1. Area Covered: Stock Policy

Introduction.

The library service has 2 main resources—one its staff, the other its stock. Whilst an increasing number of library resources are online and electronic, stock remains at the forefront of the library service and this fact is recognised in the commitment to purchase 50,000 stock items annually. There are regular displays of books in all libraries and also regular events and promotions, including author talks. These efforts are in line with one of the libraries key priorities, of books, reading and learning.

Our stock policy takes full advantage of the libraries membership of the London Libraries Consortium (LLC), which gives our customers access—via the libraries catalogue—to millions of stock items. This leads to much greater choice and ensures that the representation of the library stock corresponds much more closely with the different equality strands, which are identified below. The method of stock selection similarly increases the range of stock for such groups, as stock selection is largely—if not exclusively—based on a system of stock supplier specification policies, that were designed by a small working of librarian seeking to identify the most popular genres and categories of fiction and non-fiction stock, as well as catering for the various ethnic communities within the community, as well of those of faith and religion, disability, gender, sexual orientation and age.

All equality groups—religion and faith, gender, age disability and sexual orientation—have a presence to a greater or lesser extent within each community and are considered in stock selection policies. Their membership of the different local communities can be ascertained both through community profiling and membership details. There is an overall stock selection policy which identifies stock specially for the groups mentioned above. However library managers are also allowed a degree of latitude to enable to respond to expressed needs within local communities. User groups in each library are given a sum of money to spend on books.

Quantitative stock monitoring takes several forms: library managers studying performance reports, especially those relating to such items as issue statistics, that indicate whether or not the library stock is meeting the local communities’ needs and aspirations. The library manager can also study reservation statistics and the ten most popular authors in the branch, to establish whether or not the library has the right stock in the right quantities at the right time for its borrowers.
Stock Selection Policy and procedures.

These have been outlined above—however of equal importance is the consultation and open transparency behind this policy and procedures, designed to ensuring that library borrowers are fully aware of the policy and its various provisions. The policy also outlines the relative responsibilities of the Havering Library Service in relation to the membership of the London Libraries Consortium and the Stock Purchasing group. The policy ensures that all stock suppliers and LLC members have their own equality and diversity policies and provides for consultation amongst all library borrowers and users by means of surveys—of which the most prominent (although not exclusive) is the CIPFA surveys for both children and adults—these are individually taken every 3 years.

The scope and context of the policy

The above should have laid emphasis on the desired inclusivity of the policy. However, one of the policy’s greatest disadvantages is that it fails to meet both individual and group needs. Of the latter, some Asian women can show a reluctance to visit the library. However and perhaps even more significantly, there is a danger that individual library borrowers may show reticence/reluctance to enquire about the availability of a certain book/books and this tendency may be amplified in circumstances of either cultural differences or where the individual/individuals perceive a social barrier to making such enquiries. It is important to remember that these tendencies are not confined to the six different equality groups.

These inhibiting factors necessitate that all library staff must be fully aware of the impact that the library itself makes upon its customers. In assessing the situation, there is much that can be done: if staff walk around the library, their knowledge of what customers want will be much enhance. Furthermore talking to different equality groups and encouraging them to join user groups is fundamental to ensuring their effective involvement in the library service in general and in particular stock provision. This approach can be very effective. In Redbridge, members of the Asian Women group are members of user groups and a large number of this group resides in Havering, presenting us with an excellent opportunity to encourage similar involvement in Havering.

Age and the elderly.

In the case of the elderly we can encourage them to use the Housebound Library Service or the mobile library service, which gives them greater accessibility to the library service. We can approach them by visiting old people’s homes, as well as residential and nursing homes, in an attempt to encourage them to use our facilities. This would demand an extension of the services outlined above and a considerable expansion in volunteer working. We could also use volunteers to supply a library service to local hospitals.

One other identifiable age group that is worthy of particular attention is teenage boys, as their stock needs are often overlooked. This can be
addressed by contacting Teen Zones and War Hammer game clubs and encouraging feedback from group members. We can also approach youth clubs and sport centres, as a means of promoting the library service.

Disability groups.

Community profiling, the libraries database of such groups and their existence and collaboration with Social Services and Community Regeneration all present us with opportunities to identify and make contact with such groups. We can also use the information provided by Primary Care Trusts and the different disability associations to inform stock purchasing decisions.

It will be the responsibility of the reader development group to approach such groups and advise them of our stock provision, as well as listening to their feedback and adjusting stock provision accordingly. Branch library staff also have a major role to play, in assisting disabled borrowers find suitable reading material and information and rectify stock gaps to be rectified by stock purchases.

Racial and religious and ethnic groups.

Many of these groups do not speak English as a first language. This requires the library service to use the abilities of volunteers to overcome this obstacle. Whenever, members come into the library, we can assist them further by using the translation service. As before community profiling and membership details—which assist us identify different languages spoken—are an effective means to identify the different composition of these groups within the different communities. In cases, where there is not a sizeable ethnic contingent within Havering, we can improve our services by the use of specialist collections from other London Library authorities, as well as making full use of the resources available within the London Libraries consortium.

Sexual Orientation.

With regard to sexual orientation, we can effectively tailor our message by using specialist means, such as the gay press and the national and local press. There is a well defined gay publishing genre and this can be used to influence decisions that we have made in our Stock Suppliers’ Specification documents. Once again, it would be most helpful if representatives from these groups could be members of the user panels.

Visual Impairment.

Library Borrowers have specific needs, which will be catered for in the stock management process. The identification of those visually impaired is something that the membership process does not satisfactorily cater for, but and a problem can arise in circumstances where an individual person develops either blindness or some form of visual impairment after they have become library members. A letter from a doctor confirming this visual
impairment is required and should rectify this difficulty, but once again the individual concerned may feel embarrassed and not wish to approach a member of staff directly on this subject. Suitable training should be provided for staff to acquaint them with different forms of visual impairment and how these can be approached and staff should also be encouraged to produce a large print version of any policy, publication or document upon request.

The training outlined above has already been developed—to cater for different circumstances—and can be easily implemented. However, once again outreach work can play an important part in ensuring that the views and desires of this group of people in terms of stock provision is accomplished. There is a macular society within Havering and the Stock Development manager has given talks to this group—this work should continue, as an effective means of building lasting relations with this group. In this instance, as with other such groups, a separate sum of money can be allocated for stock recommendations.

**Illiteracy and Learn Direct.**

We face a problem already identified of approaching this group, many of whom are reluctant to admit their disability. This understandably causes a reluctance by members of this group to approach library staff directly seeking advice and there is also a great reluctance to borrow easy to read textbooks. This is why the establishment of partnerships with Havering College and the expansion of Learn Direct Centres in libraries are both so important.

**The Consultation Process.**

This can be interactive and include not only quantitative measurement—in terms of issues, reservation statistics, items added to stock—but also qualitative means, such as the CIPFA surveys. There are financial implications—most noticeably in terms of maintaining specialist collections for what may be numerically small groups of library borrowers, but the increasing number of members of the LLC has allowed the library service to apply the economies of scale, whilst increasing borrower choice, through allowing access to an ever greater number of stock items.

The consultation process can be truly effective in staff are prepared to make the necessary interaction with the public and the groups identified above to explain how the library service works and the way in which it can open doors to educational, recreational, information and cultural fulfilment. By this means, the consultation process is reiterative, based on thousands of human interactions and can give a more realistic assessment of satisfaction with the stock.

**Conclusion.**

The Stock policy lies at the forefront of the library service and is one of the key identifying features people use in order to decide their opinion of the overall library service. In the library service, one of the key service objectives
is to increase not just the number of persons using the service, but also the number who actually borrow books. At present, our visitor numbers are increasing, but the percentage of borrowers is significantly less and must be increased. One of the key methods of achieving this aim is to not only provide the right stock, but ensure that staff are promoting this stock, which in turn requires that they are given the right training-in terms of being able to interact successfully with library borrowers and promote the stock resources of the library service.