democrat controlled Outer
London Borough).

There was also evidence to suggest that particular
organizations would be refused display space. The
choice, or more often the rejection, of such groups was
often on political grounds. The Campaign for Nuclear
Disarmament, for instance, did not find favour with
Conservative councillors. In 1982 an Acting Divisional
librarian in Kent was disciplined for speaking to the
press after a county council decision to have a C.N.D.
display removed on the grounds that it was "tatty".
Opposition councillors, however, felt that it had been

removed for political reasons. ('Librarian disciplined in CND display row' <u>Library Association Record</u> 1982). In 1989 the issue was still a live one. As one Labour member explained:

> "As a point of issue the Conservatives did not want a C.N.D. information display". (Labour member Hung Metropolitan District).

Another stated:

> "In the past this has raised policy issues. There was a C.N.D. exhibition put on by the officers. When someone complained, objected to the exhibition, it was taken down." (Labour member, Hung County Council).

There are other examples of displays being taken down at the behest of members. The Leader of one council stated:

> "I involved myself in one exhibition. An Anarchist group which criticised the Royal Family, the Government, the council. We were giving them free display. I took it upon myself to get it removed. It was removed within thirty minutes." (Conservative Leader, Metropolitan Council).

The National Front would not be given space by some
Labour councillors. As one Chair explained:

"Organizations must be in line with the aims of

the Council. War on Want would get it, The

National Front would not." (Labour Chair,

Metropolitan District).

In terms of subject some Conservatives objected to:

"What I have seen here recently in our particular

library - the promotion of homosexuality."

(Conservative member, Labour controlled Outer

London Borough).

On the other hand a Labour member favoured:

"A strong policy of no racism, no sexism, those

sort of guidelines rather than direct control."

(Labour member, Hung Metropolitan Council).

There was also a feeling among some Labour members that
library displays should be used as a way of informing
people about local issues. One Chair felt that:

"Exhibitions should be placed in appropriate

places to make people realise it [local

government] is a social service. An educational

role. It is important that people know where the money is going. Programmes against poverty should be brought to the notice of people in libraries." (Labour Chair, County Council).

Another member suggested that:

"Public issues, like the replanning of the town. These could be an appropriate display in the library." (Labour member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

A number of respondents felt that displays could in some circumstances put the staff and public in danger. One respondent said:

"We have to concern ourselves when certain organizations... could cause demonstrations and dissent, Animal rights, the National Front, Anti-National Front. We need to consider the safety of the public coming into libraries. The committee does have to come out and we have done so in the past. Animal Rights posters, we could not, did not feel, that was a safe thing to do. Similar with CND - the police became alarmed... Anything that might cause affray we would not allow." (Democrat member, Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

A similar point was made more briefly by a Labour member who said:

"I believe there should be no censorship unless there is a threat to public order." (Labour member, Conservative controlled County Council).

In some cases while there would be no overt censorship it was clear that a significant number of members expected the librarian to be aware of the council's views and to operate within them. This view was expressed most often by Conservative and Labour members. A Conservative Chairman of a County Council explained:

"Our officers are sensible enough not to put on anything to upset politically or morally, they are not daft enough to put up displays that had to be censored, if that is the word you want."

One Labour Chair said much the same thing:

"Providing the librarian is aware of the policy of the committee he serves there is no reason why members should be involved [in the choice of displays]. I trust the officer not to put on displays that would clash with the opinions, views

and policies of the Council". (Labour Chair, County Council).

Officers, to some extent, are also expected to put on exhibitions reflecting council viewpoints. Another Labour Chair said:

"If you have policies they will be reflected in your exhibitions. For example gay and lesbian displays. The exhibitions which officers run will fit in with the policies of the council." (Labour Chair, Inner London Borough).

A Chief Librarian may find him or herself in trouble if he or she fails to anticipate problems. As one respondent said:

"If we had an exhibition in our library and there was a public hurroo (sic) about it I know I would be cross with the librarian for not knowing, for not having twigged it was the sort of thing to produce a public hurroo. I would advise him not to let me be surprised for a second time." (Conservative Chairman, Inner London Borough).

One member was even more direct:

"There should be no political exhibitions in the
library, keep it apolitical. [Name of the
Librarian] knows that and doesn't try to put on
exhibitions that have that background."
(Conservative member, Conservative controlled
Metropolitan District).

Other members simply saw it as their function to make
suggestions for display or exhibition topics. A
Democrat member wanted to be involved:

"Only in general terms, I might want to suggest
topics for display, for example, environmental
topics. I expect librarians to pick that up for
themselves. Not their - elected members - job to
say what should be on display unless found to be
obscene or offensive." (Democrat member, Labour
controlled Inner London Borough).

Another Democrat had made quite specific suggestions:

"I did ask for an exhibition on dog fouling.
Members can make useful suggestions." (Democrat
member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Displays in Public Libraries are the subject of a whole
section in the Library Association's booklet published
for the guidance of elected members. (Library

Association 1988).   This stresses the importance of impartiality and suggests that controversial displays by outside organizations should be accompanied by "a notice disclaiming responsibility for the content of displays. Such notices should state the broad objective of the service, which is to facilitate exchange of information and ideas and should indicate that space is available to other groups on request." (LA 1988 p12).   This advice, or the Library Association booklet, was not mentioned by a single respondent in this or any other context.

Overall the results of the current research support the propositions made by Jones (1973) and Bains (1972), in the wider context of local government, that elected members are concerned with publicly controversial, or potentially publicly controversial, and sensitive issues.   The evidence presented in this chapter also shows that there is considerable ambivalence among respondents as to their role vis-a-vis selection and displays, with Conservative members tending to be more concerned with "politicalisation" of displays, and Labour and Democrat members more concerned with social or community issues.

While it would be wrong to over-emphasise the degree to which elected members involve themselves in stock selection and library displays, the evidence from the

interviews does suggest that in a significant number of cases they do influence the decisions of officers. This influence is sometimes direct but more often indirect, in that librarians are expected to be "sensible enough not to put on anything that might upset politically or morally."   In the earlier part of the decade Lomer and Rogers (1983 p122) were able to report that "in those rare instances where a librarian was asked to remove material, this was always considered to be unacceptable to the librarian involved.   One librarian told his committee categorically that he would not."

Such actions are still considered unacceptable by most librarians but today categorical refusal is more likely to be replaced by advice. This was certainly the case during the News International Dispute when:

> "In the early part of 1986 a number of local
> authorities... instructed the libraries under
> their jurisdiction... to suspend their
> subscriptions to newspapers and periodicals
> published by News International." (Malley 1990
> p6).

In fact this dispute was mentioned by relatively few respondents but the literature of the period suggests that until the law intervened some members were willing

to remove News International publications against professional advice. In 1942 Corbett (1942) bemoaned "the state of affairs which allows the advice of trained librarians to be overruled by the local grocer or plumber who happens to be a member of the local council." Nearly half a century later, and with the News International question in mind, Christine Wares told a Library Association audience that the only time the council "have not listened to my advice and deliberately flouted my professional judgement; they ended up in the High Court; got their decision over-turned; attracted bad publicity... and incurred enormous costs." (Wares 1989)

Academic observers (Gyford 1984; Gyford, Leach & Game 1989; Knowles 1988) of local government have spoken in recent years of "the new breed of councillors (who)... have little patience with processes which they see as frustrating rather than facilitating the changes they want to achieve" (Knowles 1988 p8). There is also anecdotal evidence of a "dissatisfaction with professional orthodoxies... becoming characteristic of present-day councillors... Many chief officers will confirm and sometimes bewail, a new assertiveness among councillors, who are no longer prepared to accept their officers' advice as the last word." (Gyford 1984). The new breed, according to these writers, can be found on both the left and right. "In one or two of the more

right wing councils, officers have concluded that their
political masters have, at bottom, a deep contempt for
professional local government staff... A similar
attitude... can be seen among left wing labour
authorities. These have taken to bringing in
politically sympathetic staff, who, in Livingstone's
words, have a 'basically radical contempt' for existing
bureaucratic structures." (Gyford 1984). In the next
section we consider the extent to which such attitudes
effect the decision making processes of those members
serving on 'library committees'.

D E C I S I O N   M A K I N G

"While the daily management of a public library is the
result of countless small decisions made by the library
director and the staff, the decisions which will result
in the overall policy of the library are made by those
involved in the political structure of the
community.. .   What the public library gets, when it
gets it, and how it gets it is the central political
question about a public library, and it is power and
influence that is a major determinant of the answers to
that question."

Gellert, R. H. "Public library decision making"

1981 p8

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ELECTED MEMBER - SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Walter Lippman in The Good Society suggested that
"Governments are composed of...men studying papers at
desks, receiving and answering letters and memoranda,
listening to advice and giving it, hearing complaints
and claims and replying to them." (Lippman 1937 p25).
The present research indicates that elected members
responsible for public libraries obtain information in
similarly diverse ways. Local politicians are, of
course, expected to be closer to the services they
provide and the people who use them than are national
politicians. It is therefore important that they keep
themselves informed about the needs and attitudes of
the local community.

Many of the elected members interviewed for this study
stated that they kept in touch with library services by
making use of them. As one respondent stated:

> "I am not only a councillor, I am also a client.
> I am a regular visitor to the library. Not just
> to get out my four books. I use the service. I
> read reviews... If I see a book that looks
> interesting I request it. I find reading one of

the most satisfying aspects of living - that is
how I keep in touch." (Labour member,
Conservative controlled County Council).

Another member was, "an enthusiastic user of the
service - I read 200 books a year." (Labour member,
Conservative controlled Inner London Borough). Members
of all political persuasions kept in touch by using the
local library. A Conservative respondent said:-

"I am an avid user of the library - I appreciate
all the services there are in the library, from
Linguaphone to CDs." (Conservative member,
Conservative controlled Metropolitan District).

One must assume that in between the CDs and the
Linguaphone records he also borrowed books. A Democrat
member commented:

"I use the library myself and I am in there quite
a lot - I see what is going on." (Democrat
member, Conservative controlled County Council).

For some a visit to the library was turned into a more
deliberate attempt to find out what is going on and
what the public wants:

"I... visit libraries unannounced just to see what the public are looking for and I try and talk to members of the public and ask them what they want - just as an inquisitive man, rather than telling them who I am. That way I think I get a better picture." (Conservative member, Labour controlled Outer London Borough).

According to the Maud Report:

"It is generally assumed that in a democratic system representatives act on more or less direct knowledge of the needs and attitudes of their public." (Committee on the Management of Local Government, (1967) Vol. 2 p223).

A great number of library committee members in fact ask their constituents for comments on the library service. As one said:

"It is important to keep one's finger on the pulse so I go around keeping my ears (sic) open - very definitely know what my own constituents think about the library." (Labour member, Hung County Council).

It was felt by more than one member that:

"By meeting people in the street, members of the community, you hear what people want and what they don't want." (Conservative member, Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

Another gathered information:

"Through the needs of my friends and people in my ward who happen to talk to me about what they feel they don't like or would like in the library - I find out from purely personal knowledge." (Conservative member, Labour controlled Outer London Borough).

In some cases constituents' views were being collected on a more scientific basis. One authority had carried out a survey which had resulted in a "broad brush of opinion about the Library Service." (Chairman, Conservative controlled Metropolitan District). In another the council had:

"spent some £10,000... on having a public opinion survey carried out. This covered all aspects of the council's services and the results have been broadly reported in the latest edition of ****
Review, our three or four times a year civic newspaper." (Democrat Chairperson, Hung Metropolitan District).

A similar approach was about to be tried in another authority. The Chairman reporting:

> "one of the most significant bits of new
> expenditure is to have a marketing post within the
> library... I would regard a significant part of
> that post being asking what the public want before
> saying that is what the public shall have."
> (Conservative Chairman, Inner London Borough).

Elected members on one Democrat controlled council gathered information via:

> "A liaison person in the Democrat group... the man
> who is responsible for libraries and the arts...
> reports back at our own mid-cycle meetings."
> (Democrat member, Democrat controlled Outer London
> Borough).

One Labour councillor had his own individual way of carrying out research into users' perceptions. His method is to:

> "put one or two sheets of paper up and hang them
> in the library, with the permission of the
> librarian, and leave it on her desk where the
> people book in. I ask for comments on what they
> think, any improvements, what they think we should

allow." As a result, he said "I get some caustic

comments. Sometimes I get a lot of helpful

comments - and these are the questions and

comments I take back to the committee. I know for

a fact that I am taking back not my comments but

the comments of the people using the library."

(Labour member, Labour controlled County Council).

An Independent councillor felt that it was his "main

function to take back the views of the local

population." (Independent member, Labour controlled

Metropolitan District).

This view was echoed by a Conservative Chairman who saw

it as his role:

"To talk to people and ask them how they see the

service, invite their observations upon service

deficiency or inadequacies either in the way the

personnel run the service, the quality of the

service we provide, the material... learn as much

as is practical from those who are the users, the

customer in other words... on the basis that we

are all there to satisfy the customer. The

customer-first principle is the number one policy

of this council." (Conservative Chairman,

Metropolitan District).

There was some disagreement amongst the members in this survey as to how often "customers", or members of the public, commented on the library service. There was a significant minority who felt that:

"The public tend to be quite vocal about what they want from a library service, they write to the papers, they write to elected members and ring us up. We all have knowledge of a number of people who want improvements in the service or use the service. They all advise us from time to time." (Labour member, Hung County Council).

Another councillor admitted:

"I don't go out of my way looking for trouble. I hope the comments will come in. There is a fairly strong group of activists around this area who keep their nose to the ground. When there are problems they are only too quick to inform me." (Conservative member, Conservative controlled County Council).

Another member talked of:

"individuals phoning me at home - commercial bodies. Residents' association, that kind of thing. It tends to be either the Housebound or

the mobile which serves large estates in my ward
which I tend to be contacted about." (Labour
member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

In yet another authority the respondent was aware that:

"We have a public library user group. I meet with
them occasionally although I realise that they
represent a small and relatively elitist group of
library users." (Labour Chair, Inner London
Borough,

Indeed a number of respondents made the point that
those members of the public who did contact them may
not be representative of the whole community. As the
Chair quoted above noted, there is a need to:

"try and balance the views of the other people who
are using the library without making a lot of
noise about it, against the views of those who
contact me - often the more articulate and
organised... I try and make sure that I am not
overly swayed by a noisy campaign which may not
adequately represent the community at large."

In most cases, however, the library service was not
high on the agenda at ward meetings or surgery sessions
with individuals. This finding is in line with the

evidence, albeit sparse, to be found in the literature.
For instance the Chair of Sheffield's Libraries, Arts
and Museums Programme Committee told a professional
conference:

"I have never had anyone attend my surgery and
I've never heard any of my colleagues say that
they have had people attending their surgeries
with queries or even complaints about libraries
and arts related issues." (Nicholson 1987)

It was felt by many respondents that this was because
the public was generally satisfied with the library
service they were receiving. One member commented:

"I don't detect any great disenchantment with the
service - or feeling it should be changed. It is
not an area where you get a tremendous amount of
feedback. People are contented." (Conservative
member, Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

A Labour member in the same authority concurred with
this view. He said:

"I don't get a lot at my branch meetings on the
question of libraries because the service is
satisfactory. There don't seem to be too much
people's views on the library service. More words

are spoken about the provision of sports

facilities than the library service - they are

being well served at the moment." (Labour member,

Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

This public contentment was also perceived by the

Chairman of a County Council who said that on the

doorstep at election time:

"One does recognise that... the library service is

a popular service. Often when you tell the public

that the County Council runs the library they

don't know... rather they think that the library

service either comes out of thin air or the

District runs it." (Chairman, Conservative

controlled County Council).

In this authority the Democrat group:

"send out leaflets and newsletters, and so on, in

which we ask people to tell us anything they want

to complain about or anything. I mention

libraries but I have never had any feedback on

it." (Democrat member, Conservative controlled

County Council).

In the past this might have been regarded as a part of

a general lack of public interest in the work of local

authorities. Some years ago Dearlove (1973 p184) for
instance observed that:

"Councillors in Kensington and Chelsea were
generally aware of how little they were contacted
by the public, and they were a little embarrassed
by the fact, although they explained this by
pointing to the generally declining interest of
the community in local affairs (especially in the
London area)."

Local government, however, is now much higher on the
public and political agenda than it was in 1973 and
further research is required before one could argue
with any degree of certainty that the lack of feedback
on, or the general contentment with libraries is
typical of public attitudes to local government in
general. It can be noted that in various surveys on
the public's satisfaction with local government
services libraries have generally been seen as giving
good value for money. (e.g., Daily Mail 25 April 1979):
a fact recognised by Councillor Davis in his review of
Westminster's library service. He felt that it was:

"important to remember that the ordinary ratepayer
holds the library service in the highest esteem.
In 1957 a survey by Nalgo found that 83% of those
interviewed put libraries as the most appreciated

local government service. Ten years later, a survey by the Maud Committee... produced a similar result. On 25 April 1979 the Daily Mail published a survey of consumer attitudes in which 84% of respondents thought that in local government the best value for money was given by libraries. While a public opinion survey commissioned by the London Borough of Southwark in 1980 found that 97% of those interviewed thought libraries were 'very helpful'." (Davis 1983 p3).

One respondent to the present study felt that in the case of library services members of the public:

"Would tend to go to the library staff rather than raise issues with elected members. They would raise it with the library staff. As opposed to Housing committees issues, Social Services, Highways, where very often the elected member is the first person people contact. It seems to work the other way round with libraries - perhaps because they are so user friendly, maybe because there is a member of staff there face-to-face immediately." (Labour member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

Elected members also use the staff as a major source of information about the service. One member said:

"I have no hesitation in talking to our Director
and he and his senior officers have no hesitation
in talking to me if there are any problems. A
good relationship means we keep our finger on the
pulse." (Labour member, Hung County Council).

Another meets with "the Chief Librarian and test(s) his
views against my own prejudices and opinions."
(Conservative Chairman, Metropolitan District).

For another councillor:

"Contact with the grass roots staff is
important... because library users talk to the
staff." (Labour member, Hung Metropolitan
District).

Other members mentioned the importance of officers'
reports as a source of information about the service.
The perceived quality of reports and their function is
the subject of a later section but it can be noted here
that one respondent said that he kept himself informed:

"Almost completely through the reports of the
Borough Librarian." (Labour member, Conservative
controlled Outer London Borough).

Other officer-inspired sources of information mentioned
were tours of library services and the availability of
professional journals. The <u>Library Association Record</u>
was mentioned by two members. Others noted the receipt
of Office of Arts and Libraries Documents or "material
from Luce's office" (Labour member, Conservative
controlled Inner London Borough) as it was described by
one member, prior to that particular Minister's
departure.

Other research in the field of local government has
also found that elected members use officers as an
important source of information. (Dearlove 1973, Green
1981, Laffin 1983) Laffin (1983 p168) found that:

> "the great majority were... surprised that anyone
> should need to ask whether or not their officers
> were their main source of information - they
> obviously were. Seventeen Chairmen identified the
> officers as the principal source of information -
> only four put an alternative source first."

In his advice to newly elected councillors Freeman
gives special mention to:

> "the local public library organisation and in
> particular the Chief Librarian and his senior
> staff. They are professionally trained to advise

on sources of information and statistical references and will always be immensely helpful to a member of the Council who wants to study a particular issue." (Freeman 1975 p130).

The elected members studied in this survey keep themselves informed about the needs and attitudes of the public regarding library services in a number of ways. They or their families visit libraries, they ask in various ways the opinions of users and constituents, they talk to library officers and make use of reports and documents emanating from central and local government. In public relations terms it is of course important that they are aware of and understand the nature of the service for which they are responsible. As Kotler (1975 p351) remarks, "the legislators represent one of the most important publics of the institutions. As such they deserve to be regularly informed about the institution's accomplishments and needs. They should receive periodic reports and visits from... officials with the general aim of creating an atmosphere of understanding and interest."

In 1984 Cambridgeshire Libraries and Information Service introduced a "Members' Information Bulletin" to keep "members informed of important and interesting events taking place in libraries and museums in the county." Such a bulletin was not mentioned by any of

the members interviewed for this project
(Cambridgeshire was not one of the library authorities
involved in the study).   With hindsight it would have
been useful to have asked members what kind of use they
would make of such a document if it were to be provided
by their own authority.

In seeking out information elected members tend to use
sources which are close to their locality and part of
their own experience. As Jones and Stewart (1985b p20)
suggest:

"Councillors visit, as part of the routine of
their work, the schools, homes and housing estates
for which they are responsible. They therefore,
make decisions about areas, institutions and
people that are not names but are part of their
experience.   Thus, in local government, there is
more scope for elected representatives to make an
impact on policy making, MPs who have served as
councillors often express frustration at their
lack of involvement in policy making as
back-benchers compared with their direct and
significant contribution as councillors."

In a recent report on the information needs of elected
members LAMSAC stated that:

"The ultimate objective must be to provide just
the right amount of information for decisions to
be made quickly and correctly particularly in
terms of policy-making and allocation of resources
for operational activity." (LAMSAC Officers
Advisory Group nd, p15).

In respect of library services, few of the elected
members interviewed mentioned using local government
information services or similar "formal" services.
Dearlove in 1973 found that elected members placed
"heavy reliance on sources that are internal to the
council." Interestingly enough, one of his examples
refers to the library service. A respondent in the
Dearlove survey saying that:

"In Kensington we are lucky, we have a lot of
experienced councillors, people who are in a
position to talk wisely on many matters because of
their years of chairmanship of various
committees. Say we had a library matter before us
and it was a question of costing and paperbacks,
well the officers would give their advice, but you
might well ring up Frank Thackway (an alderman who
had been the leader of the Kensington Council, and
chairman of many committees including libraries)
as you know him and know he will have views".
(Dearlove 1973 p179).

That paragraph neatly combines the two concepts of
information and influence. It is probable that, in
reality, decisions are more likely to be based on what
is perceived to be, rather than what is objectively
regarded as "good information". Such perception will
depend to a large extent on the factors which influence
elected members' views of the quality of the
information they receive. In this chapter the sources
of information mentioned by respondents have been
considered. The next is concerned with the sources of
influence.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE ELECTED MEMBER - SOURCES OF INFLUENCE

In assessing the legislators' view of the legislative process Silverman (1954) observes that:

> "Many fingers attempt to reach into the pie of the
> legislative process. There are political parties,
> more or less organized, with a hierarchy of formal
> leadership and a framework of policies and
> sanctions. There are lines running to and from
> the executive. The administrative departments,
> in some respects adjuncts to the power and policy
> role of the executive, can also have their own
> parts to play, and can serve as leverage points
> for configurations of clientele groups."

These and other factors can and do affect members' views of a particular issue. In this section an attempt is made to look at the factors that contribute to, and have an influence on, the decisions taken by members with regard to public library services.

The contextual data collected for this part of the
study suggest that finance and service to the public
are two of the most important influences on members
when taking decisions about library matters.   In
coming to decisions about library questions members
appear to ask themselves a series of subsidiary
questions.   Faced with a suggestion one Conservative
member would ask:

> "Is the proposal going to enhance the quality of
> the service we produce? - If no, we shouldn't do
> it.   If yes, then we should do it if we possibly
> can.   If the answer is we don't know - but there
> is a chance that it might then we can perhaps
> experiment with it to see if it might."
> (Conservative Chairman, Metropolitan District).

His Labour counterpart would similarly ask:

> "When providing a service is it providing the
> right service? Is it meeting the demand and is it
> being provided across the spectrum of the
> population irrespective of their status or
> income? Will that policy, as it were, deliver to
> the majority - (I am not suggesting that
> minorities are not catered for they are - they
> have to be). Where does the policy fit in and

will it provide a service for the many?" (Labour Chair, County Council).

Although the precise nature of the questions might differ it is service to the public that is seen as important by many members. One respondent emphasised this by saying:

"I want the public to get the best possible service: my thoughts are motivated by that desire." (Labour member, Conservative controlled County Council).

A Conservative member of the same authority was likewise influenced by "the good or the well-being of the people of ****." (Conservative Chairman, County Council). Another respondent would try to:

"think about how the [proposal] would affect me - put myself in the place of the people, people like me needing the service." (Labour member, Conservative controlled County Council).

In a different county a Labour member would ask:

"Will members of the public benefit or be disadvantaged by what we are doing?" (Labour member, Hung County Council).

His words were echoed by a Democrat who had one simple
consideration:

> "How it will benefit the community - what is the
> need for what we are discussing?" (Democrat
> member, Conservative controlled Metropolitan
> District).

A Conservative member of the same authority agreed that
the major question was:

> "The service it will give people of ****. I keep
> that always in mind. That's what we are here
> for." (Conservative member, Conservative
> controlled Metropolitan District).

Another group of respondents related service to the
public to the financial situation. The weight given to
these two factors differed. For one Democrat:

> "The most important influence is service to the
> public - finance comes second." (Democrat
> Chairperson, Hung Metropolitan District).

A Labour member was even more emphatic. Asked what
influenced him he replied:

"Not money. I am not too bothered about
finance." (Labour member, Democrat controlled
Outer London Borough).

Another Labour member agreed that:

"Finance should not be at the top of the list...
it must never be the primary consideration but
value for money is very important." (Labour
member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Value for money was a theme picked up by a Conservative
member who looked for "good value for money" but added:

"Money is not always paramount: we do want to
provide a good library service - to try and put as
much money as we can into it." (Conservative
Chairman, County Council).

For most Conservative members, however, money was of
prime importance. One respondent when asked, "What is
the single most important factor that influences you
when deciding about library matters?" replied
succinctly "Money". (Leader, Conservative controlled,
Metropolitan District). An equally succinct reply came
from a member serving on an outer London Borough. For
him it was a question of "value for money."
(Conservative member, Democrat controlled Outer London

Borough). Another saw the priority to be "Providing a good service at reasonable cost." (Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan District). Yet another would consider "The balance of public need and the cost of it." (Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan District).

In terms of particular influences respondents were asked the extent to which a number of factors might influence their decisions about the operation of public library services. Seven factors were considered. The advice of professional officers, the opinions of the party group, the opinions of the Chair/Chairperson/ Chairman, the opinions of other elected members, political ideology, items in the media and the member's ward interests. Earlier research (e.g. Dearlove 1973, Green 1981, Jones 1969) had indicated these as likely important sources of information but for this study a Likert scale was used in an attempt to establish the relative influence of each and whether or not members of different parties were influenced by different factors. In an American study:

> "One group of legislators held the firm conviction
> that there was a distinct difference between the
> two parties, a difference self evident to all the
> legislators...'Republicans think differently from
> Democrats'". (Silverman 1954).

A later British study observed that:

> "Local councillors will vary considerably in their
> interpretation of what are desirable levels of
> activity, in their reaction to official advice,
> and in their assessments of, and reactions to, the
> electoral implications of any activity
> undertaken".   (Boaden and Alford 1969).

In fact as Table 8:1 indicates the present study found
relatively little difference in members' reaction to
official advice.

TABLE: 8:1   The extent to which the advice of
professional officers influences decisions about the
operation of library services.

(Figures in %)

	LARGE	SOME	SMALL	NONE
ALL	86	14	0	0
CONS	95	5	0	0
LAB	88	12	0	0
DEM	67	33	0	0

Officers are recognized by members of all parties as a
considerable source of influence.   The table suggests
some difference in emphasis between members of the SLD

and those of other parties, but the Chi square test (using the actual number of respondents rather than percentages) indicates that this was not statistically significant. Many members stressed the importance of the professional nature of the advice given by library officers. As one respondent said:

"They are the experts. It would be very wrong to ignore them. They should be well respected." (Conservative member, Conservative controlled County Council).

A Labour member of the same authority agreed:

"I regard them as professional." (Labour member, Conservative controlled County Council.)

In a Labour controlled County the response was much the same:

"They [the officers] are there to give us professional advice. If you ignore the professional advice as against the ordinary layman - unless you have some positive proof that the officer is stating something categorically wrong - you accept it for what it is and how it has been said. You study in your own mind, given a new perspective - you are using the officer in the

capacity he is there for." (Labour member, Labour
controlled County Council).

In Metropolitan Districts the emphasis was much the
same:

"He [the Librarian] is a professional man. I
resent a non-professional telling me how to do my
job. If you don't think that I am good enough I
ought not to be here." (Conservative Chairman,
Metropolitan District).

"Got to be foolish to appoint someone if you did
not have confidence in them." (Conservative
member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Although they placed heavy reliance on the advice given
to them by officers members also stressed that they
would not agree automatically with the professional
view. As one respondent argued:

"Yes I do take the advice of professional
officers. They are the people in the field and
should be able to give me the right advice. In
some cases committee doesn't always take that
advice. The officers are sometimes out of touch
with what people want. It needs a balanced
judgement. What the committee and the Chair's

point of view is as to what you are giving out as a service. Any officer can't always be right." (Labour Chair. County Council).

Another stated:

"I reserve the right as a member not to agree all the time." (Labour member, Conservative controlled London Borough).

A Conservative respondent would agree with the officers:

"Unless my own experience tells me that something they are telling me doesn't accord with my own common sense." (Conservative member, Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

Likewise a Labour member:

"Wouldn't agree for the sake of agreeing, I have views of my own and I would express them." (Labour member, Conservative controlled County Council).

A few members regarded other factors as more important than the officer's advice. For a Democrat member the most important factor is:

"The needs of the local community... By and large
user comments and user needs motivate me to say
things about the library." (Democrat member,
Labour controlled Inner London Borough).

A Labour respondent stated that the:

"Political group perhaps overrides the views of
officers when necessary." (Labour member, Hung
County Council).

The Party Group was in fact the second most important
influence on Labour members and the third most
important with Conservative and SLD members.   Table
8:2 shows the extent to which the opinions of the party
group influences decisions about the operation of
library services.

TABLE 8:2 The extent to which the opinions of the
member's party group influences decisions about the
operation of library services.
(Figures in percentages)

	LARGE	SOME	SMALL	NONE
ALL	32	44	12	10
CONS.	21	63	5	11
LAB	65	18	6	12
DEM	8	58	25	8

As Table 8:2 indicates the opinions of the party group
influence the decisions of the majority of members in
all the political parties to some or a large extent.
SLD members are however less likely to be so influenced
than members of other parties and Labour members are
much more likely to be influenced to a large extent.
For instance, one Labour respondent stated:

> "That's the basis of your whole policy. Each year
> the Labour group produces a statement and states
> aims and objectives in each area. That is our
> underlying policy statement to which we are
> working. That is essentially the views of the
> Labour Party not just the group." (Labour member,
> Hung Metropolitan District.

At least one Conservative argued that:

> "It is important to toe the party line."
> (Conservative member, Labour controlled Outer
> London Borough).

Others argued that the group was particularly important
with regard to specific issues. In the words of a
Labour Chair:

> "If my group had made a specific decision on a
> specific item and I disagree with them, if I can't

get them to change their mind I have got to do it
anyway if it has got that far - obviously
totally. Also in terms of the general attitude of
the group. Clearly, I would not do something that
was running against the grain of the majority
view. On issues of access for example. For
instance, I could not say we will not make
libraries accessible to people with a disability,
even if I thought it was a waste of money. I
would know it was something that the rest of the
group wanted and would have to take notice of
it." (Labour Chair, Inner London Borough).

This position was echoed by a Conservative Chairman who
stated:

"If the group violently opposed I would have to
back down. It is a consideration but not the
first or second criteria [sic] used to determine a
proposal." (Conservative Chairman, Metropolitan
District).

A SLD Chairperson reported a similar state of affairs
saying:

"We always have a group meeting and discuss
matters. Clearly, I go along with the group if
there happens to be a difference of opinion.

Although in fifteen months I have not yet had a
difference of opinion within the group."
(Democrat Chairperson, Hung Metropolitan
District).

On the other hand members would also try and influence
the opinions of their party group. For instance one
Chair:

"would not automatically take what I would call
their uninformed view... If I thought that the
librarian and myself had a much better idea about
what was going on... I would work very hard to
make them change their mind, if I thought they
were wrong. I would take that view if I thought
people who had thought about it a lot harder were
right." (Labour Chair, Inner London Borough).

Another respondent mentioned:

"I have to take account of the party group", but
added, "I hope to be able to influence them fairly
often." (Labour member, Conservative controlled
County Council).

This view was echoed by a Conservative respondent who,
while admitting that the group influenced him to a
large extent, added:

"That wouldn't stop me, if I disagree, from taking
an independent line or persuading my party that it
was wrong. I don't want to give the impression
that I follow slavishly what the party thinks."
(Conservative member, Democrat controlled Outer
London Borough).

Respondents were also asked the extent to which the
opinion of the Chairperson influenced their decisions
on library matters. One member compared the influence
of the Chairperson to that of the party group:

"By the time the person takes the chair decisions
have been made through the party group meetings.
The party group has made our minds up about which
way to vote. On the day the Chairperson does not
have a great deal of effect." (Conservative
member, Hung County Council).

However another member indicated that the Chairman
could have influence in the meeting of the group prior
to committee:

"They [Chairmen] should, in effect, be impartial
whatever party is appointed. They should chair
the meeting with equal views - but I would respect
the Chairman's views very much in a group

spokesmen's meeting." (Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Another respondent compared the Chairperson's influence to that of the officers:

"We listen, but we are guided more by the officers. We would agree with the Chair on certain aspects, but in essence the report is what we base our opinion on - or I do mine." (Labour member, Democrat controlled, Outer London Borough).

Another Labour member took a different view arguing that:

"He [The Chair] governs the meeting - pulling the meeting together. Allowing the meeting to go as far as he wishes. He must control that meeting." (Labour member, Labour controlled County Council).

As Table 8:3 shows members of all parties are in fact divided as to the perceived influence of the Chair, Chairperson or Chairman, Conservative members being more likely to be influenced to a large or some extent than the members of other parties.

TABLE 8:3 The extent to which the opinions of the
Chairperson influence members' decisions about the
operation of library services.

(Figures show percentages)

	LARGE	SOME	SMALL	NONE
ALL	17	34	37	11
CONS.	14	50	29	7
LAB.	17	25	42	17
DEM	29	14	43	14

From the few comments received from respondents it
would appear that "the extent to which the Chairperson
is influential depends on the Chairperson." (Labour
member, Conservative controlled County Council). One
member was influenced to a large extent by her
Chairperson:

   "Because he is one of the most logical men I have

   ever worked with, with a true vision of an overall

   direction for the Borough. A bit like a jigsaw:

   the library service fits into leisure. He sees an

   overview. So I think I pay a great attention to

   his opinion." (Democrat member, Democrat

   controlled Outer London Borough).

This, it will be noted, was a positive response to a chairperson of the same party as the respondent and it may well be that here, as in other areas, party affiliation has some effect. As one respondent stated the influence of the Chairman is likely to be:

"Small - if the Chairman is not of our party." (Conservative member, Labour controlled Outer London Borough).

Interestingly, respondents seemed far more willing to listen to the views of other members who were not chairpersons. Table 8:4 shows the response to the question "To what extent do the opinions of other elected members influence your decisions about the operation of library services."

TABLE 8:4 To what extent do the opinions of other elected members influence members' decisions about the operation of library services.
(Figures in percentages)

	LARGE	SOME	SMALL	NONE
ALL	24	56	14	6
CONS	16	79	5	0
LAB	35	41	12	12
DEM	25	50	17	8

As the table indicates, at least three quarters of the members of all parties were influenced to a large or some extent by the views of other members with 95% of the Conservative respondents coming in to these categories. It was generally thought valuable to listen to the views of others. In the words of a Labour member:

"It is important to listen to others, all of whom have an interest in the service. It would be arrogant to dismiss their views." (Labour member, Conservative controlled County Council).

Another Labour respondent agreed that it is "important not to be closed minded." (Labour member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Other argued that members' views were valuable:

"Because they are in touch with all parts of the county." (Labour member, Hung County Council).

Or as a Conservative respondent put it "they have got their ears to the ground." (Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Another member added that, "Matters grow out of discussion." (Labour member, Hung County Council). A view supported by a Conservative Chairman who said:

"The views of elected members are of course important and influential because they are a whole range of political views." (Conservative Chairman, Metropolitan District).

There could on occasions be agreement over such a range of views. A Labour Chair said:

"The Liberal we have [on the committee] is very Green... some of the stuff he says is...quite influential." (Labour Chair, Metropolitan District).

A Democrat argued that:

"Only by getting a concensus, everybody's attitudes and ideas, do you come out with an overall feeling at the end of it." (Democrat member, Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

There are, of course, limits to such cross-party influence. As one Labour respondent said:

"The opinion of the majority party I listen to. I
can concur with what they are seeking to obtain...
Remember I am the third party not a majority or an
opposition group. I listen more to the majority
party's view than the main opposition party's view
which is not always one I can accept. It is
mainly political sniping, not dealing with the
issues that should be dealt with." (Labour member,
Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

A Conservative member of the same authority argued:

"One has to take into account how sensible they
[elected members] are and the quality of the
advice given." (Conservative member, Democrat
controlled Outer London Borough).

Or, as an Independent member stated, "It depends what
they [the views of other elected members] are."
(Independent member, Hung County Council).

Major differences can be seen between the views of
members of the different parties when the influence of
political ideology is considered. Here, as Table 8:5
clearly shows, members of the Labour party are much
more likely to be influenced by political ideology than
are the members of other parties.

TABLE 8:5 The extent to which political ideology
influences members' decisions about the operation of
library services.

(Figures in percentages)

	LARGE	SOME	SMALL	NONE
ALL	16	16	46	22
CONS	0	11	63	26
LAB	41	24	29	6
DEM	8	17	42	33

For many members of the Labour Party political ideology
is absolutely relevant to the provision of public
library services. Some echoed the view of their
erstwhile Leader, Michael Foot, who on an edition of
BBC TV's Question Time stated that, "public libraries
are Socialism in action."   This sentiment was also
expressed by the late Fred Johnson (Johnson 1981) in
comments reported in The Assistant Librarian for
September 1981. Councillor Johnson told AAL members:

>   "I have always maintained that libraries are one
>   of the best examples of Socialism in action that
>   has been neglected by successive, including
>   regrettably Labour, Governments."

Interestingly enough one Conservative member also saw
support for libraries as coming from the Left. He
stated:

"I am a believer in library services - I am on the
left wing of my party as far as libraries are
concerned." (Conservative member, Hung
Metropolitan District).

Certainly many members of the Labour Party had no
difficulty in equating political ideology with their
views on libraries. As one respondent stated:

"I am motivated by political ideology and find no
clash between my politics and the interests of the
service because they coincide. My political
thoughts and my thoughts about libraries are
identical." (Labour member, Conservative
controlled County Council).

Another argued:

"If it is political ideology to say that I want to
see people enjoying reading and other activities
that are involved in libraries. If I say I want
to see that to the greatest possible extent is a
measure of my commitment to Socialism, so be it.
It is important to me as a Socialist that as many

people should have as much access to as much good
material as can possibly be provided." (Labour
member, Hung County Council).

The question of access was raised by another respondent
who stated that political ideology:

"Is immediately relevant in that I believe in
public access and equal access. That is obviously
very important. If there is a principle involved
then my political ideology may well make me jump
one way." (Labour Chair, Inner London Borough).

For another Labour member political ideology was:

"The basis on which we provide service in the
first instance". (Labour member, Hung County
Council).

While a Labour Chair argued:

"If you talk about philosophy [of service] it is
governed by political ideology." (Labour Chair,
Metropolitan District).

This view was repeated by yet another Labour member who
stated:

"Political ideology is the whole ruling philosophy
of what you are doing and what you think is
morally right."   (Labour member, Hung Metropolitan
District).

For a minority of Labour members this was not the case.
One felt that:

"Political ideology does not inhibit art and
reading much.   If you politicised it I think you
would kill it."   (Labour member, Labour controlled
County Council).

Another also felt that it had limited influence on
library matters:

"Less so than on other committees.   There is more
harmony and general agreement [on library
issues]." (Labour member, Conservative controlled
County Council).

As the table indicates political ideology was perceived
to be far less influential amongst Conservative and SLD
members.   One Democrat respondent found the concept:

"Difficult to define - but one of the things that
interests us very considerably is our belief that
services should be more distributed to the

localities and that, obviously, has affected our
views on library priorities. ...Part of our
political ideology which is, in a sense,
concurrent with the library philosophy, for
example, is that we are against censorship.
Occasionally that does arise." (Democrat
Chairperson, Outer London Borough).

Another Democrat in the same authority felt that:

"Political ideology is really not very important
in local government. It seems to me it might be
important at national level but in local issues it
is genuinely a matter of making our area and our
Borough a better place to live in." (Democrat
member, Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

Members of the Conservative Party by and large did not
find political ideology a great influence. There was
one member who felt:

"There are certain ideologies one needs to follow,
you can't totally ignore them." (Conservative
member, Conservative controlled County Council).

And a Chairman who admitted:

"I would possibly allow a twinge of political
ideology to emerge." (Conservative chairman,
Inner London Borough).

Such statements, however, are very much in the
minority. For most Conservatives ideology is only
relevant if it has:

"A sprinkling of common sense. Ideology
[influences me] provided it is practical in the
circumstances. I would not privatise libraries if
they are perfectly well run as they are now,
unless it was shown to be a considerable benefit.
I wouldn't privatise them for the sake of doing
it. Ideology can come in as a fundamental issue
or a peripheral one not of great importance.
Certainly it influences me to less extent than
what is best in my pragmatic opinion about the
conduct of the library service." (Conservative
member, Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

A Conservative Chairman took the practical argument a
stage further. He stated that ideology:

"Doesn't influence me at all. That is probably
why, in the past, I have been described as a
maverick. Why I have been described as
politically unreliable. I have always in my

professional life been taught to deal with things
on merit and political ideology doesn't always do
things on merit.   That being the case it
sometimes has to be abandoned - rather than one
should adopt it and do the wrong thing. That's
not a particularly popular view with my group
sometimes but I can't say that influences me very
much.   I can always say to them, as I have done in
the past, OK if I am not doing things the way you
want me to do, you will have to find someone else
to do the job". (Conservative Chairman,
Metropolitan District).

Another Conservative respondent dismissed the idea of
his being influenced by political ideology quite
succinctly:

    "It has nil effect, I am happy to see Karl Marx or
    Oswald Mosley there". (Conservative member,
    Conservative controlled Inner London Borough).

Yet another Conservative felt that the influence of
political ideology:

    "should be very small or not at all." He went on
    to add, "one party is more guilty of that than the
    other three." (Conservative member, Hung
    Metropolitan District).

Not all would necessarily agree that guilt is the appropriate word but certainly the data gathered from the interviews suggest that political ideology is perceived as having much more influence on members of the Labour party. It might be argued that what Labour members think of as political ideology is little different to what other respondents think of as community needs or pragmatism. The present author would reject such an argument. It has already been shown in Chapter Two that Labour respondents tend to express their political motivation in emotional, at times almost spiritual, terms. ("I believe in socialism as other believe in religion". (Labour member, Conservative controlled Outer London Borough)). Moreover it is not only the fact that Labour members mention such issues as equality, access and provision for need that shows the difference, but the way in which they talk about them. This cannot always be reflected fully on the printed page.

There is far more similarity between the parties on the perceived influence of the media. Over 60% of the Conservative and Labour members interviewed felt that items in the media had only a small or no influence on their decisions. Democrats were influenced even less with 75% of them coming into these two categories. The full figures are shown in Table 8:6.

TABLE 8:6 The extent to which items in the media
influence decisions about the operation of library
services.

(Figures in percentages)

	LARGE	SOME	SMALL	NONE
ALL	6	28	44	22
CONS.	5	32	42	21
LAB	6	29	41	24
DEM	8	17	50	25

Dislike of the media was spread evenly throughout all
parties. A significant number of members felt that the
media did not reflect the true picture of library
services. As one Labour respondent said:

"The only time we ever appear in the press is when
there is an industrial dispute or some cause
célèbre has shot up. Otherwise you would not know
we had libraries if you read the media." (Labour
Chair, Outer London Borough).

This view was supported by another member who observed:

"Over a number of years I have found that the
media don't always present a case quite as we deal
with it in committee. So I am not influenced by

the media too much." (Labour member, Democrat
controlled Outer London Borough).

A Democrat member of the same authority agreed,
stating:

"The press is so anti anything my committee is
doing that I can't say how they influence me. It
makes me angry because you just get letters and
leading articles that are full of lies. I suppose
in a way it influences me to a large extent
because I am determined that somehow the truth of
what we are doing has got to get through and
people can't be allowed to deliberately distort
everything we are saying and make something good
into something bad, which is what happens. I read
it every week and I feel really angry that they
are using it as a political thing to make
something good for the benefit of all into
something bad. I really don't like that".
(Democrat member, Democrat controlled Outer London
Borough).

A Conservative Chairman, speaking from his own
experience also expressed doubts about the quality of
reporting in the media. He said that he was:

"Not interested in what the media says. As a
lawyer I think the views of the media are, by and
large, very little worth listening to. I am sorry
to say, having frequently seen cases of mine
reported in the press, I very rarely have the
feeling that it was the slightest degree well
balanced. I can't believe it is likely to be any
better on any other topic. I feel singularly
cynical about the way the press operate."
(Conservative Chairman, Metropolitan District).

A Democrat respondent similarly felt that:

"The local media are concerned with
trivialities." (Democrat member, Hung
Metropolitan District).

Alongside this dislike of the press there was also a
feeling on the part of a number of respondents that it
would be "foolish to say you are not influenced by the
media." (Democrat member, Labour controlled
Metropolitan District). This ambivalence was nicely
demonstrated by a Conservative member who said:

"One takes an account of the media if you feel
that they are representing what the public are
thinking. If they are ill informed, as they
frequently are, then one takes no notice of

them... If the paper is representative of public
opinion I take note of it. If it is just blowing
a kite, being partisan or ill informed...then it
is wise to take no account of what they say. Make
what of that you will." (Conservative member,
Democrat controlled Outer London Borough.

Respondents went on in some cases to indicate how it
might influence them. For instance one Labour member
would:

"Take it with a pinch of salt but it would lead me
to investigate if there was a complaint." (Labour
member, Hung County Council).

Another felt that the media can:

"Raise your awareness about issues in other
authorities. [It] helps to give a wider
perspective about a situation or an issue".
(Labour member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Others felt that the media was important because it "is
going to the general public." (Labour member, Democrat
controlled Outer London Borough). One Conservative
respondent felt that:

"It is so powerful, if libraries were completely
out of touch you would be wasting your time."
(Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Another Conservative said he was influenced by the
press to a large extent:

"Because that is basically from the members of the
public. I give a high priority to their
remarks." (Conservative member, Labour controlled
Outer London Borough).

A Labour Chair questioned just how representative of
the general public the media are. He felt that:

"In some cases it can be a small group who are
articulate who take advantage of the majority.
Because middle income groups of most counties take
advantage because they have the education and are
more articulate than other groups. If you are not
careful you end up with sectionalism." (Labour
Chair, County Council).

The final potential source of influence about which
members were questioned was ward interests. Table 8:7
shows the response of members of different parties to
the question. "To what extent do ward interests

influence decisions about the operation of library services".

TABLE 8:7 The extent to which ward interests influence members' decisions about the operation of library services.

(Figures in percentages)

	LARGE	SOME	SMALL	NONE
ALL	46	22	20	12
CONS	37	21	26	16
LAB	47	29	18	6
DEM	58	8	17	17

What is not reflected fully in the figures is the tension some members can feel between representing a ward and taking decisions for the general good of the service. One respondent explained at length:

"I was elected to represent a particular ward and the interests of that area. It is part of my responsibility to look after their interests, but on the other hand I think that it is very important as a councillor that you are not parochial. That you look at the needs of the town as a whole, because I think this is very central to Labour party philosophy. We are looking for justice, if you like, the equal and appropriate distribution of resources throughout the Borough

and not just in particular pockets. If you look
at many of the resources at the moment many of
them are central to the more prosperous parts of
the town which is not acceptable. Very obviously
one looks at the interests of one's own area but
in the context of the Borough as a whole."
(Labour member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Such tensions can be even greater when the member is
Chairman of a committee responsible for a borough-wide
service. A Conservative Chairman said:

"I suppose if they [the electors of my ward] took
a very strong view I would say all right I will
listen to what you say and I will put these views
before the committee but I would also feel free to
tell the residents if I thought they were wrong.
If their assessment of what was needed was not
what I believed the authority as a whole needs.
Because that is the primary consideration - a
broad group of electors rather than a sectional
interest. For example, if somebody said we must
have a branch library, there might be other areas
in which a branch library is more important - so
sorry you are third in line or whatever."
(Conservative Chairman, Metropolitan District).

Another Chair when asked the extent to which she was
influenced by ward interests said:

"I would like to say none - but I would probably
be lying." (Labour Chair, Inner London Borough),

This view was echoed by another Chair who wryly
observed:

"To no extent is the ideal answer. To some the
truthful one. You can't divorce yourself from
being Chairman and Ward councillor, but you must
not let it cloud your judgement, must not lean too
far in the wrong way. Quite coincidentally my
ward has the best public library. Put in by ****
and not by me I assure you." (Labour Chair,
Metropolitan District).

Other respondents were less troubled by this conflict
of interests. A Conservative respondent saying:

"The library service is a borough-wide service not
a parochial issue. Unless it is a question of
carving up the cake between individual areas, then
one looks at the ward, but as a representative of
the opposition group - as Leader of the
Conservative group I look at the wider interests

not my particular ward." (Conservative member, Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

Perhaps the most cynical comment on the importance of the ward was made by a Conservative member who said, perhaps half in jest:

"It depends on whether there is an election on the way." (Conservative member, Hung County Council).

A Democrat put this rather more delicately when he stated:

"We pay attention, we can't disregard the voters." (Democrat member, Hung Metropolitan District).

For another group of members the ward was a very important influence. One Independent member simply said, "I am there for them." (Independent member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District). Another respondent said, "They are the people who put me there." (Labour member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District): a view repeated by a Conservative respondent who stated, "My first allegiance is to the ward." He then went on to explain how he saw this in library terms:

"My ward has its own library. We have a very good
library in *****. Yes my ward interests do
interest me because I would like some sort of
library in the **** part of the ward."
(Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Others felt a representative responsibility in looking
after a particular client group. A Labour respondent
explained:

"I represent that part of **** most socially
deprived and I am always anxious that they get the
kind of service they should have, and for various
reasons don't get. It is so easy for those in
authority to disregard the poorest social level."
(Labour member, Conservative controlled County
Council).

A Democrat member argued in much the same terms:

"[Ward interests] are very important to me. My
ward was a very run down area in a generally
forgotten end of the Borough. I represent the
rather poorer people of **** and feel it was very
neglected... Their feelings do influence me quite
a bit and I lobby heavily among my group for
improvement in my area." (Democrat member,
Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

Members would also take up complaints on behalf of constituents:

"I am aware of...complaints received, restricted books or about overdues. I am very receptive to views, individual complaints." (Labour Chair, Outer London Borough).

Praise from ward members was also seen as important:

"[The ward] is influential in so far as my constituents might complain or praise, and there is a lot of praise. I shall be reporting the praise I have heard only this day. A first class influence on my attitudes." (Labour member, Hung County Council).

Clearly from this survey the advice of the professional officer is the most important influence on elected members. This is common across all the political parties. In fact with the exception of the higher value placed on political ideology by members of the Labour Party there is little difference between the major factors that influence the members of the different parties. There are however some differences of emphasis and these are illusrated in Table 8:8 below.

TABLE 8:8 Factors influencing members' decisions about
the library service to a large or some extent by party
allegiance.

	ALL	CONS	LAB	DEM
1	Prof. Officer	Prof. Officer	Prof. Officer	Prof. Officer
2	Other members	Other members	Party Group	Other members
3	Party Group	Party Group	Other members Ward	Party Group Ward
4	Ward	Chairs		
5	Chairs	Ward	Pol Ideology	Chairs
6	Media	Media	Chairs	Media Pol.Ideology
7	Pol. Ideology	Pol. Ideology	Media	

The amount of influence perceived to be exerted by the officers is perhaps surprising at a time when, according to Stewart (1988 p 16-17):

"professionalism... is challenged politically, as councillors begin to question the validity of professional judgements."

However as can be seen from the data presented in Chapter 5 there is at least some suggestion on the part of some members that, with the public library service, unlike other areas of local government, it is a:

"case of letting the professionals get on with the job with encouragement and support." (Labour member, Hung County Council).

CHAPTER NINE

THE LIBRARY COMMITTEE

In his classic A.A.L. pamphlet, Berwick Sayers (1935
p5) described the library committee as:

"A body of men and women, which is elected to
formulate and direct the policy of a library or
system of libraries. That simple definition needs
enlargement, as committees are elected according
to and are subject to the Public Libraries Act of
1919, and its antecedents so far as they are still
effective."

Today in legal terms:

"Local authorities are now much more free to
organise their committee system as they wish...
Education, police and social services committees
must be formed as appropriate to the type of
authority but the authority can otherwise make
whatever arrangements it thinks fit for the
discharge of the duties of the council." (Turner
1986 p 29).

This certainly appears to be true of the arrangements for library services. The committees with responsibility for library services examined in this study involved four with the title, Leisure Services Committee, a Libraries and Arts sub-committee, a Library, Museum and Records Committee, a Libraries and General Services Committee, an Arts, Libraries and Museums Committee, a Libraries Committee, a Libraries, Museums and Arts Committee, two Neighbourhood committees responsible for a whole range of local services and a Libraries Advisory Group. This last formulation was not a formal sub-committee or committee but an advisory body with power to recommend but not to approve. Recommendations go via an Education Sub-Committee and the Main Education Committee to the Council concerned.

The vast majority of the members interviewed served on at least one other major committee in addition to the committee responsible for library services. For the majority of members, as Table 9:1 shows, the library committee is not perceived as the most important of their commitments.

TABLE 9:1   The importance of the library committee.

(Figures show percentage of members)

	LIB:MOST IMPORTANT	EQUAL IMPORTANCE	OTHER COMMITTEE MOST IMPORTANT
ALL	24	22	48
CONS	32	16	47
LAB	24	24	53
DEM	17	17	50

Note: Figures do not always add up to 100% as some members served on local neighbourhood committees responsible for the whole range of local services.

This is in line with earlier research (Blondel & Hall 1967, Ryder 1985) which shows that:

"At the local level it was felt that problems concerning housing and education took precedence over library matters, which often appeared to be on the periphery of need, forming the 'icing on the cake'.   Whilst on one council the library committee was one of the most unpopular venues, libraries being a matter in which many councillors showed a distinct disinterest."   (Ryder 1985 p 98).

This comment calls to mind David Gerard's (1988 p 137) question:

"How could a luxury like libraries compare with
the brutal urgency of a Housing Committee
meeting?"

Those responsible for chairing the library committees,
not surprisingly, placed higher importance on the
library committee; 50% of the chairpersons regarding
it as their most important committee. Nicholson
(1987), however, is of the opinion that other members
are sometimes surprised at a Chair's allegiance to
libraries. She told a Sheffield conference:

"Certainly in my experience my colleagues have
been quite surprised to find that I actually went
on Libraries and Arts Committee through choice and
I wasn't making the best of a bad job. Although
there are one or two of us on that committee who
are very committed I think it's very much seen as
the Cinderella of the services."

One respondent was quite clear in his view that:

"It is of secondary importance. Education and
basic facilities such as cleaning obviously have
to take precedence. They are more fundamental to
everyday human life... it is of peripheral
importance rather than being of fundamental

importance to the council's work." (Conservative member, Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

Cinderella was the term most frequently used to describe the library committee:

"It is a Cinderella committee, Education and Social Services take the money. They have a tear-jerking way if one of their people dies." (Conservative member, Hung County Council).

"It is often a Cinderella committee, regarded as bit of a luxury." (Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan District).

"Leisure Services is often seen as a great Cinderella by many councillors, not by the Labour Group. Housing, Social Services, Education, these are more important. Support services are crucial to people." (Labour member, Hung Metropolitan District).

"It does tend to be a Cinderella committee when it comes to money. It does not loom large in their [other council members] consideration." (Labour member, Hung County Council).

In fact, a number of respondents felt that those members who were not members of the library committee did not appreciate fully the importance of the library service. As one respondent said:

> "I think the Council does not see it as being that important. It is undervalued by other members of the council. Not true of committee." (Labour member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

A Conservative respondent echoed this view:

> "To most people it isn't [important]. I am an avid reader - but most councillors don't use it. They think it's an offshoot, not as important as other committees." (Conservative member, Conservative controlled Metropolitan District.

The low use of library services by other councillors in this particular authority was commented upon by the Chairman of the library committee:

> "In the view of members it is not very important. I don't think most members treat the library service as important as it ought to be - one of the reasons for that is they don't use it very much. I doubt whether most of them go inside a

library very often." (Conservative Chairman,
Metropolitan District).

Another respondent felt that the status of the
committee was indicated by the fact that it is:

"The last listed in the diary, regarded by the
officers as being the least important; it is the
lowest spending committee." (Democrat Chair,
Outer London Borough);

a comment that tends to support Matthew's (1988 p 4)
observation that:

"whatever the title, most library committees have
one thing in common - they have very little power
in the council hierarchy."

The link of status with spending was made by a number
of respondents, though many who made this connection
felt that:

"the library is more important than the amount of
money allocated." (Labour member, Conservative
controlled County Council).

This point of view found agreement with the Chairman of
the Council who said:

"The library service is underrated in local
government, it is comparatively small in
expenditure, but a very important service indeed."
(Conservative Chairman of County Council).

The Chair of another committee elaborated the point:

"I think that [its importance] is best reflected
in the fact that it only gets about 3.1/2 - 4% of
the budget. The profile is higher than its
resources. Libraries are those things that nobody
would appreciate until we shut them. In the cuts
a few years ago we started to get telephone calls
- 'What the bloody hell has happened to my
library?' Public impact is much greater than the
resources we are given. It is not an emotive
issue in the way that care for the elderly,
housing and so on is, it doesn't have that kind of
high profile." (Labour Chair, Metropolitan
District).

Another respondent spoke of:

"minds being on more grandiose things, finance,
social services, education... bit of a Cinderella,
with respect, that [the library] committee."
(Conservative member, Hung County Council).

That point having been made, a member in another authority stated:

> "It is maybe more important than people think" and
> spoke of its "increasing liaising with Social
> Services, Education and Housing." (Democrat
> member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Many members, like the Labour Chair quoted above, felt that the library service was very important to the public, even if this was not always reflected in the status of the committee:

> "It is very important in the sense that it
> provides an important service for the electorate.
> It is probably the service that brings the council
> into contact with the greatest number of people.
> It is the one thing that a very large
> cross-section of the public takes benefit from. I
> am not sure that non-members of the library
> committee are aware of this though." (Democrat
> member, Conservative controlled County Council).

A Chairman felt that his committee was:

> "very much in the public eye, in the front line."
> (Conservative Chairman, Outer London Borough).

This phrase was repeated by a Labour counterpart who said:

> "If libraries close you get a lot of stick - big
> impact. It makes a big impact on the public and
> the council. A front line service." (Labour
> Chair, Outer London Borough).

One respondent felt that the library committee was both:

> "A big spending committee and also one in which
> the public are interested. The average member of
> the public is more interested in whether you close
> a sports centre or open a library than in knowing
> how many Home Helps you have got. A committee of
> great interest to many people." (Labour Chair,
> Inner London Authority).

As Table 9:1 indicates, a minority of members interviewed felt that the library committee was a most important committee. One such respondent made the point that one had to look at the Council as a whole:

> "[The Library committee] is very important. I
> like to view the council and its committees a bit
> like a jig-saw puzzle - until you slot it together
> you don't get the complete picture. It is

important to maintain a balance. I think each committee has an important role - [the library committee] has a key role." (Democrat member, Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

The role of the library committee was seen by most respondents in terms of providing, protecting and promoting the service. One Chair described the function of his committee:

"To provide the best library service that we possibly can and to fight for the resources needed to achieve that." (Labour Chair, Metropolitan District).

Another respondent felt that the library committee should:

"safeguard and promote the library service...make as many libraries available as possible. [It should] make certain that everybody in the community has access to the library service, at home, in hospital or in prison. We want to serve them all." (Labour member, Conservative controlled County Council).

A Conservative respondent agreed that the committee should:

"give a voice for the libraries... gear the

library up to give the best possible service to

our customers." (Conservative member,

Conservative controlled Metropolitan District).

Another saw the need:

"To provide a service of books for the wide

populace of readers that we have in the county

from young school children to OAPs. Broad depth,

cater for all ages and a particular wide choice,

to widen readership, to encourage more people to

make use of libraries." (Conservative member,

Conservative controlled County Council).

A number of respondents felt, in fact, that the role of

the committee could and/or should be enlarged. There

was some emphasis on using the library service, and by

implication the library committee, for council public

relations. As one Chairman responded:

"[The library committee] is very important and I

have consistently tried to encourage my colleagues

to that view. We ought to be used for P.R. in

[name of County]." (Conservative Chairman, County

Council).

In another county authority it was felt that:

"Tourism should be part of the library scene. I feel [the committee] should have an enhanced role." (Democrat member, Hung County Council).

The Labour spokesperson in the same authority said that they were:

"Now looking at corporate image" and felt that "the library could be the flagship for house style." (Labour member, Hung County Council).

Likewise, in two London authorities, the library service was described as, "a public point of contact with the local community, part of our face." (Democrat member, Democrat controlled Inner London Borough) and as, "the public face of the council." (Democrat member, Labour controlled Inner London Borough).

A number of respondents also made the point that members of the public were represented via the members serving on the committee. One saw the committee:

"As being representative of the public rather than leaving the service totally to the professionals. It provides a means of public accountability and contact via elected members, rather than see service totally based on professional decisions - [the committee] is a check and public account.

Elected members are a sounding board, eyes and
ears of the community, the spokespersons for users
of the service." (Labour member, Labour
controlled, Metropolitan District).

A Conservative respondent argued the role of the
committee in much the same terms. In his view it was
the function of the library committee:

"To give a layman's input into the professional
expertise of the officers running that
department... Generally in the library committee
there is a good partnership between officers and
members - members providing the lay part of it and
also the consumer part of it. The officers
providing the professional back-up and knowledge."
(Conservative Chairman of County Council).

The general conclusion was that the library committee
was not the most important committee for most members
interviewed and that it was often believed to be held
in low esteem by other members of the council.
However, it is clear from the comments given during the
interviews that where library services are part of
multi-discipline committees they are regarded by the
vast majority of respondents as the most important
topic for such committees. The results of an analysis
of the views of members serving on multi-function
committees are shown in Table 9:2.

TABLE 9:2 Elected members' perception of most important topic on multi function committees including responsibility for public library services.

(Figures in %)

	PUBLIC LIBRARIES	TOPICS EQUAL	OTHER TOPIC
ALL	63	27	10
CONS	66	20	14
LAB	79	21	0
DEM	46	36*	18*

* includes respondents serving on neighbourhood committees responsible for the full range of council services.

On these committees it is often the case that:

"The bulk of the decisions, the bulk of the reports are about libraries." (Labour Chair, Metropolitan District).

One respondent estimated that libraries were "90% of the role of the ***** committee" (Conservative Chairman, County Council), while another stated that they take:

"About 60-65% of the budget, [libraries are] the public face of the libraries and arts service. They take up about 60-65% of our discussions."

(Labour member, Conservative controlled Inner London Borough).

Perhaps such 'guesstimates' should be regarded with caution because the chairman of the same committee felt that libraries were "about half the committee's work." (Conservative Chairman, Inner London Borough).

Another respondent expressed the opinion that:

"Libraries are the most important; it is the one side that people most understand, getting books, borrowing records, cassettes. Museums is/are a little bit of a bonus." (Conservative member, Hung County Council).

A similar point of view came from the member who said: "There is a larger public involvement in library services." (Democrat member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District): a point that was demonstrated by the respondent who said:

"Libraries, I would say, is number one because... when we had financial problems, the decision to close libraries made people very upset about that situation. They used harsh words. Actually some people have taken legal opinion... the library

service is very important." (Conservative member,
Labour controlled Outer London Borough).

The situation is not the same in all areas and local
circumstances can and do make a difference.   For
instance where the library service is discussed by an
Education committee there may be "considerable
imbalance between vast educational services and (a)
small library service." (Lomer & Rogers 1983 p81b).
An Education committee was responsible for libraries in
only one of the authorities surveyed for this study and
even then matters were considered via an advisory group
and a sub-committee. This should be kept in mind when
considering the figures given in Table 9:2. In one
authority the library service took up less time in
committee because it:

> "was very well established when we took control in
> 198... so libraries are not at the forefront of
> what we are doing at the moment, we see it
> reasonably well-catered for." (Democrat
> Chairperson, Outer London Borough).

Through the committee elected members are:

> "Involved... in decisions about running, funding
> of library services.   It ought to involve members
> in decisions about the way the library service is

provided. Do we want more branch libraries, containers etcetera." (Labour member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

It is in committee that members:

"determine strategic issues, not day-to-day work, issues where there might be political differences, long term where are we going, siting of new branch libraries, that type of activity goes on in most committees. (Independent member, Hung County Council).

It is seen as the job of the committee:

"To set the broad goals for services for which it is responsible, to decide, on an annual basis, priorities and improvements for the services and to ensure that decisions get taken at the right time and in the right way." (Democrat Chairperson, Outer London Borough).

In 1935 celebrating a century of municipal progress, Professor Harold Laski stated that:

"A Library committee... must not only choose the books which appear on the shelves. It is responsible for equipment and decoration. It must

arrange a proper relationship between its service and the schools. It must provide lectures... and exhibitions. It has to think out ways and means of helping, if it thinks fit, the development of adult education within its area. It has to cater for a population which varies from the casual newspaper-reader, through the shopgirl who reads fiction as a relief from her daily work, to the serious student who may be using the resources of the public library to enable him to pass a university examination." (Laski 1935, p83-4).

Time has brought some changes and the effectiveness of the traditional committee pattern is now being questioned. (Audit Commission 1990, Clarke & Stewart 1990). As a result some local authorities are developing new forms of working:

"Different forms of committee and forums for discussion are emerging: area committees, womens'committees, management boards for specific purposes, working parties, panels and seminars used to explore new issues." (Clarke & Stewart 1990 p59).

As has already been indicated above, the effectiveness with which a committee's functions are carried out will depend on a number of factors. Cooper (1985), albeit

referring to university library committees, details these as follows:

> "The particular make-up of the committee, the presence of influential and/or vocal members; the persuasive powers of the Chief Librarian, the perceived power of the committee in the political environment - all these were contributing factors to the operation of the committee."

It is the operation of the committee that is the subject of the next chapter, and in particular members' views on the quality of officers' presentations and their perceptions as to what should be discussed in committee.

CHAPTER TEN

IN COMMITTEE

The local government committee system has been described as "that curious combination of amateur and expert which is characteristic of English self-government." (Laski 1935 p106). According to a recent report (Audit Commission 1990) the amateurs, that is elected members,spend 45 hours each month either attending or preparing for meetings. The constitutional position of the committee and committee procedures can be traced back to the Municipal Corporations Acts of the nineteenth century (Laski 1935) and the subsequent Local Government Acts. The size and composition of committees are laid down in the Standing Orders of the local council.

The local government committee is a different animal in many ways from committees found in the private sector. Public librarians as public servants are accountable to the community as a whole rather than to a restricted group of shareholders. This has important implications in terms of the openness of the decision making process and the acceptance of responsibility for decisions and policies. As an officer, the librarian is accountable to the elected members who are in turn accountable to the electorate. As Ascher (1987), King (1987) and

others have shown, these important issues of
accountability are sometimes overlooked in comparisons
of the public and private sectors. Furthermore, the
needs of local communities require that local library
services are controlled by locally elected
representatives.

Just how much of that 'control' takes place in the
committee itself is an open question and more recent
researchers (Green 1981, Leach and Game 1989) have
suggested that:

> "the vast majority of party groups will have
> sorted out before a committee meeting what
> decisions will be taken and often also who speaks
> to an item and, (broadly) what is said."   (Leach &
> Game 1989 p41).

While Green (1981 p95) found that:

> "The main committee meetings were a formality.
> The decisions were always those of the majority
> party. In most cases its view had been determined
> beforehand."

Of course where there is no majority party, as is the
case with Hung or balanced councils the situation can
be different and it has been observed that:

"at committee level it is not unlikely that Democrat groups will in effect give the two other parties (or party spokespersons) the opportunity to convince them that their preferred option should be supported." (Leach & Game 1989 p41).

In addition, observation of library committees in action has indicated that even where decisions have been taken in advance this does not always stop the case and counter case being argued, especially one might add, if the press are present. As Jones (1973) has observed, "open committees may exacerbate party passions."

Just what is taken to committee varies from authority to authority and probably depends to some extent on the nature of the officer/elected member relationship. When asked, "What kind of matters would you expect library officers to refer to the 'library committee'?" respondents' replies ranged from:

"Everything. It has to be everything, because if it doesn't you become a rubber stamp committee, you are not aware of what's being said and what's going on. It really has to be everything." (Labour member, Conservative controlled Metropolitan District).

To a listing of items that were regarded as a waste of committee and members' time, such as:

> "Silly little things - books being exchanged without a ticket." (Conservative member, Labour controlled County Council).

Most members interviewed, however, expected financial and policy issues to be referred to their committee. Such things as the:

> "Criteria by which the service operates... staffing, level of charges established and those sort of things." (Labour member, Hung County Council).

And:

> "Certainly major items of capital expenditure...changes in policy for provision of service." (Conservative member, Conservative controlled County Council).

One Chair would:

> "expect on the committee agenda any major implementation of the policies that have been

decided and any bids for additional money."

(Labour Chair, Outer London Borough).

Another emphasised the need to discuss:

"the policies defined by the authority... if they are not workable they should be shown as not workable and the officer should justify that. A committee should deal with policies." (Labour Chair, Labour County Council).

This view found support elsewhere from a Democrat member who felt that:

"All really major policies [should come to the committee]. For instance, the setting up of a security system in libraries to stop people from stealing books and the records. Any major departure from the usual thing [of] books. Wanting to sell things in libraries. Services to actually make money with picture hire, tapes and that kind of thing. Certainly any new policies, increase in opening hours that sort of thing." (Democrat member, Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

A Conservative respondent also felt that:

"All policy matters [should come to the committee]. A very broad term. What a senior librarian should do is get the policy for running the library from the committee because that is what a policy committee is there for, that's what a Board of Directors is there for, to direct and set the policy. We shall spend so much on videos, we want videos to be educational, we will have a toy library... we will have a mobile library, we will build where? What are the staffing levels? We set the policy then the librarian should be given sufficient authority to manage it."
(Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Financial matters were mentioned as an important committee consideration by over half the respondents. A number emphasised the importance of the:

"Budget, an ongoing thing, it tends to occupy large parts of our time from September when the budget process begins and February when budget is determined." (Labour member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

Another referred to:

"The whole routine of financial planning which forms the skeletal structure of Annual committee

cycles - so that any essential request for new
money is bound to come to committee - so any
proposals for an additional service or change in
the way services are delivered must come to the
committee." (Conservative Chairman, Inner London
Borough).

Other wanted to know about:

"Shortage of funds. I am not saying there are a
shortage of funds but clearly if he [the
librarian] comes to us and says we are supposed to
be providing this and this for the library
committee and we find we just haven't got the
money we must know." (Conservative member, Labour
controlled Outer London Borough).

Or about:

"Any innovation that requires the expenditure of
extra money [as] - a first thing." (Labour
member, Hung County Council).

Members also wanted:

"Reports of changes, professional changes, general
trends. It is vital that we are kept informed of
changes." (Democrat member, Hung County Council).

"Plans for new libraries or any major changes to the service". (Labour member, Conservative controlled Outer London Borough).

"Changes in public demand." (Democrat member, Democrat controlled Inner London Borough).

"Fundamental changes in the library service: staffing rearrangements... changes in the trends of theft." (Conservative member, Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

The reason for this viewpoint was summarised by one respondent who said:

"I do think it is important that where there are fundamental changes of service that spokespersons are involved because at the end of the day the policy making is up to the members and the implementation is up to the officers - we need to get the balance right." (Labour member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Maintaining this balance means that members require:

"Regular reports on how the service is running, [on] any particular problem members may be able to offer suggestions. [Committee should] certainly

not receive all good news. If there are problems
I like them to be brought to attention rather than
let the problem develop." (Labour member, Labour
controlled Metropolitan District).

Another respondent also wanted to know of:

"Good success or failures. Summary reports of
last twelve weeks' promotions with conclusions
that can be drawn from them." (Labour Chair,
Inner London Borough).

Others felt that they were helped in this monitoring
function if the librarian provided them with regular
statistics:

"He [the librarian] should provide statistics -
how many customers use the place, how many books
are lent, how much he wants to spend - he should
refer all these matters." (Conservative member,
Conservative controlled Metropolitan District).

As well as being kept informed about the local
situation a number of respondents also wanted to be
kept aware of:

"National legislation, for example next week we
will debate Richard Luce's idea on financing

public libraries." (Conservative Chairman, Outer London Borough).

They wanted the librarian to:

"Ensure that the committee knows about things that could cause changes in policy - in a couple of months or years. Advanced warning of government legislation and requests for committee to add to, endorse or add to, or even change, comments going to government." (Labour Chair, Inner London Authority).

It is, said one respondent:

"Down to the Chief Librarian and his staff to be aware of what is happening in the library and literary world and for ourselves to reflect what is happening." (Conservative member, Labour controlled Outer London Borough).

As has already been shown in Chapter Six, stock selection still causes some concern amongst library committees and members expect "controversial items such as what books we should have in the library." (Democrat member, Hung Metropolitan District) to be referred to the committee.

Another agreed that the committee should receive
notification of:

> Anything controversial in the bookworld. For
> example - Do we stock Satanic Verses? Do we stock
> Spycatcher? (Conservative member, Democrat
> controlled Outer London Borough).

Another admitted that:

> "Items for the periodicals is one area where the
> committee exercise a form of control over what
> goes in - censorship is too strong a word."
> (Conservative Chairman, Outer London Borough).

The other major area that members expected to be
discussed at committee was staffing:

> "Staffing problems, if there are any should
> certainly be discussed." (Conservative member,
> Conservative controlled Metropolitan District).

Under this heading respondents mentioned such things as
the "need for more staff," (Democrat member, Hung
Metropolitan District); "staffing rearrangements -
staffing difficulties," (Conservative member, Democrat
controlled Outer London Borough); and "the appointment

of library officers". (Conservative member, Hung
County Council).

The appointment of local government officers, in
particular so called political appointments, has been
the subject of some public debate and members were
asked specifically to comment on the appointment of
Chief Officers who are in sympathy with the political
complexion of the Council they serve. The results
from this part of the interview are discussed further
in Chapter Twelve.

In addition to describing the kind of matters they
expected to be referred to the committee many
respondents also offered comment on what should not
be. As busy people they often resented the time that
could be spent on "silly little things". The
librarian:

> "should certainly not overburden members with
> unimportant details which he as a manager should
> deal with." (Conservative member, Conservative
> controlled Metropolitan District).

A Labour respondent agreed, saying:

"I don't see much point in small management issues
being brought to the committee." (Labour member,
Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

This view anticipated the 1990 report of the Audit
Commission, We can't go on meeting like this which
argued that trivial decisions should be delegated to
staff and more time spent discussing policy issues and
the standard of services. In fact there was a feeling
among some members that:

"librarians are the professionals... they should
be left alone to run the service. It is best for
politicians not to interfere. The last thing the
Borough Librarian wants is elected members telling
him how to run his library." (Labour member,
Conservative controlled Inner London Borough).

Just how much should be left to the librarian, just
what he or she should refer to the committee is,
though, the subject of some debate. It is, according
to one respondent:

"Increasingly a difficult question, we had quite a
lot of discussion on this last night [at a meeting
of the committee]. It is very important that
staff can take initiatives and make developments
without constantly having to come back and have

approval from committee every time they breathe in
and out. The difficulty is knowing at what
degree of importance an initiative is. Where you
draw the line basically. Any initiatives that are
new, that mark a new direction in policy, that
involve a service that hasn't previously been
offered, that involve extra staffing - or
significant changes in routine ought to be
referred if not actually to committee - at least
to [party] spokespersons. Certainly with the new
competitive tendering, although it does not affect
libraries at the moment, with this new system
councils and council officers need to make
decisions rapidly. They would be greatly
inhibited if every time a decision was made they
had to refer it back to council. Obviously a
private firm could make a decision and act on it
straight away." (Labour member, Hung Metropolitan
District).

Thus while it is clear that most members expect
officers to bring to committee "all matters involving
the philosophy and/or strategy of the service"
(Respondent to pilot questionnaire), precise
interpretation of what that means is often a matter of
judgement on the part of the librarian. The local
political climate may well determine just what is, and
what is not taken to committee. In deciding what to

present in committee and how to present it the librarian often has to exercise careful judgement as a 'political manager'. One Chief Officer is of the opinion that:

> "Matters only go before Committee which the majority Party will agree with... no good officer will cause political embarrassment for his political masters." (Liddle 1985 p21).

A major means of presenting information and ideas to elected members is via the committee report. Elcock (1982 p98) found that many members have a fairly cynical view of officers' reports, one of his respondents describing them as:

> "a subtle blend of bullshit and flannel... making sure things go their (i.e. the officers') way. They put out so many reports that you get swamped by it all. You can't read it... it's all protective confetti for the officers."

The view that officers prepared their reports to make sure things go their way found some support amongst respondents to the present study. As one said:

> "The problem is that elected members are taking decisions brought to them by officers, selected by

officers, [on] information provided by officers,
recommendations put forward by officers. Control
of information is a problem with officer/member
relationship. Reports tell you one side of any
issue." (Labour member, Hung County Council).

A Conservative respondent agreed saying:

"In the cynical world the officer's report is
designed to get his proposal through and therefore
[he] only tells the committee that which he thinks
will get his proposals through and not to educate
or inform the committee on anything else."
(Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan District).

A Democrat on the same committee said:

"I always suspect all officers frame their reports
- reports are framed - to lead us to the
conclusions they desire. This is not difficult".
(Democrat member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Another suspected that:

"they [the officers] gloss over certain issues,
make issues not look as bad as they may be.
Reports are the views of the Chief Officer rather

than a group of staff." (Labour member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

However, when they were asked to comment on the quality of the officers' reports to the library committee the majority of members responded in favourable terms, often using short phrases such as "very good" or "excellent". A few respondents commented at greater length. One replying:

"In the main our officer's reports are excellent... well researched, they come to committee with full implications: political, social, financial." (Democrat member, Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

While another felt:

"They are very clear and quite concise - they do provide us with enough information to make decisions. They are very well done actually on library committee." (Democrat member, Hung Metropolitan District).

The superiority of librarians' reports was in fact mentioned by a number of respondents, one saying that they:

"Tend to be more literate than reports that come
to other committees." (Conservative Chairman,
Inner London Borough).

"Librarians", said a respondent to the pilot
questionnaire, "appear to precis their reports better
than Education officers."

That is not to say there was no criticism of reports to
library committees. Ten respondents were critical to a
greater or lesser extent. By far the most common cause
for complaint was that reports were too long or too
wordy. One respondent complained:

"It goes right through, they say too much, too
wordy - they are saying too much, too untidyly,
too often." (Conservative member, Labour
controlled Outer London Borough).

Another said:

"I'd like to see library officers a bit sharper in
their reports - there is so much paper, they
should produce rather shorter reports, reports are
too long." (Conservative member, Conservative
controlled County Council).

Another felt:

"They are too long because you have so many papers. I need an idiot sheet, a couple of sheets." (Conservative member, Hung County Council).

One respondent felt that there might be an ulterior motive in long reports:

"I wonder about the need for detail: officers cover tail, padding out agendas and reports to the nth degree, matters of information. Awful lot of padding out of reports to make [name of committee] justifiable in its own right... To protect ivory tower." (Democrat member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

Others, however, complained about a lack of information:

"On occasions we find it necessary to criticise officers for presenting us with choices when we have not got financial information. Recent reports show a great deal of financial naivety... half baked, not thought out or researched." (Conservative member, Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

In one authority, the quality of reports was monitored
and officers:

> "get reminded by the Town Clerk [that] members
> must get the type of report that they want."
> (Conservative Leader, Metropolitan District).

In fact, in a large number of the authorities surveyed,
the dividing line between the job of the library
officers and that of elected members in the preparation
of reports was not always clear.   In many authorities
before a report reached the committee a draft had gone
to the Chairperson.   In one London Authority:

> "Every report is produced in draft for
> consultation in other departments - for legal,
> financial, race relations implications.   I as
> Chair insist that a copy is sent to me at the same
> time so I can have my input at the same time.
> Also to be aware of what the report is, so it
> doesn't take me by surprise when I get the
> agenda."   (Labour Chair, Outer London Borough).

In a County Authority the Chair reported:

> "We decide what is going on the agenda.   That's
> for the Chair to decide.   We have a pre-agenda
> [meeting].   The Chair and the Vice Chair take out

what we don't want. The Chief Librarian can withdraw a report at any time. I see it as the responsibility of the Chair/Vice Chair to make sure that the reports we want are there and not what other people want. We are involved right through." (Labour Chair, County Council).

A Conservative Chairman also behaved in a very similar way:

"I have issued instructions that I wish to be consulted about the agenda, and on any difficult items, about the content of proposed papers. In a [previous] hung council I had the feeling that the officers prepared papers and it was our job as Chairman just to fight them through. We didn't even believe in what we had to fight through... I don't want to be embarrassed with having to deal with officers' papers on contentious subjects. I want to see them beforehand." (Conservative Chairman, County Council).

In other authorities discussions took place before even a draft report was written:

"The Chief Librarian will speak to me saying, 'I am thinking of doing this - what is your view?' We will have a discussion before the draft report

is published. I know what it is going to
contain. On new topics, matters of policy, the
Chief Librarian will talk to me before he puts pen
to paper." (Conservative Chairman, Metropolitan
District).

In another authority the Chairperson said:

"They [the officers] know what we are thinking and
would not put in recommendations which they know
we would never agree but would feel us out and
vice versa on that particular item." (Democrat
Chairperson, Inner London Borough).

In case the officers did not know what members were
thinking in one authority there was a:

"A special group briefing to see drafts.
Presented as officers interpret the members'
feelings and then it is discussed and amendments
made if they have not got the feelings right."
This respondent then added, "You might not get
quite such an honest answer to that from anybody
else." (Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan
District).

Another group of members would expect "sensational or controversial items to be submitted beforehand." (Labour member, Hung County Council).

In another Hung authority:

"In recent months we have asked Committee Chairmen to discuss with [officers] controversial matters at a fairly early stage. That does not mean that they [the chairmen] play a directing part in the framing of the report." (Democrat Chairperson, Hung Metropolitan District).

Another Democrat Chairperson would only see a draft report:

"In circumstances where there is an issue of controversy - less than 10%". (Democrat Chairperson, Outer London Borough).

A small group of respondents were very much against the idea of interfering with the officer's reports. One Council Leader said it is:

"A matter for each individual chairman: I am very much opposed to it. I look at agenda one liners. I insist on never seeing a report until it is

public." (Conservative Leader, Metropolitan
District).

This view is echoed by a Labour Chair who said:

"I have never looked at draft before it goes to
committee. That is the professional job. Our job
is to decide policy based on that information."
(Labour Chair, Metropolitan District).

A substantial number of members feel that, whilst
reports to library committees are generally of a high
quality, that they reflect the views of officers rather
than those of members or of the public. As Gyford,
Leach and Game (1989 p142) remark;

"officers... stress their right to have their own
professional or technical viewpoint known,
recorded and not (significantly) amended by
members in its published form."

Some of the data from the interviews together with the
observations of academics (Gyford, Leach & Game, 1989;
Knowles, 1988; Loughlin, 1986) and Chief Officers
(Liddle, 1985; Stoakley, 1983) suggest that the
dividing line between the role of officer and the role
of the member in preparing committee reports is not

always clear. Increasingly what Stoakley (1983) has called "the battleground":

> "is not so much in the public arena but in the committees and behind the closed doors in the offices of our local government authorities."

Some of the interviews with elected members suggest that that battleground, with perhaps the exception of Hung Councils, is often not in the committee itself but behind the closed doors of pre-agenda meetings and offices where the Chief Officer and Chairperson discuss and debate the content of a report to committee.

The evidence from the present study indicates that the majority of respondents would expect the library committee to discuss financial and policy matters, staffing and any major changes to the service. A minority felt that "everything" should be subject to committee discussion whilst others felt that more could and should be left to the officers. This view is supported by the recent report from the Audit Commission (1990) which suggests that many councillors are wasting half their time discussing trivia at unnecessary meetings.

POLITICS AND THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

"At local government level it is often difficult
for managers to separate the purely managerial
from the political. Even the details of
day-to-day service delivery are of interest to
politicians and may be a matter of political
principle. It is the essence of local government
that the elected representatives have a right to
be concerned with the details of service delivery,
and sensitive managers are aware of this."

Flynn, N. "Public sector management" 1990 p52

CHAPTER ELEVEN

PARTY POLITICS AND THE LIBRARY COMMITTEE

The literature provides very little evidence regarding
the extent to which party politics plays a part in
library committees and what there is, is somewhat
conflicting. Blondell and Hall (1967) measuring
political conflict on committees in Colchester reported
that on their scale, "the library committee comes
surprisingly high." Dearlove (1973) classifies
library committees as non-political but adds the
caveat, "libraries can be a bit political." Raffel
(1974), albeit examining academic library committees,
suggested that "libraries operate as political systems
and thus improving libraries requires political
analysis". Lomer and Rogers (1983 p7) on the other
hand, concluded that, "party politics are not
apparently of major importance in the provision of
public libraries", but they felt the need to add, "at
least not in the current political situation." Eleven
years earlier Corina (1972 p226) had felt able to argue
that, "the big local fights for housing, education,
libraries etc. are in the past and are not likely to be
revived in a situation in which nationally and locally,
there is a virtually complete acceptance of the welfare
state."

In fact even in the early seventies, that was not strictly the case as some on the so-called radical right were already questioning why "the state spends all its energies taking money from the energetic, successful and thrifty to give to the idle, the failures and the feckless?" (Boyson 1971 p5). Boyson goes on to complain that:

"the state now decides how half or more of a man's (sic) income shall be spent, how his family should be educated... what library and in many cases what cultural provision they should receive." (Boyson 1971 p6).

Such theorists became government Ministers and as recent history shows, the Conservative Party moved sharply to the right thus breaking down the welfare state concensus, including the political concensus on some, but the evidence of this study suggests, not all library committees.

Table 11:1 shows how the elected members interviewed responded to the question, "To what extent [do] party politics play a part in the meetings of the library committee?"

TABLE 11:1 The extent to which elected members feel that party politics plays a part in the meetings of the library committee.

(Figures show percentage of members)

	LARGE	SOME	SMALL	NONE
ALL	22	28	36	14
CONS	26	11	47	16
LAB	12	47	41	0
DEM	25	25	17	33

Whilst the table does suggest some differences between the political parties, the qualitative evidence suggests that the figures should be treated with some care and that the perception of the part played by politics is more likely to be a product of the local political situation than a question of party allegiance. That having been said, as Chapter Eight demonstrates, "politics" and party ideology play a more important part in the life of Labour members. This was again demonstrated by a Labour member who responded to the above question by saying:

"I am certainly concerned that my political ideology, that if there is a proven need it ought to be met, applies to libraries as well as to every other committee. Not so sure some of my non

Labour colleagues would agree with that." (Labour

member, Hung County Council).

There was, however, some general agreement that the

library committee was less political than most other

committees. This lack of "politics" was often linked

with the perceived importance of library matters. As

one respondent said, library committees are:

"not exactly non-political, but there are bigger

fish to fry elsewhere. The average length of the

library committee is 45 minutes." (Conservative

Chairman, Outer London Borough).

Another linked politics with the size of the budget:

"We are less political than others, but we have

less than 1% of the budget." (Labour member,

Conservative controlled Inner London Borough).

In a number of instances members felt that their

committee had become more political over recent times:

"Traditionally we were one of the less political

committees because members of my party and members

of the opposition supported libraries. Now it is

a political thing... a recent trend in ****."

(Labour Chair, Inner London Borough).

A Conservative respondent felt that politics:

"has shaded in. There used to be very little in the old council. Currently, in the new council, with control coming to the Conservatives, party politics plays a large part. Once we shake down it will revert to small. At the moment there are political issues without a doubt." (Conservative Chairman, County Council).

Other argued that there was often general support for the service within the library committee:

"Much of the work is fairly non-political."
(Labour member, Hung County Council).

"[There is] very rarely great political argument. Libraries are supported by other parties."
(Labour member, Conservative controlled Outer London Borough).

"Libraries is (sic) regarded by both groups... a fair amount of agreement on both sides. There is a lot of crossing the floor." (Conservative Chairman, Outer London Borough).

"Politics is not a factor. They [the opposition] don't try and score party political points. The

service is important to everyone." (Labour member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District). These comments reflect the view of the former County Librarian of Warwickshire (Budge, 1971) who advised councillors that:

"Public libraries are popular. They should be free from political issues and library committees should be free from politics in their work."

An opposite point of view was put by John Stewart (1983a) when addressing the 1983 Public Library Authorities Conference. He felt that:

"Local politics should be at the heart of library management. For politics bring change. Issues should be discussed. Charging can even be mentioned."

In fact only a minority of respondents (14%) felt that their committee was entirely free from politics although 36% thought it played only a small part in the meetings of library committees. Where political differences did occur it was most often over the question of resources. As one member said:

"The main divide as for all committees of the council is money of course. The extent to which

more or less money should be spent and, the corollary to that, the extent to which rates levied should be increased or decreased - that is the main party political issue. Other party divisions are relatively minor." (Conservative member, Conservative controlled Inner London Borough).

This view was echoed by a Labour member who said:

"Really it is only finance that matters. The ruling party governs the state of the library." (Labour member, Labour controlled County Council).

Hodgkinson (1970 p244) in his memoirs was quite clear how finance mattered in the provision of services. According to him:

"The Tories... apply the measuring stick in policy making of the private business executive, extol the virtues of private profitmaking... if a penny can be saved on the rates. They will make the citizen pay more for the loan of a library book or gramophone record, even if they do lie unused on the shelves..."

Lansley et al (1989 p96) report the similar views of a current political leader:

"Margaret Hodge, leader of Islington, says that 'compared with the old Right, the new Left of the 70s did believe in using the council as a redistributive mechanism. We believe in using the rates income to build nurseries, to provide libraries. The old Tammary Hall politics were low tax, low services."

The view of the third party was put by a Democrat respondent who said:

"Where resources are concerned **** is divided by North and South. I am in the middle. I take the balanced view." (Democrat member, Conservative controlled Metropolitan District).

As Chapter Thirteen will show, the question of charging is a matter of some difference between the political parties.

Lomer and Rogers (1983 p117), despite their reservations about the role of party politics also found that:

"A... factor controlling expenditure was the political will of the authority with, in many cases, Conservative Party members being more likely to believe in cutting public expenditure

and the Labour Party members being more inclined
to increase or maintain public spending. But it
could be said that there also appeared to be a
distinctly local attitude to spending on
libraries."

Indeed as will be argued later, local factors are
distinctly important in the whole of this area.

In addition to expenditure priorities, the provision of
services to special groups was also mentioned as a
source of political disagreement. A Conservative
respondent said:

> "We have had some [party political debate] over
> sex discrimination in terms of spending. Move to
> go to all ethnic communities. If you go to all
> the minority communities the ones that will have
> nothing will be the majority community."
> (Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan District).

This kind of issue was also the subject of some debate
in one committee observed by the writer.   On this
occasion the Conservative Shadow Chair severely
criticised a Black Arts project and expenditure on
ethnic minority services. He also launched a
vituperative attack on a video project undertaken as
part of an urban action programme.   On this particular

committee the Conservatives are very much in the
minority and it is arguable that his comments were
aimed at the press contingent rather than made in any
real expectation that members would change their
minds. On another occasion the Conservatives insisted
on a recorded vote, on grant aid for a library
publication describing women's experience of the
miners' strike having voted against the proposal. At
the same committee a book exhibition featuring material
from the USSR was also the subject of some political
point making.

As Stewart (1988a p4) states:

> "The routine event can become a political issue.
> An apparently routine letting of council premises
> can cause a storm of controversy if the letting
> turns out to be an extremist organisation."

Certainly political conflict can arise from the most
innocuous looking items. For example the present
writer observed a meeting where the decision by a
working group to change a children's art competition to
a children's art exhibition provoked a quite lengthy
discussion when reported to the libraries committee.
The Conservative councillors arguing that competition
was natural, the Labour members agreeing with the

officers who regarded "the competitive element as one
of the main problem areas."

On other occasions:

> "You get opportunism. For example on library
> closure. There was unanimous agreement, no
> opposition in committee. But at full council
> there was a petition. The opposition changed
> tack. Changed for obvious political advantage."
> (Labour Chair, Outer London Borough).

At the same time some minority party members felt that:

> "If you have a point to put across it can be
> smoked out and brought back in a different form.
> They are politically minded. Nobody is allowed to
> have input as good as their own. (Independent
> member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

In the past, and perhaps in the present, although it is
rarely recorded publicly, officers have found this kind
of behaviour disagreeable. Gerard (1988 p137) recalls
the views of Tighe, the former City Librarian at
Nottingham:

> "The Library Committee was a subject much
> ventilated at the morning discussion, and he

[Tighe] would convey to me the devious workings of those party nominees, the tedium of their unschooled views on libraries, the narrow purposes they too often served, the dangers of partisan politics..."

As the comments from councillors demonstrate it is difficult to generalise about the degree to which library committees are political. The extent to which party politics plays a part in the meetings of the library committee seems to vary from authority to authority. Tables 11:2 - 11:4 are concerned with the impact of political control on the perceptions of members. Table 11:2 suggests that library committees on Labour and Democrat controlled councils are perceived as more party political, while Tables 11:3 and 11:4 indicate that, so far as the two major parties are concerned, it is the opposition members rather than the members of the controlling party who are more likely to regard the committee as political. Because of the relatively small numbers involved the figures should be treated with some circumspection but they do lend some support to the interview data presented in Chapter Two and the perception that:

"My side do not bring politics in. The other side do." (Conservative Chairman, County Council).

TABLES 11:2 - 11:4 The colour of political control and the impact of party politics.

TABLE 11:2 The extent to which elected members feel that party politics plays a part in the meetings of the library committee. (Figures show percentage of members according to the political control of the council on which they serve.)

	LARGE	SOME	SMALL	NONE
CON CONT	6	33	44	17
LAB CONT	46	15	31	8
DEM CONT	57	0	14	29
HUNG	0	50	42	8

TABLE 11:3 The extent to which elected members feel that party politics plays a part in Conservative controlled library committees.
(Figures show percentage of members on Conservative controlled councils).

	LARGE	SOME	SMALL	NONE
CONS	0	10	60	30
LAB	16	67	17	0
DEM	0	50	50	0

TABLE 11:4 The extent to which elected members feel
that party politics plays a part in Labour controlled
library committees.

(Figures show percentage of members on Labour
controlled councils)

	LARGE	SOME	SMALL	NONE
CONS	100	0	0	0
LAB	14	29	57	0
DEM	50	0	0	50

Some writers (Gyford 1984; Gyford, Leach & Game 1989;
Leach and Game 1989) have suggested that the degree to
which party politics plays a part in the work of an
authority is related to the type of authority. Leach
and Game (1989 p64) for instance suggest that:

> "the tendency for Labour groups in shire counties
> to be more 'moderate' in their outlook than some
> of their counterparts in London and the
> metropolitan areas meant that the 'idealogical
> gap' between Labour and other party groups
> (notably the Alliance) was less striking."

A similar view had also been expressed to the author,
in anecdotal terms, by chief librarians. Lomer and
Rogers (1983 p88) also noted a difference in management
style between a county and a metropolitan authority:

"In a county council example the programme
committee appeared to rely heavily on the advice
of the director and his management team... A
different situation existed in a metropolitan
district where the committee was more involved in
detailed resource allocation and has shown itself
less prepared to follow the advice of its
director."

Table 11:5 shows how members from different types of
authority perceived the extent to which party politics
played a part in the work of their library committee.
The figures suggest that members in Outer London
authorities feel that party politics plays a larger
role than members from elsewhere. The table also
indicates that county members perceive that party
politics play a smaller part in the work of the library
committee than those members serving on other types of
authority. However these results should be treated
with a degree of caution in that just three of each
type of authority were included in the survey; the
main purpose of which was to examine the perceptions of
individual members. It is also worth noting that the
survey was undertaken at a time when there were a large
number of hung county councils and according to (Travis
1989):

"The shire councils... proved to be the most
lively testbed for coalition politics."

The high figure for outer London is almost certainly
the result of the fact that one of the outer London
Boroughs surveyed had, through local circumstances,
become highly politicised.

TABLE 11:5   The extent to which elected members feel
that party politics plays a part in the meetings of the
library committee.   (Figures show percentage of
members by type of local authority)

	LARGE	SOME	SMALL	NONE
COUNTY	13	20	60	7
INNER LON.	14	29	29	29
OUTER LON.	55	36	9	0
MET.DIST.	12	29	35	24

In that authority, every single respondent from the
controlling party, and major opposition party reported
a high level of party politics.   The Democrat
chairperson of the committee would only say that it
played a very large part in the committee.   This
comment was followed by a bitter laugh which was
explained by a back-bench member who said:

"The opposition play a destructive role. The
balance of power situation is that we hold balance
by casting vote of the Mayor. Politics is very,
pretty, important when you have a balance so
fine. No matter how good a suggestion is the
Conservatives will automatically vote against it
and go out and stir up trouble about the Liberal
(sic) group. They had 22 years running [in
control of the council]. They don't find
opposition easy - and their main role is to see
how much they can wreck." (Democrat member,
Democrat controlled, Outer London Borough).

Party politics tends to manifest itself according to
local circumstances. The majority of members
interviewed for this study feel that it plays at least
a small part in the operations of the library
committees but most regard the library committee as
less party political than other committees of the
councils they serve on. It is open to question
whether this is a good thing for the public library
service because often the lack of "party politics" is
linked to a lack of perceived importance. Members have
"bigger fish to fry elsewhere" and "the library service
only accounts for about 1% of the council's budget."
One Chair has argued that:

"We've got to make our arguments for libraries and
arts political ones. We've got to start to talk
in language our colleagues will understand. For
too long we've talked with pride about the absence
of politics from the Libraries and Arts
Committee." (Nicholson 1987).

Some respondents did report an increase in the impact
of party politics in recent years. A particular
example of this was in an authority which had recently
changed its political colour, to the chagrin of the
previous ruling party. The public library service, it
appears, is more likely to become a political issue as
more issues in an authority become politicized.

A further extension of the argument regarding the
influence of party politics is to be seen in the debate
over the politicalization of officers, and more
specifically in accusations of political appointments.
Traditionally, in theory at least, officers have been
politically neutral but changes in local government
have forced members, officers and academics to
reconsider the traditional relationship between what
Alexander (1982 Chapter 5) has termed "partisanship and
professionalism". Likewise Laffin and Young (1990
p92) have observed that:

"The relationship with elected politicians has changed. The old stance of aloofness from the political process and from politicians is less and less viable."

They go on to say:

"Any chief officers who hold themselves back from the political process may well be simply consigning themselves to irrelevance."

The perceived change in the officer/member relationship led some to conclude that chief officers were being appointed on the basis of their political allegiance. (Baker 1984, Goodson-Wickes 1984.) The next chapter examines members' perceptions of the extent of this trend in the public library service.

CHAPTER TWELVE

POLITICAL APPOINTMENTS AND THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Although it has been presented as a relatively recent issue (Alexander 1982a, Blunkett 1985, Liddell 1985), the question of political appointments has been the subject of debate for some time. Savage (1942 P51-52) for instance, with specific reference to library appointments, was of the opinion that:

> "A committee on which one party is dominant will never be wholly in sympathy with a librarian known to be of the opposite party... Appointments are often political. However able a librarian, he won't be appointed by a Big Endian majority when he is known to be a Little Endian. Sometimes deputy-librarians with good technical claims have been passed over because they have flown their colours."

He goes on to say:

> "In cities and towns where parties are closely organized it isn't unusual to inquire confidentially, through local agents, about the politics of candidates on a short leet."

Gerard (1988 p167) considering his own appointment as City Librarian of Nottingham in the mid-sixties was also well aware of the possible importance of a candidate's perceived political allegiance. He writes:

> "To the Chairman of the day I was well known, since he was Treasurer of the Nottingham Labour Party and was wont to call on me regularly for the subscription, not without embarrassment (officials shouldn't get mixed up in politics but we're glad to have you on our side); so perfunctory were my connections with the Party (bare rooms and ward meetings have slim appeal) that any party members on the committee would try only to forget the awkward fact. It had always been said, notably by Tighe [Gerard's predecessor] himself, that he had won the post because of support from the Tories, who preferred him to E. V. Corbett."

Saunders (1979 p224) looking at Croydon in the early seventies concluded that:

> "The 'political elite' can choose its men in its own image, for leading members dominate the Interviews and Appointments committee which selects Chief Officers."

More recently, Laffin and Young (1990 p80) found that some "chief officers claimed that Conservative central office held a 'black list' of 'politically undesirable officers'." In discussing what the public library boss does the former Chief Librarian, now Leisure Director, David Liddle, (1985 p20-21) said:

"In the real world, officers cannot be political virgins. Indeed the trend is towards the appointment of officers who are in sympathy with the political complexion of the Council."

It was this view that was put to members in this study. Most respondents felt that it did happen but many were reluctant to admit that it was true of their own authority or more particularly their own party. Describing the suggestion as "Oh rubbish, rubbish" a respondent went on to say:

"It happens in [name of neighbouring authority]. Yes I think it does. I think when I was on the County Council it happened quite a lot. Certainly does not happen in our borough in ****." (Conservative member, Conservative controlled Metropolitan District).

Conservative members tended to suggest it was a trend in "Left wing councils [to] employ people who think

their way." (Conservative member, Labour controlled County Council).

One Conservative member said:

"I don't think it is any secret from the present Labour Party that their appointees are, and certainly have been in the past, politically sympathetic and this seems in many cases to overrule their consideration of their fitness for the job." (Conservative member, Labour controlled Outer London Borough).

Another felt that political appointments are:

"More marked now, more marked, and you would expect me to say this wouldn't you, to the left than the right." (Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Be that as it may, none of the Labour members interviewed for this study supported the idea of "political appointments" in the crude meaning of the term. One Labour member observed that:

"There are a lot of myths about that particular thing. Quite clearly a Chief Officer has to work with elected members and it is no use being

diametrically opposed to everything they say...
The officer represents a continuation in
councils; he is there to serve whatever political
masters are in power at that time. (Labour
member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

Another Labour respondent felt that:

"It would be an unfortunate situation if people
were appointed because of their political views.
I can think of officers on both sides of the
political spectrum who I see as highly
professional officers and who carry out an
extremely good job despite very strongly held
political views themselves." (Labour member, Hung
Metropolitan District).

A Labour Chair agreed saying:

"I believe if you bring in people who are
politically subservient to you that, I think you
could, in a democracy, be going down a very rocky
path, and I think in some societies, after some
time in office, graft and other problems become a
problem and what is more, it makes for
complacency." (Labour Chair, County Council).

A Democrat member on a council with a large Labour
majority said:

"I have seen nothing as an opposition member to
suggest he (the Chief Librarian) was treading a
particular path. I think it is a dangerous path
to start appointing on political grounds because
A, you are not necessarily getting the best person
for the job and B, it opens up the question of how
democratic is the local authority, and how it is
then reactive to the views of the public."
(Democrat member, Labour controlled Metropolitan
District).

These more moderate views tend to be supported by the
recent evidence from the Widdicombe Committee.
(Committee of the Inquiry into Local Authority business
1986). When elected members giving evidence to
Widdicombe were asked if "officials should only be
appointed if they are broadly sympathetic with the aims
of the majority party" only 5% were in favour.

The picture that emerged from the present study was a
complicated one, and certainly one that had many more
shades of grey than that presented by the more
hysterical sections of the press. No member of any
party spoke in favour of the straight political
appointment. That is, most members would be:

"Unhappy were we to have an appointment whose only qualification is loyalty to one political party... we promote on the basis of merit." (Labour member, Conservative controlled Inner London Borough).

The question of merit, now embodied in the 1989 Local Government and Housing Act, was raised by a number of respondents. A Conservative chairman stated:

"They [candidates for a post] are not asked... about what their political views are. I think it is undesirable. We only appoint on merit. Whether we make the right decision or not I don't know, but that is what we try to do. Find the best person for the job in other words. There is (sic) no other criteria." (Conservative chairman, Metropolitan District).

A Labour Chair commented:

"I know for a fact that political appointments have been made. In my own case I always try to appoint on merit and rarely know the allegiance of the officers concerned." (Labour Chair, Outer London Borough).

It was felt by another respondent that:

"A librarian, a chief officer, must first of all be a master of his job and quite capable of earning the money he is being paid. That is one of the criteria that we look for when looking for personnel. To say that he has got to have leanings towards one way or another is, to me, a load of piffle. We look for a librarian, an expert in the sphere he is applying for. Without that expertise, and this is what we are looking for - the expertise that he has got, the knowledge that he has got and able to give out to the public." (Labour member, Labour controlled County Council).

All this having been said, it does not mean that there is no relationship between the political views of an officer and his or her appointment to a particular authority. As a number of members pointed out:

"When you apply for a job at Chief Officer level, when you have strong political views either way, you are unlikely to apply for a job in an authority you know is strongly the other way. It is not just a question of appointment it is a question of people going for interview in the first place." (Labour Chair, Inner London Borough).

This view was supported by a respondent from a county who said:

"I think officers are very often seeking appointment in areas with political opinions they share." (Labour member, Conservative controlled County Council).

A Conservative member agreed:

"I think that the tendency is, if officers have pronounced political views, for them not to apply to a council where they would find themselves at variance with the political complexion." (Conservative Chairman, Inner London Borough).

If an officer does not support the political views of his or her council, members felt that he or she might find the situation difficult. As one respondent said:

"Officers who are not in sympathy with their council will have difficulty in carrying out their function, which is not to say their political affiliation should be the same. I believe that the best officers in **** are non-political but I don't believe there are many officers in many councils around the county who are totally

non-political." (Labour member, Hung County Council).

Another member spoke of the personal experience of a relative:

"My brother is a Chief Officer in a Labour authority and is a Labour voter, although not a party member. According to him it becomes very difficult for the officers involved if they are not broadly in sympathy with the council, the political persuasion of the council. Particularly, if that council is not likely to change. In a council like **** which has been Conservative since living memory, and despite what I would like, is likely to remain so, officers would find it very difficult if they were not in sympathy with the political views of the majority party." (Labour member, Conservative controlled Outer London Borough).

A Conservative member felt that this was a recent development:

"It used to be that officers were strictly impartial and kept impartial. They don't seem to do it as much nowadays. It's fairly easy to discover their political leanings and I would have

thought it disastrous to have a party in control
that has a number of Chief Officers who were
antipathetic to the aims of what it was trying to
pursue." (Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan
District).

In addition some members feel that:

"It is always helpful to have an officer whose
views are in sympathy with your own, when you are
discussing a matter. As a Chair it is nice to
have a Chief Officer who is in political sympathy
with you. Very helpful, you are on the same
wavelength." (Labour Chair, Outer London
Borough).

These views in common need not always be political but
simply a shared belief in the service. One respondent
said:

"I believe that officers are the servants of every
member of the Council... I regard my party as
being concerned to see that people have [library]
facilities. I would hope that a County Librarian
would be in sympathy with that aim whether he
happens to be of my political persuasion or not,
but I would certainly hope he agrees with my aim
in respect of the availability of literature and

this sort of thing, books and tapes." (Labour member, Hung County Council).

The importance of members and officers sharing views on the policy behind service delivery was emphasised in an article by the Secretary of the Association of County Councils. (Stevenson 1985). Commenting on the growth of so-called political appointments he said:

"It may be that the reason lies not in the desire simply to secure advancement for an individual but because it is felt that there is a genuine need to deliver effectively the chosen policy aims."

How this works in practice was described by one chairperson who said:

"In all the appointments I have been involved in in the Borough I would say we have tried to appoint the person that is best for the job, although there are certain things we would consider more important than other boroughs might. Although these are inner London issues rather than political ones. We would be looking for someone different from Wandsworth who are very clearly political in a different direction, and openly political." (Labour Chairperson, Inner London Borough).

One respondent suggested that this kind of approach is not only followed by local government:

"I think it is almost inevitable that any organization... particularly to senior posts, will tend to appoint those people who are sympathetic to the views of the organization. Equally so in a private concern." (Democrat member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

Another group of respondents felt that problems could arise if the officers favour one form of politics. In the pilot study a number of respondents made the point that "if elected members and officers all subscribe to the same political view it could lead to policy making becoming sterile. There is a danger of what Janis (1968) called "groupthink". This viewpoint was supported by members in the study proper who valued the independent advice of officers. One member argued:

"The important thing at **** is we get varied views, we get varied reports, that give us pros and cons in various directions without it all being biased in one way. (Democrat member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Laffin and Young (1990 p112) in their study of professionalism in local government also found that:

"Many members are aware of the dangers of locking themselves up inside a cage of ideological certainties. At least in principle, though perhaps not always in particular circumstances, they can recognise the benefit of having officers willing to 'speak truth to power'. Many members talked to us about the values of having professionally committed officers against whom they can test their own ideas."

A respondent to the present study also observed that:

"At the end of the day councillors are only amateurs. They are not experts on the subject of the committee they serve. In the end you have really got to have trust in the officers. In the Chief Librarian to give proper and impartial advice. If you wish to go against that for political reasons that should be clear." (Labour member, Conservative controlled Outer London Borough).

"The Chief Officer", said another:

"has to be the Vicar of Bray. He has his own thoughts. The best officers don't let their politics interfere with their job. They manage as

directed by their employers." (Democrat member, Hung County Council).

Another respondent suggested that:

"The independence of the officer, who is an expert in his field is a very good buffer between the political ideas and directions of the authority and the public you are aiming to serve." (Democrat member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

The findings of the Widdicombe Committee (Committee of Inquiry into the Conduct of Local Authority business, 1986) indicated that the majority of members wanted members to have some say in selecting the experts to serve them. 71% of those surveyed were in favour of councillor involvement in the "selection and recruitment of senior council officials." The Widdicombe figures did vary across the political spectrum but not as much as might have been expected by readers of the tabloid press or Goodson-Wickes' (1984) "The New Corruption." 64% of Conservatives wanted more involvement in recruitment and selection, 82% of Labour members, 74% of Liberal members and 71% of Independent members.

Although the present survey, like the pilot that proceeded it, (Usherwood 1987) found no evidence of political vetting, the responses from some members suggest that answers at interview can influence members' decisions about appointments. The Chairman of one committee said:

"In general terms I don't think the specific political views of Chief officers are tested, certainly not in the authority of which I am a member. But I think if candidates for that post, Chief Librarian, were to demonstrate certain attitudes which clearly have a political cast upon them it would be difficult for them to obtain the post in question - because clearly these attitudes would be distinctly at odds with the political complexion of the authority as at present constituted. Therefore, [decisions about appointment are influenced] obliquely, because there is a political judgement made in terms of the attitudes, responses, and philosophies of potential chief officers." (Conservative Chairman, Metropolitan District).

Another Chairman observed:

"If in an interview I had an active member of C.N.D. I would think twice, but would hope that

after an interview personal qualities would come across anyway." (Conservative Chairman, Outer London Borough).

In one authority interview panels were structured so as to minimise the effect of "bias" on the part of any individual member. As the Chairperson of the library committee explained:

"At **** we have... a balanced interviewing board. Of course as I am an ex-Civil Servant, 40 years in the Civil Service, I prefer to see them as divorced from political aspects as possible." (Democrat Chairperson, Hung Metropolitan District).

This was a Hung council and, as a number of members indicated, that makes political appointments less likely. One respondent said:

"We have no idea what are the political sympathies of our chief officers. This never comes out in interview when we are selecting them, and I can honestly say that in the six years I have been on the council, I have never been able to decide what is the political sympathy of any of our chief officers, or indeed of our second tier officers. It has no importance whatsoever. We are a

balanced council, some call it a hung council, and that is an even greater reason why officers are not appointed because of their political tendencies." (Democrat member, Hung Metropolitan District).

This view was supported by respondents from a Hung County council:

"In **** it would be difficult [to make a political appointment]. It is the nature of the hung council. In other councils I suppose it follows that there may well be a bias in that direction." (Independent member, Hung County Council).

"The political complexity is difficult to determine. There is no clear majority, we are a hung council. If we suddenly become a Labour or Conservative run council I still wouldn't agree with it, that the Chief Officer should be a Socialist or Conservative. I think officers should be neutral, should be very wise and understand the various aspects of what each party stands for - but they must be above all that." (Conservative member, Hung County Council).

In just one of the authorities surveyed for this study was there any strong feeling that the appointment of the Chief Officer responsible for libraries had been political. The position was perceived by the Conservatives as follows:

> "The opinion of the opposition groups is that the newly appointed Director... although an internal promotion, is certainly very sympathetic to the views of the ruling group... more so than any other officer within the Council's employment in our view. The cosiness of this relationship has been resented by opposition groups. There is a history in **** of officers having managed to maintain an independent stance and have been very professional up to recently. This departure I think has been resented, not only by opposition groups, but by other officers in other departments who don't like the proximity of the relationship". (Conservative member, Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

A member of the ruling party commented:

> "I know it is said. Obviously any Chief Officer will have a political view, he has gone to vote some way or other. It is difficult for me to be direct about it in as much as I do feel the Chief

Officer on the committee will favour the political
persuasion of my group because it is spending
money on leisure, whereas the other group, I mean
the Conservatives don't. They cut back on it.
They [the officers] carry out their job in an
absolutely impartial way but I feel that some of
them most certainly would lean in our direction
and be very worried that we would not get back
next time. Although that is only a personal
feeling - they wouldn't really say that, our
officers are very professional people and they
carry out the job of whoever... they are very fair
really. I feel that one or two of them definitely
lean in the direction of the Democrat party.
(Democrat member, Democrat controlled Outer London
Borough).

In this particular authority political feelings were
running high and without further investigation it would
be difficult to prove or disprove the accusation that a
political appointment had in fact been made. The
perceived situation is probably the product of the
local political chemistry and the particular
personalities of the Chief Officer and politicians
involved. The Chairperson of the library committee at
the centre of these accusations felt that "political
appointments" might be a result:

"of the pressure on local government administration of a non-governmental hue, shall we say, feel under. It is not an overriding consideration. I have never seen an occasion when a Chief Officer has been appointed who is inadequate. It [politics] may weigh at the margin." (Democrat Chairperson, Outer London Borough).

Although party politics is not new in British local government there can be little doubt that it has become more important in recent years. We have now reached the stage where "there are only a handful [of councils] which proclaim themselves as non-political or independent. ... The truth of the matter is that local authorities are not well structured for the emphatic and positive party political method of working today." (Boynton 1986 p54-55). This situation led one respondent to suggest that:

"If you are going to develop that side of the authority, then like parliament, like Mrs. Thatcher, then you should appoint political advisers to advise politicians. In other words if you want political advisers, people to do research for you that is one thing. Research should be done by people who are sympathetic towards you but they should not be the people who carry that

policy out. In other words I don't subscribe to
picking people on the basis of their politics. If
that was the case you would have to alter the
whole doctrine of local authorities. And as each,
and after each election emerged you would bring in
with you, your own people. Like the American
system. That would mean you would alter the
system of local government in this country that
has evolved over many years." (Labour Chair,
County Council).

David Brown (1985), a former Chair of Sheffield
Libraries and Arts Committee has described political
advisers as the "very antithesis of democracy as we
define it in Britain." He told the 1985 Public
Libraries Authorities Conference:

"I can think of nothing more disheartening to a
Chief Officer than to have to refer new ideas and
thoughts to a political adviser who then vets them
to see whether they are ideologically sound before
they come before the elected Chairman and
Committee members. We have seen them in certain
Conservative Local Authorities, especially on the
Education Committee, and we are now seeing it in
certain Labour Authorities. These political
advisers represent nothing other than political
dogmatism in a most vivacious form and I strongly

deplore their interference in the relationship between officers of the Local Authority and the elected representatives."

The results from this and other studies suggest that most elected members feel that overtly political appointments are a bad thing. Although some members of the Conservative party suggest that they are made by left wing councils all the Labour members interviewed argued strongly against the idea. That is not to say that there is not a relationship between an officer's politics and his or her appointment but that is more likely to be the result of the officer applying for a post in any particular authority than of any direct, crude political intervention. Elected members, all things being equal, want to appoint on merit and are aware of the dangers of "group think". However respondents also recognised that without the officer having some "sympathy" for the policies of the ruling party he or she might not have an easy relationship with the committee.

Quite naturally, as in the private sector, public organizations can be expected to appoint people who share their values and policy aims as these are the people most likely to deliver the service in an effective manner. That does not mean that there are not "a few councils where the reasoned and reasonable

approach... will make little headway. These cowboys of the political world want to ride roughshod over the minority councillors and the paid administrators alike... and seek to appoint staff at senior level who share their views." (Boynton 1986 p67-8). The evidence, however, suggests that they are in the minority.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

POLITICS AND THE PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE

It is no longer possible to study the workings of a public body such as a 'library committee' without taking politics, often party politics, into account. As Newton (1976 p144) has written, "In voting Labour or Conservative the elector is choosing not only between different party policies but between people with different conceptions of what politics is about and what elected representatives should do". Kretchmer (1973) made a similar point when addressing a Library Association Conference in the early seventies. Discussing objectives he said; "it is important to remember that many objectives depend on one's political outlook and therefore, in our society it is right and inevitable that the setting of objectives in a local authority is ultimately a political decision by members of the council."

In this chapter the extent to which party politics influences the attitudes and opinions of those members of councils responsible for the operation of public library services is examined. Elected members were asked to express an opinion on the use of voluntary organizations, the possible contracting out of library

services, charges for the loan of library books,
charging for a "premium service" and the
decentralisation of the management and political
control of library services. All these issues had
received some publicity in the local government and
library press, some specifically in the government's
Green Paper, Financing our public library service: Four
subjects for debate which devoted sections to "wider
charging", "joint ventures" and "contracting out."

Using a Likert scale elected members were asked to
indicate the strength of their agreement or
disagreement with a series of statement about library
services (See Appendix 3 questions 32 - 36 inclusive).
However (cf Hess 1974) it was felt important to
ascertain the reason for, as well as the strength
of, their views and therefore respondents were asked to
elaborate on their answers. In the text that follows
use is made of both quantitative and qualitative data.

Table 13:1 and Figure 13:1 show the response of members
of the various political parties when asked to indicate
the strength of their agreement or disagreement with
the statement that "Some aspects of the public library
service should be left to voluntary organizations".

TABLE 13:1 Should some aspects of the library service
be left to voluntary organizations?
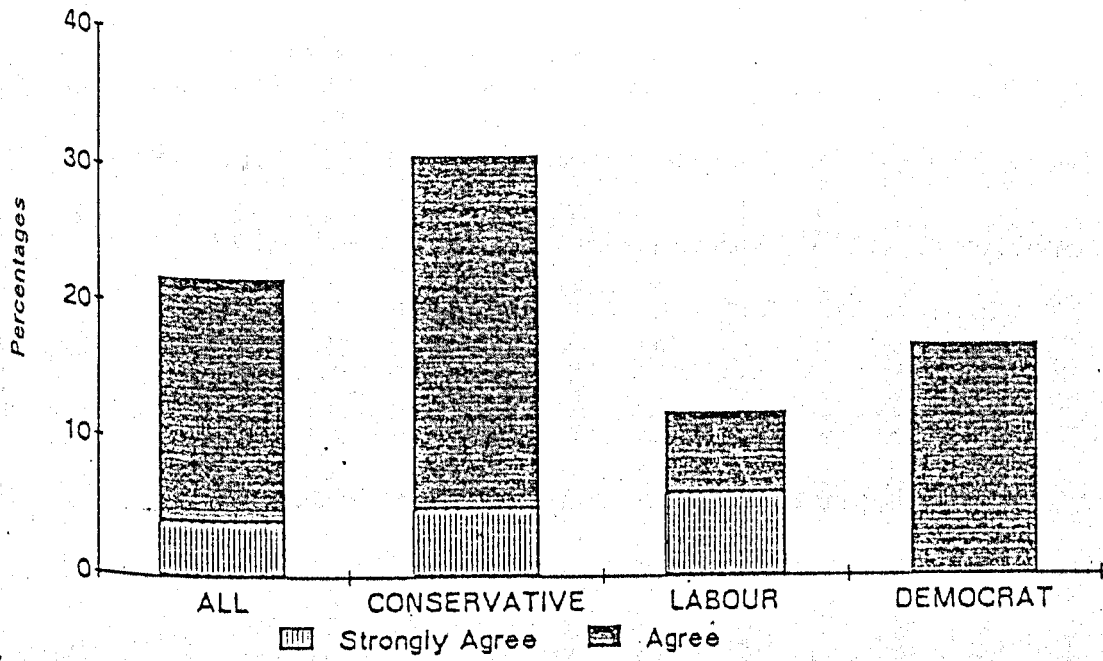(Figures show percentage of members)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
ALL	4	18	12	44	22
CONS	5	26	16	47	5
LAB	6	6	6	41	41
DEM	0	17	8	50	25

The majority of the members interviewed were not in
favour of some aspects of the library service being
left to voluntary organizations. However, there was an
observable difference between the views of Conservative
members and the views of members of other parties,
nearly one third of the Conservative members
interviewed being in favour of the idea. The idea
often found favour with this group because it helped
library finances and resources.

As one member said:

"You haven't got the money and the manpower to do
it [Housebound service] by professionals... it can
be done by the WVRS and that kind of thing; by
doing that money is saved which can buy more

Aspects of Library Service
left to Voluntary Organizations

Strongly Agree   Agree

Aspects of the Library Service
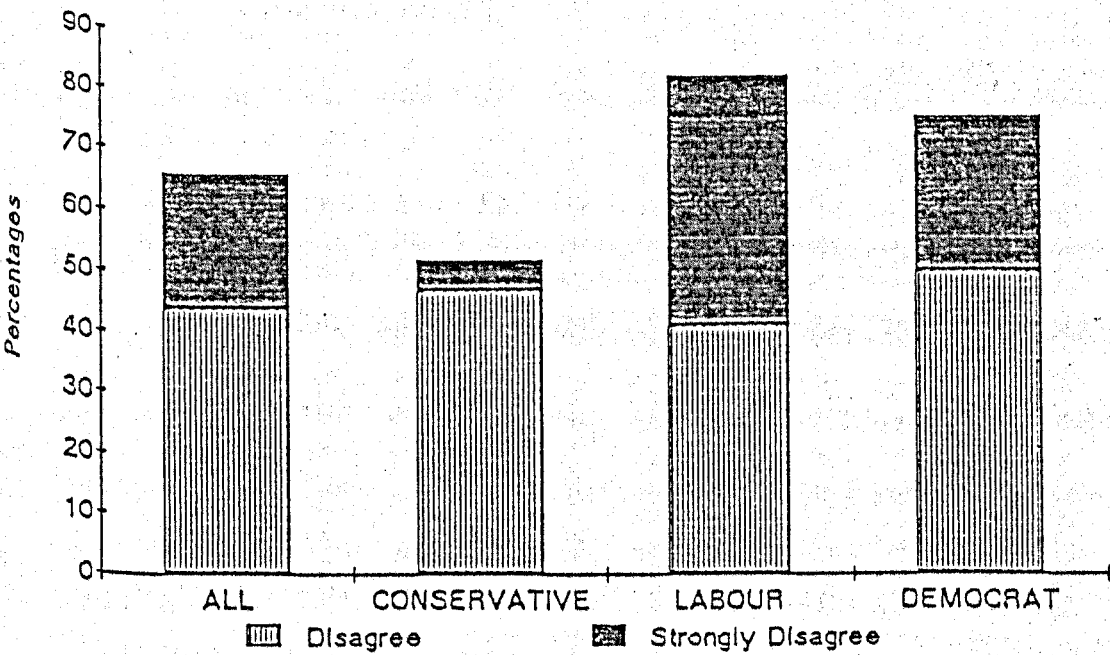### left to Voluntary Organizations

Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Figure 13:1

books." (Conservative member, Hung County Council).

Another said:

> "The concept appeals in the sense that if
> voluntary organizations came to the committee and
> said we feel we could run this well and if it was
> examined on its merits it would certainly be
> worthy of consideration - perhaps one could serve
> disabled people... free-up resources in the County
> if the voluntary organization came in and said we
> would like to run this for you - talking books,
> housebound, something along those lines."
> (Conservative member, Conservative controlled
> County Council).

A Democrat respondent, also aware of the economic
circumstances, replied by saying:

> "I don't think they should be left to voluntary
> organizations but we might have to." (Democrat
> member, Hung Metropolitan District).

A number of members in all parties also saw a role for
voluntary organizations in serving:

> "the handicapped, to provide a service on the
> doorstep." The member added that he "would not

want to decry that kind of help because I think it is important." (Democrat member, Hung Metropolitan District).

A Labour member who neither agreed or disagreed with the proposition felt there was little harm in the idea:

"if people can put cherry on the cake, give them the opportunity, for example, housebound and exhibitions. We can exploit the enthusiasm for people who can add that little bit extra." (Labour member Conservative controlled Outer London Borough).

Others were happy to have volunteers "to help improvements in the service" but "would not 'leave it' to them." (Labour member, Hung County Council).

As one respondent said:

"I would not want to put any barrier in the way of voluntary services - but I don't think we should rely on them. We have to provide the service. We must be in charge." (Labour member, Conservative controlled County).

Those who argued most strongly against the use of volunteers did so on the grounds that:

"a library service is a professional service.
When a person goes into a library it should be
like going to the dentist or a doctor - they
should get the right advice on books - which way
to develop themselves - this is very important -
therefore, one can only do this work if you have
been professionally trained." (Labour Chair
County Council).

This support for "the professional" came from across
the political spectrum. A Conservative Chairman, for
instance, argued that:

"Voluntary organizations are well meaning, with
enthusiasm and a degree of dedication but that is
in my view no substitute for a professionally run
operation. It is like asking whether the CAB is a
good substitute for the professional lawyer."
(Conservative Chairman, Metropolitan District).

While some, especially those responsible for Citizens'
Advice Bureaux, might question the analogy in his last
sentence the point is clear enough.

Another respondent provided comment on the suggestion
that volunteers might be used to run hospital or
housebound services. Speaking from personal experience
of the Health Service he said:

"What springs to mind is the example of the
hospital library which is run by professionals and
is not left to the willing volunteers of the
WVRS. It is actually run by trained staff and the
results have been very good - rather than just the
old fashioned idea of a trolley going round the
wards with romances and what have you. There is
the responsible patient usage. The staff library
at ***** hospital has been very successful. I
can't really see any regular function of the
public library being better served by
volunteers." (Labour member, Labour controlled
Metropolitan District).

An even clearer difference of opinion between members
of the Conservative Party and members of other parties
was observed on the question of contracting out library
services to private companies. Table 13:2 and Figure
13:2 show the response to the proposition that "Some
parts of the library service should be "contracted out"
to private companies."

Political allegiance does appear to produce a
difference when it comes to respondent's opinions on
contracting out. Labour and Democrat councillors are
one hundred percent against the idea, with, as might be
expected, Labour members expressing a stronger sense of
disagreement. It is also interesting to note that

TABLE 13:2 Some parts of the library service should be "contracted out" to private companies.

(Figures show percentage of members)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
ALL	2	16	8	28	46
CONS	5	42	21	21	11
LAB	0	0	0	6	94
DEM	0	0	0	67	33

despite the Conservative Government's Green paper, which suggested contracting out might be a means to better and more cost effective services less than half of the Conservative members interviewed favoured the idea.

The Chairman of the "library committee" in one strongly Conservative area admitted that he was:

"Unenthusiastic about the suggestion. It is difficult to see how it would work efficiently. I recognise that in many aspects of local government we do contract out various parts of the activity to profit making operations - like cleaning of libraries, schools and the rest of it. But the thought of contracting out part of the library service on that basis I would think is most

Parts of the Library Service

should be "contracted out"

Strongly Agree   Agree

Parts of the Library Service

should be "contracted out"

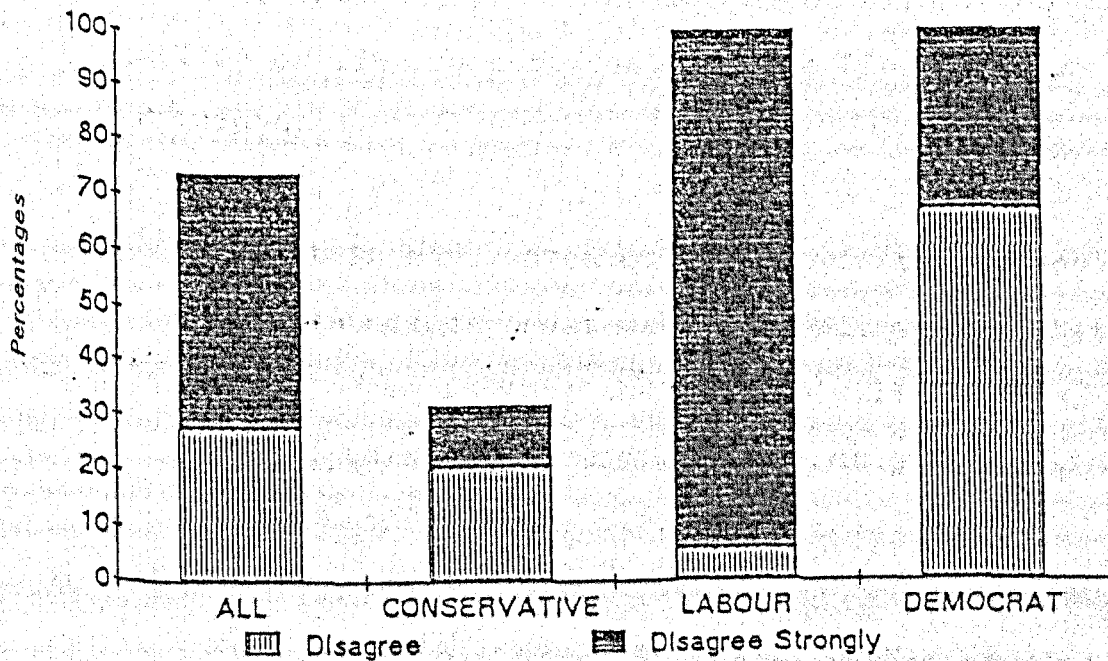Disagree   Disagree Strongly
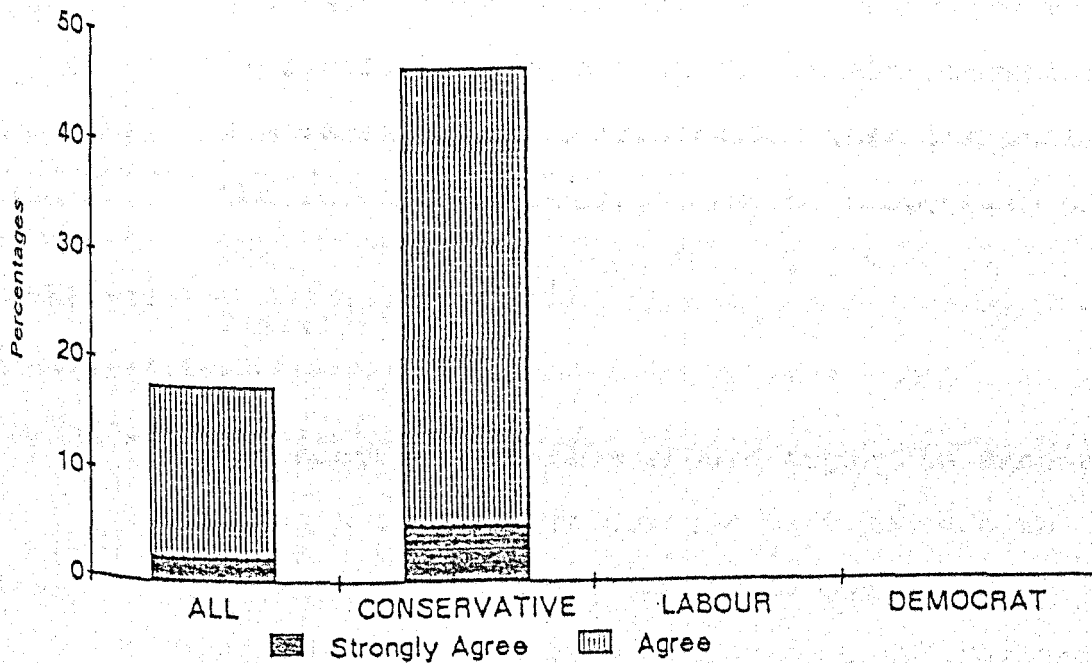
Figure 13:2

unlikely to be satisfactory. The anxiety to make
it profitable would I think, in all probability be
a more important consideration than the quality of
the service produced. I am not happy with the
idea." (Conservative Chairman, Metropolitan
District).

That a Conservative member should argue the dangers of
the profit motive in providing a service such as
libraries is a contradiction of the conventional
wisdom. The response from Labour members provided no
such surprise. All, as the figures indicate, were
against the idea of contracting out and many were
afraid of how the profit motive might affect the
quality of library services. As one Labour Chair
explained:

> "If it is contracted out to a private company the
> private company must make a profit and... what
> will happen is that the service will dwindle, and
> when I talk about service I am not just talking
> about handing books out. I am talking about the
> advice, the sort of interest that should be shown
> once you walk through a library door. If it is a
> profit motive if it is based on the profit motive,
> not a service motive the people giving that
> service will not have had the development in the
> library service that they should have had - that

the County has developed over the years. The library has had a good track record over many years and therefore to try and redirect it into profit motive is not going to be very helpful to people." (Labour Chair, County Council).

Another Labour member argued that:

"A private company will only become involved in libraries if there is a profit margin at the end of the day. I see the library service as a service - putting service first before the profit margin." (Labour member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

Another Labour Chair had found:

"The Government's Green Paper very frightening with a hint, more than a hint of the eventual privatisation of Branch Libraries which is ridiculous. I have not heard of anyone who knows public libraries support that, whatever political persuasion they may be - even rank Tories. In fact we had a Tory on this council who resigned the Conservative whip - left the council over two issues: education and public libraries." (Labour Chair, Metropolitan District).

As is indicated above there is indeed a divergence of
opinion amongst Conservative members on this question.
Those who argued in favour of contracting did so most
often:

"not on any idealogical grounds but if there were
areas that could be managed more efficiently by
the private sector." (Conservative member,
Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

This view was echoed by a respondent from a County
council who argued that in choosing between the public
and private sector:

"It depends who does it better and efficiently.
The better one of the two. If private industry
can do it better and they are set up for certain
things... ." (Conservative member, Hung County
Council).

Another Conservative respondent saw "No reason at
all... why a small section of the community shouldn't
have a library, shouldn't have a private one" and
complained that:

"A lot of people on the Leisure Service Committee
say libraries are the purview of the local
authority. I don't believe that they are. I

don't say that we should sell them all off but
there is no reason why, economically, private
enterprise should not provide some of them."
(Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Some of those arguing why private enterprise should not
provide any of them did so on the grounds that it could
lead to an inequality of provision. One Labour
respondent argued that:

"If you develop into profit then you will
sectionalise - you will give a service to those
who can afford it - and those that you are trying
to develop and trying to help - you will not be
able to give a service to them." (Labour Chair,
Labour controlled County Council).

The issue of the inequality of provision was also
raised by members discussing library charges and the
idea of a premium service. Table 13:3 and Figure 13:3
show members' responses to the statement that "charges
should be introduced for the loan of public library
books." As can be seen from the figures there was not
a great amount of support for this idea from members of
any of the political parties. Once again the
Conservative members appeared to be rather more in
favour of this idea than the members of other parties;
with members of the Labour party being stronger in

their opposition to the idea. One Labour member

exclaiming "I strongly disagree. If there was a

category greater than that, that would be it." (Labour

Chair, Metropolitan District).

TABLE 13:3 Charges should be introduced for the loan

of public library books.

(Figures show percentage of members)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
ALL	2	8	10	24	56
CONS	0	16	16	32	37
LAB	6*	0	6	12	76
DEM	0	8	8	25	58

* Note

This figure represents one respondent who regarded

overdue charges as 'charges for the loan of

library books.' This councillor's comment was: "I

strongly agree with charges for overdues. I find

initial charges quite reasonable. Should be

careful not to overcharge." (Labour member,

Labour controlled County Council).

Charges should be introduced
for the loan of books
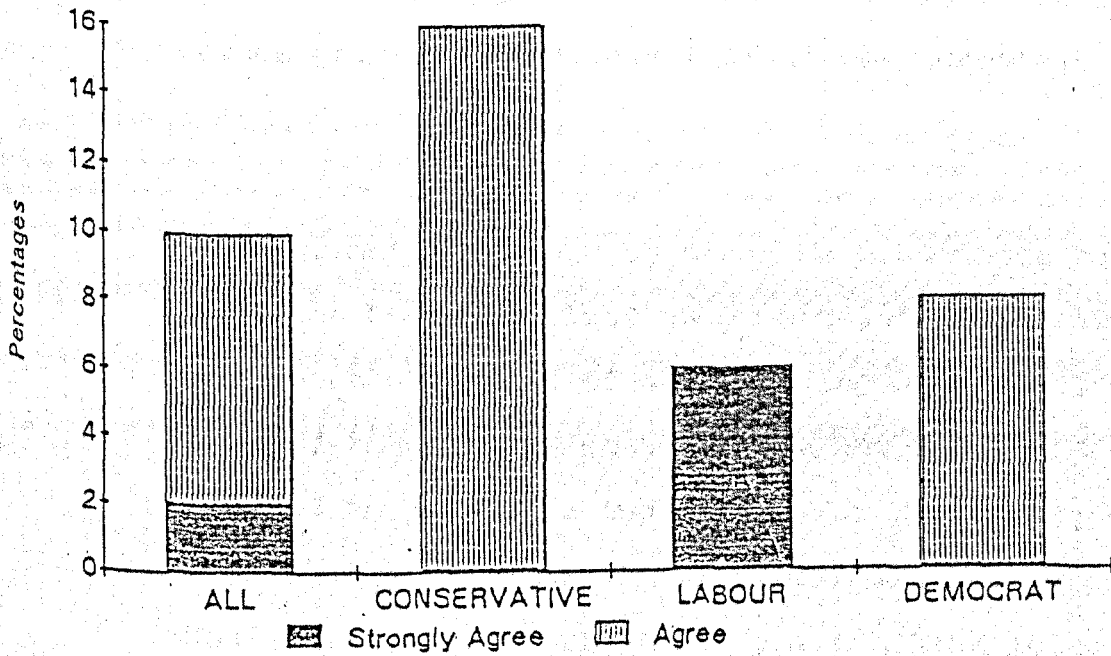
Charges should be introduced
for the loan of books
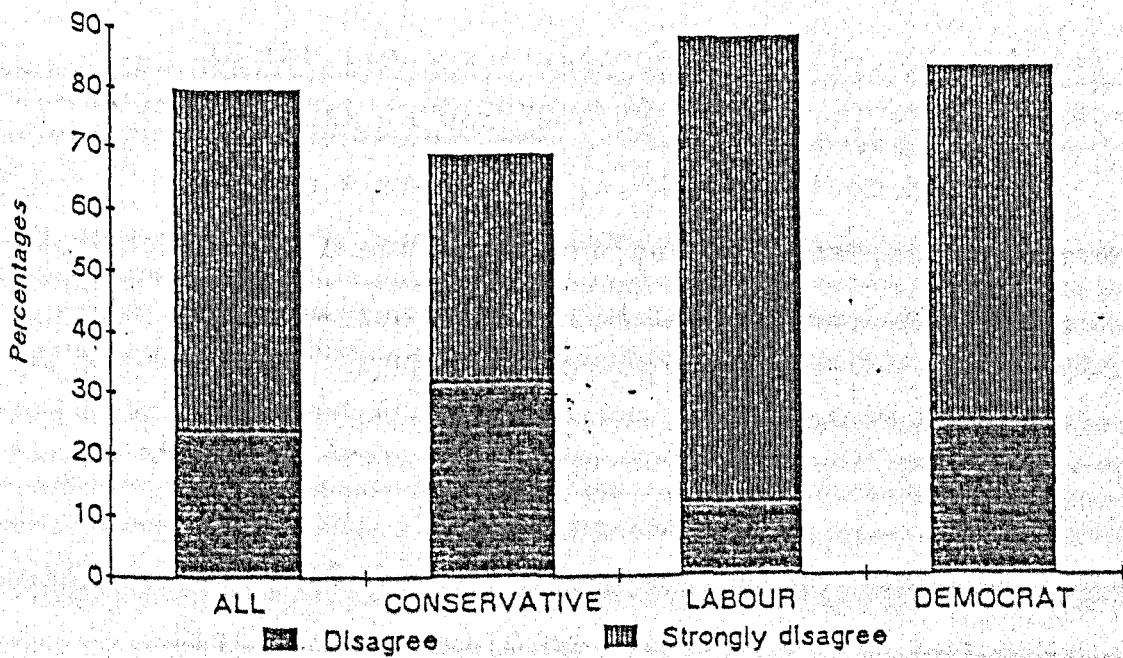
Figure 13:3

Those few members arguing in favour of charges did so on various grounds. One felt that it was necessary that:

"A distinction should be drawn between those books that can be categorized as entertaining/recreation and those which are of an improving nature. I am opposed to a charge on knowledge but I am not opposed to people having to pay for books they can obtain at W. H. Smith." (Conservative member, Conservative controlled Metropolitan District).

Others would agree to a charge for books:

"If the financial stringency on the council was such that we were facing closing libraries or levying a small charge, I would then have to settle for a small charge." (Conservative member, Conservative controlled Inner London Borough).

Or if:

"It enabled the library to increase information facilities I would be prepared to see charges for books, with obvious exceptions for disabled groups, pensioners and people like that." (Democrat member, Conservative controlled County Council).

One Conservative, who was in favour of charging, was also aware of the general and professional opposition to the idea:

> "I see nothing wrong with charging for books but some people see it as the end... Including our present librarian who would have a 'thrombie' (sic)." (Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan District).

The majority arguing against charging for books did so on the basis that:

> "Peoples' use of library services should not depend on their ability to pay." (Labour member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

A form of words that was repeated in various ways by a large number of respondents. Other argued that people expect the library service to be free of direct charge:

> "I believe that the residents of **** accepted that it is a service that should be given freely. They pay through their rates." (Labour Chair, County Council).

A Conservative also strongly disagreeing with the idea of charging said the public library service was "like education" and added:

> "What on earth are we getting our rates for. Surely not solely for the purpose of putting kerbs on footpaths." (Conservative Chairman, Metropolitan District).

In light of the Green paper suggestions that charges could be introduced for non-basic services, premium book subscriptions, additional borrowing privileges and the like, members were asked if "charges should be introduced to enable some members of the public to receive a 'premium service'". Responses to this question are shown in table 13:4 and Figure 13:4.

TABLE 13:4 Charges should be introduced to enable some members of the public to receive a "premium service". (Figures show percentage of members)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
ALL	12	14	2	32	40
CONS	26	16	5	42	11
LAB	0	12	0	12	76
DEM	8	8	0	42	42

Once again, as the figures show, there was a discernable difference between the responses of members of the Conservative party and the members of other parties. 42% of the Conservative members interviewed were in favour of the idea of a premium service. They often argued that charges should be made for specialist services. One respondent explained:

"The other 99 people should not have to pay for what you and I particularly want. If you want something very special, it's the same with shoes, if you want leather shoes, plastic shoes, canvas shoes. You choose to have a dearer option, well and good." (Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan District).

A Democrat member felt that:

"You might charge for reference books - say one that costs 3 volumes at £40 a piece. I suppose I can see a case for it in some circumstances. I would not call it a premium service but a specialist service." (Democrat member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

A Conservative member thought that a distinction should be made between offering a premium service to an organization and an individual:

Charges should be introduced

for a "premium service"

Strongly agree   Agree

Charges should be introduced

for a "premium service"

Disagree   Strongly disagree
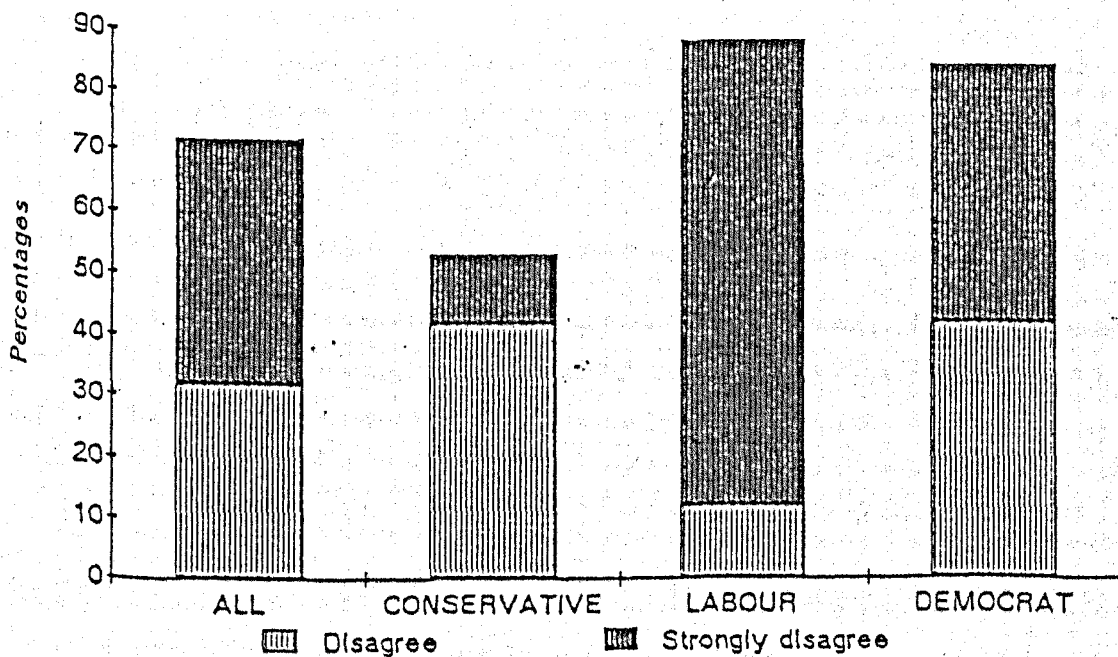
Figure 13:4

"If... an organization - a company - had a
particular need of certain facilities and
information, certain additional bits of help and
guidance, the production of documents and that
sort of thing - then if they were to pay for it on
a commercial basis then that's all right. If it
is understood that those that are ratepayers don't
get a better service only on the grounds that they
are able to afford a better service. I would only
think that it is appropriate where a company for
good commercial reasons needs some special
assistance from the library service."
(Conservative Chairman, Metropolitan District).

Another respondent from the same party felt that it was
fair to ask people to pay in order to obtain a better
service:

"I am a democrat, talking in belief, I don't mean
Liberal Democrat. In other words if someone wants
to get something better, if they are prepared to
pay for it, yes." (Conservative member, Hung
County Council).

One of the few Labour respondents to agree with the
suggestion also seemed to feel that a premium charge
would make the service more equal. In agreeing with
such a charge he argued:

"You should not deprive a person who is unemployed from being able to take a book out of the library." (Labour member, Labour controlled County Council).

The logic of this argument was never revealed and his was definitely a minority view amongst Labour members, most of whom disagreed on the basis that a premium service:

"divides up the service into a privileged service and a non privileged service." (Labour member, Conservative controlled County Council).

and/or argued that:

"the service should not be divided into first class and second class." (Labour member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

and that "Everyone should get the same service across the Borough." (Labour member, Conservative controlled Metropolitan District).

Another disagreed with the idea of a premium service:

"on the grounds that if you put a charge on it will mean... that those who can afford it will get

an advantage over those who can't. It's like

having an operation - you should have an operation

- a service from the local authority based on need

and not whether your wallet fits what you

require." (Labour Chair, County Council).

Some of those Conservatives who were against the idea
made a similar point. One argued that:

"The implication inevitably means that those who

can afford will get and those who can't won't

get. That isn't my view of the way the library

service should work." (Conservative Chairman,

Metropolitan District).

Two other Conservative members indicated the divide
between some Conservatives at the local level and the
views expressed in the Government's Green Paper. One
said:

"It was part of the Green Paper that was

superficially attractive, but there are practical

difficulties. It would cost more than the income

you would derive." (Conservative Chairman, Inner

London Borough).

While another commented:

"I gather that idea has now been dropped.

Hopefully because of our comments on the Green

Paper." (Conservative Chairman, Outer London

Borough).

The final question in this section of the interview
asked members to respond to the idea that "the
management and political control of public libraries
should be decentralised". Table 13:5 and Figure 13:5
indicate the views of members from the different
parties but before discussing these it is worth noting
that despite the wide coverage of decentralisation in
the literature (e.g. Hadley et al 1984, Earle 1985,
Gyford 1983, March 1988) many respondents asked for the
term to be clarified. This perhaps illustrates a gap
between the interests of the grass roots member and
those responsible for articles in academic journals and
the local government press.

One of the authorities covered by the study had been
decentralised. This had resulted in seven
neighbourhood committees each of which was responsible
for a wide range of services including the public
library service. The authority was Democrat
controlled, although the members interviewed described
themselves as "Liberal" or "non-party political as far
as local authorities are concerned." Each

TABLE 13:5   The management and political control of
public libraries should be decentralised.

(Figures show percentage of members)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
ALL	10	18	8	34	30
CONS	11	16	0	21	53
LAB	6	24	6	41	24
DEM	17	8	25	42	8

neighbourhood committee was made up of ward
councillors.   The majority party claimed that this
resulted in three of the seven neighbourhoods being
under the control of the Opposition Labour Party and
thus to a devolution of power within the authority.
This view was not shared by the leader of the Labour
group who in an interview with a local government
journal said: "During the past two years we have seen a
gradual centralisation of the decision-making process,
where the key issues have been taken out of the purview
of neighbourhoods and given to a centralised clique of
councillors."   (Source not identified to maintain
confidentiality).

The majority party described the advantages of
decentralisation in the following terms:

Management and political control
of libraries should be decentralised

Strongly agree   Agree

Management and political control
of libraries should be decentralised

Disagree   Strongly disagree
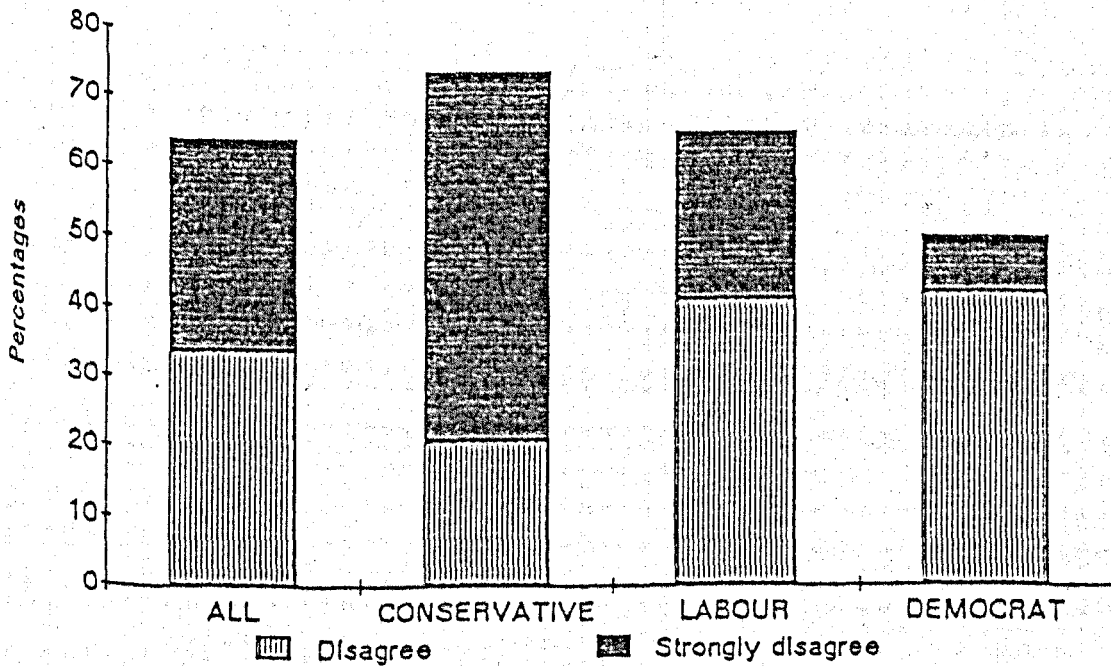
Figure 13:5

"Government will be moved nearer to those
governed".

"The civil servants will be accessible to the
people they serve and will operate within the area
they serve, thus becoming fully familiar to both."

"The people will have only one office - which will
be within the area - to go to for assistance
relating to the area."

"The councillors will be making all the major
decisions affecting the people who elected
them, and about the areas they know best, and so
will have greater awareness of events and needs."
(Extract from 1986 Liberal Party Manifesto Inner
London Borough).

This manifesto statement found some support in library
terms from a Labour member of a different council.
Decentralisation he felt:

"allows for an area responsibility rather than
everything being based in the centre and more
resources for the branches out in the communities.
Rather than base everything on a central library
flagship." (Labour member, Metropolitan
District).

Although it is doubtful if they were all talking about precisely the same thing just under a third of the members of each party did agree with some form of decentralisation. The question reawoke in some respondents the old controversy about which tier of local government should be responsible for libraries. In one of the county authorities surveyed some Labour and Conservative members felt that "District councils should run libraries": a view that was also supported by some members in Metropolitan Districts and London boroughs. Although they did not support the idea in their own authority. One Labour Chair felt that:

"It depends on the circumstances, the size of the authority. It might work differently in a county to a compact borough." (Labour Chair Inner London Borough).

This view was echoed by a Conservative counterpart. Asked if library services should be decentralised he replied:

"Not in this borough: we are very small, highly, densely populated. There might be an argument for it in terms of a county." (Conservative Chairman, Inner London Borough).

This view was rejected by the majority of members serving on county councils. One Conservative member felt that because of:

"the size of resources required, a certain amount of sharing is required... I think it is useful to move things around over a much wider area." (Conservative member, Conservative County Council).

The importance of sharing resources was expressed in rather different terms by a Labour Chair:

"I believe that if you develop the library services across **** if you take areas of affluence and poor areas - the areas of affluence will be able to afford a service - the areas of deprivation will get nothing." (Labour Chair, County Council).

Another Labour respondent developed a similar point arguing that:

"Central control is important to see there is a proper distribution of service, it is back to this issue of justice. It is important that the Borough is served equally in different areas." (Labour member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Other respondents argued against the concept of decentralisation on managerial and administrative grounds. One was of the view that:

"In a county service you have the clout to buy the books, structure and everything else - buying power. Otherwise overheads will eat it all up." (Conservative member, Hung County Council).

Another was of the view that "you have to have a firm management tree." (Conservative Chairman, Outer London Borough). A similar view was expressed by a Labour member who felt that:

"Although there is a case for individual libraries having individual managers, I think an overall central control of the overlaying policy direction is important." (Labour member, Hung Metropolitan District).

As Table 13:5 indicates the strongest disagreement to decentralisation tended to come from members of the Conservative Party. One felt quite simply that it was:

"Not the way to provide a service. I have no patience with that kind of thing, breaking everything down to the smallest denomination. That is exactly what happened in Germany, in

middle Europe... all little states struggling hard. Unification is what brought strength." (Conservative Chairman, Metropolitan District).

Another, once the idea was explained, exclaimed:

"Oh God help us. I strongly disagree. It would lead to chaos." (Conservative member, Conservative controlled Inner London Borough).

Although, as shown earlier, there is a reasonable amount of literature on the subject it was not evident that the concept of decentralization is understood fully by officers or elected members. The respondents to this survey, like those to the pilot project had a variety of views as to what decentralization means and what if any, might be the benefits for library services.

The literature suggests that decentralization policies will alter the distribution of political, professional and community power. Some of its consequences might well be unintentional. For instance, it has been suggested that "Local communities and groups might seize the gift of power... but use it for varying and indeed competing purposes, not always those intended by the donor." (Gyford 1983). What, for example, might some local communities do to positive stock selection

policies? Such questions were not, in the context of this question, raised by respondents and are outside the parameters set for this study. However, they do suggest some interesting lines of research for the future. For instance, into the possible conflict between community control of the library service and professional values.

The data provided in this chapter suggest that political allegiance does appear to produce differences when it comes to elected members' opinions on the use of volunteers, charging, contracting out and the provision of a premium service. However, in light of the government's Green Paper it is interesting to note that even amongst Conservative members there is not overwhelming support for such ideas. For instance while 47% of Conservative members strongly agreed or agreed with contracting out library services 32% disagreed or strongly disagreed. In addition, only one of the four Conservative Chairmen was in favour of contracting out and none supported the idea of a premium service. Indeed the figures suggest that the Conservative party at the local level is divided, or perhaps open-minded, on a number of the more contentious issues. For example 31% of Conservatives agree or strongly agree that some aspects of the library service should be left to voluntary organizations but 52% disagree or strongly disagree.

42% of the Conservative members agreed or strongly agreed with the idea of a premium service but 53% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

As Chapter Eight demonstrated, the Conservative elected members interviewed paid little attention to ideology and this may be one reason for their rejection of some ideas emanating from the New Right. David Saunders, a former Federation of Conservative Students vice chairman and reported to be one of those who provided the detail for the rightwing programme pushed through by Bradford's former Conservative Council has said:

"An awful lot has to be done to chivvy Tory councillors along. Most of them are blue-rinsed old dears who've finished their term running the Women's Institute so turn to local government. We provide the ideological and factual backup they need." (Rose 1988).

Members of the other two parties appear to be less divided amongst themselves or indeed with each other on library issues. Thus 100% of both Labour and Democrat members disagreed or strongly disagreed with the idea of contracting out library services, while 88% of Labour members and 84% of Democrat members disagreed or strongly disagreed with the idea of a premium service. The majority of respondents in all parties are against

the introduction of charges for the loan of public
library books although there is stronger feeling
against the idea amongst Labour and Democrat members.

THE ELECTED MEMBER AND THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Nor must the library committees, without which
the official can do nothing, be forgotten in this
just tribute to their achievement. Most of their
members knew little of books or libraries. They
were just typical councillors, members of library
committees because somebody had to be allocated to
these committees, honest shrewd, with many
prejudices, and generally without culture - as in
the broad mass they are to-day."

L. Stanley Jast in Laski et al (1935)

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE ELECTED MEMBER AND THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

The late Fred Johnson, the much respected Chair of the Gateshead Libraries, Arts and Shipley Gallery Committee once welcomed AAL delegates to his authority with "a few personal views about libraries and their value to the community." (Johnson 1981). He told them:

"I believe without qualification in the value of a Library Service. I believe in the contribution a free Public Library can make to the well being of people, both individually and as part of the community."

Such statements by local politicians on the functions of the library service are relatively rare in the literature. In order to obtain further information about the values, perceptions and beliefs of policy makers, members taking part in this study were asked to give their views on the role of the public library service and to express their hopes and fears for its future.

Not surprisingly most members mentioned the importance of the library as a book lending agency. Such a view is common across the political parties as the following

responses from members indicate. Asked, "What in your opinion is the most important function of the public library service in Britain today?" interviewees responded as follows:

"To lend a book; an extensive range of books on extensive subjects without imposing too many restrictions." (Democrat member, Conservative controlled Metropolitan District).

"To provide books for the population." (Conservative member, Conservative controlled County Council)

"I think it is still the issue of books, less so than it used to be but I still think that is it." (Labour Chair, Outer London Borough).

As the last quote suggests, most respondents were also aware of the role the library has in lending other kinds of material. Thus, the role of the library is seen as:

'To issue books to the public and also all the cassettes, records, you name it, that go with it. That is most important." (Labour member, Conservative controlled County Council).

Furthermore the lending of material is not regarded as an end in itself but a way:

> "to encourage people to use the written word, to appreciate the written word." (Democrat member, Labour controlled Inner London Borough).

> "To maintain and, if possible, increase an interest in literature and reading." (Democrat Chairperson, Outer London Borough).

> "To provide a repository of knowledge, entertainment, stimulation; to broaden people's horizons and their education." (Labour member, Labour controlled Metropolitan District).

Education was regarded as an important function of the service by a large number of respondents. As one respondent stated the public library:

> "provides the opportunity for anybody to educate themselves... however rich or poor they are." (Labour Chair, Inner London Borough).

One member regarded the library's role in:

"Good old fashioned education [as] - a Reithian
concept if you like." (Conservative member,
Conservative controlled Inner London Borough).

Another said that the library service is:

"an ongoing education, people are always getting a
book out on something they are interested in, as
life is an ongoing education." (Conservative
Chairman, County Council).

Yet another regarded the library's function as:

"Education in the widest sense of education -
education, information and recreation." (Labour
Chair, Metropolitan District).

This combination of factors was echoed by another
member who felt that the library's educational and
recreational roles:

"go along hand in hand. I believe that learning
should be fun, and in a good library one gets
education through pleasure, and pleasure through
education." (Labour member, Hung County Council).

In fact, entertainment and recreation were mentioned by
many members as important functions of the public

library service. One respondent wanted the public
library service:

"To expand and develop to cover people's
recreational needs. Twenty years ago libraries
lent books, then they started lending records, now
we do everthing from CDs to computer games... we
should ensure that the library service is
responding to public need, which I think it does
very well in ****." (Conservative member,
Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

A similar view was expressed by a Labour member who
felt that the public library should:

"Provide as wide a spectrum of written knowledge,
written entertainment and amusements of all
kinds... tapes, cassettes, a community library in
its fullest sense. The widest spectrum
possible." (Labour member, Labour controlled
County Council).

The provision of information was also perceived as an
important function. Again this was mentioned by a
large number of respondents. One chairman said the
library service should:

"Help create an informed general public."
(Conservative Chairman, Inner London Borough).

This was described by another respondent as:

"A community function, information giving. The
distribution of information about local events as
a public service." (Labour member, Hung
Metropolitan District).

This view was echoed by a Democrat respondent who
wanted libraries:

"To provide all levels of information, to provide
reading matter, to provide a community facility."
(Democrat member, Democrat controlled Inner London
Borough).

There was a difference of emphasis between some
Conservative members and those of other parties
regarding the public library's role in the community.
For instance, one Conservative stated bluntly that the
role of the library is:

"Not a social function. The most important
function is for people to have access to reading
materials generally and they wouldn't otherwise

have access to. As simple as that."

(Conservative Leader, Metropolitan District).

It was important to many respondents that these
educational, recreational and information services
should be provided free of any direct charge on the
user. A number emphasised the point:

"The most important function is [the provision of]
a free service. I am now talking of library
books giving a wide ranging spectrum of life, and
different aspects of life, political and religious
views etcetera. So the population and those who
read can have a rounded outlook on life, that is
if they avail themselves of it of course."
(Democrat member, Hung Metropolitan District).

"[The most important function is] the free
provision of reading." (Labour member, Hung
Metropolitan District).

"[The most important function is] to provide a
free library service to anybody who wants to use
it" (Democrat member, Hung Metropolitan
District).

"In terms of leisure [the most important function
is] to give people free leisure of a nature that

cannot be supplied in any other form. In terms of education, to allow free education to anybody who wants to use it." (Conservative member, Conservative controlled Metropolitan District).

Other Conservative members also mentioned the economics of the service but seemed to suggest that some limit might need to be placed on free provision. The reason for this, it was suggested by one respondent, was that:

"Fewer people need a free service than they did thirty, fifty, sixty years ago." (Conservative Chairman, County Council).

Another felt it was the function of the public library:

"to provide an economical access to knowledge." (Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan District), [emphasis added]

A colleague stressing that the council:

"should spend money as carefully as you can, as you would at home. If you and I want to buy a book to read on the train you don't read a hardback one usually. Well I don't." (Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Such differences of emphasis apart there was general
agreement on the role of the public library service.
Education, recreation and information were all
perceived to be important aspects of the public
library's function. Most members too were aware of,
and in favour of, libraries lending a wide range of
material although, as will be indicated later, some
respondents felt that this trend might go too far in
the future.

When considering the future of the public library
service there was a greater division between the
responses of Conservative members and those of other
parties. When asked, "What are your hopes and fears
for the public library service over the next ten
years?" Conservative members were far less fearful of
the future. Many simply responded to the second part
of the question with a simple "None" or "I have no
fears." One member argued:

> "Why should I have any fears? I don't have any
> fears." (Conservative member, Democrat controlled
> Outer London Borough).

Another said:

> "Fears? If they [public libraries] are properly
> maintained in the manner in which we are doing it,

I don't have any fears." (Conservative member, Conservative controlled Metropolitan District).

Most Labour and Democrat respondents and some Conservatives were worried lest the service could not be maintained. Funding, or lack of it, was mentioned by many as a course of concern. For one member:

"The major worry is that lack of funding could lead to a fall back from the position we have presently reached." (Conservative Chairman, Inner London Borough).

Another commented:

"If cuts continue public libraries are quite vulnerable. They would retreat to a kind of elitist position by virtue of reduction in the bookstock - or the way they look to the public. Or worst of all, they could go down routes of charging, premium service etcetera." (Democrat Chairperson, Outer London Borough).

Yet another was afraid that public libraries would be:

"Less and less resourced and more and more made the subject of profit". (Labour member, Hung County Council).

Others feared that future developments in local
government finance would harm the library service:

"My biggest fear is that there is going to be a
massive cut again on RSG, especially when the Poll
Tax starts and libraries will be one of the
services going to be injured." (Labour member,
Conservative controlled Metropolitan District).

"My fears are that they [libraries] are going to
have their budgets completely slashed in the next
five years." (Democrat member, Democrat
controlled Inner London Borough).

At the time of the survey the government's Green paper
was being, or had been recently considered, by local
library committees and many Labour and Democrat members
were worried that:

"The ideas in the Green paper will come to pass."
(Labour Chair, Inner London Borough).

Amongst these members there was:

"A strong body of opinion against the issues Mr.
Luce wanted to introduce in the Green Paper. I
fear in a monetarist society that charges will be
introduced and services diminished and libraries

kept closed for large parts of the week." (Labour member, Conservative controlled County Council).

A Democrat member expressed fears that:

"The Library Bill (sic) will in fact be realised. Even if it [the library service] were to stay in public hands the thought that, for instance, some people would have to be charged is not just a fear for the people having to pay, some people would not be able to pay. It is a wider fear that it could lead to violence, even if only in the mind. This sounds very extreme this but I actually believe it. My fears are that is what is going to happen." (Democrat member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Others considered:

"the idea of a library service just being the cheapest is so fundamentally ghastly that it frightens me a lot. I am afraid of a two tier system where you can get a much better service if you pay because that undermines the principle." (Labour Chair, Inner London Borough).

This would lead to libraries:

"becoming a service for a few privileged people."
(Labour member, Hung County Council).

Charging and the privatisation of the service were
expressed as fears by many Labour and Democrat members:

"My fears are that it [the public library service]
will be privatised. Not wholesale, but like the
Health service." (Labour member, Conservative
controlled Outer London Borough).

"My fear is that Conservative legislation will
force us to privatise in some way and our
currently free service will go. Libraries will
become basically yet another business
enterprise." (Labour member, Hung Metropolitan
District).

A former Democrat now sitting as an Independent member
feared that through privatisation the library service
would be:

"taken out of local authority hands and
accountability to the local population lost."
(Independent member, Labour controlled
Metropolitan District).

As Chapter Thirteen indicated, Conservative members were divided on the question of privatisation. One thought Labour and Democrat fears were unnecessary:

"If they [libraries] were to be privatised in some cases [because] people are paying for them one way [and] might as well pay for them another. I would not necessarily advocate it without great thought, and I have not given it great thought. I do not think it would be a terrible thing. I have no fears." (Conservative member, Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

Another Conservative was rather more cautious and did fear that:

"There might be some attempt to privatise part of the service, which philosophically I might have sympathy with. I fear any ill conceived move to hive off part of the service or in some way to contract out part of the service, although I think there are aspects that might be contracted out. If ill considered moves were made in that direction the central body of the service might be damaged and that I would fear greatly. Because I do think what public libraries have created in the one hundred odd years has been of immense value and I do think that the central pillar of that

service should not be damaged by whatever
influence. I would hope that any moves that are
made are made most carefully." (Conservative
Chairman, Metropolitan District).

As has already been shown, by and large members of the
Conservative party were less afraid for the future of
public libraries than their counterparts in other
parties. When Conservative members did express concern
at likely future developments it was most often in
terms that suggested that the library service might
move too far away from what they saw as its roots.
That:

"too much diversification will lead them to be
another leisure activity. Frivolity will lead
away from the serious purpose of the printed
word. The management could swing towards the
wrestling match promotion where the library is an
offshoot, and rather a minor offshoot, of
leisure. I still believe in libraries as places
for the intending scholars and other scholars. I
hope that libraries won't become too diversified,
too depreciated, too prostituted so that the
primary function of printed book learning and
scholarship are lost." (Conservative member,
Conservative controlled County Council).

A similar point of view was expressed by another respondent who was concerned that libraries might:

"go off on some trendy fashion of doing things that libraries shouldn't be doing. That the local High Street shop can do, probably a damn sight better." (Conservative member, Conservative controlled Metropolitan District).

This fear of the trendy library was set in a different context by another respondent who spoke of:

"A disturbing tendency for some library services to become overtly political, with exhibitions which have been devised by CND, anti-apartheid, anti-vivisection and other quasi-political bodies. [Libraries that] try and be trendy Left wing, 'with it' organizations rather than serving the public." (Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Another Conservative was unhappy at developments in his own Borough:

"I think, judging by what I see in ****, and I can only judge it on that basis, that it [the public library service] will become trivialised and out of touch with people because of political

considerations." (Conservative member, Labour
controlled Outer London Borough).

This view was echoed by another member who feared that
libraries might:

"go running off, introducing a lot of politically
motivated experimental matters for very minority
groups to the detriment of other people."
(Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan District).

A similar view is also to be found in the literature.
Emery-Wallis (1981) told a Public Libraries Authority
Conference ten years ago that:

"There is a danger with this sort of service, that
you could lose your identity as a library service
and come to be regarded simply as a social service
or as a purely leisure and entertainments
activity."

It would be wrong to regard this as a representative
Conservative view, for as will be shown later, many
Conservative members are enthusiastic about the library
service developing in new directions. However, there
does appear to be a strand of opinion amongst
Conservative members that would prefer to see the
public library maintain a more traditional role.

Two Democrat respondents expressed concern at libraries becoming the subject of political interference. One, in a Metropolitan district:

"would not want any political dogma to interfere with libraries as they are now. I think they are too important to the population as a whole for them to be interfered with to any extent. (Democrat Chair, Hung Metropolitan District).

A colleague in an Outer London Borough feared:

"there will be more intervention, perhaps by central government, in the way things are going. I hope that libraries in each council can maintain an independence of what they want to do, free of politics really. That even means people like me as an elected member. I don't want to see politics spoiling the library service... My fear is that politics will get in the way and people will see it [the library service] as a political football." (Democrat member, Democrat controlled Outer London Borough).

Two respondents felt that the public appeal of libraries might be in decline and feared that:

"The public might not take it up, even if it was provided." (Democrat member, Conservative controlled County Council).

Another feared:

"that it [the public library service] will decline because people will read less and less and they will pick up a paperback rather than go into a library and pick up a more serious book." (Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan District).

This was, however, very much a minority point of view and most members, when asked about their hopes for the future, were keen to see the library service continue to develop. Although, as has already been shown, there was some difference of opinion as to how and if such development might be funded.

When funding was considered, for most Labour and Democrat members:

"Hopes are directly the opposite of my fears." (Labour member, Hung County Council).

That is to say they hoped:

"That people will recognise the importance of the public library service and fund it into the twenty-first century."   (Labour Chair, Inner London Borough).

They want:

"to see funding expansion. I want to see a lot more money spent on books. Not spending money for the sake of spending money, but in some of our Branch Libraries the choice of books is not all it should be." (Labour member, Conservative controlled County Council).

Another Labour member hoped that:

"we will get a big input of money to develop what are already excellent services beyond traditional services of lending and study." (Labour member, Hung Metropolitan District).

A Democrat respondent hoped that public libraries:

"will be able to have more funding, that their benefit will be seen by the government as a vital part of everybody's lives."   (Democrat member, Democrat controlled Inner London Borough).

For these hopes to be realised it was felt that there
would:

> "Have to be political change, not necessary a
> change of government. They now seem to say all
> public is bad and all private is good.
> Demonstrably a nonsense." (Labour Chair,
> Metropolitan District).

Another Labour member said that:

> "My hopes would depend on a change of government
> because I can't see this present government
> [increasing funding] if it stays in. Bits will be
> hived off to private concerns or charges made for
> various services." (Labour member, Conservative
> controlled Outer London Borough).

Many members were keen for the public library service
to:

> "be able to adapt with the times and expand."
> (Conservative member, Hung Metropolitan District).

Such expansion to include:

> "Videos, tapes and records and so on. Extension
> of facilities for children, possibly a library for

teenagers. Provision for people with sensory
handicaps, the development of services for the
housebound. The development of the library as
very much a community centre and a community
resource." (Labour member, Hung Metropolitan
District).

This view was echoed by another respondent who hoped
that the:

"Public library would continue to develop so as to
reach out into the local community, a source of
information for the community as well as books.
They should be set up in attractive locations
become part of people's normal pattern of
recreation and leisure time." (Democrat
Chairperson, Outer London Borough).

Another saw such expansion as enlarging:

"the work it [the public library] does in
providing a means of enriching individual people's
lives and helping them do their job better. There
is a lot we can do in providing business
information... to develop better qualified
individuals. We should continue to develop the
business side, there is lots of opportunity."
(Conservative Chairman, Inner London Borough).

Elected members addressing the Public Libraries
Authority Conference have often mentioned the role of
the new technology (e.g. Dell 1980, Emery-Wallis 1981,
Fox 1983) and its importance in the future of the
public library service was mentioned by a number of
respondents to the present survey. As one member said:

    "We could achieve quite a lot of things by putting
    technology in, making better use of the
    technology. Computers. Put computers in that
    people could learn on." (Labour member,
    Conservative controlled Metropolitan District).

A Conservative respondent agreed saying:

    "I am very happy to see it [the library service]
    spread into the new technology... It doesn't have
    to be entirely books." (Conservative member,
    Conservative controlled Inner London Borough).

Other members had hopes that were specific to their own
locality such as an increase in opening hours. In one
authority the members of the majority party hoped:

    "We could move to having the libraries open seven
    days a week because people's leisure comes at
    different times and we are not all even
    Christians. For the Jewish community Saturday is

out for them." (Democrat member, Democrat
controlled Outer London Borough).

For another respondent the hope was that:

"Libraries in the community and schools should
become a very important part of life." (Democrat
member, Conservative controlled Metropolitan
District).

Others hoped simply:

"To maintain the service at the present level.
Provide a proper service." (Labour member,
Conservative controlled Inner London Borough).

However, as the above indicates, respondents were not
short of views or ideas regarding the future of the
public library service. In addition, and contrary to
Jast's opinion quoted at the start of this section,
they knew more than a little about libraries. The
evidence from this study suggests that while most
members still see the public library as a book lending
agency there is general support for libraries lending a
wide range of material and for the introduction and use
of information technology. Respondents expected the
service to be concerned with education, information
and recreation.

There was a greater division between the responses of Conservative councillors and those of other parties when members were asked about the future of public libraries. Most Labour and Democrat respondents, and a few Conservatives, were worried that services might face further cuts and/or pressures for charging and some form of privatisation. The Conservative were less worried about the future, but some were concerned that the service might become too diversified and trivialised. That aside most respondents hoped that the public library service would expand and develop.

Just one member found it difficult to look forward. Responding to the question about his hopes and fears for the future he replied:

"Hopes? I just can't see where we go from here." (Democrat member, Hung Metropolitan District).

In the next and final chapter an attempt will be made to answer that question in terms of the conclusions that can be drawn from the present study, and with regard to some suggestions for further research into the elected member and the public library.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

CONCLUSIONS

This study has considered the attitudes and perceptions of elected members responsible for public libraries in an attempt to explain how such attitudes and perceptions might influence decisions taken about the operation of library services. At the local level elected members are the prime decision makers so far as public library services are concerned. Their views, therefore, are of some importance to the library profession. Members' opinions were obtained through a series of semi-structured interviews. These were standardised open-ended interviews which also incorporated the use of Likert scales to assess the strength of respondents' feelings on a number of contemporary professional issues.

Direct quotations from interviewees have been used throughout the study so as to allow members to 'speak for themselves'. Appropriate references have been made to the albeit limited literature where it substantiates or contradicts the interview data. In addition to just reporting the views of members, the study has also sought to discover the factors that can influence their attitudes and behaviour.

The relationship between attitudes and behaviour is a complex one which cannot be explored here. Suffice it to say that, while one cannot be sure that attitudes will _always_ lead to the kind of behaviour they suggest, it is reasonable to expect that members' behaviour will sometimes be influenced by their perceptions and attitudes. Individual attitudes may be the result of self interest, personal beliefs, reputation or the code of the society in which one has lived or worked.

To the best of our knowledge this study has been the first to investigate in any depth the views, values and perceptions of elected members responsible for public libraries. As the first study in the area it was necessary to consider a relatively wide range of issues, to set up, as it were, markers for future research. All of the themes addressed in this piece of work have sub-themes which are worthy of further investigation.

As we have seen, the elected members, who are the subject of this study, often had a family background in politics and this led many of them to enter local politics. The Labour members interviewed tended to express their motivation for public service in more emotional terms than members of other parties. Democrats placed more emphasis on community politics than Conservative or Labour members. A significant

number of Democrats and Conservatives appear to have first stood for election as a reaction to what they perceived as wrongs in their local political scene.

In many respects library committee members have much in common with other councillors although it would appear, if the figures from the present study are compared with those presented in the Widdicombe Report, that they are likely to have a higher level of education and are more likely to be in professional employment. The data also suggest that library committees tend to have a greater proportion of members with a relatively short experience of council work and a greater proportion of members who may be toward the end of their political career than the population of elected members as a whole.

Elected members in general have to fulfil a number of roles. They are representatives of the electorate, of their party, their community and the committees on which they serve. They may see themselves as watchdogs, managers, policy makers and/or problem solvers.

The Chairperson of any committee has additional responsibilities. The members interviewed for this study identified the following as the main functions of the Chairperson of the library committee:

(i)   To be a spokesperson for, and an advocate, of the library service.

(ii)   To run the library committee meeting.

(iii)   To act as the political arm of the service.

(iv)   To provide direction for the service.

(v)   To liaise between officers and members and between officers and the public.

(vi)   To maintain links with the chairpersons of other committees.

This list taken together with the findings of the Maud Committee provide a description of the Chairperson's role which appears to be closely related to Mintzberg's (1980) analysis of the manager's working roles. It is suggested that a study, based on Mintzberg's observation of chief executives, could provide similar valuable insights into the work of library committee chairpersons.

As Knowles (1988 p49) has written:

"The relationship between committee chairman and departmental head can be very close... If the chairman is to evaluate the professional advice given to the committee he requires a knowledge of the person giving it, including 'the bent of his mind'."

The data from the interviews suggest that elected members expect the Chief Librarian to possess both managerial and professional skills. In addition they wanted him or her to have an outgoing personality, diplomatic skills and what might be termed political nous. In many respects the views of the elected members responding to this study support the conclusions of the Local Government Training Board report (1987 p14) which stated that:

"the credibility of the chief officer comes to rest on... personality and competence: the ability to communicate effectively within the authority and to a wider public, the ability to defend his or her staff and budget."

The results of this study suggest that most elected members serving on library committees hold professional advice in high regard. However, the present research was undertaken before two large library authorities saw fit to appoint non-librarians to the post of Chief Librarian. These events led that most perceptive observer of the library world, Edward Dudley, to comment:

"attendance [by librarians] at a miasma of management courses hasn't been sufficient to cut

much ice with the politicos of Kent and East

Sussex." (Dudley 1991)

In the light of such appointments, the question of how
far members' perceptions of the role of the Chief
Librarian coincide with the professional view of that
role, is one that is worthy of further investigation.
That particular question was outside the parameters set
for this investigation but, with hindsight, it would
have been useful to have included a question on
members' views on non-librarian, as well as political,
appointments.

Few respondents saw an unambiguous dividing line
between the role of elected members and that of library
officers. Rather, they related the functions of each
to the expertise that was seen to reside in each
group. The librarian, the professional, was widely
perceived to have special knowledge and professional
abilities, whereas the politician was seen to be
elected on a political position. The librarian was
thought of as the expert, whereas the members generally
recognised their "amateur" role. In general terms the
officers were perceived to be an important source of
advice and professional expertise. The members saw it
as their own role to decide and direct policy in line
with political priorities and to act as a conduit for
complaints. Most members suggested that there was

however a considerable blurring of these functions and
in many ways, those interviewed, echoed the Bains
Report which stated that:

> "a rigid interpretation of the roles of one or the
> other defeats any attempt to create a sense of
> unity of purpose within an authority." (Bains
> 1972 Chap 3)

Most members did not want to be involved in the
day-to-day running of the library service but there
were exceptions to this general rule. This was
particularly the case when it came to discussing stock
selection and the content of displays and exhibitions.
The evidence presented in Chapter Six supports the
views of Jones (1973) and Bains (1972) that elected
members are concerned with publicly controversial, or
potentially publicly controversial, and sensitive
issues. There was a considerable degree of ambivalence
on the part of respondents with regard to their role in
stock selection and the choice of library displays.
Conservative respondents tended to be more concerned
with 'politicalisation' of displays while Labour and
Democrat members were more worried about social or
community issues.

While it would be wrong to over-emphasise the degree to
which elected members involve themselves in these

activities, the evidence from the interviews suggests that, in a significant number of cases, they do influence the decisions of officers. This influence is sometimes direct but more often indirect, in that librarians are expected to be "sensible enough not to put on anything that might upset politically or morally." Surprisingly, the News International dispute was mentioned by relatively few respondents. However, the literature on the period (News International ban; Minister moves at last, 1986; O tempora, O mores! 1986; Wares 1989) suggests that, until the law intervened, some elected members wanted to remove News International publications from public libraries even though this was against the advice of their librarian.

The elected members studied in this survey keep themselves informed about the needs and attitudes of the public regarding library services in a number of ways. They or their families visit libraries, they ask, using a variety of methods, the opinions of users and constituents, they talk to library officers and make use of reports and documents emanating from central and local government. In seeking out information elected members tend to use sources which are close to their locality and part of their own experience. As Jones and Stewart (1985b p20) suggest:

"Councillors visit, as part of the routine of
their work, the schools, homes and housing estates
for which they are responsible. They therefore
make decisions about areas, institutions and
people that are not names but are part of their
experience. Thus in local government there is
more scope for elected representatives to make an
impact on policy making. MPs who have served as
councillors often express frustration at their
lack of involvement in policy making as
back-benchers compared with their direct and
significant contribution as councillors."

In a recent report on the information needs of elected
members LAMSAC stated that:

"The ultimate objective must be to provide just
the right amount of information for decisions to
be made quickly and correctly particularly in
terms of policy-making and allocation of resources
for operational activity." (LAMSAC Officers
Advisory Group nd, p15).

In respect of library services, few of the elected
members interviewed mentioned using local government
information services or similar "formal" sources. Much
more research could be undertaken with regard to
members' information sources. Dearlove (1973 p232) for

instance, has suggested, with respect to councillors'
use of information "that theories of selective
perception and cognitive dissonance are of importance."

It is probable that, in reality, decisions are more
likely to be based on what is perceived to be, rather
than what might be objectively regarded as "good
information". Such perception will depend to a large
extent on the factors which influence elected members'
views on the information they receive. Finance and the
desire to provide a service for the public were
mentioned as pervasive factors by most respondents,
with Conservative members being more concerned about
financial matters.

Further evidence from the interviews undertaken for
this study suggests that the advice of the professional
officer is the most important specific influence on
elected members. This is common across all the
political parties. As Laffin and Young (1990 p112)
have observed:

> "members find they often need a chief officer with
> whom they can discuss the specifics of frontline
> professional practice."

It would appear that despite the new style of elected
member cited in the literature (Boddy & Fudge 1984;

Gyford 1984a, 1985; Stewart 1988a; Gyford, Leach &
Games 1989) the well respected and well prepared Chief
Librarian can still be an important influence on
members' decisions.

The amount of influence perceived to be exerted by the
officers is perhaps surprising at a time when,
according to Stewart (1988 p16-17):

> "professionalism... is challenged politically, as
> councillors begin to question the validity of
> professional judgements."

However, as can be seen from the data presented in
Chapter Five there is at least some suggestion on the
part of some members that, with the public library
service, unlike other areas of local government, it is
a:

> "case of letting the professionals get on with the
> job with encouragement and support." (Labour
> member, Hung County Council).

With the exception of the high value placed on
political ideology by members of the Labour Party there
is little difference between the major factors that
influence the members of the different parties. There

are, however, some differences of emphasis and these
are illustrated in Table 8:8 in Chapter Eight.

With a few exceptions, all of the members interviewed
serve on at least one other major committee in addition
to the committee responsible for library services. The
majority of those members did not regard the library
committee as the most important of their commitments.
The role of the library committee was seen, by most
respondents, in terms of providing, protecting and
promoting the service. It was felt that it was often
held in low esteem by other members of the council. On
the other hand, where library services are the
responsibility of multi-function committees the
interview data from this study suggest that they are
regarded, by the majority of respondents, as the most
important topic for such committees. However, other
research indicates that this is less likely to be the
case where the library service is discussed by an
Education Committee. (Lomer & Rogers 1983).

The results of the present survey, together with those
of some other recent research quoted earlier, would
tend to suggest that, with perhaps the exception of
Hung Councils, the committee is no longer the main
forum for decision making. Increasingly this is to be
found behind the closed doors of pre-agenda meetings
and offices where the Chief Officer and Chairperson

discuss and debate the content of a report prior to it going to committee. That having been said, it is still true that, "committees dominate the working life of councillors and define their role within the local authority." (Rogers 1990 p113). A substantial number of members feel that, whilst reports to library committees are generally of a high quality, they tend to reflect the views of officers rather than those of members or of the public. Perhaps to counter this tendency, in many authorities, before a report reached the committee, a draft would go to the Chairperson and/or a pre-agenda meeting for consideration.

Members responding to the present study expected the library committee to discuss financial and policy matters, staffing and any major changes to the service. A minority felt that "everything" should be subject to committee discussion whilst others felt that more could and should be left to the officers. This view was supported by the recent report from the Audit Commission (1990) which suggested that many councillors are wasting half their time discussing trivia at unnecessary meetings.

Most respondents found their work on the library committee satisfying. Satisfaction was and is obtained as a result of getting things done for the library service and/or in winning political battles. Labour

and Democrat politicians in particular were frustrated by the lack of finance available for public library services and by what they perceived as the increasing loss of local autonomy. The introduction of party politics into library matters was found dissatisfying by about one in ten of the members interviewed. Others felt that library services had suffered in the past because of a lack of political impact.

A large majority of the members interviewed in this study regarded the library committee as less party political than most other committees of the councils they served on. It is open to question whether this is a good thing for the public library service. Some professional librarians have, in the past, valued the absence of politics in library matters, perhaps on the basis that features of the service implemented on political grounds by one party, may be rejected when another party comes to power - also on political grounds. Twenty years ago Budge (1971) said:

"Public libraries are popular. They should be free from political issues and library committees should be free from politics in their work."

A dozen years later Roger Stoakley (1983) put the argument even more strongly when he asked:

"What value have politics for us? Politics are
all about conflict; one ideology against another.
You never achieve anything worthwhile in this
world through conflict. Conflict inevitably leads
to alienation and alienation is certainly what we
do not want in libraries."

In the eyes of some elected members, however, a lack of
'party politics' in library committees is linked to a
lack of perceived importance. Members have "bigger
fish to fry elsewhere" (Conservative chairman, Outer
London Borough) and the library service "only accounts
for about 1% of the council's budget". Thus one Chair
has argued that:

"We've got to make our arguments for libraries and
arts political ones. We've got to start to talk
in language our colleagues will understand. For
too long we've talked with pride about the absence
of politics from the Libraries and Arts
Committee." (Nicholson 1987).

In addition Professor John Stewart (1983a) has argued
that:

"Local politics should be at the heart of library
management. For politics bring change."

The figures presented in Chapter Eleven tend to suggest that members of county councils perceive that party politics play a smaller part in the work of the library committee than those members serving on other types of authority, and that Labour and Democrat controlled committees are perceived as more 'party political' than those controlled by Conservatives. However, these results should be treated with a degree of caution in that just three of each type of authority were included in the survey, the main purpose of which was to examine the perceptions of individual members. It is also worth noting that the survey was undertaken at a time when there were a large number of hung county councils and when according to Travis (1989):

"The shire councils... proved to be the most lively testbed for coalition politics."

The data suggest a high degree of politicalisation in outer London but this almost certainly results from the fact that one of the outer London Boroughs surveyed had, through a combination of local circumstances and local personalities, become highly politicised.

The interviews carried out for this study suggest that party politics play at least a small part in the operations of the majority of library committees and that its importance, in some, has been perceived to

have increased over recent years. In these
circumstances it is increasingly important that public
librarians are politically aware and that those with
strategic management responsibilities develop skills
that enable them to function effectively in the
political arena.

There are implications here too for library education.
It is arguable for instance, that more should be
included in library school programmes to prepare
students for the political realities of public library
work. At Sheffield's Department of Information Studies
public library students are taken to observe a library
committee in action and lectures by local politicians
have been included in courses. There is a need,
however, for further research into how political
astuteness and sensitivity can be best taught and
learnt.

The impact of politics has also raised questions about
the neutrality of the librarian and the related topic
of political appointments. The results from this and
other studies, notably the Widdicombe Report, tend to
suggest that the danger of political appointments has
probably been somewhat exaggerated (Baker, 1984;
Goodson-Wickes 1984). Although many Conservative
respondents suggested that they are made by left wing
councils all the Labour members interviewed argued

strongly against the idea. That is not to say that there is not a relationship between an officer's politics and his or her appointment but that is seen as more likely to be the result of the officer applying for a post in a particular authority rather than the consequence of any direct, crudely political intervention.

Elected members, all things being equal, want to appoint on merit and are aware of the dangers of "group think". Quite naturally, as in the private sector, public organisations can be expected to appoint people who share their values and policy aims as these are the people most likely to deliver the service in an effective manner. That does not mean that there are not:

> "a few councils where the reasoned and reasonable
> approach... will make little headway. These
> cowboys of the political world want to ride
> roughshod over the minority councillors and the
> paid administrators alike... and seek to appoint
> staff at senior level who share their views."
> (Boynton 1986 p67-8).

The evidence in this study, however, tends to suggest that such councils are in the minority.

The data provided in Chapter Thirteen suggest that
political allegiance produces differences when it comes
to elected members' opinions on some aspects of the
public library service. Notably on the use of
volunteers, funding, contracting out and the provision
of a premium service. However, it is interesting to
note that, even amongst Conservative members, there is
not overwhelming support for some of the suggestions
made in the government's Green Paper, Financing our
public library service. Four subjects for debate.
For instance, while 47% of Conservative members
strongly agreed or agreed with contracting out library
services, 32% disagreed or strongly disagreed. In
addition only one of the four Conservative Chairmen was
in favour of contracting out and none supported the
idea of a premium service.

Indeed, the figures suggest that the Conservative party
at the local level is divided, or perhaps open-minded,
on a number of the more contentious issues. For
example, 31% of Conservatives agree or strongly agree
that some aspects of the library service should be left
to voluntary organizations but 52% disagree or strongly
disagree. 42% of the Conservative members agreed or
strongly agreed with the idea of a premium service but
53% disagreed or strongly disagreed.   As Chapter Eight
demonstrated, the Conservative elected members
interviewed paid little attention to ideology and this

may be one reason for their rejection of some of the
ideas emanating from the New Right.

Members of the other two parties appear to be less
divided amongst themselves or indeed with each other on
library issues. Thus, 100% of both Labour and Democrat
members disagreed or strongly disagreed with the idea
of contracting out library services, while 88% of
Labour members and 84% of Democrat members disagreed or
strongly disagreed with the idea of a premium service.
The majority of members in all parties were against the
introduction of charges for the loan of public library
books although there is stronger feeling against the
idea amongst Labour and Democrat members.

Respondents were not short of views or ideas regarding
the future of the public library service. Education,
recreation and information were all perceived to be
important aspects of the public library's work. Most
members were aware of, and in favour of, libraries
lending a wide range of material. Most respondents
hoped that public libraries would expand and develop,
although some Conservative members were afraid that the
service might become too diversified and/or
trivialised. There seemed to be a general enthusiasm
for public libraries developing an information role and
making use of the new technology. Labour and Democrat
members in particular are very concerned about what

they perceive as a lack of adequate funding whilst members of the Conservative party appear to be less worried about the financial prospects for the service.

In 1984, in a study of the determinants of public policy, Sharpe and Newton (1984) asked, "Does politics matter?".   Most of those interviewed for the present study did not feel that it mattered as much in the library committee as in other areas of local government, such as social services, housing or education.   However, that does not mean that politics is without importance for the library profession because, as Chapter Thirteen most clearly demonstrates, politicians of different political persuasions do hold different views about the way the public library service should be financed and organized.   Moreover politics also matters in the more general sense that the public librarian, like any other local government officer is operating in a political, some respondents argued an increasingly political, environment.

Even allowing for the possible influence of the halo effect, the results of this study suggest that the majority of elected members serving on library committees have a real interest in the service and a concern for it.   The vast majority of members interviewed, had thought quite deeply about the library service and were generally supportive of it.   In

contrast to the view often expressed by professional librarians (Evans forthcoming, Gerard 1988, Jast 1935), the members interviewed did possess a reasonable knowledge of the scope and aims of the service. Their perception is, as it should be, different from that of the professional librarian. As Domain theory (Kouses and Mico 1979) suggests those operating in the Policy Domain and the Management Domain operate by different and contrasting principles. Likewise Jones (1973) in discussing the functions and organization of councillors argued that "members and officials... are influenced by different pressures." Overall it is still possible to agree with Savage's (1942 p12) perceptive remark that:

"All parties (though not all men) seem to be in favour of libraries, at any rate in thriving and peaceful times."

However, in the most recent, and less than thriving, times the demands emanating from the political realm have appeared to make some members less in favour of libraries.

It is worth emphasising at this point that the members interviewed for this study were all members of library committees and that many respondents expressed some doubt that other elected members held libraries in such

high regard.   The recent cutbacks in library services have led the Chief Executive of the Library Association (Cunningham 1991) to suggest that politicians undervalue the public library service. Of course it could also be argued that some professional librarians underestimate the importance of politics. It was not the aim of the present work to obtain the views of local politicians in general but a further study of a wider range of members is needed to test Cunningham's assumption.

The present work has sought to examine the perceptions and values of elected members in the belief that the way that "different 'actors' perceive and make sense of the world helps to explain oganizational behaviour." (Barrett & Fudge, 1981 p28). The data in Chapter Two suggest that the different political actors 'make sense of the world' in different ways. Members of the Conservative party tended to be pragmatic in their approach, while Labour members were motivated by issues of social justice and the Democrats by community welfare. These differing perceptions and values would appear to make some difference in how members of the different political parties view the public library service. Sharpe and Newton (1984 p209) in looking at the whole range of local government services observed that:

"[Political] Parties... seem to provide crucial
elements in the decision-making process. Perhaps
the best analogy to a party in this context is
that of a prism; the party transforms other major
elements in line with party ideology and the need
to get re-elected."

While the evidence presented in this study suggests
that local politicians play an important part in the
operation of public libraries, it is not suggested that
a study of elected members or political parties can
provide the best, or only, explanation of the decisions
taken about library services. For instance, it is
recognised that local government is a partnership
between elected members and council employers. To
quote from The 'Cheshire Values':

"Employees are responsible to councillors but they
depend on each other for effectiveness. Mutual
support within this partnership is necessary for
the successful operation of the organization as a
whole." (Cheshire County Council nd.)

One might add that the successful operation of the
organization as a whole also requires a mutual
understanding of each group's aims and aspirations.

With this in mind, it is suggested that further
research be undertaken to ascertain librarians'
perceptions of politicians responsible for libraries.
The results of such a study might provide an
interesting contrast with the politicians' view of
themselves as presented above. There is some anecdotal
evidence to suggest that the library professionals'
perception of local politicians may not be entirely
accurate. As a former library committee chairman has
written:

"I asked [name of librarian] what he thought, and
he said that some of his colleagues wouldn't know
a politician from Father Christmas, and would be
likely to ask for a present from either in exactly
the same terms. I took this to mean that he had
no great opinion of the political awareness of
those he had in mind." (Monroe 1987)

Whilst in his memoirs David Gerard (1988 p167), who
was, amongst other things, City Librarian of
Nottingham, confesses that, "Generally the world of
elected members was inscrutable to me." It is hoped
that the data contained in this study will have made
that world a little clearer for a future generation of
public librarians.

P O S T S C R I P T

The world of local government is, as recent history
testifies, a fast changing one and a number of
important events have taken place since the field work
was completed. Had the study been started today then a
number of other matters would have been investigated
via the interview schedule. In particular members
would have been asked about recent and proposed changes
in the structure, management and financing of local
government, the impact of compulsory competitive
tendering, and the implications for library services of
the 1988 Education Reform Act. In addition to such
legislation, it should be noted that since the research
was undertaken, there has also been a change of Prime
Minister and three different Ministers for the Arts.

The financial climate has changed and continues to do
so at a rapid pace. As Midwinter and McVicar (1991)
wrote at the beginning of this year:

> "Grant reductions, grant penalties, rate capping
> and now the community charge have dramatically
> changed the budgeting environment."

Since even that was written, we have seen the beginning
of the end of the Poll Tax and the promise of a council
tax.

The Local Government Act 1988 required local
authorities to put some services, often referred to as
'defined activities', out to open competition. At that
time library services were not included. However in
the light of the green paper, <u>Financing our public
library service: Four subjects for debate</u>, members were
asked their views on contracting out some aspects of
the library service to private companies, and their
opinions are set out in Chapter Thirteen.   Despite
reports to the contrary ('No privatisation' claim 1991)
such contracting out now seems a real possibility. The
government has recently established a feasibility study
into the extension of compulsory competitive tendering
(CCT) into white collar services in local government,
including the public library service.

If CCT is extended to public libraries then elected
members, officers and clients may indeed find that some
services are run by private companies.   CCT is likely
to have significant implications for the work of
elected members. As one respondent indicated in the
study, it will require quicker decision making than the
traditional committee structure may allow. In
addition, members may have to give more consideration
to the desired standards of service if the idea of the
enabling authority is extended to the public library
service.

Furthermore the legislation arising from Richard Luce's Green Paper received the Royal Assent in November 1989 (The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (c42) Section 154) and the regulations authorised by the section have just been published. The Act already gives local authorities the power to introduce charges for a range of services and the new regulations are specifically concerned with library charges. These are due to come into force on the 1st January 1992. According to the Chief Executive of the Library Association the wording of these regulations is "likely to give rise to uncertainty" (Cunningham 1991a) and it remains to be seen how they will be interpreted by public library authorities.

In addition, the present government has produced a whole series of discussion documents on the future structure of local government. Under Michael Heseltine, the Department of the Environment has issued three Consultation papers; (Department of the Environment 1991: 1991a Department of the Environment, Scottish Office, Welsh Office 1991) on finance, structure and internal management. The professional response to these plans has been given by the Library Association (Government plans may be 'inefficient' 1991) but the timing of the present research made it impossible to discuss this topic in the interviews with elected members. What, for instance, are elected

members reactions to the proposed move towards unitary authorities and, how do they think such a move will affect the public library service?

There is also some indication that more authorities are considering the appointment of people without library qualifications to the post of Chief Librarian, or its equivalent. Given that the present research indicated that elected members placed a high value on the advice of professional officers, it would be interesting to ascertain the locus of support for such appointments. Are those members responsible for libraries becoming dissatisfied with professional orthodoxies (Gyford 1984b) or are they being "led" by Chief Executives keen to develop a new management culture in which individual service managers have, and/or are expected to develop, more generalist skills? In terms of the public library service is there, in the members' view, a need for "a new management which is general management as opposed to professional management"? (Clarke & Stewart 1990 p11).

What happens within the local education authorities as a result of the 1988 Education Reform Act will also have a direct impact on public and school library services. One of the main proposals of the Act is the local management of schools (LMS) which delegates powers and resources from the LEA to individual

schools. The effects of LMS on school library services in England and Wales have been discussed elsewhere (Eyre & Usherwood 1990; Sage 1991) but how an authority reacts will be determined to some extent by the politics or culture of that authority. This may determine, for instance, whether money is directed towards positive action in inner cities or to reward efficiency in budget handling.

These are not the only changes to have taken place or to be proposed since the present work was started. They do, however, provide some evidence of the size of the challenge currently facing elected members, public librarians and those who attempt to write about, analyse and explain their activities.

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APPENDICES

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Mr. *********,
Chief Librarian,
*************s,
*******,
**********,
****

12.5.89.

Dear *****,

The Elected Member and the Public Library

I am carrying out research to obtain the views of
elected members regarding the management and operation of
public library services. I am now at the stage where I need to
arrange interviews with members and I am hoping to interview
some members of the committee responsible for public libraries
in your authority. In particular, I would wish to interview
the Chairperson, Shadow Chairperson, and one or two
"backbenchers" from each of the political interests represented
on the committee. In addition, I would hope to interview the
Leader of the Council.

It is my intention to write directly to members
requesting an interview but I do not wish to do this before
informing you of my plans. If for any reason you would rather
I did not go ahead I will, of course, seek co-operation from
another authority.

I should point out that the interviews will be part of
my personal research for a PhD and that my work has no
connection whatsoever with any commercial or political
organisation. All responses will be treated in confidence.

I should also be grateful if you could provide me with a
list of the members serving on your "library committee"together
with an indication of their political allegiance (if any). The
Municipal Year Book for 1989 states that the Leader of your
Council is * *********** and that *.* ******* is Chairperson
of the committee responsible for libraries.If this is not so, I
would be most grateful if you could let me have the name of
the current occupant. I hope to start interviewing towards the
end of May, continuing through June, July and August.

The University of Sheffield

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Councillor *.*.********,
** ******** *****,
*****,
** ***

26 May 1989

Dear Councillor ********,

The elected member and the public library

I am currently undertaking a study of elected members who serve on committees that have responsibility for public library services and would like to obtain your views on the work of members, libraries and librarianship. I would, therefore, be most grateful if you would permit me to interview you.

I plan to be in the ****** area on July 18, 19,20,21,24,25,26, 27 and 28th., and would like to make an appointment to see you on one of those dates. As a guide to the likely time involved, I can let you know that in the pilot study already undertaken, interviews lasted between 40 minutes and 1 hour. If you are unable to meet me I should like to carry out the interview by telephone during a convenient evening or weekend.

If you are willing to be interviewed, I would be grateful if you would use the enclosed stamped addressed envelope to let me know the time and place most convenient for you.

I should add that my study has no connection with any political or commercial organization and that no respondent will be identified in the final report.

I appreciate how busy elected members are these days, but I do hope you will be able to find the time to take part in what I hope will be a valuable piece of research.

If you have any questions regarding the project, please contact me at the above address or at home. (Telephone 0742 ******). I would greatly appreciate your co-operation.

Yours sincerely,

R. Usherwood
Senior Lecturer in Librarianship

By way of background, I enclose a copy of a paper which appeared in Public Library Journal. This was based on a literature review and some pilot interviews carried out with members from other authorities.I also enclose a pre-paid envelope for your reply.

Yours sincerely,

R.C. Usherwood
Senior Lecturer in
Librarianship.

Enc.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: THE ELECTED MEMBER AND THE PUBLIC
LIBRARY

RECORD OF INTERVIEW WITH COUNCILLOR   ON   /   / 89

AUTHORITY...

TYPE OF AUTHORITY

COUNTY COUNCIL ....
METROPOLITAN DISTRICT..............
INNER LONDON BOROUGH...............
OUTER LONDON BOROUGH...............

POLITICAL CONTROL

ALLIANCE...........................
CONSERVATIVE.......................
LABOUR.............................
NO OVERALL CONTROL.................
OTHER (Specify)....................

NAME OF COMMITTEE.................................

POLITICAL ALLEGIANCE OF INTERVIEWEE

CONSERVATIVE.......................
INDEPENDENT........................
LABOUR.............................
SOCIAL AND LIBERAL DEMOCRAT........
SDP................................
OTHER (Specify)....................

INTRODUCTION
The aim of this interview is to obtain your views
regarding public library services and to obtain
information about the decision making process in
committees responsible for public libraries. It is
part of an academic study and my work has no connection
with any commercial or political organization. Your
answers will be treated in confidence and no individual
will be identified in the final report.

In the questions that follow I shall use the term
"library committee" to cover all those committees that
have the major responsibility for public library
services. (e.g. Amenity Services, Cultural Services,
Education, Leisure and Recreation etc.)

SECTION A   POLITICAL BACKGROUND

I should like to start by asking a few questions about your political background.

1   Why did you decide to enter local politics?

2   When were you first elected to the council?

3   How would you describe your personal brand of ....?

4   How many main committees do you serve on at the present time?

5   Which of these do you regard as the most important?

SECTION B   THE LIBRARY COMMITTEE OFFICERS AND MEMBERS

I should now like to discuss the "library committee" and the role of officers and members.

6   What in your view is the most important function of the "library committee"?

7   In relation to the work of the council as a whole how important is the work of the "library committee"?

8   In relation to the work of the ....committee as a whole how important is the work of the public library service?

9   What in your view is the most important function of the Chairperson of the "library committee"?

10   What in your view is the most important function of the Chief Librarian?

11   It has been said that the trend is towards the appointment of Chief Officers who are in sympathy with the political complexion of the Council they serve. What are your views on this?

12   What kind of matters would you expect library officers to refer to the "library committee"?

13   What in you view is the dividing line between the job of the library officers and the work of elected members?

14   Do you think that elected members should be involved in the day to day running of the library service?   (If yes please give examples).

15   Do you think that the "library committee" should concern itself with the selection of library stock? (If yes please give examples).

16   Do you think that the "library committee" should concern itself with the type of displays or exhibitions held in the library? (If yes please give examples).

17   Has there ever been a sharp difference of opinion on any matter between library officers and the elected members on your committee?

18   Have you any comments on the quality of the officers reports to the "library committee"? (In addition ask Chairperson - Do the officers prepare reports in draft for discussion with you before they go to committee?).

19   What are the main ways that you keep yourself informed about the needs and attitudes of the public regarding the library service in your authority?

20   What is the single most important factor that influences you when deciding about library matters?

USING THE TERMS ON THIS CARD PLEASE TELL ME THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE FOLLOWING INFLUENCE YOUR DECISIONS ABOUT THE OPERATION OF LIBRARY SERVICES. IF YOU WANT TO ADD TO YOUR ANSWERS PLEASE DO SO.

21   The advice of professional officers?

22   The opinions of your party group?

23   The opinions of the chairperson?

24   The opinions of other elected members?

25   Political ideology?

26   Items in the media?

27   Ward interests?

28   USING THE SAME CATEGORIES, PLEASE TELL ME To what extent party politics play a part in the meetings of the "library committee"?

29   Looking back on your time on the "library committee" what things have you found most satisfying?

30   And what things have you found least satisfying?

SECTION C   THE PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE

I should now like to hear your views on public library services in general.

31   What in your opinion is the most important issue facing public library services in Britain today?

USING THE TERMS ON THIS CARD PLEASE TELL ME THE STRENGTH OF YOUR AGREEMENT OR DISAGREEMENT WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ABOUT PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES, IF YOU WANT TO ADD TO YOUR ANSWERS PLEASE DO SO.

32   Some aspects of the public library service should be left to voluntary organizations. (If yes please give examples).

33   Some parts of the library service should be "contracted out" to private companies.

34   Charges should be introduced for the loan of public library books.

35   Charges should be introduced to enable some members of the public to receive a "premium service".

36   The management and political control of public libraries should be decentralised?

37   What in your opinion is the most important function of the public library service in Britain today?

38   What are your hopes and fears for the public library service over the next ten years?

SECTION D   BACKGROUND OF ELECTED MEMBERS

In order to compare the results of this study with others on elected members I would be grateful if you would let me have some information on your personal background.

39   Are you EMPLOYED?   (Please give occupation).......

A HOUSEWIFE?......................................
UNEMPLOYED? (Please give former occupation)....
RETIRED? (Please give former occupation).......

40   Are you   Under 30 years of age?...................
Between 30 and 44?.......................
Between 45 and 64?.......................
65 years or over?.......................

41   Please tell me the type of educational institute
that you last attended on a full time basis.......

42   Apart from this have you had any further
education? (e.g. WEA or Open University)   If YES
please specify.

43   Do you think that there is anything of importance
about libraries or library committees which I have
not asked, or to which I have not given enough
attention?

CONCLUSION

Thank you very much for your time, help and
cooperation. It has been greatly appreciated.

TO A LARGE EXTENT

TO SOME EXTENT BUT NOT A LARGE EXTENT

TO A SMALL EXTENT

TO NO EXTENT AT ALL

IF YOU WANT TO ADD TO YOUR ANSWERS PLEASE DO SO

STRONGLY AGREE

AGREE

NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE

DISAGREE

STRONGLY DISAGREE

IF YOU WANT TO ADD TO YOUR ANSWERS PLEASE DO SO.