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LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURES
AND THE
PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE
IN WALES

BY

GERAINT I EVANS

Volume I
Text

Submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements
for the award of
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ABSTRACT

The thesis examines the relationship between evolution and change in local government structures and the development of the public library service, concentrating on the development of that service in Wales. This relationship is examined against governmental enquiries such as the Roberts Report (1959), the Bourdillon Report (1962) and the Redcliffe Maud Report (1969), and the culmination of these enquiries, The Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964 and The Local Government Act, 1972. Special attention is paid to Section 207 of the Local Government Act which enabled district councils in Wales to apply for library powers. An investigation of the mechanics and rationale of awarding such powers in 1974 and 1984 is based on research of private papers and statistical analysis. Expenditure patterns and service delivery levels of all public library authorities in Wales are examined for the period 1979-1989 to attempt to discover whether counties or districts best match selected criteria of efficiency. The whole topic is brought full circle though an examination of the post-1990 proposals for the re-structuring of local government, concentrating once again on the implications for the public library service in Wales.

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of this thesis is to examine the processes of change and evolution in local government structures in Wales and more specifically the place of the public library service within those structures. The work further examines the politically induced reorganisation of public libraries in Wales in the light of such relevant data (especially statistical) as are available.

The process of change and evolution is firstly explored within the context of the provision of a public library service by a wide range of local authorities in Wales and the subsequent attempt to reform and rationalise that service. The first local authority in Wales to provide a library service was the city of Cardiff (1862), followed by Bangor and Newport (1871), Aberystwyth (1874) and Swansea (1875). The adoption of library legislation and the resultant provision of a service was thus initially confined to urban areas - and in this respect Wales reflected the pattern of development in the remainder of the United Kingdom. Gradually the formal provision of service spread to the smaller towns such as Blaenau Ffestiniog (1893) and Penarth (1895) and to civil parishes such as Llanberis and Llanuwchllyn (both 1895). The final stage in this development came with the passing of the 1919 Public Libraries Act which gave library powers to county authorities; the pioneers here were Denbighshire (1921) and Caernarfonshire (1923) (all dates indicate commencement of service) and by 1926 all of the thirteen counties which then existed in Wales had adopted the 1919 Act. Thus, within a sixty four year period (1862 - 1926), eighty six authorities in Wales, ranging from the city of Cardiff to the parish of Llanuwchllyn had adopted the library legislation to ensure that in theory at least, the whole of the geographical area of Wales was served by a library authority. In practice however it soon became evident that the development that had occurred was essentially piecemeal

and often haphazard and because of this the service that was provided varied considerably in nature and quality.

This led to a growing realisation in local and central government that such variation could only be eradicated with the creation of what was described as viable units for the delivery of the public library service. Thus it was that librarians, the Library Association and a series of government initiated investigations sought to establish valid criteria and adequate definitions for the concept of viable library authorities. The reports of Kenyon (1927)¹, McColvin (1942)², Roberts (1959)³ and Bourdillon (1962)⁴ attempted in different ways to explore and define viability, but failed to provide a satisfactory or definitive answer. Whatever criteria were promulgated - population, rateable value, overall expenditure or expenditure on books - they could all be (and were) countered by examples of small library authorities devoting a high level of resources to the provision of a library service. The quest for viability also foundered because it tended to set local authorities one against another with the arguments inevitably descending at the last analysis into factionalism. Nevertheless much of what had been recommended by Roberts and Bourdillon was given statutory force in the Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964. The legislation (which came into force on 1 April 1965) required a Minister of the Crown, the Secretary of State for Education and Science, to superintend and promote the public library service and placed a legal duty on every public library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient service.

With regard to the historiography of the evolution of public library services in Wales reference must be made to four fundamental matters. The first relates to the relative paucity of primary and secondary material. Roe's thesis⁵ traces the establishment and growth of the public library in Wales from the adoption of library legislation

from 1850 onwards to the imminent reorganisation of local government in 1974. This is the only work that attempts to place the topic within a national perspective and offers comparisons between England and Wales. Beyond this, there are a number of regional studies⁶ which, though valuable as a record of the development of the service within the boundaries of one local authority, cannot by their very intent and purpose place that development in a national setting. Secondly, there is a tendency in all of this work to examine the past in a descriptive, uncritical manner. For instance, there is minimal consideration of why the public library service in Wales has largely followed patterns advocated for England and thus there is little or no discussion of the argument that solutions relevant to the urbanised south-east of England might not be so apposite for rural Mid-Wales. Thirdly, and related to the above, there has been a natural and understandable tendency to concentrate on what did happen as opposed to what did not happen and why, and to pay attention to the significance of development at the expense of the significance of non-development. The most apparent example of non-development is the complete lack of a strategic, national focus for the planning of public library services in Wales. Fourthly, the studies referred to have not discussed the pervasive influence of Welsh politics at the national and local level. This thesis therefore seeks to show that often crude political factors have significantly influenced (and may continue to influence) the shape of local government structures in Wales and that these structures in turn have increasingly affected the delivery of the public library service since 1974.

It is therefore appropriate that evolution and change in the public library service in Wales should be further examined within the wider context of the reform of local government. From 1945 onwards, successive administrations grappled with the task of restructuring local government throughout the United Kingdom. In Wales the establishment

of the Welsh Office in 1964 meant that the issue of local government reform could be set against the specific characteristics and needs of Wales. Initially the Welsh Office appeared to set and follow a different path which could have given Wales a distinctive local government structure. In England, the Redcliffe-Maud Report (1969)⁷ recommended a single tier of unitary authorities. For reasons which had more to do with political pressures than the rationale of reform, this key recommendation was abandoned; Wales was brought into line with England and the Local Government Act, 1972⁸ gave legislative force to a two tier structure of counties and districts. Within this two tier structure library powers were allocated to counties and metropolitan districts in England and to the counties in Wales, with the proviso that powers could also be allocated to Welsh districts under the terms of Section 207 of the Local Government Act, 1972. The provisions of the 1972 Local Government Act came into force on the 1 April 1974 and put in place a reformed and seemingly stable structure of local authorities. And yet in 1994, a Conservative administration embarked on a further round of reorganisation and in so doing moved full circle to implement the previously rejected Redcliffe-Maud philosophy of a single tier of unitary authorities. The thesis attempts to trace and explain this reversal of policy and outlines the legislative process up to the granting of the Royal Assent for the Local Government (Wales) Bill⁹ on the 5 July 1994.

Within the related contexts of the evolution of a public library service in Wales and changes in local government structures which sustained that service, the thesis attempts to address several key issues.

It gives particular attention to the criteria which have been offered in the past for the evaluation of the effectiveness of local government structures in general and

more specifically the public library service within those structures.

In retrospect, it would appear that Section 207 of the Local Government Act, 1972 ran counter to those criteria. Why therefore was Section 207 included in the legislation? The acceptance of its provisions by the Department of Education and Science and by the Welsh Office leads to a further set of questions. How have these government departments reacted to the statutory requirements of the Section and in particular to the process of awarding library powers to districts in 1974 and the need to undertake a review of library powers in 1984? This process of decision making is the fundamental concern of this study and the thesis attempts to show that political factors were paramount in the decision to incorporate Section 207 in legislation and in its initial implementation.

Is it therefore possible to conclude that the four Welsh districts awarded library powers under that Section have been able to deliver a comprehensive, efficient and above all cost-effective library service? Further, the thesis seeks to consider the wider effects arising from the implementation of Section 207 and whether the resultant district library authorities and the public library service in Wales have benefited from the legislation.

The thesis also considers why and how central government embarked on a further round of local government reorganisation in the late 1980's and early 1990's. In particular consideration is given to the criteria for the evaluation of effectiveness offered in the post-1990 proposals for reform and how these differ from previous criteria.

And finally, the thesis considers to what extent the library profession has been able to influence this latest round of reorganisation and what is the likely effect of

the reorganisation on the evolution and growth of public library services. Have the "real" decisions, as before been pre-determined and pre-shaped by political factors with all other considerations following on from that?

It is inevitable that a socio-historical study such as this one has to depend firstly on the literature which is available. As indicated above only one other thesis has explored a related area and the published material on the evolution of public libraries in Wales is sparse. It is however possible to turn to sources dealing with the United Kingdom as a whole and extract and extrapolate material relevant to Wales. This has the added advantage of placing developments in Wales in a wider context and enables comparisons to be made. A good example of this is the way in which an explanation may be obtained of how England, Scotland and Wales moved by different routes and divergent methods to the post-1990 reorganisation of local government. The bibliography shows that the thesis has depended heavily on official investigations of the public library service (such as the Roberts and Redcliffe-Maud Reports) and the legislation which arose from those investigations (the Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964 and the Local Government Act, 1972). These investigations (and others) are indicators of a call for organic change from within the public library service and from local government in general; the resultant legislation gave statutory force to that call for change. An examination of the legislative process which led to the passing of these two Acts offers the necessary political dimension and is central to any explanation of the ultimate shape and form of the legislation - why certain clauses were successful and were included and why others were not. Published material has been supplemented by an examination of relevant archives and other primary sources housed at the National Library of Wales - most notably the papers of the Association of Welsh Counties, the Council for the Principality, the Council of Welsh Districts and the Welsh

Library Association. These primary and secondary sources are reinforced by interviews and correspondence with individuals who were able to throw further light on the legislative and decision-making process. This approach was essential to the explanation of how Cynon Valley, Lanelli, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda District Councils had library powers made available to them in 1974. Advice and guidance has also been obtained from ex-Cabinet Ministers, Members of Parliament and civil servants. A problem with the latter category is that although they were prepared to discuss their involvement in a general manner they were not prepared (and this is understandable) to provide documentary/attributable evidence.

Secondly, the thesis draws extensively from the papers and documents relating to the enquiries of the two Review Panels established by the Secretary of State for Wales to examine the whole question of district library powers in Wales in 1984 and 1986. The author of this study was invited by the Secretary of State to be a member of both Panels and as such had access to crucial documentation. Without access to this documentation the study would not have been possible and this coupled to personal experience means that a large proportion of the thesis is based on original material and hopefully, a valid interpretation of that material. To ensure that the interpretation is objective and because hardly any of this documentation is in the public domain, key sections of the documentation and related correspondence are included in a separate volume of Appendices. The author of this study gratefully acknowledges the permission of the Welsh Office and the relevant local authorities to use this material. On this question of access, the study confines itself to the documentation and makes no use of the content of meetings held between members of the Review Panels and local authorities. As explained in the body of the thesis, much of what was discussed at these meetings was communicated in

confidence and its use in the context of this work would be a breach of trust.

The third source used by the thesis is the statistical information on the public library service in Britain, most notably the Public Library Statistics collated and published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.⁸ This data is used to calculate and evaluate the resource base of public library authorities in Wales (with a comparison to similar authorities in England) and is especially relevant to the county/district analysis given in Chapter 6.

This introduction has already remarked that research on the public library service in Wales is not abundant. This thesis attempts to provide an insight into one aspect of that service. One study invariably tends to show the need and opportunities for further research such as the question of what constitutes a comparable English/Welsh service (particularly in the light of the Welsh Language Act, 1993); the influence of the Welsh Office and the Library and Information Services Council (Wales) on public library service; and in due course the effect of the 1995-96 local government reorganisation. As always, the compilation of such a list of topics is relatively easy - the actual research work requires support, commitment and not a little effort.

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CHAPTER ONE

"The Lord is not on the side of the large armies".
Lionel McColvin

The history and growth of the public library system of England and Wales can be divided into two periods. The first period is characterised by the adoption of library legislation by a wide spectrum of local authorities and the consequent provision of public library services by those authorities. Within this first period there was little or no consideration as to the ideal size of a local authority which could best provide a public library service. Adoption of the legislation was voluntary often based on a public poll and authorities who took up library powers ranged from cities with a population of a million to villages with two or three hundred people each. Clearly the library service available to the populace of the former would be significantly different in quantity and quality from that provided to the inhabitants of the latter. The second period is characterised by an attempt to rationalize and standardize the ensuing uneven pattern of provision. Within this period there was a constant and often tortuous quest to determine the ideal size of an effective library authority, the direction of that quest centering and usually foundering on acceptable criteria for effectiveness.

The first Public Libraries Act of 1850 is widely regarded as representative of a series of reforming measures of the era, measures which extended the franchise and ameliorated the worst horrors of the Industrial Revolution. As Kelly indicates the roots of such reforming legislation came not from popular uprising or support but from a growing awareness in an enlightened sector of the ruling classes that the lot of the common man must be improved.¹ A typical representative of this group was William Ewart (1789-1869), who was born in Liverpool and served first as Member of Parliament for that city (1830-37) and then as member for Dumfries (1841-68). In February 1850 Ewart was given leave

to introduce a Public Libraries Bill and although the Bill was subjected to considerable opposition in Parliament, it received the Royal Assent six months later. The Public Libraries Act of 1850 empowered any borough with a population of 10,000 or more to establish a free library. The population qualification was forced upon Ewart by his critics in the House of Commons; the legislation was further limited in that authorities could only levy a $1/2$ d. for library purposes and the monies so raised could only be used on the building, furnishing and operation of the library. No expenditure could be incurred on the purchase of books and other materials; it was assumed that these would be donated by benefactors and other patrons of the library. A final requirement was that boroughs wishing to adopt the Act had to conduct a poll of the ratepayers with a two-thirds majority being necessary for adoption.

The removal of these limitations was one of the prime objectives of subsequent legislation. The Public Libraries and Museums Act of 1855 extended the power to establish a library service to authorities other than boroughs, with the population qualification being lowered to 5,000. This legislation also provided for a penny rate and the monies raised could be used for the purchase of books and newspapers. The population qualification was repealed under the provisions of the Public Libraries (England and Scotland) Amendment Act of 1866 and thus within the comparatively short period of sixteen years library legislation made it possible for all strata of existing local authorities to provide a service. It has been argued that Ewart and his supporters in and outside Parliament saw this extension of powers to all authorities as a "crowning triumph"², but it was becoming clear that there was a negative side to this process. The legislation said little or nothing about the standard of the service to be provided and the removal of the population qualification meant that the size and resources of a potential library authority were not taken to be important.

As the smallest parish was thus enabled to set up a public library, the seeds of bad development were sown: many local authorities without adequate resources sought to emulate the larger towns.³

Library powers were made available to the County Councils through the Public Libraries Act of 1919. This Act had its origin in the activity of the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust and the reports of the Adult Education Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction which recommended inter alia that public library powers in England and Wales should be transferred to the education authorities, the counties and the county boroughs, and that a clause in future library legislation should provide for the abolition of the limit of a penny rate.⁴ The first of these recommendations may be seen as an early attempt to rationalize the pattern and level of provision of public library services. Had the recommendation been incorporated into legislation the authorities which had adopted the earlier Acts would have seen their library powers falling into the hands of the counties and county boroughs. This proposal caused so much controversy that the Public Libraries Bill introduced by the government in 1919 compromised on the delicate issue of the transfer of library powers. County Councils were empowered to adopt the Public Libraries Acts for any area within their administrative boundaries, which was not already being served by an existing library authority. There was thus no question of a county taking over any existing library service, although the Bill did provide for a voluntary transfer of powers from the small authorities to the counties.

The adoption of legislation did not automatically result in the rapid provision of a service. The first local authority to adopt the acts in Wales was the Municipal Borough of Cardiff in 1862; the City commenced the operation of a library service in the same year. Cardiff was followed by the Local Board District of Bangor and the Municipal Boroughs of Newport and Swansea, all of these authorities

adopting the legislation in 1870 and providing a service between 1871 and 1874. By the end of 1913, fifty nine authorities had adopted the legislation in Wales, this total being made up of thirteen Boroughs, twenty nine Urban Districts and seventeen Civil Parishes.⁵ The thirteen counties established their services over a ten year period from 1921 to 1931, bringing the number of library authorities in Wales to seventy two. Whilst it was clear that there was a development of services throughout the whole of Wales, it was also becoming apparent that this growth - in England and Wales - was the growth of a number of separate services rather than the co-ordinated growth of a linked system. There was a realization of the beginnings of "bad development"⁶ that Munford refers to and that standards of service varied greatly between different authorities. This led to the appointment of a departmental Committee of the Board of Education in 1924, under the Chairmanship of Sir Frederick Kenyon. The terms of reference of the Committee were clear; its task was

To enquire into the adequacy of library provision already made under the Public Libraries Acts, and the means of extending and completing such provision throughout England and Wales, regard being had to the relation of the libraries conducted under these Acts to other public libraries and to the general system of national education.⁷

The Kenyon Report paid special attention to the proposal put forward by the Adult Education Committee that all library powers should be transferred to the County Boroughs and County Councils, setting aside the compromise embodied in the 1919 Act. By force of actual circumstance the Committee decided that this was no longer a practical proposition and recommended that existing library authorities should continue as they were. Pragmatism brought Kenyon and his Committee to this conclusion but they were clearly aware that many of the existing authorities were struggling to provide what could only be described as an inadequate service.

Although notable efforts have been made by small communities to provide themselves with a library service, there comes a point where economic factors become so strong so as to defeat the efforts of any community to provide itself with an efficient library. We are clear that this is the position in areas with a population of under 10,000 and although there are good libraries in areas with a population of between 10,000 and 20,000 we regard this group also as one in which economic factors tend to be too strong to permit the maintenance of an efficient library service.⁸

If this viewpoint is related to the statistical survey presented at the end of the Kenyon Report it becomes clear that of the fifty seven urban and parish library systems operating in Wales in 1926, thirty seven (65%) served populations below 10,000 with eleven (19%) serving populations between 10,000 and 20,000. Thus a total of forty eight (84%) of the urban and parish libraries of Wales would, according to the Committee's findings, find it difficult to maintain an efficient library service. To exacerbate matters, analysis⁹ of the statistics reveal that Welsh authorities within these population groupings were on average spending less per capita on their library services, and had fewer volumes and fewer borrowers per 100 population than comparable English authorities. Not surprisingly the Committee's solution was a greater degree of co-operation between library authorities, but they were forced to concede that such a solution would often transgress parochial emotions and civic pride, no matter how poor the actual library service may be.

Some local government bodies have thought that even the discussion of co-operation implies some interference with their statutory powers and privileges.¹⁰

The problems facing the smaller authorities is further highlighted in a nationwide survey undertaken by members of the Library Association in 1936-37.¹¹ It is unfortunate that Wales did not receive separate treatment in this survey, with North Wales being included with Cheshire and Shropshire and South Wales with South West England. The

major concern of the survey was the small authorities with populations below 20,000 and the section which dealt with North Wales revealed that a large proportion of the libraries in that area fell into this category. The main conclusion echoes the sentiments expressed in the Kenyon Report.

The great problem appeared to be ... the problem of the small library.¹²

The editor of this survey, Lionel McColvin, was invited by the Library Association in 1941 to undertake a personal appraisal of British libraries. His report¹³ addressed itself at length to the difficulties facing public library authorities and presented solutions which remain strikingly relevant.

In its trenchant statement of basic principles and its radical proposals for the restructuring of the public library service uncompromisingly to meet the requirements of effective library service, rather than the historical and political expedients of local government tradition, the McColvin report remains the single great classic on the problems of public library structure and logistics.¹⁴

McColvin broke new ground in that all of his thinking started not from an analysis of "where we were", in terms of structure and provision, but from "where we should be". He argued that the library service should be delivered by a suitable service unit which

must embrace a natural congregation of people and be well related to their ways of living, their normal comings and goings, their interests and occupations.¹⁵

His report, being the work of an individual could overcome compromise and move away from existing local government structures and the place of library services within those structures and present proposals for the size and geographical composition of an unit which could best provide

an efficient library service. The suitable service unit must above all else make available an adequate bookstock; thus McColvin stressed what he himself and later analysts regard as the keynote statement of the whole report.

Book provision cannot be satisfactory unless the limit of supply is a large one ... the small unit cannot afford economically to provide all that its readers may need; the bigger unit must also provide much that could be useful also to readers in an even wider area.¹⁶

The creation of these suitable service units would lead inevitably to a process described as "carving up the country".¹⁷ These units would range in population from 300,000 to 800,000 (strangely this vital information was not provided in the McColvin Report itself, but in a summary of the Report in the Library Association Record).¹⁸ In Wales the process of carving up the country would lead to the creation of five units:

- (i) Newport and Monmouth - headquarters at Newport;
- (ii) Cardiff and East Glamorgan - headquarters at Cardiff;
- (iii) Swansea and West Glamorgan - headquarters at Swansea;
- (iv) Mid-Wales - headquarters at Aberystwyth (McColvin saw this being based at the National Library of Wales);
- (v) North Wales (Flint and Denbigh) headquarters at Wrexham.

In a controversial report the establishment of such ad hoc units throughout the United Kingdom cutting across existing and possible future pattern of local authority areas was by far the most contentious proposal. McColvin argued that the creation of these units could be part of a radical process of reorganization for local government, bringing reform and revitalization not only to library services, but to all other local services. If no such wide ranging reform

occurred then librarians must press independently for the creation of suitable units.

We do not advocate an ad hoc library authority save as an alternative to be adopted if suitable general authorities are not instituted.¹⁹

McColvin was in essence placing in the sharpest possible focus the question of an ideal size of a local authority providing an effective library service. His arguments and proposals can in hindsight be recognized as far sighted and illuminating. A perfect example of these qualities is the fact that when new units of local government were established in Wales on 1 April 1974 (over thirty years after the publication of the report) they were in many respects a carbon copy of the geographical divisions originally suggested by McColvin.

The response of the profession to the McColvin Report was the Public Library Service: its post war reorganization and development; proposals by the Council of the Library Association.²⁰ This document accepted and re-presented many of McColvin's proposals with one essential difference. Instead of promulgating the creation of ad hoc library units the Council of the Library Association placed their faith in the evolution of such units in consequence of a process of Local Government reorganization.

The creation of suitable library authorities should be secured by such reform of local government ... as will provide areas suitable not only for libraries, but for education, public health and most if not indeed all other local government purposes.²¹

A caveat is included which returns to the idea of ad hoc units, but the main thrust of the Association's argument was based upon a realistic acceptance of the actual and possible structure of local government whereas McColvin's proposals started from the idealism of what could be. However, both

McColvin and the Library Association were in agreement on one of the main causes of inadequate provision.

A multiplicity of authorities many of which are too small to be effective independent units.²²

The ideal size for an effective library authority was once again spelt out: this time the population range of such a unit was 250,000 to 750,000, a slight reduction on McColvin's figures. Given that the total population of Wales at this time was 2.4 million, the Library Association requirements would have led to the creation of eight or nine authorities instead of McColvin's original five.

Many sentiments embodied in the Library Association's proposals were voiced in a paper delivered by Ben (later Sir Ben) Bowen Thomas at the 1947 Conference of Library Authorities in Wales and Monmouthshire.²³ Ben Bowen Thomas was Permanent Secretary at the Welsh Department of the Ministry of Education and it is not surprising that he sought a solution to the haphazard pattern of development of library services in Wales by suggesting that powers should be transferred to the local education authorities. This was a reiteration of a course of action first mooted in 1919 by the Adult Education Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction. If it had been implemented in 1947 it would have reduced the number of library authorities in Wales to seventeen - the thirteen counties and four county boroughs. Ben Bowen Thomas' suggestion came to nothing, but he was correct in his description of haphazard development. Concrete evidence to support this view is available from a survey undertaken by the Welsh Branch of the Library Association in 1947, the results being published in a report in 1950.²⁴ The survey reveals that 11.5% of the population of Wales (300,000) were not receiving a library service of any sort; for many others the situation was not much better

large numbers of residents in all parts of Wales and Monmouthshire ... are not provided with adequate library facilities.²⁵

Despite this sorry state of affairs there was little evidence of co-operation between urban authorities or between urban and county authorities and an analysis of the survey at the 1948 session of the Conference of Library Authorities in Wales and Monmouthshire pointed to the almost stagnant position of several urban and county authorities in Wales at that time

some small councils, well in the van to adopt the Acts have made scant progress through the decades of a century which has brought tremendous acceleration in social advancement.

Six of the ... County library systems are running today in 1948, on essentially the same lines as they did when their systems were started between the years of 1918 and 1926.²⁶

The next attempt by the Library Association to establish criteria for viable units was in 1955, at a time when wider revision of local government areas and responsibilities was under consideration. The Council of the Association recommended that suitable library authorities could be created if

the library powers of all local authorities where the rateable value is less than £300,000 should be surrendered to their county councils or arrangements should be made for joint services.²⁷

This approach clearly represents a shift in the strategy of the Association: whereas earlier proposals had based viability on population figures a solution is now founded on rateable values and although the recommendations do not state specifically the type of local authority that should in future be responsible for library services, the message is clear enough. Only large authorities, or more exactly, authorities with a large financial base could do the job. Two fundamental difficulties immediately presented themselves: the existence of such a large financial base would not per se lead to an efficient library service; conversely there could be many authorities with a small

financial base who would nevertheless be providing an efficient service. The Library Association - with McColvin speaking on their behalf - recognized this point.

The Lord is not on the side of the large armies. We shall not promote improvement merely by creating large areas of service. There are proportionally as many ill-supported large library systems as there are small; as many less progressive counties as there are county districts. There are many small authorities who are displaying understanding and interest far exceeding many that are larger; and county districts with independent libraries, which despite their limited resources are giving services much better than those enjoyed by comparable county districts served by county libraries.²⁸

This was the nub of the problem facing the Library Association and they could only hope that the existence of financial resources would lead to an efficient library service. A related complication arises from the fact that library powers of authorities with rateable values below £300,000 were to be transferred to the county, yet once again the Association could only hope that this stratum of local authority would in fact deliver an improved service. The proposals were rejected at the Annual General Meeting in 1955, the decision was reversed by postal ballot, but the crucial section on surrender of library powers was again thrown out at the 1956 Annual General Meeting.

Thus after much squabbling of a very public kind the Association was once again bereft of anything beyond very general statements of principle regarding size of library authority.²⁹

If the Library Association's proposals had been implemented the effect in Wales once more would have been the reduction of library authorities to seventeen - the four county boroughs and thirteen counties. This threat was discussed by the Chairman of the Welsh Branch of the Library Association (Harold Prescott, Borough Librarian, Llanelli) at the 1956 session of the Conference of Library Authorities

in Wales and Monmouthshire. He pointed to the anomalies inherent in the Association's proposals and related them specifically to Wales: many of the smaller authorities did in fact have a rateable value higher than that of the counties in Wales, yet under the proposals the latter authority would be the automatic inheritor of library powers. The Chairman defeats his own valid arguments by putting forward a solution which would arouse as much hostility as the Library Association's original recommendations. In his view the smaller authorities

should be brought up to the desired standard of rateable value by increasing their areas for the purposes of the Acts.³⁰

This increase would, of course, be at the expense of the counties! The reaction of the counties to this step is summarily and somewhat naively dismissed.

If a case of need could be made out, rateable value lost to the counties would be made up through exchequer grants.³¹

A reaction to the Library Association's proposals was the establishment in 1955 of the Smaller Libraries Group (later the Smaller Public Libraries Group). Small in this context referred to authorities serving populations below 50,000,³² authorities who no longer felt that the Library Association was effectively representing their interests. The Group realized that although authorities within this population grouping had adopted the Acts, and had certain rights under those Acts, those rights also brought obligations. To state anew the obligations the Group produced for its members a set of standards which spelt out the requirements for the maintenance and more importantly the retention of library powers.

Thus the SPLG was telling the small public libraries that their only hope of survival as independent units lay in their adopting minimum standards and the smaller the library, the greater the effort required.³³

In a wider context central government was also investigating the future structure of local government and the place and function of smaller authorities within that structure. Two White Papers on the reform of local government were published in 1956 and 1957.³⁴ The main proposal of the second White Paper was that boroughs and urban districts should be empowered to claim responsibility for all services listed - with certain minor exceptions. One of these minor exceptions was libraries (it is interesting that libraries were taken to be a minor exception), and the White Paper made it clear that the proposals for restructuring were not to apply to libraries. This local government function required closer investigation and accordingly the Minister of Education stated that he intended to establish a committee to consider the matter and that any redistribution of library powers would be viewed in the light of the committee's report. The outcome was the appointment in September 1957 of Dr Sydney Roberts (later Sir Sydney Roberts), master of Pembroke College Cambridge, and a past president of the Library Association, to chair a committee which would

consider the structure of the public library service in England and Wales and to advise what changes if any should be made in the administrative arrangements, regard being had to the relation of public libraries to other libraries.³⁵

The Committee received evidence from a range of interested parties, much of it directly contradictory. The County Councils Association argued that library powers should be vested in county authorities - the County Boroughs and County Councils; the Association of Municipal Corporations placed heavy emphasis on the local nature of library services; while the Smaller Public Libraries Group thought that a satisfactory library service could be provided by all authorities with a population of 15,000 or more. The Library Association representing libraries and librarians from each of these camps had to tread carefully as it

prepared its evidence for Roberts. Even so it is clear that the document was not produced without a good deal of rancour and argument, with each stratum of library service fighting its corner. Against this background of tension it is not surprising that the Association adopted a middle position, taking 40,000 as a minimum population figure and recommending a minimum annual expenditure of £8,000 on library materials. Although the Association's evidence pointed to inadequacies in all types of library authority, the strongest medicine was handed out to the smaller libraries.

With the greatest goodwill towards the smaller autonomous authorities, struggling under the weight of adverse circumstances, we cannot avoid the conclusion that in the light of modern needs it would be difficult for a case to be made out for the retention of library powers by some authorities below 40,000.³⁶

In a somewhat bald statement the Association recognized that Wales did present certain problems, but offered no more than the vaguest of solutions to those problems.

We would draw special attention to the outstanding difficulties of creating suitable library authorities in Wales. It may be that arrangements outside the pattern of local government areas are necessary here and we suggest that the Departmental Committee should call for Welsh local government and professional opinion on these matters.³⁷

The Roberts Committee saw its task as improving library services throughout England and Wales. For this to take place certain guidelines had to be laid down in terms of the type and size of local authority that could operate an effective library service and how that effectiveness might be measured. The main recommendations of the Roberts Report may be summarised as follows:

- (i) every public library authority should have a statutory duty to provide an efficient service;

- (ii) a central government department should have responsibility for the oversight of the public library service;
- (iii) two Library Advisory Councils should be established - one for England and one for Wales - to assist and advise the Minister at that department of central government;
- (iv) counties, county boroughs, metropolitan boroughs should continue as library authorities;
- (v) parishes should cease to be library authorities;
- (vi) other library authorities (non county boroughs and urban districts) should be entitled to retain their library powers subject to a minimum annual expenditure on books of £5,000 or 2s.0d. per head of population, whichever was the greater;
- (vii) other non county boroughs and urban districts with populations in excess of 50,000, not at present library authorities should also be entitled to apply for library powers subject to the expenditure criteria outlined above.

The population qualification was in fact more profoundly emphasised in the body of the report with the Committee clearly stating that it was unlikely that authorities serving populations below 40,000 could provide an efficient service economically. Roberts did not state categorically that these authorities should lose their powers; rather they would be allowed to demonstrate that they could fulfil the conditions laid down on book expenditure and could then be designated as library authorities. A possible consequence of the Roberts Report therefore was an increase rather than a decrease in the number of library authorities (leaving aside the loss of the parishes). Roberts states that there were twenty one local authorities with populations above 50,000 not exercising library powers; these would be allowed to present a case for designation to the Minister of Education.

The terms of reference of the Roberts Committee required it to investigate the structure of the public library service in England and Wales, and from the outset the Committee was aware that Wales presented special problems which merited special attention. Of the sixteen members of the Committee one may be described as a Welsh representative: Mr T I Ellis, an ex tutor at the University of Wales and a member of the Council of the National Library of Wales. Although Mr Ellis was a Welsh speaking Welshman, his direct links with the public library system (which the Committee was to investigate) were tenuous. One can only assume that a representative with stronger links would at the same time stand in danger of appearing partisan whereas the objective of the Committee - as with all such official investigations - was to present an independent front. Of the twenty meetings of the Committee, two were held at the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth; of the seventy one organizations who submitted written or oral evidence, ten were from Wales (a mixture of local authority associations, local authorities, professional and cultural associations and librarians).³⁸

The outcome of all this evidence and of Roberts' deliberations is a separate chapter (Chapter VI) outlining the position of the public library service in Wales in 1957-58. Fifty two local authorities were providing a service, their status and composition being as follows:

- 13 Counties
- 4 County Boroughs
- 15 Municipal Boroughs
- 13 Urban Districts
- 7 Parishes

Only eighteen of these (34%) had a population of over 40,000 (the Roberts figure for economic viability); seventeen (32%) had a population of below 10,000. The pattern was not only prevalent amongst the smaller authorities in status (the Urban Districts and Municipal Boroughs): two counties

had populations below 40,000 and one county a population of below 20,000. When library authorities in Wales were measured against the Roberts expenditure criteria (£5,000 or 2s.0d per capita, whichever is the greater) the true picture of public library services in Wales at that time becomes clear.

Only two library authorities in 1957-58 spent 2s.6d or more per head of population on the purchase of books and only seven spent 2s.0d or more. None of these spent on books as much as the figure of £5,000 a year which we have suggested as the minimum necessary to justify autonomy.³⁹

To underline and elaborate the point made by Roberts: in the populous authorities expenditure on books would exceed a total of £5,000 but that expenditure never resulted in a per capita figure of 2s.0d or above; many of the smaller authorities achieved per capita figures in excess of 2s.0d but because of their lower populations they never spent more than £5,000 in total. There was also enormous variation in levels of expenditure in similarly sized authorities. One example suffices: Llandudno an urban district of 16,820 population spent £2,045 (29s.2d per capita) on books while Flint, a non County borough serving 14,230 inhabitants, spent only £583 (9s.8d per capita).⁴⁰ The conclusions of the Roberts Report on the public library service in Wales are not surprising.

Thus a large number of Welsh library authorities are characterised by very small populations, modest financial resources and inadequate expenditure on books. These conditions are not peculiar to Wales and there are many parts of England to which they apply; where the difference lies is in the higher proportion in Wales of libraries serving tiny populations with slender resources ... the library service in Wales apart from that provided in the four county boroughs and a very few of the non-county boroughs is spread very thinly over large areas.⁴¹

These difficulties were compounded by the requirement to provide what Roberts called a comparable service to both

English and Welsh speaking groups. The extent of this requirement is revealed by the fact that 28.9% of the inhabitants of Wales declared themselves to be Welsh speaking in the 1951 census; a more accurate yardstick of the extent of the requirement in certain areas is the percentage of Welsh speakers in those areas: Anglesey 79.8%, Caernarfon 71.7%, Cardigan 79.5%, Carmarthen 77.3% and Meirioneth 75.4%.⁴² Although the Roberts Report accepts that this would place an extra strain on the resources of Public Libraries in Wales, no special solution such as grant in aid from the Exchequer was proposed to ease the difficulties of providing a comparable service to bilingual communities. Indeed, save for recommendations to establish a library school in Wales and a Library Advisory Council for Wales, the report did not offer specific proposals relating to the situation in Wales. There was a conviction that an even stronger case existed in Wales for creating larger units of administration, but beyond that what was good for the public library service in England was also good for the public library service in Wales.

We feel that the general principles laid down for a satisfactory independent library service and for the future structure of the service as a whole should apply in Wales as in England. Indeed the special problems in Wales seem to us to strengthen rather than weaken the case for library authorities with wider responsibilities.⁴³

The reaction to the report was as might be expected with different local authority associations viewing the document from a narrow and partisan point of view. Although Roberts dealt lightly with the smaller authorities (if they reached the required standards) the Association of Municipal Corporations was strident in its criticism. The Association resisted the idea of any diminution of local responsibility for the public library service, did not accept the criteria for efficiency and stated that they had no confidence in counties as library authorities. Partisan this may have been, but the smaller authorities were able to levy a serious charge against the report in that the criteria for

efficiency (£5,000 or 2s.0d per capita) was to apply only to boroughs and urban districts. No such requirement was placed upon the counties or county boroughs, the very authorities who could as a result of Roberts be the inheritors of library services previously controlled by the urban districts and boroughs

Can you imagine anything more completely illogical and ironical. What the committee are saying is that if you are to survive you must increase your expenditure on books to two shillings per head per annum... But the Committee does not talk about the County Councils having to spend up to the level of 2s.0d. per head per annum. It only talks about the independent authorities ... this is just another instance of the removal of functions from district councils to county councils. It will have to be fought all the way to the floor of the House.⁴⁴

The validity of this statement is supported by the statistical evidence presented in the Roberts Report itself. Of the thirteen counties in Wales only one was meeting part of the criteria for efficiency, whereas six non county authorities could point to book expenditure figures above 2s.0d per capita. There was thus a distinct danger of readers in these non county authorities receiving a worse service if responsibility was given to the counties.

The Welsh representative on Roberts, Mr T I Ellis, presented a paper at the Conference of Library Authorities in Wales and Monmouthshire in 1959. For the most part this is no more than a precis of the report itself, but the speaker does acknowledge, albeit cautiously, that there might be an argument for the transfer of library powers or for the operation of joint services

there is in some instances, a case if not for the surrender of powers, at least for beginning to consider whether some schemes for co-operation are not worth considering for the improvement of the library service.⁴⁵

A further criticism of Roberts was that the criterion for efficiency in terms of book expenditure was in no way a guarantee of the quality of the ensuing library service. An authority could spend on books 2s.0d per capita per annum or £5,000 per annum, whichever was the greater and yet only attain and deliver a level of service which would be satisfactory in quantity, not quality. That Roberts said nothing about what should be done with this money was a serious flaw in the report.

In the face of such criticism the consequence was that the Roberts Report did not after all have "to be fought all the way to the floor of the House".⁴⁶ Central government realized that Roberts was sorely deficient in one respect

- it did not provide a practical base for legislation. Accordingly the Minister for Education announced in the House of Commons on the 15 December 1960 that he intended to appoint two working parties. One to examine further, from a technical point of view, the basic requirements for an efficient service, the other to study more closely the problems of inter-library co-operation.⁴⁷

The Minister stated that although he accepted most of the recommendations of the Roberts Report, a revised population figure of 40,000 would now be taken as a base for the conferment or the granting anew of library powers. The first Working Party referred to by the Minister was appointed in March 1961 under the Chairmanship of a career civil servant, H T Bourdillon, and its report was published on 20 December 1962.⁴⁸ The task of the Working Party, as indicated by the Minister was to

study the technical implications of the recommendations in the Roberts Report about the basic requirements for an efficient public library service, with particular reference to non county borough and urban district library authorities with populations under 40,000.⁴⁹

The Working Party made it clear from the outset that efficiency could not be measured by the single criterion of expenditure on books as proposed by Roberts. Such an approach was too simplistic and took no account of local needs nor of the quality of the service to be provided. To move forward on a sounder basis the Working Party undertook an enquiry into best current practice in public libraries in England and Wales by sending a questionnaire to fifty three library authorities spending above the average on books. As a control group the Working Party also requested information from a further twenty library authorities whose spending on books was below the average. The standards formulated were thus pragmatic and attempted to side-step the pitfalls of earlier investigations. Bourdillon recognised that a gathering and analysis of data was an essential prerequisite to any recommendation concerning the exercise, transfer or withdrawal of library powers

the efficiency of a smaller authority must be compared with that of any system with which it might be merged or with which it might enter into close co-operative arrangements. It would be no service to the public for the Minister to withdraw the library powers of an existing authority on the grounds that essential standards were not being maintained if the authority which took its place were then to maintain equally low or even lower standards.⁵⁰

If expenditure criteria as proposed by Roberts were inadequate, Bourdillon realized that some other measure of effectiveness had to be offered. The Bourdillon Report did this in two ways: by working within the confines of what it described as a basic library unit, the smallest unit capable of providing an adequate service for the population within its catchment area, and by presenting standards of provision for that unit. The basic library unit was the bed-rock of the library service, the very least that members of the public could expect; as population levels rose beyond that of the basic unit, so also would the standards. The crucial standards for the basic unit were not stated in terms of expenditure, but in terms of detailed recommendations on

purchase levels for different categories of library materials. In summary the Bourdillon Report called for

a provision of not less than 250 volumes of all kinds and not less than 90 adult non fiction volumes for both lending and reference purposes, per thousand population [per annum]⁵¹

moving away from the per capita expenditure criteria on which Roberts (and earlier investigations) had placed great faith. Standards for staffing, premises and other services were also proposed and all the standards were subject to periodic review, this being one of the main tasks of the Library Advisory Councils advocated in the Roberts Report.

Although the Bourdillon standards were to be applied continuously to the basic library unit, the report makes it clear that those standards could only be economically attained by a local authority of a certain size in terms of population.

A library serving less than 30,000 will be unable of its own resources to provide the total annual additions necessary for a basic library service unless it increases the additions per thousand of the population to a figure higher than 250 with the subsequent increase in the per capita cost.⁵²

Bourdillon was charged with promulgating standards for England and Wales and like Roberts devotes a separate chapter (Chapter V) to consider the problems of library services in Wales. The committee also had a Welsh representative, this time the public librarian, Mr Alun Edwards, the County Librarian of Cardiganshire. Bourdillon did not seek evidence from interested parties but seven authorities from Wales were included in the data gathering exercise.⁵³ To support the information obtained by questionnaire, visits were undertaken to public libraries. One of these was to Cardiganshire: a sub-committee (not named) spent three days in the County from the 14 to the 16 March 1962.⁵⁴ A reading of the chapter on Wales quickly demonstrates the influence of Alun Edwards on

the shape and content of that chapter. Almost in its entirety it deals with the provision of Welsh language material in public libraries in Wales, with the Bourdillon Report recommending that for every 1,000 Welsh speakers served, 50 of the 250 volumes to be purchased should be in Welsh. (This was clearly not enough for Alun Edwards, prompting him to present a minority report). Given the heavy emphasis in the chapter on Wales on the purchase or availability of Welsh language material it is somewhat strange that there is no reference to the provision of such material in the exhaustive surveys in the appendices at the end of the report. There is what Bourdillon calls "a mass of indispensable material"⁵⁵ on almost every aspect of the library service, but nothing on the purchase of Welsh material by public libraries in Wales. To turn to Bourdillon's other recommendations for Wales it repeats Roberts' call for a school of librarianship and there is a suggestion that rural areas could be better served by the use of small mobiles. Beyond this there are no specific proposals for the ideal size and structure for Welsh library authorities - they like their neighbours in England were to meet the standards stated. However if one matches the Bourdillon population qualification (a library serving less than 30,000...) against the forty seven Welsh public library authorities listed by Bourdillon,⁵⁶ one discovers that twenty four (51%) had populations below the benchmark figure of 30,000. Thirty authorities (64%) were below 40,000, the figure put forward by the Minister of Education as a viable base for library authorities.

Bourdillon had to face many of the changes and criticisms levied at the Roberts Report. In particular it was argued that the presentation of standards for levels of purchase might again say a great deal about the quantity and nothing about the quality of a library service, straining to attain those standards

the Working Party ... substituted another quantitative measure, where high expenditure would not guarantee quality of service.⁵⁷

This leads logically to the argument that non attainment of the standards could not be taken as a valid reason for removal of library powers.

No Minister should sit in Whitehall and heartlessly deprive a community of its library service merely by reference to the sort of measuring rod which the Working Party has offered him.⁵⁸

Many of these points were answered by the Chairman of the Working Party H T Bourdillon when he spoke at the Public Libraries Conference of the Library Association in 1963. The Library Association had invited Sir Edward Boyle, Minister of State at the Ministry of Education, to speak at the conference, but as Sir Edward could not be present H T Bourdillon had to take his place. This is not to suggest that Bourdillon was a poor substitute. The opposite is likely to be closer to the truth as his explanations of the methodology of the Working Party are more valuable than the cautions, politicised generalities that is often the hallmark of any ministerial speech. Bourdillon refers to

the familiar tug of war in trying to lay down standards, the pull of the ideal versus the pragmatic.⁵⁹

and that the Working Party, under his guidance leant their weight to the latter, by constantly attempting to align their standards to expectations of what could realistically be attained. Bourdillon explains that he saw that the main task of the Working Party was to give guidance to the Minister as he considered applications for the granting or withdrawal of library powers. On this issue the Working Party placed heavy emphasis on access to a wide range of resources. The ability of smaller authorities to act as a gateway to other materials in other libraries was crucial to the decision to grant or withdraw powers. Bourdillon also

makes a fundamental point which is a result of the many criticisms levied at the Working Party report.

You will know that criticisms cannot be sustained unless they [the critics] find some other answer to the underlying problems we had to face.⁶⁰

P H Sewell, Library Adviser to the Minister of Education and Assessor to the Working Party underlines several of the arguments used by his Chairman in a paper delivered to the Conference of Library Authorities in Wales and Monmouthshire in 1963. Although the paper was given to a gathering of Welsh librarians and local authority representatives, it does in fact have little to say about Wales beyond a revealing statement that Welsh library authorities were not performing as well as their counterparts on the other side of Offa's Dyke

I can say that many library authorities in Wales are spending a good deal less per head of population than authorities in England and I am not aware of any good reason for this.⁶¹

(The statement, though revealing, is also surprising coming as it does from an Assessor to the Working Party that had striven so hard to move measurement of efficiency away from expenditure criteria). There is finally a prophetic and illuminating indication of what was to follow Bourdillon - legislation certainly, but not perhaps, the kind of legislation that librarians would expect:

although therefore a new Act will require library authorities to provide an efficient service, there can be no question of defining this service statistically.⁶² (Author's emphasis).

The announcement of the proposed legislation in the 1963 Session of Parliament is a perfect indication of the place of libraries in the scheme of things. The inclusion of the Public Libraries Bill in the Parliamentary timetable was unexpected as there had been no reference to such legislation in the Queen's speech for the 1963-64 session.

The reason for its rather sudden introduction may be found in an area of governmental activity which had nothing to do with libraries. During 1963 the Conservative administration under the premiership of Sir Alec Douglas Home was actively pursuing Britain's application to enter the European Economic Community. With the expectation that the application would come to fruition, time had been allocated in the 1963-64 session for the passage of legislation which would ratify Britain's membership of the EEC. On the 14 January 1963, General de Gaulle, the President of France uttered his famous *non* and vetoed British entry to the Community. The Conservatives were left with a gap in the Parliamentary timetable and part of the gap was filled by the introduction of the Public Libraries and Museums Bill.⁶³ Despite the fact that this was the first significant legislation since 1919 and despite the fact that it had been preceded by three lengthy investigations its promoter in Parliament, Sir Edward Boyle, Minister of Education referred to the Bill as:

legislation not in the most urgent category.⁶⁴

Much of the groundwork prior to drafting the legislation had been completed by Roberts and Bourdillon, and the Bill, as presented to Parliament phrased in legal terms many of the proposals of those enquiries. Its main provisions:

- (i) Required the Minister of Education to superintend and promote the development of the public library service and to secure the proper discharge by local authorities of their functions as library authorities.
- (ii) Placed a duty on every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient service.
- (iii) Proposed the establishment of two Library Advisory Councils, one for England and one for Wales, to advise the Minister on library matters.
- (iv) Constituted the following as library authorities

- (a) Councils of counties, county boroughs and London boroughs.
- (b) Non county boroughs and urban districts with a population of over 40,000. Non county boroughs and urban districts with a population of over 40,000 not at that time library authorities, could apply for powers; conversely non county boroughs and urban districts with populations below 40,000 would have to apply for retention of powers. The holding and granting of library powers would be reviewed every ten years, from the appointed day, that is, the day on which the legislation came into force.
- (v) Withdrew library powers from parish councils.
- (vi) Gave the Minister default powers: if a complaint was laid against a library authority that it had failed to discharge its duties under the legislation, the Minister was empowered to hold an enquiry to investigate the complaint, with the ultimate sanction of loss of library powers.

Beyond the fundamental point that an efficient public library service would become a statutory requirement monitored by central government, several aspects of the Bill are worth noting. Nowhere in the proposed legislation is there a definition of the required level of efficiency or comprehensiveness. Two reasons may be suggested for this: all previous investigations had shown that any such criteria, be they population, expenditure or purchase levels could be countered by sound argument; further a requirement to provide a service at a certain level would have involved an unwarranted degree of interference by central government in a local government service, particularly as there was no mention of central government aid to assist with the attainment of a standard of service. By omitting a requirement on standards, the Government clearly intended to minimise opposition to the Bill, particularly from

Parliamentary representatives of local authority associations. Another aspect of the Bill did however carry considerable potential of incurring the opposition of a sector of local authorities. In the process of granting or withdrawal of library powers the Minister would consult the County Council. To one Member of Parliament this requirement to consult the counties was like

asking a cannibal to decide whether a missionary should or should not be cooked in the interests of humanity.⁶⁵

The counties were obviously an interested party in this process of consultation: if a non county authority lost its powers they would fall to the county; further, as a non county authority applied anew for powers it is hardly likely that the Minister would receive unbiased advice on this matter from the County, the very authority who would loose out if powers were granted.

Christopher Chataway, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Education opened the Second Reading debate on the 5 February 1964, declaring that the Bill was

not a very controversial measure.⁶⁶

He was mistaken in his assumption: Members of Parliament were anxious to debate the underlying principles of the Bill and to seek further information and amendments in relation to the administrative machinery proposed by the Bill. There was also through all the stages of legislative procedure a good deal of comment and fact from Members on the efficacy of the library service operative in their constituency. This is to be expected as many members, particularly from urban areas represented constituencies which approximated to the area served by the smaller library authorities. Expected or not the intervention of these members influenced the ultimate provisions of the Bill. Parliamentary representatives of the local authority associations were

also prominent in their attempts to amend the legislation.
This was

an inevitable consequence of the Government's policy of redistributing certain functions between authorities without disturbing the structure of local government.⁶⁷

Thus, as expected, the proposals on redistribution of library powers were to cause the sharpest comments during the passage of the Bill. The views of the opposing camps may be clearly instanced:

to have an efficient library service one must tend towards larger rather than smaller authorities. It is no good pretending that by and large a smaller authority can give as good a service as a large one.⁶⁸

The thesis behind the Bill which I would like to question...is that a large authority is more likely to be efficient in the provision of a library than a smaller authority. This may be true of almost all local government functions, but I do not believe it to be true of libraries.⁶⁹

The dividing line between large and small was the population qualification of 40,000, yet many members saw it as inimical that authorities above this line, but with no experience of operating a library service could apply for powers, while experienced authorities below this figure stood to lose their library powers

a non county borough which has never taken an interest in the library service and never had a library could after the Act comes into force become a library authority if it has more than 40,000 population.... On the other hand a non county borough which has had a first class library service with a long tradition, but with a population less than 40,000, will have to apply to the Minister for its authority to continue⁷⁰

As the Bill contained no reference to specific criteria on the efficiency of a library service, an obvious question arose

If a non county borough with a population of less than 40,000 applies to retain its library, what...yardstick will apply, and who will apply it in order to ensure whether or not that local authority should continue to have its own library?⁷¹

The Government clearly had to defend its position and though the Minister for Education admitted that it would become increasingly difficult for the smaller authorities to provide a full range of services, he assured members that the Bill was in no way a charter for counties and county boroughs to establish themselves as library authorities. All authorities would be consulted and he asserted that

we must not proceed by rule of thumb and we must consider the particular circumstances of every small authority.⁷²

At the same time the Minister realized that if local authorities and central government were not to proceed by rule of thumb, then some other yardstick would indeed have to be offered. Accordingly he promised that criteria for efficiency would be laid down in a circular which would follow the enactment of the Bill.⁷³

Although interest on the part of Welsh members was considerable (out of the twenty six members who spoke during the second reading, five represented Welsh constituencies) much of this interest centered on sentiments of support for individual library services. Only two members raised issues relating specifically to Wales: the first returned to the question of the establishment of a school of librarianship recommended by Roberts and Bourdillon;⁷⁴ the second argued that the legislation would place extra demands on the public library service in Wales

If a Welsh authority is to meet the requirements of this measure - that is to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service - it must provide reading matter in both languages. This is an additional duty which applies only to library authorities in Wales. Exactly as the Minister of Education is bound to ensure that

Welsh local authorities are enabled to provide education in both languages in Welsh speaking counties, so he should ensure that Welsh library authorities are enabled financially as well as structurally to provide a library service in both languages.⁷⁵

This question returns to the call made by the Roberts Report for a comparable service to Welsh and English speaking groups and to the Bourdillon requirement to purchase a certain number of Welsh language titles per annum. The question received no answer in the debate and to all intents and purposes remains unanswered

As a result of arguments put forward at the Committee stage certain amendments were forced upon the Government. Firstly, before a library authority could be deprived of its library powers it would be necessary to hold a public enquiry in addition to the normal departmental investigation.⁷⁶ Secondly, the Minister's powers of default and refusal of an application for library status by a non county borough or urban district could only be exercised by statutory instrument subject to annulment by either House of Parliament.⁷⁷ This second category of amendments would force a Minister of State to defend his actions in the Commons - that was the positive argument. There was an equally convincing negative argument that to bring each decision to debate would provide endless opportunities for individual members to defend their library authorities ad infinitum, using the amendments as a device for doing nothing. Thirdly, on the thorny question of transfer of library powers it was conceded that the Minister would only approve such a change if he were of the opinion that it would lead to an improvement in the library services already provided by the smaller authorities.⁷⁸

The Bill was subjected to Report Stage and Third Reading by the Commons on 8 June 1964, was debated by the Lords on the 30 June and 9 July and received the Royal Assent on the 31 July 1964. The provisions of the Public Libraries and

Museums Act would come into force on the 1 April 1965 constituting the following as library authorities:

- (i) the council of a county or county borough
- (ii) the council of a London borough
- (iii) the council of a non county borough or urban district where either the council was a library authority before the commencement of the Act, or the council was approved by the Secretary of State as a library authority.

Non county boroughs and urban districts could therefore lose or gain library powers with the population qualification of 40,000 again being applied. All other local authorities (parishes) would lose their library powers. The Act required the Secretary of State for Education and Science to

superintend and promote the improvement of the public library service provided by local authorities.⁷⁹

it also brought into being two Library Advisory Councils, one for England and one for Wales and placed a legal obligation on all local authorities to provide a public library service of a requisite standard.

It shall be the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof.⁸⁰

It is hardly surprising that the Act and its implications were the focal point of papers and discussion at the 1964 Library Association Public Libraries Conference. The County Librarian of Hertfordshire Miss L V Paulin, welcomed the Act pointing to the fact that local authorities now had a statutory duty to provide a library service of a certain standard. This duty placed a heavy responsibility on all library authorities, but especially on the smaller authorities and those non county boroughs and urban districts with populations in excess of 40,000 who might be

considering applying for library powers.⁸¹ A more jaundiced view was taken by W Caldwell, Head of the Department of Librarianship at Newcastle upon Tyne. He saw the Act as being similar to the proverbial curate's egg - it was good in parts. The bad parts arose from the possibilities provided for the smaller authorities, particularly the fact that removal of library powers for authorities below 40,000 could only be exercised by statutory instrument subject to annulment by either House.

Could anything be better calculated to clutter and delay implementation of the Act? One can almost hear now the tear - jerking speeches of prodded Members of Parliament representing authorities whose applications for retention of library powers have been rejected by the Secretary of State and who are seeking to have the appropriate statutory instrument annulled.⁸²

The legislation was also the main topic at the 1964 and 1965 Conference of Library Authorities in Wales and Monmouthshire. At the 1964 session (in a paper delivered prior to the Royal Assent) F M Gardner, President of the Library Association and a member of the Bourdillon Committee, raised the issue facing many library authorities in Wales

There is of course the problem of the small authorities. I wouldn't pretend to know what is in the Minister's mind, but it does seem that most authorities below 40,000 will disappear. Some on the borderline may survive but having in mind the standards contemplated, it would obviously be folly to spend large sums per head of population to maintain standards, when a larger authority could do the job better.⁸³

Gardner drove home his arguments with supporting statistical evidence on the performance of public library authorities in Wales. Levels of book purchase, expenditure per 1,000 population, number of professional staff employed - all were lower in Wales than in England. He acknowledged that there had been improvements, but perhaps not from the quarter that one might expect.

What is interesting is what has already been done since Roberts. Many authorities have already doubled their book expenditure, particularly those well behind. But... it is the larger authorities which have done least.⁸⁴ (Author's emphasis).

This is a telling point and the only conclusion that one can draw is that the smaller authorities, threatened with loss of autonomy in the wake of Roberts and Bourdillon were making stringent efforts to improve their library services. The larger authorities (in size and status) faced no such dangers and were thus less concerned to seek improvements.

Following the passing of the Bill local authorities in England and Wales responded to the requirements of the legislation by making more money available for library services and developments. Between 1965 and 1966 total net expenditure on public libraries increased by 17%; for the years 1966-82 the increase was 12% per annum, with the rate of growth being reduced to 8.2% for 1968-69.⁸⁵ A more extensive examination of statistical evidence reveals the pattern of response in Wales.

TABLE 1.1
AVERAGE ANNUAL INCREASE IN NET EXPENDITURE
ON PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN WALES⁸⁶

YEARS	% INCREASE
1952-57	9.5
1957-61	7.2
1961-64	10.0
1964-68	18.5

The completely different character of the period prior to and after 1964 is obvious. The first period is fairly constant the second exhibits real progress in monetary terms. However an investigation of the response by different local authorities in Wales exhibits considerable variation.

TABLE 1.2
PERCENTAGE INCREASES IN FUNDS ALLOCATED TO
PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN WALES BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES

	1952-57	1957-68
Counties	10.5	21
County Boroughs	10.2	10.8
Non County Boroughs	8.2	18.7
Urban Districts	3.5	20.9

These statistics provide further evidence for Gardner's assertions. The counties non county boroughs and urban districts react positively, but for different reasons. The counties were increasing their expenditure in response to the Act, but were also demonstrating the growing faith in larger units of service, particularly in the light of possible reorganization of local government. The non county boroughs and urban districts who stood to lose their library powers (a significant number in Wales) clearly attempted to put their house in order. The almost standstill reaction of the county boroughs can be explained by two factors: their future was not threatened by early reorganization proposals, nor by the Public Libraries and Museums Act.

One development which did not follow the Act was the widespread granting or withdrawal of library powers. The Royal Commissions on Local Government Reorganization had already begun their work by the mid 1960's and it was becoming clear that their investigations would occasion radical changes in the general structure of local government boundaries and responsibilities. Thus, the Public Libraries and Museums Act was overtaken by events: it would have been irresponsible to reallocate library powers under the Act only to have to contemplate possible further changes in a short space of time. In the event only one authority in England and Wales - the urban district of Chigwell in Essex (population 56,300) was granted library powers, effecting the legislation as from 1 April 1968.⁸⁷ On the converse side, although central government did not enforce the clause in the Act which would remove library powers, there was some voluntary relinquishment of powers on the part of the

smaller authorities who finally had to concede that they could no longer deliver an effective service

of the 180 small municipal library authorities which could conceivably have lost their powers under the Act, six relinquished powers on 1 April 1966, and eight on 1 April 1967, and none of these had a population greater than 20,000.⁸⁸

Events took a similar turn in Wales: in 1965-66, five local authorities - three non county boroughs and two urban districts - voluntarily gave up their library powers to the adjacent counties, and five parishes were obliged under the legislation to relinquish powers - again to the counties. The composition of local authorities providing an independent public library service in Wales on the 1 April 1970 was as follows:

Counties	13
County Boroughs	4
Non County Boroughs	11
Urban Districts	7
TOTAL	35 ⁸⁹

When matched against the 40,000 population qualification stipulated in the Act, 51.4% of these authorities in Wales were below that qualification - three counties (23%), eight non county boroughs (66%) and all of the urban districts. Thus, to all intents and purposes and leaving aside the disappearance of the Parishes, the status quo persisted. The structure and status of local authorities responsible for public libraries in England and Wales in the late 1960's remained in the mould cast in 1919. Several investigations had given close attention to the question of an ideal size for a library authority, their recommendations had been incorporated into legislation, and yet little or nothing had changed. It is salient to observe that solutions to this question of size finally arose, not from an awareness of a need for more efficient library services (though that might be a by- product), but from a realization that the whole

structure of local government had to be recast if local services were to adapt and meet the challenges of the future. In this process of reorganization, McColvin's words would be negated, and experience would show that the Lord was certainly on the side of the large armies.

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CHAPTER TWO

"A chaos of areas, a chaos of franchises, a chaos of authorities and a chaos of rates".

W Rathbone and W Pell
Local Government and Taxation, 1885

The three traditional units of local government in England and Wales have already been referred to in this study: they were the county, the borough and the parish. The evolution of the county may be traced back to feudal times when it was the territory granted by the King to an earl in return for acceptance of feudal obligations. After the feudal period, justices of the peace, selected by the King's representative, the Lord Lieutenant, became responsible for county government. As their name implies, justices were primarily concerned with the maintenance of law and order within the county, but they had some administrative duties in relation to prisons and bridges. The King also played an important role in the creation of boroughs as these were based on Royal Charters granted at different times by the monarchy. These Charters were valuable because they gave small towns certain rights and privileges. The borough could appoint its own justices and so maintain a court enabling disputes to be settled locally and at less cost. Markets could be held assisting trade and prosperity in the town, and the boroughs by virtue of their Charters, enjoyed separate Parliamentary representation. The parish was originally the smallest unit of church organisation but it gradually acquired non- ecclesiastical functions such as highway maintenance and the care of the poor in 1601. The decisions and activities of the parish had considerable relevance of the common man, having an immediate effect on his everyday life. Growing responsibilities did however pose problems for the parish and over a period of time duties and functions far outstripped financial and administrative resources. These problems were exacerbated by the fact that burdensome tasks such as the care of the highways and welfare of the poor had to be undertaken on a voluntary basis.

The three units - the county, the borough and the parish saw themselves as local institutions confining their functions to their locality and working to solve problems in that locality in a way that they thought best. Central control was slight and one of the main reasons for this was that national grants were not provided until the 1840s. This lack of central funding meant that the scale of activity was minimal. So that when extra responsibilities had to be met during the eighteenth century many ad hoc bodies were established to undertake tasks which were beyond the scope of the existing units of local government. The need for a more efficient system of road maintenance led to the creation of the Turnpike Trusts. Improvement Commissioners became responsible for street drainage and law and order (including an embryonic police force) and Poor Law Unions were brought into being by an Act of 1782 to appoint paid officers to carry out the distribution of relief. These developments were pragmatic: a decision to create bodies and allocate functions in response to a particular situation, to meet a particular pressing need. There was no blue-print, no master plan that was implemented in well thought out stages. The proliferation of ad hoc bodies contributed to a lack of cohesion in the provision of local services and although there was an ever growing pressure on counties, boroughs, parishes and the ad hoc bodies, the links between them were almost non-existent

the sense of separateness was so strong that the idea of a local government system with major and minor local authorities, with interlocking responsibilities did not emerge clearly until the nineteenth century.¹

Local government did not evolve to provide a co-ordinated system of administration for a logically defined range of services; it emerged piecemeal in answer to a succession of separate needs and demands. This led to a chaotic and often ridiculous pattern of overlapping authorities and areas, a pattern well illustrated by the following example.

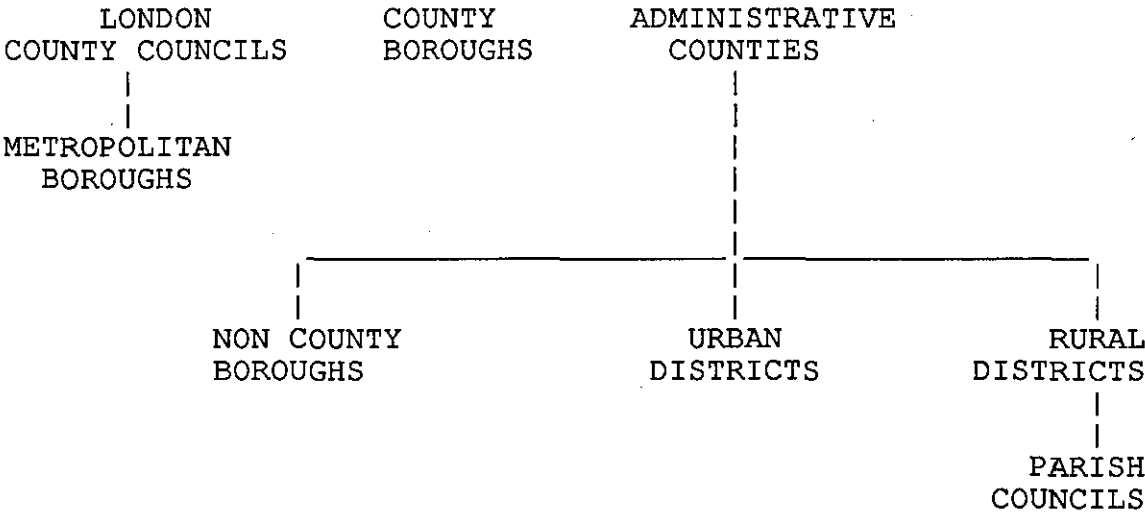
The parish of Threapwood in the Wrexham Poor Law Union was partly in Cheshire and partly in Denbighshire and so was part in England and part in Wales. A woman in the village, a pauper, went mad and had to be sent to an asylum. In England the charge of maintaining a pauper lunatic was 14s a week, in Wales it was only 8s a week. The question arose whether the woman was domiciled in the English or Welsh part of the village. The Clerk of the Wrexham union discovered that the house where the woman was born lay astride the county boundary. However he was able to establish that the woman was born in the Welsh piece of the house and so saved his authority 6s a week.²

This chaos of overlapping authorities, areas and responsibilities was thrown into sharper focus by the political reforms of the nineteenth century. The extension of the franchise helped to reveal the undemocratic nature of local government and led to further calls for reform. The changes occasioned by national legislation such as the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834 and the Education Act of 1870 placed new pressures on the structure of local government, a structure that was in places strained to breaking point. As the nineteenth century tide of reform reached and affected local government, it became clear that local government itself would have to change, if it was to implement national legislation in an effective and democratic manner. This change was brought into being by four Acts which carved out of the chaos of ad hoc municipal and rural administration, the two tier system of counties and county boroughs, and below them the non-county boroughs and district authorities. The first of these Acts was the Municipal Corporations Act, 1835 which gave boroughs a new constitution, established an elected council (albeit on a narrow franchise) and called for proper financial management. The Local Government Act, 1888 extended reforms to the counties, creating a new system of county councils elected on a ratepayer franchise and removing, at long last, the administrative powers of the non-elected Justices of the Peace. The original proposals of the 1888 Act would have brought all towns with a population below 150,000 under the control of the counties but due to pressure in Parliament this figure was reduced to

50,000. The Local Government Act, 1894 brought into being the urban and rural district councils, overhauled the powers and responsibilities of the parish and ensured that all of these councils were elected on a ratepayer franchise. Finally the London Government Act, 1899 established a two tier system with twenty eight metropolitan borough councils balanced by the London County Council. The overall local government structure created by these four acts was to remain intact for over half a century - until 1963 in London and until 1974 in the remainder of England and Wales.

TABLE 2.1

LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE - ENGLAND AND WALES 1899-1974
LONDON 1899-1963



In the wake of these structural changes local authorities enjoyed a steady growth of powers between 1835 and 1930, this being particularly true of the top tier authorities, the counties and county boroughs. Despite and indeed because of this extension in powers local authority structures and services found it difficult to keep pace with the rapid rate of social change in the latter years of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century. Firstly local authorities were to experience and cope with widespread demographic changes. Between 1882 and 1921 the population of England and Wales rose from 26 million to 38 million an increase of 46% in forty years. This increase was not distributed evenly throughout the country and was

most apparent in towns which extended into the surrounding countryside. These shifts and increases in population, combined with other factors such as extended mobility, presented the second problem - geographical changes. Put simply, the boundaries of local authorities became increasingly irrelevant. They had been determined by criteria which became archaic and outmoded: the geographical size of a parish was dependent on the distance that could be travelled during one day on foot, while the county represented an area that could be covered on horseback from sunrise to sunset.³ A local government map drawn within such confines could not reflect demographic and geographic changes and over a period of time became almost a chart of anomalies. At the turn of the century the population of the largest administrative county, Lancashire, was some four hundred times greater than that of the smallest county, Radnor. A third difficulty was that status bore little or no relation to population: there were authorities of second tier status with a greater population than that of the smaller county boroughs; it was even possible to find some third tier authorities, suburbanised parishes in rural districts, with a population not far short of Radnor. These variations led almost automatically to the fourth problem: status could often be of minimal relevance when one considered the capacity of a particular authority to deliver a particular service. Whilst it was true that the more expensive services such as highways and education became the province of top tier authorities, other services (libraries are an example) were provided and to a large extent duplicated by a range of authorities. This led to a needlessly complex system of local government creating confusion for the users of services and all but the most experienced administrators. Outside the larger towns some services were run by the county council and some by the district council. Urban and rural districts were twin organisations performing virtually identical tasks and usually administered from two offices in one small town. A fifth problem emanated from attempts to change the local

government system to reflect wider social developments. In the main these changes centred on applications for county borough status under the 1888 Act (the population qualification was raised to 75,000 in 1926). The granting of such status dependent on an arbitrary population qualification occurred in a haphazard fashion and could in no way be seen as part of a plan to rationalize local government structures and services. Further the process of awarding county borough status was particularly damaging to the other top tier authorities, the county councils. Between 1889 and 1925 there were 109 extensions of county borough areas and an increase in the number of county boroughs from 61 to 82 involving a combined loss to the counties of 350,000 acres, 3 million population and £14¹/₂ million in rateable values.⁴

Although local authorities had to face all these problems, their response was slow and all too often negative. Local government became characterised by factionalism with each type of authority fighting to hold on to powers or to attain new ones. In essence, the main function of the local authority associations was to reflect and support this factionalism, each association protecting the interests of its members while an arbiter (usually central government) sought the impossible consensus. Elected members and officers would be patriotically supportive of their authority and would tend to see any criticism as a personal slight. Councillors and the local authority associations also had powerful allies in Members of Parliament who would be more ready to debate the specific grievances or merits of their local authority rather than the wider principles of local government reform. Nor could it be suggested that such reform was a major priority and successive administrations were quick to realize that attempts at restructuring would be unpopular and politically unwise. The process would antagonize local authorities and carried a distinct possibility of being a vote loser as it would almost certainly involve boundary changes.

The first administration to grasp the nettle of restructuring and rationalisation was the War-time coalition government. In 1945 it published a White Paper⁵ which grudgingly accepted the need for reform and proposed the establishment of a Boundary Commission and district councils on the basis of certain population qualifications. The Commission was formally brought into being by the Local Government (Boundary Commission) Act, 1945 (the measure, which received the Royal Assent on 15 June 1945 was one of the last pieces of legislation promoted and passed by the Coalition Government; a General Election was held on 5 July 1945 with Labour being returned to power). Although the Commission commenced its task in a spirit of high idealism, it soon found that its work was fettered in two crucial ways. Firstly its recommendations had to fit in with the existing structure of local government and it could not introduce any new type of authority. Secondly, the Commission had no powers over functions: it could push boundaries this way and that, demote county boroughs and amalgamate counties, but it could do nothing to reallocate functions to the most appropriate authority. The Commission laboured for two years and produced a report which revealed the fatal flaw of its investigations.

We have definitely reached the conclusion that in many areas - and these cover the great bulk of the population - our present powers and instructions do not permit the formation of local government units as effective and convenient, as in our opinion they should be ... Our experience also confirms the statement made recently in Parliament by the Minister of Health (Aneurin Bevan): 'Everyone who knows about local government feels that it is nonsense to talk about functions and boundaries separately. They have to be taken together...'. We have no jurisdiction over functions.⁶

The specific proposals that were presented succeeded in incurring the almost united hostility of local authorities. In the face of such criticism the Atlee Government decided to wind up the work of the Commission in 1949, realising that changes and amalgamations would hardly be politic in

the run up to the General Election of 1950. The Commission had little to show for two years work - its proposals were rejected and it had failed to move a boundary a single yard in any direction.

The problem of local government reform did not go away. The incoming Conservative government was made aware of the need for reform by the constant stream of Private Bills sponsored by the larger boroughs to attain county borough status. The Government opposed and defeated these Bills on the grounds that general reorganisation was coming soon and should not be prejudiced. Such stop-gap opposition could not however be presented as policy and had the net effect of further straining relations between counties and county boroughs and between these authorities and central government. The Minister in charge (Duncan Sandys) was aware that policy would have to be formulated and so he entered into negotiations with the local authority associations. The outcome was a series of White Papers,⁷ one of which

Proposed to create two local government Commissions, one for England and one for Wales. Their main task would be to make recommendations to the Minister in regard to the creation and extension of county boroughs, any necessary alterations in county boroughs and the organisation of local government in the conurbations.⁸

The Commissions were formally brought into being by the Local Government Act, 1958. The English Commission approached its task by examining general review areas, groups of counties and county boroughs outside London and special review areas, Tyneside, West Yorkshire, South East Lancashire, Merseyside and the West Midlands. The Commissioners for Wales were appointed on the 5 January 1959 and tackled the problem in a similar manner, dividing the country into three areas:

- (i) the counties of Glamorgan and Monmouth and the county boroughs of Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Newport and Swansea;

- (ii) the counties of Brecon, Cardigan, Carmarthen, Pembroke and Radnor;
- (iii) the counties of Anglesey, Caernarfon, Denbigh, Flint and Montgomery.

The Welsh Commission devoted considerable time to the question of an ideal size for a top-tier authority and although the Commissioners readily admitted that they could give no guidance on the optimum size for greatest effectiveness they did assert

that there is a minimum size in terms of population and resources below which the full range of county functions cannot be effectively carried out ... many of our Welsh counties fall below that minimum and that accordingly it is desirable ... that the smaller Welsh counties should be replaced by larger administrative units.⁹

In its Draft Proposals published in May 1961 the Commission argued for a radical solution, reducing the number of administrative counties from thirteen to five. In theory these proposals seemed commendable in their attempt to link the rural hinterland with the wealthier, populous areas of North and South Wales. In practice they were seen as a rural sell out in that in each of the five new counties rural councillors could always be outvoted by their urban counterparts. Amidst a welter of criticism one of the few organizations to actually welcome the Draft Proposals was the Library Association who believed that the new county pattern would lead to an improved service. Such opinion was the exception and the Commission was forced to amend its plans in its Final Report published in December 1962. The number of counties was increased to seven and the number of county boroughs to three (Cardiff, Newport and Swansea with Merthyr Tydfil losing its status as a county borough). The seven counties would be:

- (i) Mid Wales - Brecon and Radnor, Montgomery, North Cardiganshire and southern Meirioneth;
- (ii) Anglesey;

- (iii) Gwynedd - Caernarfon, northern Meirioneth and southern Denbigh;
- (iv) Flint and eastern Denbigh;
- (v) West Wales - Carmarthen, Pembroke and south Cardiganshire;
- (vi) Glamorgan (to include Merthyr Tydfil);
- (vii) Gwent - Monmouth.

A serious difficulty facing both Commissions was that they (like the previous investigation of 1945) were not empowered to examine functions. This led to comments which were almost a word for word reiteration of earlier complaints.

Boundaries cannot reasonably be divorced from functions or finance. We have tried faithfully to carry out the tasks assigned to us ... But we cannot help wondering whether, had we been allowed to consider at least the distribution of functions, we might not have done a better job. That we were not permitted to consider the redistribution of functions was ... a serious mistake, and was, in fact a disservice to Wales.¹⁰

Both Commissions also became bogged down in procedure. The first stage of investigations were based on the evidence of local authorities and national and local bodies followed by visits to discuss the issues with residents in each locality. All of this information was assembled into Draft Proposals which were amended after further verbal and written representations. This led to a Final Report with any changes subject to a public inquiry giving an opportunity for arguments to be deployed once more. This tortuous and lengthy process had the effect of causing tension between local and central government and of whittling down the recommendations of the Commissions at each stage of negotiation.

the procedure designed for consultations, enquiries and appeals was so complex that some five years elapsed between the start of local discussions and the operative date for any actual change ... There was a marked tendency for each stage of decision-making to reduce the amount of change.¹¹

This slowness was one of the prime factors which led to the demise of the English and Welsh Commissions, but there were also specific grievances arising from weaknesses in the investigations and their reception by Government. In the case of Wales the argument for seven counties paid no attention to existing boundaries, but more serious was the reprieve of Anglesey as a top-tier authority. Although the Commissioners had admitted the need for larger counties they decided in their Final Report to include Anglesey, the fourth smallest county in Wales, in their list of top tier authorities. This was a glaring exercise in self-contradiction and led to a note of reservation by one of the Commissioners. The ultimate blow to the English Commission was the rejection by Government of its proposals on the county of Rutland, a top tier authority of only 25,000 which relied heavily on neighbouring counties for the provision of many services. Faced with amalgamation with Leicestershire, the Rutland councillors fought hard to retain their independence, and the Government, in the person of the Minister, Sir Keith Joseph, bowed to pressure. The decision seriously eroded the credibility of the English Commission and brought many to the conclusion that there was little point in long and expensive investigations if at the end of the process such an investigation could not achieve the amalgamation of one of the smallest counties in both England and Wales. The incoming Labour Government of 1964 soon realised the futility and irrationality of this method of dealing with the problem. A head strong new minister, Richard Crossman, wanted a new start and so in January 1966 the Old Commissions were disbanded and on the 24 May 1966 the Prime Minister announced in the Commons, the appointment of a Royal Commission on Local Government in England, under the chairmanship of Sir John Maud (later Lord Redcliffe-Maud), Master of University College Oxford.

To consider the structure of Local Government in England outside greater London, in relation to its existing functions; and to make recommendations for authorities and boundaries, and for functions and their division, having regard to the size and

character of the areas in which these can be most effectively exercised and the need to sustain a viable system of democracy.¹²

The fact that this was a Royal Commission for England (a similar investigation, the Wheatley Commission was instigated in Scotland) reveals that Wales was to receive and indeed was already receiving separate treatment. Between 1965 and 1971 consideration of the reform of local government in England differed from that relating to Wales: the objectives may have been the same, but the ways in which the problem was tackled and the solutions formulated were different.

Redcliffe-Maud's Commission commenced its task by seeking evidence from interested parties. In all 2,156 bodies offered written evidence; of these 1,269 were individual local authorities, 536 were individual members of the public with the remaining 350 or so representing various political, business and professional organizations. The Library Association falls into this latter category and it presented its evidence to the Commission in October 1966. The Association outlined the range and standard of service to be expected from a modern library authority and then explained how the library service must be allocated to achieve such a standard

We share the view of those who have urged in the past that library services can be provided more efficiently and economically by larger local government units than the smaller units which between 1850 and 1964 were in the vast majority ... We therefore recommend that 'most purpose' authorities or 'first tier' authorities in any new structure involving delegation of functions and powers should be library authorities.¹³

The Society of County Librarians was not prepared to be so specific calling for the library function to be exercised by larger authorities. The County Councils' Association was even more ambivalent, suggesting that powers could be exercised by first and second tier authorities and that more

consideration needed to be given to the division of responsibilities. The other relevant local authority associations satisfied themselves with a general review of the effectiveness of library authorities within their strata and made no recommendation. On a broader front the evidence of the associations was once again an exercise in self interest. The County Councils' Association advocated a two tier system, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities favoured a one tier pattern, while rural districts and parish councils urged the retention of more and smaller authorities.

Redcliffe-Maud and his Commissioners found that one of the most intractable problems that they had to deal with was the ideal size for different authorities within a reformed structure. Like all the previous investigations into the restructuring of local government, and like the investigations into the best pattern for library service, the Commission received wildly conflicting evidence on this crucial issue. The ministries called for large units of between 3,000,000 and 5,000,000 population where the associations representing the lower strata of local authorities argued that many functions could be retained by and operated within units of between 75,000 and 100,000. Unlike previous investigations Redcliffe-Maud did make considerable attempts to seek answers by appointing a permanent research team and one investigation was undertaken into the correlations between the size and performance of local authorities. Though the techniques may have been more sophisticated, the problems encountered were familiar: what criteria should be used, population alone, population and geography or these two plus financial resources? While it was relatively easy to measure input statistics, outputs were often immeasurable or unquantifiable; finally all evidence and data could only related to the situation at that time and could be rapidly eroded by technological developments. The relevance of this last difficulty is usefully indicated by the following prescient comment

many of the yardsticks which various ministries apply to local government are essentially ephemeral. Within a decade could we not be in a position where a modest type of computer is in the financial reach of the tiniest council?¹⁴

Within slightly more than a decade such computers were within the reach not only of the tiniest council, but also many individuals.

When the Commission's report¹⁵ was published in June 1964, Redcliffe- Maud and his fellow investigators admitted that despite the research undertaken and the volumes of evidence gathered, they could give no indicative guidelines relating to the maximum size of an authority. Nevertheless

Our own conclusion is that there is no single service in which administration by a very large authority would have decisive disadvantages. Future developments in most services seem almost certain to favour much bigger operational units than most of the existing ones.¹⁶

Redcliffe-Maud further stated that the population of these bigger operational units would be between 250,000 and 1 million and that their geographical boundaries would bring the virtue of combining town and country. The majority of England (in terms of land area) would be served by 61 unitary or all purpose authorities, but in three conurbations (Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester) there would be a two tier structure of metropolitan counties and metropolitan districts. Within this new structure library powers would be with the fifty eight unitary authorities and twenty metropolitan districts giving a total of seventy eight. Apart from this recommendation on allocation of powers Redcliffe-Maud was sparse in its comments on libraries dealing with the matter in a few words which proposed that

the library service ... should always be organised over the whole of a unitary authority's area.¹⁷

The Government's response to Redcliffe-Maud was presented in a White Paper published on the 4 February 1970.¹⁸ Most of the Commissions' proposals were accepted and the impetus for reform was maintained. The Prime Minister Harold Wilson had spoken of an intention "to press ahead quickly"¹⁹ and the introduction of legislation seemed imminent. The flow of events was however interrupted by the General Election held on 18 June 1970, and won by the Conservatives under Edward Heath. A new administration brought a new policy unveiled by Peter Walker, Secretary of State for Environment in a White Paper which appeared on 16 February 1971.²⁰ In this Conservative statement of intent, the unitary concept was abandoned in favour of a two tier county/district model; the split was further reflected in the urban areas which would be administered within metropolitan counties and districts as advocated by Redcliffe-Maud. The allocation of library powers was also as in Redcliffe-Maud

responsibilities for libraries should rest with education - the district councils in the metropolitan areas and the county councils elsewhere.²¹

giving a total of seventy two library authorities in England: thirty eight rural counties with populations ranging from 251,000 to 1.3 million and thirty four metropolitan districts with populations between 173,000 and over 1 million. The rationale behind this recommendation on the allocation of library powers is clearly based on the traditional concept of the library service. In a new revitalised local government structure libraries were still seen as an adjunct to education; rural counties and metropolitan districts were to be the education authorities and so libraries are tacked on almost in an automatic fashion. This unimaginative proposal is all the more dispiriting when one considers that the Library Association in evidence to Redcliffe-Maud had specifically pointed to the dangers of linking the library service to education.

Although there were some modifications and boundary changes, the policy for reorganization in England presented in the Conservative White Paper was the policy which became embodied into the Local Government Bill which was presented to Parliament on 3 November 1971.

It now becomes necessary to consider the proposals for the reorganisation of local government in Wales. While Redcliffe-Maud was investigating this question in England, different approaches were sought in Wales. The main reason for this divergence lies in the Welsh Office established by the Wilson government in 1964, with James Griffiths as the first Secretary of State for Wales. It was acknowledged that Wales presented special problems (sparse population, low rateable values etc) and as the new Department of State had responsibility for local government - one of its few functions - it seemed sensible and logical that the problem of reorganisation should be looked at by the Welsh office.

In these circumstances it appeared that the virtues claimed for the Welsh Office by its advocates - in particular as an agency to promote sensible cooperation and coordination - were exactly appropriate to the task of reforming local government.²²

James Griffiths moved ahead with some urgency, appointing a Working Party in March 1965 to examine the question. From the outset the idea of an open or semi-public commission was abandoned in favour of an investigating team made up of section heads at the Welsh Office and chaired by the Permanent Secretary, Goronwy Daniel (later Sir Goronwy Daniel). One outside individual was also invited to be a member of the Working Party - Professor Ivor Gowan of the Department of Political Science at the University College of Wales Aberystwyth. From 1965 to 1967 the Working Party gathered evidence from interested parties and the local authority associations on an informal basis. Although a mass of data was collected it is clear that the real influence lay with the civil servants²³ in Cardiff and

Whitehall. The eventual outcome of these consultations and deliberations was a White Paper published 11 July 1967,²⁴ which pointed to the central problem

the main defects in the present Welsh organisation are that most of the local authorities are too small and weak to discharge their responsibilities effectively.²⁵

In order to offer a solution three alternative models for reform were investigated - a strengthened version of the existing structure, a unitary or all purpose structure and a regional or sub-regional system. The former evolutionary approach was the one advocated, a course of action that one might well expect from a Working Party in which the prime movers were civil servants working for the most part with a case put forward by the Local Authority Associations. Accordingly it was proposed that

- (i) Five new administrative counties would replace the existing thirteen. These would be:

Gwynedd - an amalgamation of Anglesey, Caernarfon, Denbigh, Flint and Merioneth - population 553,460;

Powys - an amalgamation of Brecon, Montgomery and Radnor - population 116,470;

Dyfed - an amalgamation of Cardigan, Carmarthen and Pembroke - population 316,640;

Glamorgan - the existing county with the addition of Merthyr Tydfil which was to lose its County Borough status - population 721,820;

Gwent - the existing county of Monmouth - population 419,900.

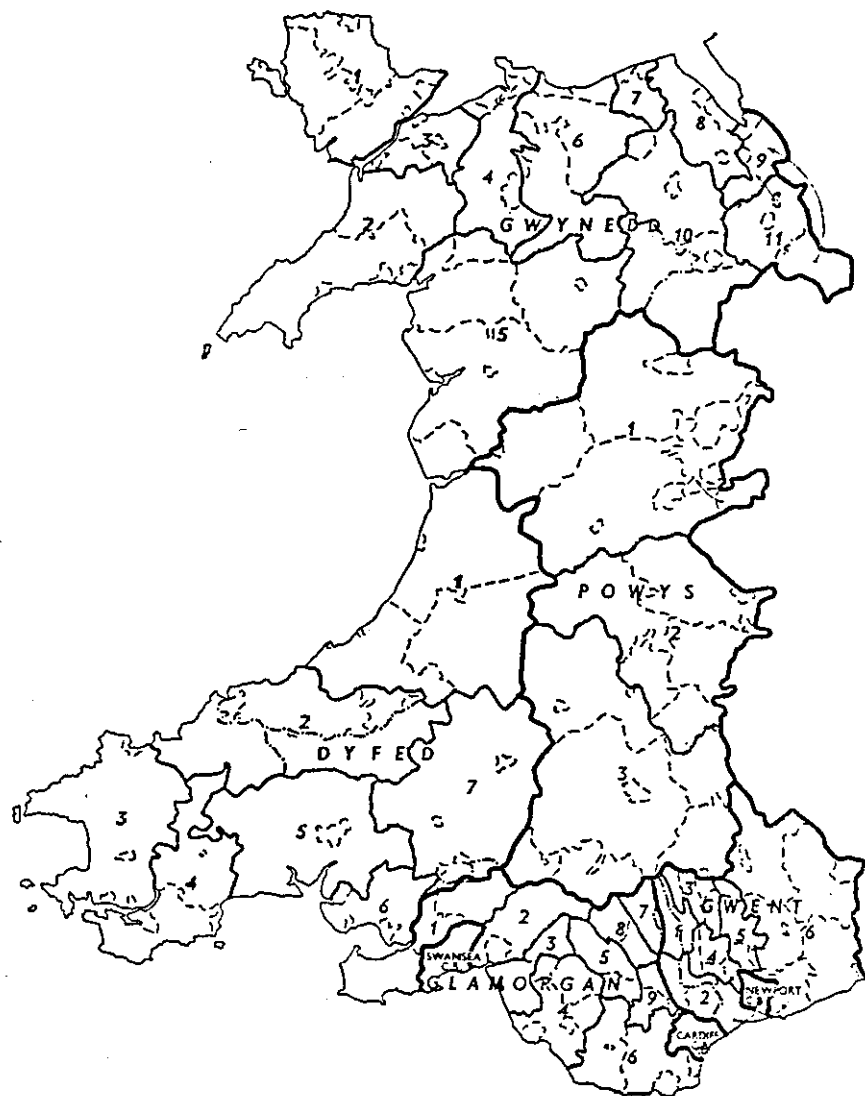
- (ii) Three County Boroughs

Cardiff - population, 289,050

Swansea - population, 170,870

Newport - population, 113,000.

MAP 2.1
LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE AS RECOMMENDED IN
LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN WALES, JULY 1967



WALES: Proposed distribution of county, county borough and district authorities. The proposed new county and county borough boundaries are shown by a thick red line; the new district boundaries by a thinner red line. The populations, areas and rateable values of the proposed new authorities are described in Appendix 2.

The new counties and county boroughs would be the top tier authorities; below them there would be -

- (iii) Thirty six new districts, preserving where possible the identities of the former counties.

The Working Party also proposed -

- (iv) a nominated Welsh Council with advisory powers, membership and functions being taken partly from central and local government. (It later became clear that this was a diluted version of the original proposal for an elected council with executive powers²⁶).

On the allocation of library powers the White Paper was ambiguous. While it states that

the new county councils ... should have responsibility for the same functions as the present authorities.²⁷

libraries are not actually included in the list of functions. It is thus only possible to assume that libraries would go to the five top tier authorities - an assumption which is less than convincing in the light of a later comment in paragraph 32 of the White Paper.

Some of the new districts, particularly former counties which as such had previously exercised library powers and some existing library authorities in the larger urban centres might be able to make a strong case to the Secretary of State for Education and Science to be considered as suitable bodies to exercise library powers for their areas.²⁸ (Author's emphasis).

These are crucial words in the context of this study. They represent the first indication that in a reformed structure of local government in Wales an opportunity would still be available for libraries to be operated by first and second tier authorities. While the White Paper acknowledged the need for larger units for almost all the other major services, libraries were the exception. The thinking ran contrary to the bulk of evidence presented to Roberts, Bourdillon and Redcliffe-Maud and undoubtedly led ultimately

to the inclusion of a section in the Local Government Bill which gave districts in Wales the right to apply for library powers.

There is some evidence that a sector of the profession in Wales reacted swiftly to these developments. At the close of a week-end school of County Librarians held at Carmarthen between 14-16 July 1967 (three days after the publication of the White Paper) the following resolution was passed

The exclusion of the library service from the list of specific functions of the new county councils in paragraph 30 of the White Paper on Local Government in Wales is viewed with concern ...; the stipulation in paragraph 32 authorizing newly created district councils to seek library powers is regarded as a contrary recommendation to the general intention of a White Paper to safeguard local government functions by the creation of larger administrative units.²⁹

The resolution went on to recommend to the Secretary of State for Wales that library powers should only be allocated to the top tier authorities - the counties and county boroughs. The passage of events indicate that the Secretary of State was to pay no attention to this point of view - matters moved on under the influence of those whose voices and viewpoints were more powerful than those of librarians.

While paragraph 32 caused offence to County Librarians in Wales, it offered new hope to those librarians working for non-county authorities. A positive response on their part was the formation in 1967 of the North Wales Urban Libraries Group. This federation of eight public library systems (Bangor, Caernarfon, Colwyn Bay, Conway, Flint, Llandudno, Rhyl and Wrexham) foresaw the enormous problems that would arise if library services in North Wales were to be administered by the one large county of Gwynedd.

The only feasible solution is decentralisation, basing the new library authorities on the proposed Districts by vesting so far as is possible the powers of existing library

authorities in the new Districts. We are convinced that autonomous District Councils would give a more efficient service to the public than by treating each District as a Regional Service Point in a larger authority.³⁰

To give added weight to its assertions the Group instigated schemes of cooperative purchase and inter-lending and members met regularly for an inter-change of ideas. These were the practical achievements; what was not attained was a supra local reference service, to be financed (a rather unpalatable suggestion made by the Group) by the Department of Education and Science. Nevertheless the work of the group from 1967 to 1972 represented a pragmatic attempt to capitalize on the opportunities offered by paragraph 32 of the White Paper. Districts indicated that by working in unison they could offer a comprehensive and efficient service. It is ironic that despite their preparatory work none of these eight authorities was to receive serious consideration as providers of a library service in the post 1972 system.

On a wider front the 1967 White Paper was criticised from several quarters. Traditionalists argued that the county amalgamations went too far; radicals pointed to the fact that the new limits were no more than a joining of existing counties, that the advisory council would be no more than a talking shop and most seriously that the new structure would perpetuate one of the inherent weaknesses by retaining the town- county dichotomy in South Wales. This latter charge was strengthened with the growing realization that Redcliffe-Maud would deliberately abandon the town/county divide and opt for unitary authorities.

The Welsh Office now embarked on a further series of consultations with local authorities and local authority associations. If there had ever been a possibility that separate legislation would be drafted for Wales, that possibility was now lost. George Thomas, the third

Secretary of State to address the issue in four years was forced to admit in the Commons that although there was

sufficient general degree of support to justify my proceeding with the further detailed work needed to prepare legislation ... I cannot at this stage say when it will become possible to introduce legislation.³¹

The Secretary of State went on to support the evolutionary approach of the 1967 White Paper - the only major difference arising out of his statement was that North Wales would now be divided into two counties, giving a total of six instead of the White Paper's five. The town/county dichotomy would persist, a decision that became ever stranger as England moved towards the publication of the Redcliffe-Maud report. In consequence when that report did appear in June 1969 the Labour Government found itself confronted by conflicting sets of proposals for England and Wales. Obviously to support the unitary principle in England and reject it in Wales would be hailed as nonsense; somewhere along the road to reform, the policies had to align and so accordingly

in the light of further consideration ... the Secretary of State for Wales proposes now to make a further urgent review in the geographical counties of Glamorgan and Monmouth to see if a satisfactory pattern can be worked out which will avoid the continued division between county boroughs and administrative counties.³²

This urgent review led to a further set of proposals and a further White Paper published 17 March 1970.³³ With this cold, calculating document, laden with sociological arguments, Wales was finally brought back into line and proposals for reorganisation matched those advocated by Redcliffe-Maud for England. Three unitary authorities were proposed for South Wales:

- (i) Swansea and West Glamorgan;
- (ii) Cardiff and East Glamorgan;
- (iii) Gwent - Newport and Monmouth.

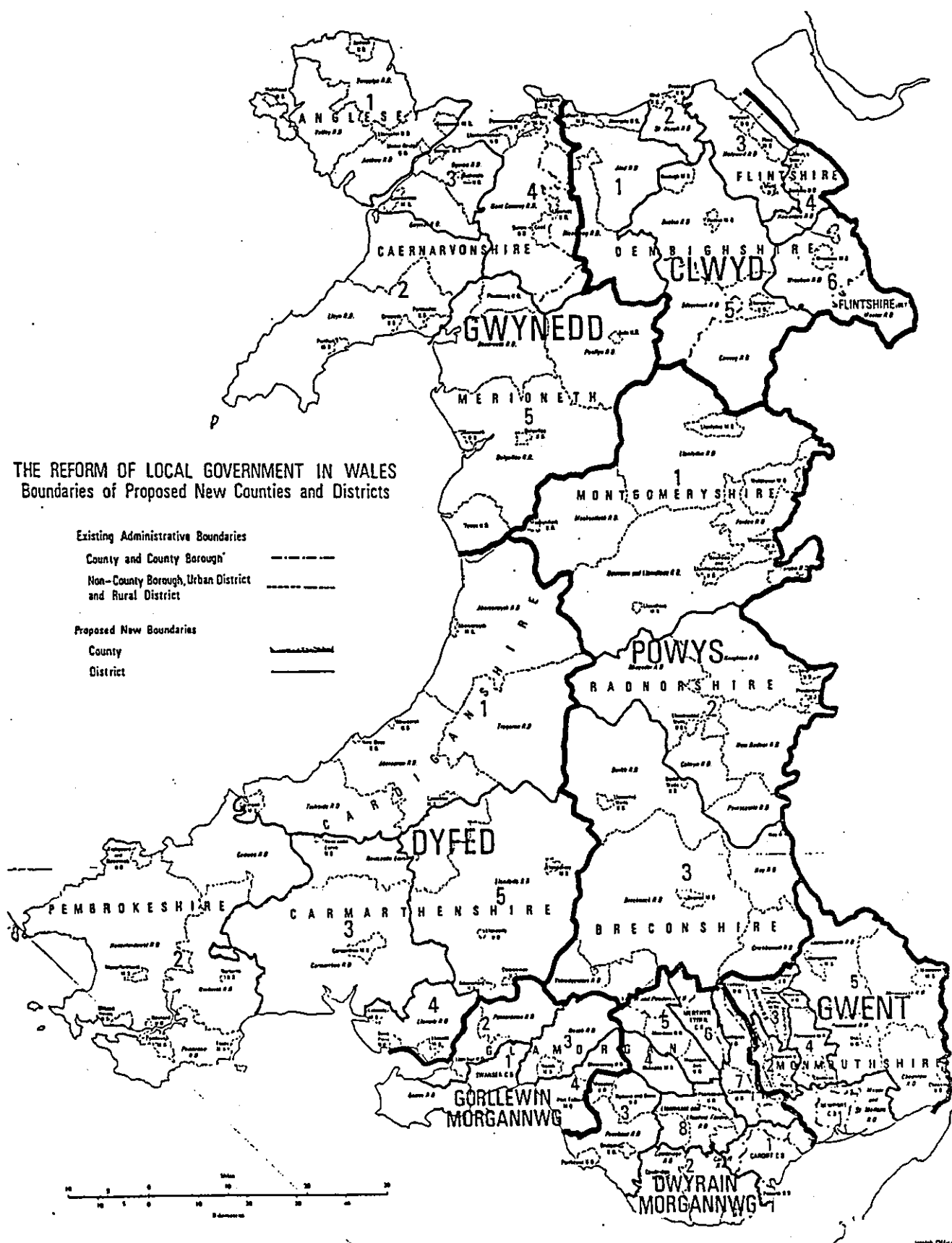
The remainder of Wales was to be administered in the two tier pattern of counties and districts. The 1970 White Paper said nothing about functions but promised that a further opportunity would now be given for consultation with all interested parties.

In the event, the consultative process was cut short by the General Election of June 1970. As indicated earlier the policy of the new Conservative administration was to reject the unitary philosophy of Redcliffe-Maud and to replace it with a two tier county-district model. The policy was also to apply in Wales: on the same day as proposals were announced for England, 16 February 1971, a Consultative Document was published for Wales.³⁴ In this, the fifth blueprint in ten years, it was clear that the general approach to reform was all but identical to the pattern offered for England. Much of the phraseology in the two documents was identical, they were published on the same day, and both proposed a two tier structure. In Wales there would be seven counties or top tier authorities (Clwyd, Gwynedd, Powys, Dyfed, West Glamorgan, East Glamorgan and Gwent) and thirty six districts or second tier authorities. Although the Consultative Document dealt with Wales in exactly the same way as England as regards the overall plan of a reformed structure, there were exceptions and one of these dealt with libraries.

In these services, the Government think it is right to allow for the possibility that where a district council has a sufficiently large population to provide them economically and efficiently and their provision by the district council would not substantially damage the service in the remainder of the county, the district council should be allowed to provide the service. It is not thought that there will be more than a few places in Wales where these conditions will be met.³⁵

This section of the Consultative Document went on to explain that the power to allocate responsibility for libraries in Wales would rest with the Minister (the Secretary of State

MAP 2.2
LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE AS RECOMMENDED IN
THE REFORM OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN WALES, 1971



for Education and Science) and that a decision would be taken well in advance of the actual date of transfer of powers. Other differences between England and Wales related to refuse disposal, car parks and trading standards. With the statement in the Labour White Paper of 1967 and this expression of Conservative policy there was by 1971 what may be described as a bi-partisan approach to the operation of public library services in Wales. Both parties had clearly stated that responsibility in the main would be with the counties, the top tier authorities, but that an opportunity should be given for the districts, the second tier authorities to apply for powers. Neither party had said what criteria should apply before library powers would be granted. The second statement was a little more specific in that it spoke of a need to provide library services economically and efficiently, and that the granting of powers should not damage the county service, but this hardly amounted to detailed guidelines. The important point is that with the inclusion of these words in the 1971 Consultative Document, policy in relation to the operation of library services in England and Wales was different. The Conservative White Paper for England echoed Redcliffe-Maud and placed libraries with education - at district level in the metropolitan counties and with the administrative counties elsewhere. In Wales libraries could be with the seven new counties, but they might also be with the districts which had no responsibility for education.

The only major change in Conservative policy before the Local Government Bill was laid before Parliament was that a decision was taken, at the eleventh hour in November 1971 to further sub-divide the existing county of Glamorgan to form three new counties. The third county, South Glamorgan emerged as a two district county completely dominated by the city of Cardiff with a population of 290,000 and rateable value of £14.6m while the smaller Vale of Glamorgan district had a population of 110,000 and a rateable value of £3.5m.

The wider effect of all this was the creation of an unbalanced and poorly resourced county in mid-Glamorgan.

Confronted with acute social and economic problems of declining industries of the valleys, the new county [Mid-Glamorgan] was denied the broad rate base which the Cardiff link would have provided. Thus an important feature of the reorganised local government scene in Wales was an impoverished county with a population of 529,000 and possessing a rateable value of only £14m.³⁶

The proposal to create the third county of South Glamorgan was attacked as a clear case of gerrymandering. More serious is the charge that the decision could be seen as an object lesson in irony at the culmination of a long process of investigation of local government structures in Wales, one of whose prime objectives had been the creation of local authorities more equal in terms of population and resources. As a result Wales was now to have eight counties with responsibility for all the major services and thirty six districts, some of whom might operate library services.

The Local Government Bill was presented to Parliament and given its First Reading on 3 November 1971. Clause 198 dealt with Public Libraries and Museums (England) and specified that the library authorities in England would be:

- (i) the council of a non-metropolitan county;
- (ii) the council of a London borough;
- (iii) the council of a metropolitan district.

For Wales Clause 199 specified that the library authorities would be:

- (i) the council of a county;
- (ii) the council of a district who have been constituted a library authority under this section.

(A complete version of Clause 199 is provided in Appendix 1).

Clause 199 went on to explain that district councils in Wales would be able to apply to the Secretary of State for Education and Science for constitution as library authorities any time before 1 April 1974. The option was available to existing library authorities and to those who had never held library powers. As he sought a decision the Minister would consider the ability of a district to provide an efficient library service and the effect which any such granting of powers would have on the adjacent county library service. Powers would be granted for a period of ten years, the situation to be reviewed at the end of that period.

The Bill received its Second Reading on the 16 and 17 November 1971. During these debates the Secretary of State for Wales (Peter Thomas a Welshman, but MP for Hendon South) dealt with differences in the legislation as it related to England and Wales. The question of libraries did not arise and the Minister devoted most of his speech to an explanation of why there was not a separate Bill for Wales and why the Conservatives had found it necessary to divide Glamorgan three ways. The Bill now passed on to the Committee Stage and Clauses 198 and 199 were debated at the forty first sitting of Standing Committee D on 7 March 1972. The main point at issue was that England should have parity of provision with Wales and that Clause 199 should apply.

If the Government cannot concede the very proper case that district authorities shall be the library authorities then I hope at least the Government will accept the argument that the provisions in England shall be the same as in Wales and that district councils, providing they have sufficient population and the efficiency of a proper library authority, shall be designated by the Secretary of State as a library authority.³⁷

Other members supported this view and their arguments seemed to be partly accepted by the Minister replying for the Government, Mr Michael Heseltine who was Under Secretary at the Department of the Environment.

I have listened carefully to the argument which has been developed about the English position ... and that we should seek a way of moving more closely towards that which is provided in the Bill for Wales ... I think there is a case for considering the arguments put forward by my hon. friend.³⁸

On the basis of this assurance, the amendments to place England on an equal footing with Wales were withdrawn. Michael Heseltine also indicated that library powers in England could be allocated to districts through agency arrangements. Clause 199 relating to Public Libraries and Museums (Wales) was debated next. Debated is in reality something of a misnomer: all that occurred was that Alec Jones (Member for Rhondda West) sought from David Gibson-Watt (Minister of State at the Welsh Office) a list of the criteria that would be used in deciding which of the district authorities in Wales would exercise library functions. Various assurances were provided and this brief question and answer session³⁹ represents the extent of the debate on Clause 199 of the Local Government Bill as it passed through its various stages in Parliament.

The next opportunity to discuss the subject arose during the Third Reading of the Bill on the 20 July 1972. It becomes clear that the assurances given by Michael Heseltine at Committee Stage were not satisfactory: members returned to the fray seeking further clarification on why England was to be treated differently from Wales.

The Minister spoke of the Welsh proposals ... providing that during a specified period an application may be made to the Secretary of State for an order whereby the district council is constituted the library authority in place of the County Council. All I would say is that English district councils should not be worse off than district councils in the Principality of Wales.⁴⁰

Other members put forward the same argument, some enquiring why it was possible for relatively small districts to apply for library powers in Wales while that opportunity was denied large district councils in England. In his reply the

Minister for the Environment offered two reasons to explain the differences between the two countries.

My Hon. Friends quite rightly asked why there was a difference for Wales. There are two factors which led my right hon and learned friend the Secretary of State for Wales to decide on the Welsh provisions. One was that under Welsh proposals quite a few existing counties are being made into districts. Because of their geographical size and because they have been counties with county educational services, he considered that this provision was needed there. The other factor was the Welsh language. There could be a need in certain parts of Wales to make a designation because of language factors. That sort of factor does not apply in England.⁴¹

These are weak arguments. It was hardly logical to press for library services in England to be with the existing education authorities while stating that the possibility was provided for library services in Wales to be with previous education authorities. The argument on the Welsh language is rendered weak in hindsight: it played no part in the decision to grant powers in 1974 and language factors were not prominent in any of the four districts that were ultimately granted powers. The inclusion of the point on language is also surprising in that this reason had never been previously presented as a possible consideration in the decision to allocate library powers.

At the end of this Third Reading debate the amendment to give districts in England the right to apply for library powers was put to the vote and defeated by 112 votes to 130. Voting was strictly on party lines and seven Conservative members for Welsh constituencies found themselves in the ridiculous position of voting against the rights of districts in England, while agreeing a moment later for such rights to be made available to district authorities in Wales. Clause 200, which gave Welsh districts the right to apply, was not in fact debated and was agreed to without a vote. One can only conclude that the excellence, or otherwise, of public library services within a new local

government structure in Wales was not uppermost in members' minds when they debated these clauses. The Conservatives were determined that one set of arrangements should apply in England and another in Wales and ultimately rejected all arguments that districts might apply for library powers in England. More interesting is the fact that no member for a Welsh constituency attempted to put the converse argument proposing that Wales should be brought back into line with England. At no juncture during the passage of the Bill - Second Reading, Committee Stage or Third Reading - did a single Welsh member speak against the rights of districts in Wales. In essence the bi-partisan support for districts which became evident in the 1967 and 1971 documents⁴² was maintained. Conservative members from Wales supported the argument and voted for the Clause because this was a Conservative Bill; Labour members (particularly those representing South Wales constituencies) viewed the question in a constituency light and naturally gave their support to the districts.

The Bill passed to the Lords and although the allocation of library powers in England was discussed, the Government refused to concede any points. The Local Government Act 1972 received the Royal Assent on 26 October 1972 - all the changes occasioned by the legislation would come into effect on the 1 April 1974. Section 207 of the Act (identical in wording to Clause 199) was the one which dealt with the granting of library powers in Wales (a full version of Section 207 is provided in Appendix 2). The door was now open for districts in Wales to present their case to the Secretary of State for Education and Science.

Although English districts had failed to secure similar rights, Sections 101 and 110 of the Act did provide an opportunity for these authorities to seek a library role via agency arrangements. Further guidance on this and other shared functions was outlined in a Departmental Circular⁴³ issued on the 19 December 1972. The bulk of the

introductory material in the circular consisted of general statements about reform and emphasised the need to avoid misunderstanding or conflict in the run-up period to 1 April 1974. The significant part of the circular lay in five annexes and the last of these dealt with the allocation of library functions. The philosophy presented was overtly supportive of large units of service with major responsibilities falling to the counties.

Present and future trends in the library service emphasise the need for a strong county library service (in the non-metropolitan counties) including strong support and specialist services provided for the counties as a whole.⁴⁴

Such an agency role as was available would be restricted to the larger urban non-metropolitan districts; even here agency arrangements must not impair the county library service and professional staff could only be attached to the district and must be in the employ of the county.

More detailed guidance for Welsh districts was provided in a joint circular issued by the Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office on 29 March 1973.⁴⁵ (A full version of this circular is provided in Appendix 3). The overall tenor of this circular also was one of dissuasion rather than persuasion. The benefits of operating libraries within larger units of administration were re-emphasised and districts were advised to consider alternatives such as consultative or agency arrangements. Nevertheless the drafters of the circular had to face the fact that Section 207 was part of the Act and that consequently districts in Wales had to be advised on the procedure of application in particular on the criteria to be met.

The most important considerations are those set out in Section 207(2) of the 1972 Act, namely:-

- (i) the capacity of the council to provide an efficient library service for their district; and

- (ii) the effect which the order would have on the library service which is to be provided by the council of the new county comprising that district.

As these considerations are expressed in general terms, councils may welcome some indication of how they may be expected to be applied in practice. The following paragraphs outline the main factors which will be taken into account when a district's application is examined.

First, as a rule, an applicant district will be expected to have a substantially larger population than the minimum of 40,000 required for new library authorities by the 1964 Act. Moreover, except in special circumstances, a claim will be considered only from a district which is either a mainly urban area or is an area with a substantial urban nucleus.

Secondly, an applicant district council will normally be expected to include all or a major part of the area of a substantial existing library authority. Because of the need to maintain and develop a comprehensive and efficient service in the district, the Secretary of State will take into account the standard of service provided by existing authorities.

Thirdly, it is equally as important to ensure high standards throughout the county as a whole. The Secretary of State will therefore have regard to the effect of agreeing to any or all of the applications on the library service of the county of which the districts form part, and will take into account the views of the county council concerned. For example, there would be serious objections to acceding to an application from a district which was the administrative centre or natural focal point of the county, or which represented, either by itself or collectively with other district applicants, a significantly large proportion of the county's population, thus impairing the county council's capacity to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service in the remainder of the county.⁴⁶

Although some of the key sections contain ambiguity, the Circular, in theory, placed considerable obstacles before applying districts. The population qualification is as stated a direct reiteration of the requirements of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. Districts were expected to have a population substantially above this

minimum but no exact figure is given. Of the thirty seven new districts in Wales, thirty (81%) had populations above 40,000, falling into the following population bands.

40,000	-	60,000	-	11
60,000	-	80,000	-	9
80,000	-	100,000	-	2
100,000	-	120,000	-	4
120,000 +			-	4 ⁴⁷

The population qualification is reinforced by the requirement that applications would in the main only be considered from urban areas or areas with a substantial urban nucleus. The applying districts were also expected to have some experience of operating a library service ensuring a degree of continuity and efficiency in any district which might be granted powers. Moreover such efficiency was necessary not only in the district but also in the adjacent county library service. Now the population/urban criteria are brought to bear in a converse way. The granting of powers would be unlikely if such a move entailed the loss of a major segment of a county's population, or the loss of a natural geographical focus (which could be much the same as a substantial urban nucleus!). Thus it seemed as if the districts were caught both ways - they had to be large enough in terms of population to ensure viability and yet not so large as to damage the viability of the County library service. It is interesting that the Circular contains no reference to the arguments put forward in Parliament to justify separate treatment for Wales: namely that previous counties should have an opportunity to operate library services and that special consideration needed to be given to linguistic factors.

A crucial question must now be answered: how had a policy evolved which allowed for differing arrangements for the operation of public library services in England and Wales? To that question there is not one simple answer but rather a

series of linked answers or circumstances which culminate in Section 207 of the Local Government Act, 1972.

The first answer may be found in the Welsh Office. This infant government department, created in 1964, was in its early days seeking new roles and functions and met one of its first tests in policy making when it was asked to formulate plans for a reformed structure of local government. While England waited for Redcliffe-Maud and Scotland for Wheatley, Wales chose to go it alone with the working party of civil servants and one outside adviser appointed in 1965 by James Griffiths. The outcome was the 1967 White Paper advocating an evolutionary approach and offering for the first time a potential role for districts as library authorities. It is however important to realize that behind the Welsh Office was Whitehall and Westminster. Policy could be different (acknowledging that the Welsh Office had a credible influence), but not significantly different! This would explain why the radical proposal for an elected council for Wales with executive powers was transformed in the 1967 White Paper into a nominated council with advisory powers. As one policy statement followed another the influence of the Welsh Office was weakened - ultimately, in 1971, Wales was brought back into line and one Conservative policy was promulgated for both countries. From then on the differences that remained were sad remnants of an intention that in its early stages would have led to a totally separate Local Government Bill for Wales.

The second answer may be found in the activity of the other principal architect of policy - the local authorities and their associations. In a small country such as Wales these bodies were able to depend on close and effective links with the Welsh Office

Local authorities have given impressive evidence before various parliamentary committees of the great value of the close personal working relationship with the Welsh Office. Officials of the department appear justified in claiming that

they are closer to the problem than their Whitehall counterparts.⁴⁸

The influence of the local authorities and their associations on the 1967 White Paper is acknowledged by James Griffiths⁴⁹ and although there is no direct evidence it is possible to surmise and assume that local authority representatives would have suggested that districts should be given a chance to operate library services in Wales.

A third possible answer arises from political considerations. The whole question of local government reform was suffused with political pressure and it is clear that such pressure had a significant bearing on the shape of Labour and Conservative policy statements on restructuring in Wales. The influence is perhaps heavier on Labour, an administration dealing with its own people - county, borough and district councillors in the Labour dominated authorities of the South Wales Valleys. This helps to explain why plans for reform (never an easy task for any administration) were especially intractable for Labour in Wales.

For the Labour Government the politics of local government reform in South Wales were particularly difficult to handle. The area has long been a Labour party stronghold at both county and district level, as well as in the county borough ... Thus there were strong and conflicting pressures on the Secretary of State. The 1967 proposals represented a delicate balance acceptable to most councils.⁵⁰

Such a balance is achieved through compromise and where easier to compromise than in the case of libraries? The validity of this statement is substantiated when one considers that the only other exceptions in the allocation of functions between England and Wales related to refuse disposal, car parks and trading standards. Once again the perceived place of libraries in the scheme of things is revealed. In such a context the opportunity to operate library services can well be presented as a political sop to authorities who would lose status and functions in the new

structure of local government. This assertion becomes more relevant with the appearance of later proposals which advocated the abolition of county boroughs, authorities who had previously been responsible for the provision of a full range of services. Section 207 was a chance to sweeten the bitter pill of demotion an opportunity to give something back in return for loss of status.

Against this realistic, perhaps cynical, approach must be placed a fourth possible answer - that successive administrations did genuinely feel that certain districts in Wales could offer and operate an efficient library service. This view would again have been communicated by the local authorities and their associations and would be supported by the record of some of the larger urban authorities and the level of service offered by them. (Cardiff and Swansea are examples which come to mind). However, if this is a realistic and true reflection of the situation it leads automatically to a further question: Why could not similar arguments be deployed and listened to in England? If it was possible to consider Cardiff and Swansea as potential library authorities in Wales, why was it impossible to consider Bristol and Southampton as potential library authorities in England?

Beyond all this, and in the last analysis one is forced to accept the divergence of policy because Labour and Conservative administrations had decided that this was the way it was to be, basing the decision on the flimsiest of reasons offered at the Third Reading.

It was not easy to see why ... library functions should be allocated to one type of authority in England (the county) and another (the district) in Wales. Observers waited in vain for an explanation because parliamentary procedure made it impossible to discuss both countries in a single debate. English ministers merely stated that they could not answer for their Welsh Office colleagues and vice versa. Critics had to be satisfied with statements such as 'the Government do not accept that the allocation of functions in

Wales must be exactly the same as that in England'.⁵¹

To place consideration of these developments in a wider context, it is strange to note that as the whole of the United Kingdom moved towards the implementation of a new structure for local government, different arrangements for libraries within that structure were to apply not only in England and Wales, but in each of the four countries of the UK. In Scotland the equivalent to Redcliffe-Maud, the Wheatley Commission had reported in 1969⁵² proposing a two tier-structure of local authorities. As this was in line with Conservative thinking the Wheatley proposals were for the most part accepted and embodied in the Local Government (Scotland) Act, 1973, which came into effect in 1975. Wheatley and the Act separated libraries from education at second tier level under district control apart from three regional councils (Borders, Dumfries and Galloway) and three Island Councils (Orkney, Shetland and Western Isles). While the link with education was broken in Scotland, it was further strengthened in Northern Ireland. The Macrory Report of 1970⁵³ had recommended that major local government services should be placed under the control of ad hoc bodies and libraries were included in the list of services to be administered in this way. In October 1973 all library powers previously held by local authorities were transferred to the Northern Ireland Ministry of Education. The province was divided into five Education and Libraries Boards composed of members nominated by Government (60%) and councillors nominated by district authorities (40%). This radical approach has been described by one observer as

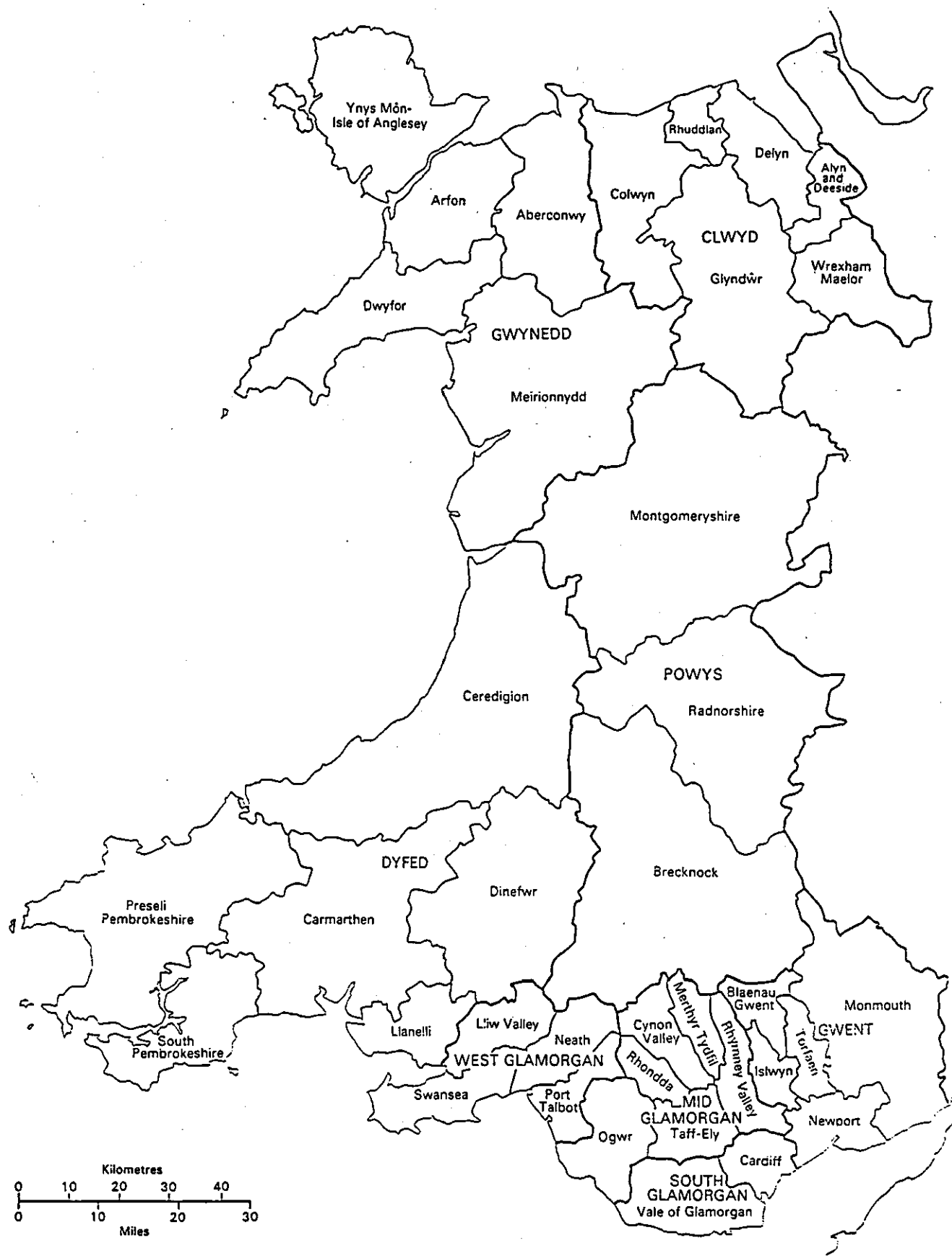
virtually the nationalisation of libraries.⁵⁴

The upshot of all this was that libraries and librarians were once again denied the opportunity of operating their services within a uniform structure right across the United Kingdom. This was the uniformity which had been sought prior to and at the passing of the Public Libraries and

Museums Act 1964, and sought again within the framework of a widespread reorganisation of local government.

Truly it is a remarkable situation that within the narrow borders of the United Kingdom these different methods of organisation have come about; while one can understand some of the underlying problems, it is difficult to satisfy oneself that all of the methods can be equally good for the public library service.⁵⁵

MAP 2.3
POST 1974 LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE OF COUNTIES AND
DISTRICTS IN WALES



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CHAPTER THREE

"The people of Britain may not notice much change; it is a quiet revolution. But they will have their dustbins emptied as usual and receive their rent and rate demands as usual".

The Times, 1 April 1974

To a largely apathetic general public, the reorganisation of local government may indeed have been a quiet revolution, but for the officers and elected representatives involved it was an unprecedented and often traumatic experience. The whole operation of transfer of powers from old authority to new, the appointment of key personnel and the election of councillors had to be accomplished in the sixteen months between the date of Royal Assent of the Local Government Act (26 October 1972) and the appointed day (1 April 1974). For the public library service in Wales this period of hectic activity was made more complex by the attempts of district authorities to seek library powers. Embryonic counties had to respond to the challenge of the districts at a time when the county library service itself was in a state of change and upheaval. Under these circumstances the districts undoubtedly held the tactical advantage: for the most part they were already in existence as old counties, county boroughs or urban districts, whereas the new counties had yet to establish themselves as independent entities.

The ground rules for district applications were laid out in the Department of Education and Science and Welsh Office Circular¹ already referred to. The Circular gave districts and counties a timetable for applications and responses. The districts were to present their case to the Secretary of State for Education and Science by 30 June 1973, at the latest and at the same time forward a copy of the application to the council of the county in which the district was located. The observations of the county were expected by 23 July 1973 with the Secretary of State announcing the decision by the end of September 1973, again at the latest. Operating within this target timetable it

was assumed that the protagonists in the struggle for library powers would know well in advance of the appointed day who was actually to have responsibility for the provision of library services.

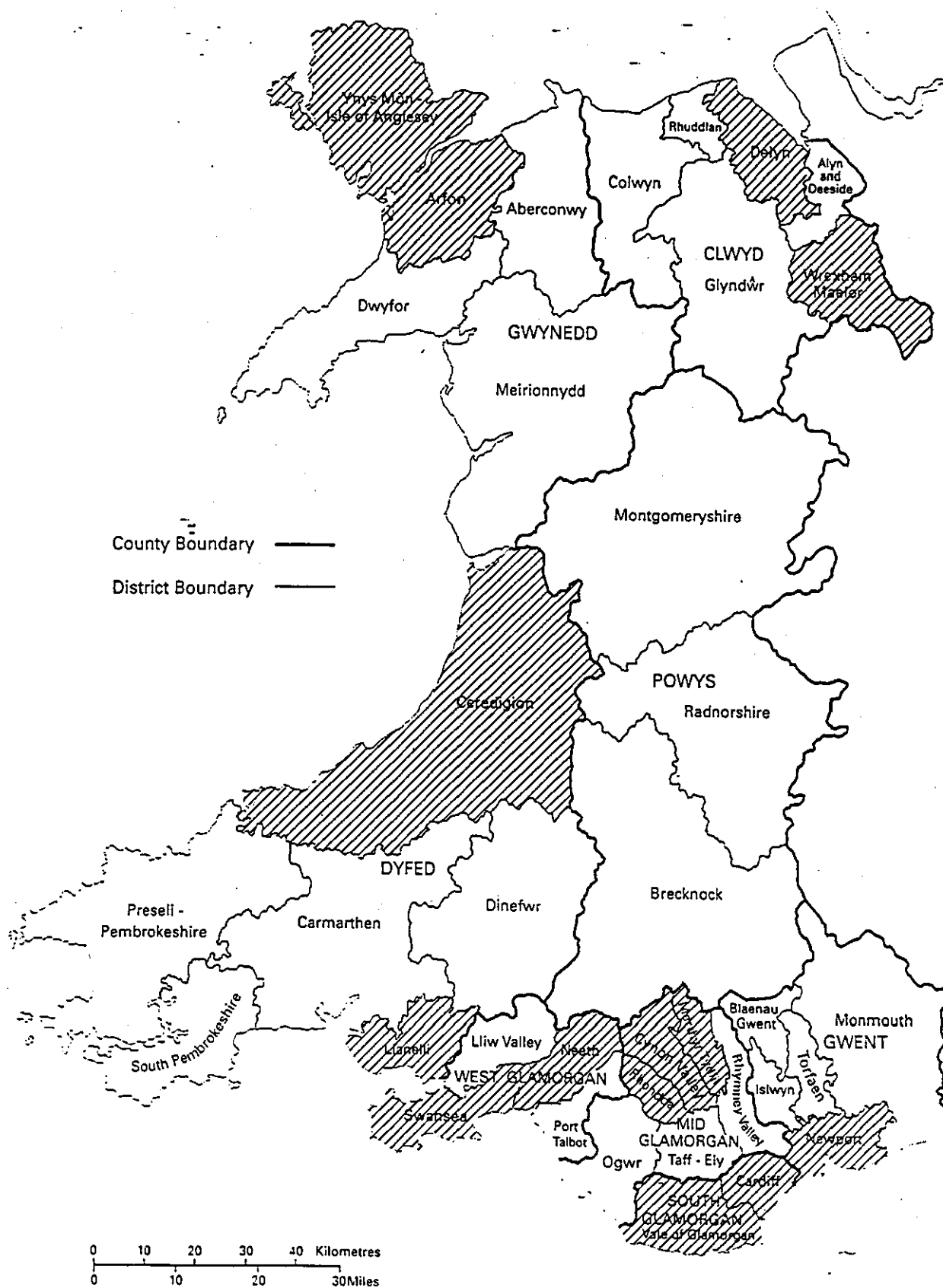
In the event fourteen district councils (37% of districts in Wales) had lodged an application with the Department of Education and Science by 30 June. The fourteen, with adjacent county, are listed below in increasing order in terms of population.

TABLE 3.1
DISTRICT COUNCILS IN WALES APPLYING FOR LIBRARY POWERS
JUNE 1973

	DISTRICT	POPULATION ²	COUNTY
1	Arfon	53,640	Gwynedd
2	Ceredigion	55,430	Dyfed
3	Delyn	59,440	Clwyd
4	Merthyr Tydfil	61,490	Mid-Glamorgan
5	Ynys Môn	62,020	Gwynedd
6	Neath	66,150	West Glamorgan
7	Cynon Valley	69,630	Mid Glamorgan
8	Llanelli	76,720	Dyfed
9	Rhondda	87,710	Mid-Glamorgan
10	Vale of Glamorgan	106,490	South Glamorgan
11	Wrexham Maelor	106,800	Clwyd
12	Newport	135,910	Gwent
13	Swansea	190,370	West Glamorgan
14	Cardiff	285,760	South Glamorgan

These applications would affect seven of the eight new counties in Wales: the only county to escape the pattern of district claims was Powys, an amalgamation of the old counties of Brecon, Radnor and Montgomery and several urban authorities.

MAP 3.1
GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF DISTRICT COUNCILS
APPLYING FOR LIBRARY POWERS JUNE 1973



Of the fourteen applications, three (Arfon, Ceredigion and Ynys Môn) corresponded to former county library authorities with the remaining eleven from a mixture of county boroughs, non county boroughs and urban districts.

The list of applicants exhibits a wide spread of population: all districts exceed the target of 40,000 stipulated by the Circular, but there was considerable variation in the extent to which they were above target. For example Arfon with 53,640 inhabitants was only 34% above the minimum figure while Cardiff with 285,760 was 614% above the minimum. The three most populous authorities (Cardiff, Newport, Swansea) could also point to the fact that their populations were in excess of that of the new county of Powys (99,370). All of this returns to the question of establishing valid criteria for effective library authorities and would undoubtedly have a bearing on the decision to grant or withhold library powers.

Circular 6/73 further stated that an application would only be considered from a district which was either a mainly urban area or an area with a substantial urban nucleus. Set against this requirement the fourteen applicants would divide once again into a county and non county pattern. Regardless of the yardsticks deployed, it would be difficult to categorise the old counties of Arfon, Ceredigion and Ynys Môn as anything but rural; conversely, the remaining eleven districts could lay claim on a progressive scale to be urban areas. The apex of the scale is reached in the densely populated boroughs of Cardiff, Newport and Swansea.

To turn this argument around Circular 6/73 made it clear that an application from a natural centre or focal point of a new county would stand little chance of success - and this is where Cardiff, Newport and Swansea would face problems. Beyond these three obvious examples it is difficult to provide a definitive answer. Wrexham Maelor was and is an integral part of Clwyd, but it could not be stated that it

was the focal point of that county as it was becoming obvious, even prior to reorganization that all major services, including the library service would be administered from a new shire hall complex some eleven miles distant from Wrexham. The vagueness of this criterion is best exemplified by reference to applications in the county of Mid-Glamorgan. All three applications (Cynon Valley, Merthyr and Rhondda) would remove a significant segment of the area to be served by a new county library service yet none of the three could be presented as the focal point of Mid-Glamorgan. It is questionable whether this county had a focal point. In consequence of its creation as an artificial authority Mid-Glamorgan found itself in an unique position on account of administrative and geographical factors. The 1972 Local Government Act subdivided the old Glamorgan into three parts, the only example in England and Wales of an existing county being dismembered rather than consolidated. Mid-Glamorgan was also to become the only county in England and Wales administered from a centre outside its own boundaries: from 1 April 1974 the County Hall would be located in Cardiff, in the county of South Glamorgan.

Circular 6/73 also laid great stress on the effect which the granting of applications would have on the remaining county library service. It is possible to illustrate the potential consequences of separation in three ways: loss of population to the county, loss of land area and most important of all, loss of revenue in terms of rateable value.

TABLE 3.2
POTENTIAL EFFECT³ OF SEPARATION ON
COUNTY LIBRARY SERVICE

(i) IN CLWYD

DISTRICTS	POPULATION LOSS
Delyn	16.1%
Wrexham Maelor	28.4%
Delyn and Wrexham Maelor	45%
	LAND AREA LOSS (ACRES)
Delyn	11.4%
Wrexham Maelor	15.1%
Delyn and Wrexham Maelor	26.5%
	RATEABLE VALUE LOSS
Delyn	14.3%
Wrexham Maelor	25.8%
Delyn and Wrexham Maelor	40.1%

In summary the granting of powers to the two districts in Clwyd would result in the county library service losing 45% of its population, 26% of land area and 40% of rateable value.

(ii) IN DYFED

DISTRICTS	POPULATION LOSS
Ceredigion	17.4%
Llanelli	24.2%
Ceredigion and Llanelli	41.6%
	LAND AREA LOSS (ACRES)
Ceredigion	31.1%
Llanelli	4.0%
Ceredigion and Llanelli	35.1%
	RATEABLE VALUE LOSS
Ceredigion	12.6%
Llanelli	22.0%
Ceredigion and Llanelli	34.6%

The loss of two districts in Dyfed would leave that county with 41% less population, 35% less land area and 34% less rateable value. The effect of granting powers to Llanelli

would be marked by a loss of only 4% of land area, but of 22% of the rateable value of the new authority.

(iii) IN GWENT

DISTRICT	POPULATION LOSS
Newport	30.8%
	LAND AREA LOSS (ACRES)
Newport	14.5%
	RATEABLE VALUE LOSS
Newport	44.9%

The most marked effect here would be the loss of almost 45% of rateable value to the new county library authority, with a loss of nearly 31% population and 14% land area.

(iv) IN GWYNEDD

DISTRICTS	POPULATION LOSS
Arfon	24.1%
Ynys Môn	27.9%
Arfon and Ynys Môn	52%
	LAND AREA LOSS (ACRES)
Arfon	10.5%
Ynys Môn	18.4%
Arfon and Ynys Môn	28.9%
	RATEABLE VALUE LOSS
Arfon	18.7%
Ynys Môn	29.6%
Arfon and Ynys Môn	48.3%

If powers were granted to the two districts in Gwynedd the county library service would lose 52% of the population served, nearly 30% of the land area and almost half of the rateable value - 48.3%.

(v) IN MID-GLAMORGAN

DISTRICTS	POPULATION LOSS
Cynon Valley	12.9%
Merthyr Tydfil	11.4%
Rhondda	16.3%
Cynon, Merthyr and Rhondda	40.6%

	LAND AREA LOSS (ACRES)
Cynon Valley	17.7%
Merthyr Tydfil	10.9%
Rhondda	9.4%
Cynon, Merthyr and Rhondda	38%

	RATEABLE VALUE LOSS
Cynon Valley	12.1%
Merthyr Tydfil	11.2%
Rhondda	10.6%
Cynon, Merthyr and Rhondda	33.9%

Independence for the three districts in Mid-Glamorgan would leave the county library service with 40% less population, 38% less land area and almost 34% less rateable value (and did as it eventually transpired).

(vi) IN SOUTH GLAMORGAN

DISTRICTS	POPULATION LOSS
Cardiff	72.8%
Vale of Glamorgan	27.2%
Cardiff and Vale	100%

	LAND AREA LOSS (ACRES)
Cardiff	28.8%
Vale of Glamorgan	71.2%
Cardiff and Vale	100%

	RATEABLE VALUE LOSS
Cardiff	76.5%
Vale of Glamorgan	23.5%
Cardiff and Vale	100%

The 100% loss in each category would thus have the consequence of making a county library service an impossibility. In a two district county such as South Glamorgan granting powers to the districts would place all

library functions at that level and there would be no role for a county library service. Granting powers to Cardiff alone (72% of population, 76% rateable value) would to all intents and purposes deprive a county library service of a viable financial and demographic base.

(vii) IN WEST GLAMORGAN

DISTRICTS	POPULATION LOSS
Neath	17.7%
Swansea	51%
Neath and Swansea	68.7%
	LAND AREA LOSS (ACRES)
Neath	25.2%
Swansea	30.0%
Neath and Swansea	55.2%
	RATEABLE VALUE LOSS
Neath	17.5%
Swansea	46.4%
Neath and Swansea	63.9%

The loss of two districts in the four district county of West Glamorgan would leave the county library authority serving 68% less population, 55% less land area from a financial base curtailed by almost 64% in terms of rateable value. Almost as marked would be the loss of Swansea which contained over half the inhabitants of the new county and above 46% of the rateable value.

This analysis reveals that in each area, the granting of powers to the districts would have an adverse effect on the county library service. The effect would occur on a sliding scale from a point where a county would face some difficulties but would still exist as a viable entity (Dyfed without Llanelli for example) to a situation where the county would encounter serious problems (West Glamorgan minus Swansea) and finally to a position where the county library service could not possibly exist (South Glamorgan minus Vale of Glamorgan or Cardiff). It would seem therefore that the fourteen districts faced an

insurmountable barrier in relation to one of the crucial requirements of Circular 6/73.

there would be serious objections to acceding to an application from a district which ... represented either by itself or collectively with other district applicants, a significantly large proportion of the county's population, thus impairing the county council's capacity to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service in the remainder of the county.⁴

In view of the final outcome of negotiations between the local authorities and the Department of Education and Science, the applications of four districts and the responses of the relevant counties are now examined in detail. The districts are Llanelli in Dyfed and Cynon Valley, Merthyr Tydfil and the Rhondda in Mid-Glamorgan.

LLANELLI'S APPLICATION

On its creation in 1974, Llanelli represented the most south-easterly authority in the county of Dyfed. As a new district it took under its control several former municipal boroughs and urban and rural districts to make up a total area of over 57,000 acres. The shape and development of modern Llanelli was strongly influenced by the Industrial Revolution. Coal and steel had played their part, but it was the tin-plate industry which put Llanelli on the industrial map of Britain. Such was the rapid growth of the canning industry that Llanelli had, by the early twentieth century established itself as Britain's major tin-plate centre. As heavy industries declined, the district had to face problems of serious economic contraction and one of the main tasks of the authority in a post-1974 reorganisation structure was to endeavour to widen and diversify the economic base of its area.

As the districts application (Appendix 4) indicates, the Borough of Llanelli, a constituent part of the new district, adopted the Public Library Acts in 1898 as an Urban District Council. The borough library service was however provided

for a relatively compact area surrounding the town of Llanelli itself, whereas the application for district powers would seek to include a more extensive area, with a near trebling of the population to be served.

Llanelli's application lays heavy emphasis on the distinction between the character and needs of the district and the remainder of Dyfed. Basically the authority's claim is that the district is industrial where the county is, by and large, rural. The argument then runs on to assert that such an industrial area has special requirements and that these would be best met by a district based library service. The application claims that a separation of district and county

would in no way impair the efficiency or effectiveness of the county to provide a library service to the remainder of the county... with the Llanelli district out of Dyfed, the remainder of the county would still have a population and a rateable value greater than two other Welsh counties.⁵

This of course pays no attention to the fact that the county might be better placed to provide an effective library service without the loss of the district, but one can hardly expect the district in such a document to play devil's advocate and present such an argument. The application goes on to outline the range of services offered, and the standards attained.

The general standard of service in the existing Borough of Llanelli measured both in relation to expenditure on particular aspects of the service and on the range of services offered has been well above the national average for England and Wales for many years.⁶

To illustrate and evaluate that claim a statistical summary of the performance of Llanelli as a library authority is provided, with an appraisal of that performance against two key Bourdillon standards which called for a staffing level of one non manual member of staff for every 2,500 population

served (40% to be qualified) and a purchasing level of 250 volumes per annum for every 1,000 population served.

TABLE 3.3
SUMMARY AND EVALUATION⁷ OF THE LIBRARY SERVICE
PROVIDED BY LLANELLI NON-COUNTY BOROUGH 1972-73

Population served	26,080	
Professional Posts	5)	Bourdillon Standard 4.1)
	) 16	) 14.5
Non Manual Posts	11)	Bourdillon Standard 10.4)
Total Book Stock	141,386	5.4 Volumes for each inhabitant
Books added to stock 1972-73		9,384
Bourdillon Standard		6,520
Expenditure per 1,000 on employees		£1,134
Wales NC Borough Average		£ 787
Expenditure per 1,000 on premises		£ 211
Wales NC Borough Average		£ 167
Expenditure per 1,000 on books		£ 521
Wales NC Borough Average		£ 371
Total expenditure per 1,000 population		£2,336
Wales NC Borough Average		£1,641
England NC Borough Average		£1,476

Llanelli could thus justifiably assert that they were offering a library service above Bourdillon requirements and were considerably above average when compared with the library spending of other non-county boroughs in England and Wales.

The application closes with detailed proposals for capital development, the authority obviously responding to the fact that it would be taking over an area substantially larger than the one served by the existing library system. These proposals are set against wider developments in the Llanelli district with the authority seeing control and growth of the library service as a concomitant contributor to the overall well being of the district.

As a claim for library powers, the application can be described as a confident document and performance indicators supported the view that this confidence was justified. There are instances where the arguments border on the insular: where Section 11 speaks in laudable terms of the need for effective co-operation with other library authorities, it is interesting that almost all the examples cited are of neighbouring services making use of Llanelli's facilities rather than vice versa. This is as much as might be expected from a document whose raison d'etre in its entirety is to support the district's case for library powers. This being so it is strange that the application makes no mention in terms of book provision or cultural activities for Welsh speakers and readers. The omission is compounded by the fact that at the 1971 census, 44% of the residents of Llanelli Municipal Borough declared themselves to be Welsh speakers (31% Welsh readers); in the surrounding rural district the figure was higher at 64% (56% Welsh readers). These may be regarded as high returns in the context of a national figure of 19.6% Welsh speakers.⁸

DYFED'S RESPONSE

Dyfed, an amalgamation of the former counties of Cardigan, Carmarthen and Pembroke, was on its creation in 1974, in area the largest county in Wales. The new county was for the most part rural and agriculture was the predominant industry. Heavy industry was centred on two areas: an anthracite coalfield with some manufacturing activity around Llanelli in the south east and in oil refineries at Milford Haven, Britain's premier deep water harbour in the extreme south west. The centre of administration for Dyfed was to be at Carmarthen, a town some nineteen miles distant from Llanelli. The headquarters of the county library service would also be at this location. One of the counties which was amalgamated to form Dyfed, Carmarthenshire, had for many years been providing a library service for the area surrounding Llanelli Municipal Borough.

Dyfed's response was presented to the Department of Education and Science in July 1973 in the form of observations on the application of Llanelli District Council (and Ceredigion) for constitution as a library authority (Appendix 5). The observations from the office of the County Secretary, reveal in the first paragraph that the county was at a distinct disadvantage as it attempted to oppose the district case

Owing to pressure of work arising from reorganisation the first opportunity for a full debate by the whole council did not arise until 18 July

and again

On 18 July my authority appointed Mr Alun R Edwards ... as the new Dyfed County Librarian. Since he has not had time to compile a comprehensive report for the Council I have asked him to outline briefly his plans for development.⁹

A related difficulty was that the county, as an authority not yet in existence had no record to put forward as an indicator of past performance, and this in marked contrast to the district which could refer to levels of standards and expenditure and partly justify its application on those grounds. Within such a vacuum the county had to resort to promises and vague intentions, which at times smack of instant thinking. For example the suggestion that Llanelli should specialise in gramophone records and Ceredigion, some 70 miles distant, in sound cassettes is clearly nonsensical and shows that there had been little or no opportunity for detailed planning for a rationalized post-reorganisation library service.

The county is probably on stronger ground when it asserts that the DES had itself pointed to the virtues of integration in its publication, The Public Library Service: Reorganisation and After.¹⁰ The argument here is lucid: the Department of Education and Science could not say one

thing in its publications and then do the opposite by granting powers to non-county authorities

any dilution would create the opposite effect of that advocated and would be a complete negation of Government's policy 11.

While acknowledging the efficiency of the library service provided by Llanelli Borough, Dyfed counters that this efficiency cannot be accepted as a guarantee for an extension of a high level service to a larger geographical area and to almost three times the population. The county response then elaborated on plans to serve the area and the developments that are called for. These are much the same as the intentions presented by Llanelli in its case with minor variations on how to best serve the periphery of the district: Llanelli opts for container libraries while Dyfed favours an additional mobile. Dyfed's observations close with a promise to maintain an active programme of cultural activities in the district and not surprisingly points to Llanelli's complete absence of plans and services for Welsh speakers and readers.

CYNON VALLEY'S APPLICATION

The new district of Cynon Valley was basically an amalgamation of the urban districts of Aberdare and Mountain Ash. The area from which the district took its name lies within the confines of a long valley following the path of the river Cynon and situated to the north of Cardiff. The valley, some eleven miles in length is narrow at its southern extremity but gradually broadens at its northern end as it reaches the Brecon Beacons. The district is an industrial region - the main activity in the past was coal mining and although this was still important in 1974, the industry was even at that time in decline. Mining had to a certain extent been replaced by a diversification into manufacturing and other light industries.

Aberdare had adopted the Library Acts in 1903 and the first public library in that district opened in the following year. In stark contrast, Mountain Ash

had contrived to put off adopting the Public Library Acts until 1963¹²

and thus had the dubious distinction of being the last local authority in England and Wales to take up library powers prior to the 1964 Act. There is little room to doubt that Mountain Ash only moved to establish a service in 1963 because it knew that the new Public Libraries and Museums Act would enforce such a move in a short space of time.

Cynon Valley's application (Appendix 6) asserts that within its area there is a high degree of what is described as library mindedness. The presence of this characteristic is attributed to the fact that the library system largely evolved from Workmen's Institutes Libraries. Strong links were maintained with these Institute libraries, so strong that the public library service provided in Mountain Ash from 1963 onwards was based on the four Institute Libraries already in existence. Although these links with the past are valuable it becomes clear that they had led Aberdare and Mountain Ash to an antiquated and outmoded pattern of provision which was not ideally suited to a modern age. While the application boasts that

nobody in the populated areas is more than a mile from a service point. At the Mountain Ash end the provision of full time branches per head of population is double that recommended by the Bourdillon Working Party on Standards¹³

this need not necessarily be accepted as a virtue. Bourdillon had stated that in urban areas no reader should normally have to travel more than a mile to a library, but to move to a doubling of this standard is uneconomic proliferation based on archaic patterns of the past.

This in itself raises the question of standards of service provided by the two previous authorities. This will be appraised against the same statistical base as in the case of Llanelli and against the Bourdillon standards for staffing and levels of purchase.

TABLE 3.4
SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF THE LIBRARY SERVICE
PROVIDED BY ABERDARE UDC 1972-73

Population served	37,760		
Professional Posts	5)	Bourdillon Standard	6)
	) 16		) 21
Non Manual Posts	11)	Bourdillon Standard	15)
Total Book Stock	149,569	3.9 Volumes for each inhabitant	
Books added to stock 1972-73			8,315
Bourdillon Standard			9,440
Expenditure per 1,000 on employees		£	691
Wales UDC Borough Average		£	509
Expenditure per 1,000 on premises		£	145
Wales UDC Borough Average		£	117
Expenditure per 1,000 on books		£	313
Wales UDC Borough Average		£	254
Total expenditure per 1,000 population		£1,561	
Wales UDC Borough Average		£1,043	
England UDC Borough Average		£1,414	

TABLE 3.5
SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF THE LIBRARY SERVICE
PROVIDED BY MOUNTAIN ASH UDC 1972-73

Population served	27,770		
Professional Posts	3)	Bourdillon Standard	4.4)
	) 14		) 15.4
Non Manual Posts	11)	Bourdillon Standard	11)
Total Book Stock	55,763	2 Volumes for each inhabitant	
Books added to stock 1972-73			6,641
Bourdillon Standard			6,942
Expenditure per 1,000 on employees		£	580
Wales UDC Borough Average		£	509
Expenditure per 1,000 on premises		£	186
Wales UDC Borough Average		£	117
Expenditure per 1,000 on books		£	320
Wales UDC Borough Average		£	254
Total expenditure per 1,000 population		£1,230	
Wales UDC Borough Average		£1,043	
England UDC Borough Average		£1,414	

In summary, Aberdare was below and Mountain Ash near the Bourdillon staffing standard; both authorities fall short of the standard of level of purchase of 250 volumes for each 1,000 persons served. The two authorities were however above average library spenders when compared with other Urban District Councils in Wales.

The application lists a set of proposals for future development of the library service, these centre around a building programme, extension of the mobile library service and the appointment of extra staff. It is claimed that these developments would be impossible for the new county of Mid-Glamorgan which would have to plan and operate a library service on a wide scale

a completely different order of priorities would prevail; and the Cynon Valley, already relatively speaking very well supplied would command little priority and would have to give way to other less fortunate places having at present no local service or a very indifferent one.¹⁴

'Local' here must be interpreted as under district control and the application goes on to enumerate the benefits that would accrue to Cynon Valley if libraries remained with the district instead of being transferred to the county.

This then was Cynon Valley's case - a case which could point to widespread support in the community (readers wrote in large numbers to their Member of Parliament or directly to the DES) and a case publicised by a novel poster campaign which urged library users not to be stumped by the MCC - Mid-Glamorgan County Council (see Appendix 7).

MERTHYR TYDFIL'S APPLICATION

Merthyr Tydfil has often been regarded as the cradle of the Industrial Revolution in Britain. Two examples are presented to support this claim: the town saw the world's first steam railway in 1804 and the largest ironworks in the world had been established there by the mid-nineteenth century. Industry attracted large numbers of workers to the area: between 1881-1911 the population of the town rose from 48,861 to 80,990.¹⁵ Commensurate with its rapid growth Merthyr was granted county borough status in 1908 and from that point onwards was responsible for a wide range of services including education. The post second World War era ushered in a period of steady decline of heavy industry in the borough and the erosion of economic activity and the consequent drift of population had left Merthyr by the mid 1960's as by far the smallest of the four county boroughs in Wales. Its anomalous position was highlighted by successive investigations into the restructuring of local government in Wales, with each investigation in turn recommending that the area should lose its status as a County Borough.

The authority could point to a long tradition of provision of a public library service. Merthyr adopted the Library Acts in 1899 when it was still an urban district and a service was provided two years later in 1901. This tradition of local control is emphasised in the authority's

application for library powers (Appendix 8) and is the basis of the assertion that

The Public Library service is essentially a local personal service and its value is largely dependent on what is available locally in the way of books and information with decisions being made instantly from intimate knowledge of the needs and tastes of the local community.¹⁶

At this local level, and as a former county borough, it is argued that the authority had the wide experience, goodwill, and resources to operate an efficient library service.

It is also claimed that the existing library service was more than satisfactory and although there is no reference to Bourdillon standards, a statistical appendix compares Merthyr's performance with that of Glamorgan County Council. Two points arise from these statistics. Firstly it is questionable whether comparison with an old pre-1974 authority is valid; expenditure patterns of the past are of minimal relevance to the intentions and policies of the new and completely different county of Mid-Glamorgan. Secondly the statistics show, and the application itself admits

that the County Borough increased its book fund provision between 1971-72 and 1973-74 by 30%.¹⁷

A laudable step certainly, but one which exactly matched the period of time between the Introduction and passing of the Local Government Act and the day on which the districts would gain or lose library powers. Was this a coincidence or was the authority responding to the opportunities offered by Section 207?

To pursue the question of efficiency and standards, Merthyr's performance is evaluated against the same statistical base and against Bourdillon standards.

TABLE 3.6
SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF THE LIBRARY SERVICE
PROVIDED BY MERTHYR TYDFIL COUNTY BOROUGH 1972-73

Population served	54,530		
Professional Posts	5)	Bourdillon Standard	8.7)
	) 17		) 30.5
Non Manual Posts	12)	Bourdillon Standard	21.8)
Total Book Stock	103,670	1.9 volumes for each inhabitant	
Books added to stock			10,453
Bourdillon Standard			13,632
Expenditure per 1,000 on employees		£	619
Wales CB Average		£	640
Expenditure per 1,000 on premises		£	115
Wales CB Average		£	137
Expenditure per 1,000 on books		£	234
Wales CB Average		£	242
Total expenditure per 1,000 population		£1,098	
Wales CB Average		£1,241	
England CB Average		£1,532	

Merthyr therefore failed to meet the Bourdillon Standard on staffing and was particularly deficient in non-manual posts. Despite the stated 30% increase in the book fund the authority still failed to meet the standard of acquiring 250 volumes per annum for each 1,000 population served. The authority was below average in terms of library spending when compared with the three other county boroughs in Wales (Cardiff, Newport, Swansea), and Merthyr's total expenditure per 1,000 population was some 40% below the average of county boroughs in England.

On future developments the application is terse, confining itself to the statement that

the much needed extension to the Central Library to its rear is now possible.¹⁸

Beyond this, the application is in several instances little more than a statement of good intent, resorting to open-

ended commitments which do not in reality further the case for library powers. For example

Merthyr has shown a determination to resolve its own problems and conserve the community.¹⁹

All applying districts and indeed all local authorities would say the same. More surprising therefore for the authority to present itself as a special case and assert that

This diversity of interest and need is probably unique within the Principality and it would not create a precedent if this were given special attention.¹⁹

Once again, other districts in Wales could equally lay claim to the diversity of interest and need, and these other districts (and central government) would most certainly see the decision to grant Merthyr Tydfil library powers as a precedent.

RHONDDA'S APPLICATION

There are actually two Rhondda Valleys - the Rhondda Fawr, and Rhondda Fach, meeting at Porth (the Welsh name for a gateway) some thirteen miles north-west of Cardiff. The Rhondda is the archetypal area of South Wales conjuring up a popular image of booming coal mines, spoil heaps, a dust-polluted atmosphere and blue-scarred miners. At the time when coal was King the image was close to reality: in 1913 there were sixty mines in the Rhondda with a total output of nine and a half million tons. By 1974 however the valley retained but a few of its mines and the two main tasks facing the local authority was to attract new industry to replace the old and to remove some of the worst scars of the past, making the area more attractive for investors and inhabitants. As the valley is on average only some four miles wide, the pattern of settlement is one of an almost continuous chain of towns and villages with no natural centre or focal point.

Almost half of the authority's application for powers (Appendix 9) traces the history and development of the public library service in the Rhondda, noting that the library acts were adopted by the borough in 1933. The library system was designed and evolved to serve the unique nature of the community with a number of branches being located at strategic points in the valley. The policy of the authority was one of continuous improvement and this claim is supported by statistical details throughout the application. The service in the Rhondda is now assessed in the same manner as with previous districts.

TABLE 3.7
SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF THE LIBRARY SERVICE
PROVIDED BY RHONDDA NON-COUNTY BOROUGH 1972-73

Population served	88,450		
Professional Posts	15)	Bourdillon Standard	14)
	) 35		) 39
Non Manual Posts	20)	Bourdillon Standard	35)
Total Book Stock	160,541	1.8 volumes for each inhabitant	
Books added to stock			21,935
Bourdillon Standard			22,112
Expenditure per 1,000 on employees		£	721
Wales CB Average		£	787
Expenditure per 1,000 on premises		£	145
Wales CB Average		£	167
Expenditure per 1,000 on books		£	339
Wales CB Average		£	371
Total expenditure per 1,000 population		£1,457	
Wales CB Average		£1,641	
England CB Average		£1,476	

Although the Rhondda met the Bourdillon standard for professional posts, it was clearly not employing enough non-manual staff. The purchase level standard is all but reached, but the authority emerges as a below average spender when compared with other non-county boroughs in Wales.

As the authority was an excepted district under the 1944 Education Act it had certain responsibilities for primary and secondary education with the borough. This had led to the provision of a school library service with the cost of the books being borne by the education authority (county) and the administrative expenses falling on the borough.

A section on future plans, in the application, gives information on branch development which was taking place at that time and lists schemes which the authority planned for the long term.

The argument central to Rhondda's application is presented in the final section. The essentials of a good library service are outlined and then the almost to be expected claim follows.

It is in the provision of a good service ... that local conditions have to be taken into account. Building up a balanced stock which bears some relationship to the needs of an area cannot be done without knowledge of local conditions.²⁰

Looking again at the three applications in Mid-Glamorgan it is noticeable that there is little or no criticism or denigration of a future library service which might be provided by the county council. This need not necessarily be taken as deliberate as it was difficult for the districts to pass judgement on something which was not yet in existence. Be that as it may, the main thrust of each of the three districts is that if they were granted powers they could get on with the task of improving library services within their boundaries, and Mid-Glamorgan would do likewise. By this course of action, library users in district and county would benefit.

MID-GLAMORGAN'S RESPONSE

It could not be expected that the officers and elected representatives of Mid-Glamorgan would agree with the district view that an effective library service throughout

the county would be best achieved by a sharing of powers. The potential effect of granting powers to the districts in Mid-Glamorgan has already been referred to and it is certain that these effects would cause further difficulties for a county which was itself little more than a political creation and a geographical anomaly. These difficulties became more evident for Mid-Glamorgan as the county moved to establish a viable pattern of services resourced from a sound financial base. The county had a population of 531,000, the highest of all the eight counties in Wales, but its total rateable value at 1 April 1974 was only £33.7m.²¹ Combining these two factors, high population and relatively low rateable value left the county with by far the lowest rateable value per capita of all the counties in Wales. In other words, Mid-Glamorgan, on its creation was required to serve the highest population from an under-resourced financial base; in addition numerous social problems exacerbated its difficulties. Although the Rate Support Grant would compensate for these factors, it is evident that a county starting out from such a precarious position could ill afford the loss of any part of its area for library purposes.

Unfortunately the analysis of Mid-Glamorgan's response to district applications cannot be included as it has been impossible to discover the location of the document which the county would have sent to the Department of Education and Science in July 1973.

The applications from the districts and responses from the counties represent the first round in the decision making process. All the authorities involved had been promised a reply by the end of September 1973. The Secretary of State for Education and Science, Margaret Thatcher, managed to stay close to the original target date and communicated her decision to counties and districts by 11 October 1973 with the decision being made public on 17 October. All fourteen applications - including the four here analysed in detail -

were rejected. The Conservatives were clearly intent on establishing a common pattern for public library services in England and Wales, allocating responsibility to the counties in rural areas and metropolitan districts elsewhere. The outright rejection of all applications received some publicity: this article in the Western Mail, one of Wales' daily newspapers is fairly typical.

LIBRARY REINS TO GO TO COUNTY COUNCILS, DISTRICTS TOLD

Applications by 14 Welsh districts to run their own library service after local government reorganization were turned down yesterday by the Government. Instead the services will be operated by the new county authorities. The only exception will be metropolitan districts which will have full control over libraries within their boundaries. There will be no metropolitan districts in Wales ... The decision was announced yesterday by the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Paymaster General, Lord Eccles.²²

The same issue of the newspaper also carried that rarity - an editorial comment on library matters. It poses several searching questions and its relevance is such that it is quoted in full.

RIGHT AND WRONG

Mrs Margaret Thatcher's decision not to let the new Welsh district councils operate library services from next April 1 is both right and wrong at the same time. It is undoubtedly the right decision in terms of the future efficiency of the service itself. The counties will be better able to provide comprehensive facilities with more varied ancillary services such as those for the aged, the housebound, and the disabled like the blind. In addition a county organization will be better able to recruit specialist staff and provide all staff with the necessary training and promotion opportunities.

However the fact remains that 14 Welsh districts applied for this function and were turned down. A number of questions are raised. In the Local Government Reform Act, the library function in England is given automatically to the new counties. In Wales it was also given to the

counties but with the proviso that the Minister could exercise his or her discretion to allow a district to take on the job. The first question, therefore, is why such a proviso was written into the Bill, if it was felt that, as it certainly was in relation to England, that there was no valid case for giving that function to the districts. Secondly if the Act implied that different criteria should be adopted or different factors admitted when considering the function in Wales, is it right to ask those same civil servants who advised on the right course of action in England to advise the Minister on the exercise of her discretion in Wales? Regrettably the Welsh Office of the Department of Education and Science does not seem to have played any great role in this decision.

This leads to the third disturbing feature: that library services in Wales should be controlled by the Department of Education and Science in the first place. Surely if the Welsh Office is capable of handling specialised consumer services like health and primary and secondary education it is perfectly capable of keeping an eye on Welsh libraries.²³

The editorial asks the central question - why was the proviso giving districts in Wales the right to apply for library powers written into the Bill? An attempt has been made to provide the answer, but it must be acknowledged that rejection of all fourteen applicants in October 1973 throws the question itself into sharper relief. Conservative ministers had argued for the proviso as the Local Government Bill passed through its various stages, voting for the clause to remain to cater for different circumstances in Wales. Yet when a wide range of districts did apply none were apparently representative of those different circumstances and all were turned down. The decision was undoubtedly a volte face for the Conservatives yet two strands of reasoning can be seen behind it. The first is relatively obvious: the granting of powers to one or more than one district within any county would have an adverse effect on the county library service. As indicated, the consequences would be more dramatic in some areas than in others, but nevertheless there would in each case be an effect. The second strand emanates from the government

office which was responsible for the rejection - the Department of Education and Science. As Section 207 of the Local Government Bill passed unscathed through various stages in Parliament it is pertinent to recall that when a defence was called for, that defence for a different course of action in relation to public library powers in England and Wales, came from the Department of the Environment, with some support from the Welsh Office. At no time were the views of the DES sought or presented, yet this was the Department which was to take the decision to allocate or withhold library powers in Wales. Now the view of that department on the ideal location for the public library service within a reformed structure of local government had been made abundantly clear in a Departmental Circular issued on 29 March 1973²⁴ and reinforced in the publication The Public Library Service: Reorganisation and After.²⁵ The second document, issued early in May 1973 a month or so prior to the process of Application by Districts in Wales, is a statement of the views of the Library Advisers of the DES - the very individuals who would naturally advise the Minister on the appropriate course of action in Wales. The standpoint of the document is explicitly stated in the Introduction.

The creation of library authorities to service larger populations and with larger local resources will facilitate the coordinated development of library services over wider areas than has hitherto been possible. These new authorities will therefore be better able to meet the needs of their communities for comprehensive facilities. they will also be able more effectively and economically to deploy specialist staff whose services smaller authorities have not always been able to command, and they will be in a better position to make full use of computers, photocopying and audio-visual equipment, telex and other aids. They will also be able to develop services in co-operation with co-terminous authorities for education, health and social services.²⁶

Re-examined in this context, the rejection of all fourteen applications is therefore not so surprising. A central

government department whose library advisers pointed to the benefits inherent in the large post- 1974 authorities and to the advantages of co-operation with education and social services was hardly likely to grant applications from district/non-education authorities in Wales with average populations of just above 100,000.

All of this suggests that the decision was taken in London, with a minimal consultative role for the Welsh Office. The Western Mail editorial raises this as a subsidiary question and argues that Whitehall civil servants were not those best placed to advise the Minister on her decision. Whether this is valid or not, it is important to observe that although the Welsh Office had oversight for major services such as health care and education, it did not have responsibility for public libraries. Some five years were to elapse before this aberration in division of responsibilities was rectified.

Beyond this analysis into the rejection of all applications it is relevant to enquire whether the decision was coloured by political or other considerations. An examination of the political composition of the fourteen districts that did apply reveals that ten were solidly controlled by Labour with the remaining four controlled by Independents.²⁷ The Secretary of State for Education and Science was hardly likely to antagonise a large number of Conservative councillors by her decision to reject all applicants. Counter to this line of thinking would be the assertion that the granting or withholding of library powers would not be a matter of political import to a Secretary of State wrestling with contentious issues such as a dramatic rise in the cost of school meals and the ending of the provision of free school milk. It is exactly within this context that evidence is available which suggests that at least one of the fourteen applicants would be familiar to Margaret Thatcher and that her awareness of that local authority would have been heightened by May-December 1971 by

the decision of Merthyr Borough Council to defy the Government by continuing to give its children aged between 7 and 11 free milk. Other local authorities in Sheffield and Manchester followed suit. As a result it was necessary to put a Bill through the House to stop those authorities doing it.²⁸

While it is impossible to argue with certainty that the earlier actions of Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council influenced Margaret Thatcher's decision to reject their (and other) claims for library powers, it is certain that the past history of the authority would have been irksome to the Minister.

In the wake of rejection a vigorous lobbying campaign was swiftly mounted, a campaign which in essence represented the second round in the decision making process. Members of Parliament whose constituencies covered largely the same areas as the applying districts were the first to bring pressure to bear

MP'S TO PLEAD FOR LOCAL LIBRARIES

The Education Minister, Mrs Margaret Thatcher has been asked urgently to receive four Glamorgan MP's to discuss her decision not to allow district authorities in their areas to continue to run libraries. The MP's, Mr Alec Jones (Rhondda West), Mr Elfed Davies (Rhondda East), Mr Arthur Probert (Aberdare), and Mr Ted Rowlands (Merthyr) want the minister to reconsider her decision.²⁹

Llanelli's MP, Denzil Davies pledged his support³⁰ and the ex Member of Parliament for that constituency, James Griffiths, an ex-Secretary of State for Wales joined the fray with a letter³¹ to the Western Mail which expressed his deep regret at the decision.

Local authorities irritated by the blanket rejection indicated that they were also anxious to represent their arguments to the Minister

KEEP LOCAL CONTROL OF LIBRARIES PLEA

A delegation from three Glamorgan local authorities will protest to the Secretary of State for Education and Science, Mrs Margaret Thatcher, about her decision not to allow Welsh district councils to run their own public libraries.

Mrs Thatcher ruled last week that the responsibility for libraries in Wales would fall on the county authorities. The delegation comprising two members each from the South Glamorgan County Council, Cardiff District Council and Vale of Glamorgan District Council will see Mrs Thatcher next week.³²

The matter was raised in the Commons on 3 December 1973 with an oral question from Arthur Probert, member for Aberdare to Peter Thomas the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr Probert asked the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning the designation of Library Authorities in Wales; and what action he proposes to take in this matter.

Mr Peter Thomas: Representations have been made to me by seven local authorities and a number of members of Parliament. I am arranging to receive deputations jointly with my right hon Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science.³³

By this time however the Conservative administration was facing far more serious and pressing decisions than the allocation of library powers in Wales. To combat spiralling wage claims and resultant price rises the Government had embarked on a Prices and Incomes Policy. A determined attempt to breach this policy was instigated by the National Union of Mineworkers with an overtime ban on 12 November 1973. The impact of the ban was exacerbated by a shortage of imported fuel: Arab States on whom Britain depended for two-thirds of her oil decided to retaliate against British support of the Israelis in the Middle East war of October 1973. The Arabs cut back on supplies to Britain (and to other nations who had supported the Israelis) and raised the price of the oil which was made available. These two moves had a devastating effect on

Britain's balance of payments and on world commodity prices. As a reaction to these national and international difficulties the Government was forced to proclaim a State of Emergency on 13 November bringing in stringent restrictions on the use of electricity. The crisis in industry and commerce took a sharp turn for the worse on 12 December as the railwaymen's union ASLEF started working to rule. On the next day the Government announced that electricity supplied to all users apart from emergency services would be restricted to three days in any one week. A deteriorating economic situation made it obvious that even harsher measures were necessary and these took the form of drastic expenditure cuts announced in the Commons on 17 December 1973.

Against this scenario district councils in Wales continued in their attempts to reverse the October rejection. The moves set in train by Llanelli Borough Council are a case in point; they were not prepared to accept defeat and sought a meeting with Norman StJohn Stevas, Minister of State with responsibility for libraries at the DES. (One of the deputations referred to in the Commons answer quoted above). The meeting was held at the Welsh Office on 19 December 1973 and the District's case was emphasised in a set of submissions to the Minister (Appendix 10). On one side of the table were Mr StJohn Stevas and Mr David Gibson-Watt, Minister of State at the Welsh Office together with two library advisers from the Department of Education and Science. The authority was represented by a deputation of councillors and officers, including the Borough Librarian.

The submissions represent a harder and more pointed document than the original application. Ministers are reminded of the lineage and origin of Section 207 and of the assurances given when the Local Government Bill was passing through Parliament. Reference is made to Labour and Conservative policy statements³⁴ and some further evidence is put forward to explain why Section 207 was incorporated into

legislation. Llanelli's case is appraised in line with the criteria in Circular 6/73 with the authority claiming that the district more than met each of the stipulations put forward. The argument consistently presented is that the district could deliver a better library service than the county and there is some denigration of the past record of the authorities that would amalgamate to form Dyfed - an aspect noticeably absent in Llanelli's original application. The Borough Librarian recalls that the Ministers listened politely as Ministers do, but it became clear during the course of the meeting that the DES believed - and in particular the library advisers believed - that counties were the viable and natural inheritors of the public library service in Wales.³⁵

Two days after this meeting between Ministers and the Llanelli deputation, Parliament adjourned for the Christmas recess. The festive season of 1973 will be best remembered for a serious shortage of electricity and for the enforced early close-down of national television services. It was after Christmas that the catastrophic and mounting consequences of the three day week became obvious. Employees, returning to work on completion of their holidays found factories and offices closed: on 27 December about 400,000 workers were reported as being temporarily laid off as a result of the emergency measures; this figure had risen to 885,000 by 7 January 1974.³⁶

Parliament was not due to resume sitting until 15 January but in view of the crisis both Houses were recalled on 9 January. The impact of the miners' overtime ban was being intensified by the ASLEF work to rule. The net effect of this two-pronged attack was that even if power was available for industrial processes it was increasingly difficult for employees in conurbations to travel to their place of work as there were no trains to transport them. Matters came to a head on 5 February when the miners balloted conclusively for an all out strike. Within this confrontational

atmosphere a General Election was almost inevitable and the Prime Minister, Edward Heath, duly announced on 7 February that an election would be held in exactly three weeks on 28 February. The central issue of the forthcoming campaign was spelt out by the Prime Minister in a television broadcast from Downing Street after the announcement of the election.

The issue before you is a simple one. As a country we face grave problems at home and abroad. Do you want a strong government which has clear authority for the future to take the decisions which will be needed? Do you want Parliament and the elected Government to continue to fight strenuously against inflation? Do you want them to abandon the struggle against rising prices under pressure from one particular, powerful group of workers?³⁷

When the result of the General Election became known on 1 March it emerged that the electorate had not seen the issues in such a simple light as Edward Heath. Despite and perhaps because of the distinct polarization prior to and during the campaign, the election failed to produce a clear majority for either major party in Parliament - the first time in forty five years that an election had resulted in such a deadlock.

Labour with 301 seats was only four ahead of the Conservatives and none of the other three main groups, the Liberals, the Nationalists and the Ulstermen could by itself provide the 17 or 21 seats which the big parties needed for a clear lead.³⁸

In an attempt to hang on to power Edward Heath had discussions with the Liberal leader Jeremy Thorpe. These came to nothing and on 4 March Mr Heath bowed to the inevitable and resigned. On the same day the Labour leader was invited by the Sovereign to form a government; Harold Wilson was more than ready to accede to the request and made known the membership of his Cabinet on the following day, 5 March. Appointments relevant to this study were Reginald Prentice as Secretary of State for Education and Science and John Morris as Secretary of State for Wales.

Other junior posts were filled later: Hugh Jenkins was Minister for the Arts with responsibility for libraries and Barry Jones and Ted Rowlands were Under Secretaries at the Welsh Office.

Three weeks before the appointed day for reorganization on 1 April 1974, many librarians in Wales were still unclear about their future. As districts brought further pressure to bear on the new Labour administration, librarians in the counties and districts in question realized that even at this late hour, they did not know for certain who would be employing them, where they would be working and who would be working for them. The counties had to assume that all would remain as decreed by Margaret Thatcher in October 1973 and continued to plan for a full assimilation of districts under a county-wide service. However the counties could be sure of nothing: within this brief period from early March to the beginning of April the districts intensified their struggles and the decision-making process to allocate or withhold library powers moved into a third and final round.

A new element now appears in the debate as the districts' case is taken up by the Smaller Public Libraries Group. The Secretary of the group, Harold Prescott (who was also Librarian at Llanelli, one of the applying districts) wrote to Ministers at the Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office on 6 March 1974. The letter (Appendix 11) reminds Ministers of the strong support that many Labour Members of Parliament had given to Section 207 as the Local Government Bill passed through the legislative procedure, and urges them to evaluate district applications against the criteria stipulated in Circular 6/73, and those criteria alone

a Labour Minister should not be swayed by questions of Departmental convenience or a desire to impose a uniform pattern of library provision in England and Wales.³⁹

(Author's emphasis)

These are key words and are obviously meant to drive a wedge between Ministers and their library advisers, whose clear objective was a uniform pattern of library provision in England and Wales. The letter asks Ministers to look again at the question and suggests that if library powers were not granted to districts in 1974, then Section 207 would to all intents and purposes be irrelevant. This appeal to Ministers was reinforced by a letter dispatched to eighty or so Labour Members of Parliament representing constituencies in England and Wales (Appendix 12). The members that were selected had spoken in support of Section 207 in the debates on the Local Government Bill, arguing for effective implementation of the Section in Wales and/or for its extension to English districts. This second communication from the smaller Public Libraries Group solicits members' support and requests that they make their views known to the ministers concerned.

Welsh Labour Members were only too ready to renew their efforts on behalf of the districts. The new Parliament assembled on 12 March 1974 and six days later, Denzil Davies, the Member for Llanelli, put an oral question to Ted Rowlands, Under Secretary of State at the Welsh Office.

Mr Denzil Davies (Llanelli) asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many letters his Department had received protesting at the decision to transfer control over the Llanelli public library to the new Dyfed County Council.

Mr Rowlands (Under Secretary of State, Welsh Office). Five since this Government took office.

Mr Davies. I thank my hon Friend for that answer. Is he aware that there is considerable indignation in my constituency at the previous Government's decision ... to transfer of our public library to the County Council? Will my hon Friend seek urgent consultations with his hon Friend in the Department of Education and Science to see whether that decision can be reversed?

Mr Rowlands. As my hon Friend knows, the final decision lies with the Secretary of State for

Education and Science. We are having urgent discussions on the matter this week ... Other applications which were received are under consideration also.⁴⁰

In addition to Llanelli, three other districts, Cynon Valley, Merthyr Tydfil and the Rhondda were pressing hard for a reprieve. All participants in the decision making process were now working against an increasingly tight timetable, with 1 April less than a fortnight away. The final decision was, as might be expected an eleventh hour affair. On Friday, 29 March, the Secretary of State for Education and Science, Reginald Prentice, laid an order⁴¹ before Parliament constituting the district councils of Llanelli, Cynon Valley, Merthyr Tydfil and the Rhondda as library authorities for the purposes of the Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964 (Appendix 13). Also, on 29 March, letters communicating the decision were sent to the four districts and to the counties in which those districts were situated (Dyfed and Mid-Glamorgan). Thus on the last working day before the great change-over the districts learnt that they would retain library powers and the counties discovered that they would have to begin to provide services on the following Monday to a curtailed area, their whole operation being resourced from a completely different financial base. This late change of mind by Ministers can only be seen as ironic when viewed against the whole question of viable public library authorities, a question which had represented a fulcrum of debate for librarians in the United Kingdom for a lengthy period of time. The change of mind, again as might be expected created administrative confusion for the authorities concerned.

The chaotic nature of the reorganisation process was emphasised in the instance of Mid-Glamorgan. On 1 April 1974 the Borough Librarian of the Rhondda was advised that the Secretary of State had issued a temporary order granting Rhondda separate library powers. At that time the cataloguing section had been dispersed, stocks of stationery run down, bookseller arrangements terminated. The staff who would have become part

of Mid-Glamorgan were recalled and the service was carried on under rather trying conditions.⁴²

As the quotation indicates, the order laid before Parliament in actual fact only gave the districts temporary designation as library authorities under paragraph 2 of Section 207 of the Local Government Act 1972, which states that

While the Secretary of State is considering an application by the council of a district ... he may make an order constituting that council a library authority for a period beginning with the 1 April 1974 and ending on a date specified by the Secretary of State on deciding to make or not to make the order applied for.⁴³

Ministers had been pressed into this course of action by the lateness of their decision: with the order being laid on 29 March there was no time for further consultation with the counties. The Department of Education and Science felt that Dyfed and Mid-Glamorgan should now be given the opportunity to respond. Dyfed reacted with a document (extracts Appendix 14) which pointed to the need for integration of local government services, to the fact that a large library authority was better able to achieve the objectives of the 1964 Act, and that only a large authority had the capacity to provide specialist services such as cultural activities. Mid-Glamorgan's response (Appendix 15) also concentrates on the benefits of operating a county-wide service and the ensuing economies of scale and moves on to specific charges

The cases put forward by the Districts are retrospective and reflect a concern which is parochial and restrictive and a failing to appreciate that only a strong, co-ordinated service will meet the varied needs of a demanding community. The main interest of the public is in the quality of the service provided and not in who is responsible for controlling that service - they can use and identify with a County branch as effectively as they can with a library provided and controlled by a District.⁴⁴

Interestingly Mid-Glamorgan offered the districts extensive agency arrangements including Joint District Committees (comprising members of county and district councils),

control over book selection and the supervision of day to day management of libraries, with local determination of opening hours.

Although the counties were given this final chance to put their side of the argument, both Dyfed and Mid-Glamorgan must have realized that the whole question of library powers was to all intents and purposes settled. It is almost inconceivable that Ministers having reversed the October 1973 decision, would change their minds once more and deprive Llanelli, Cynon Valley, Merthyr and the Rhondda of their status as newly constituted library authorities. A further reversal would have laid the policy of the Labour government open to ridicule, causing consternation amongst a substantial number of Welsh members of Parliament and would have created more havoc for the authorities concerned. Accordingly the Secretary of State for Education and Science laid two subsequent orders⁴⁵ before Parliament on 12 February 1975 which revoked the earlier temporary designation and gave the four districts continuing library powers from 6 March onwards (Appendix 16). The DES had already written to the districts informing them that if they were granted powers beyond the temporary period, then the following conditions should be borne in mind:

that the District Council should be prepared to co-operate in any arrangements for the compilation and maintenance of joint records for the holdings of libraries within the County as a whole:

that the District council should be prepared to co-operate in making arrangements whereby the resources both of library materials and of staff expertise in the district and the county libraries could be built up and used for the benefit of readers in the district and county as a whole:

that the District Council should make no charges to county readers which it did not also make to its own readers.⁴⁶

The districts were more than ready to agree to these conditions and were thus empowered from March 1975 onwards

to maintain their status as library authorities, having responsibility with the eight counties for the provision of public library services in Wales.

How can this reversal of policy be explained? How had it come to pass that a blanket rejection by a Conservative Secretary of State for Education and Science in October 1973 had become a few months later an acceptance by the Labour counterpart that four district councils should have the right to run public libraries? The about-turn from one position to another may be analysed in the light of a series of considerations, some of which quite clearly had a more important bearing than others.

Firstly, it is doubtful whether Labour Ministers were persuaded or convinced by the excellence or otherwise of the standard of library services which had been offered by the districts in question or by the extent which they matched the stipulated criteria. Whist it has been shown that one of the districts - Llanelli - did have a good record when measured against existing performance indicators, the standards of the other three were not beyond criticism. Moreover if high levels of expenditure or overall size were the touchstones of success in the struggle for library powers, several of the other original applicants could have provided equal proof that they also had expended an above average level of resources in the provision of a public library service. In terms of population, Merthyr was fourth largest, Cynon Valley seventh, Llanelli eighth and Rhondda ninth in the overall ranking of original applicants. The matter of size and thus potential viability as an authority was obviously not central to the decision to allocate powers.

Nor can it be suggested that the course of action chosen in Wales was in some way an extension of what had occurred in England. Section 207 of the Local Government Act applied to Wales alone and non-metropolitan districts in England were

left to seek a library role through agency arrangements. Guidance on this was laid out in the Department of the Environment Circular 131/72⁴⁷: counties and districts were to seek solutions internally by mid-September 1973; if they had failed the dispute would go to the Minister after that date. Fifty nine districts in England applied to the DES for directions on agency in relation to library powers, the high number indicative of factors such as civic tradition, interest and pride in a locally operated service. Thirty six applications were withdrawn (this in itself revealing the influence of a departmental line towards county based services) leaving twenty three for Ministerial decision. The timetable of agency applications meant that all claims went to Margaret Thatcher, the Conservative Secretary of State for Education and Science, and just as she had rejected all district applications in Wales, she turned down all agency claims in England. The thinking and the policy were consistent

Parliament had given library powers to the shire counties. So unless an overwhelming case could be made to the contrary, the shires should decide how to run their own libraries. The second point is that the districts which had the strongest claim to agency in terms of their resources and experience were so important and central to the counties that the county services would have been seriously weakened if these districts had been allowed to stand apart.⁴⁸

There was no change when Labour came to power and it became clear that there could be no library role for non-metropolitan districts in England via agency arrangements. Viewed within the confines of this bi-partisan approach the decision to grant library powers to the four districts in Wales can only be seen as an aberration. If counties in England were in danger of being seriously weakened if districts were allowed to stand apart, was it not true that a county in Wales, such as Mid-Glamorgan would be seriously weakened by the loss of three of its six districts?

There is virtually no evidence to suggest that the relevant local authority associations had an important influence on the matter of library powers in Wales. The prime reason for this is that the associations, like local government itself, were in a state of considerable transition during this period. A Welsh Counties Committee of the Association of County Councils was established in July 1973, but there is no indication that either Dyfed or Mid-Glamorgan used this committee as a means to further their case against the districts in Wales. The districts voice was the Council for the Principality which met for the first time at Cardiff on 7 May 1974. By that date the four districts had already been granted library powers; the matter was thus merely reported at the meeting⁴⁹ and once again there is no sign that the Council played any part on behalf of the applying districts.

The influence of the Library Association throughout the whole affair was minimal. Although LA Council and the Public Libraries Committee of the Association expressed regret at the decision to grant district library powers, the Association felt that it was more appropriate for the Welsh Library Association to handle negotiations with central government. This much is made clear in a brief reference to the subject in Liaison⁵⁰ and in correspondence between the Welsh Association and the Department of Education and Science and between the LA and the same Department.⁵¹ The bulk of this correspondence is again dated following the granting of powers and is thus an example of action after the event. At such a juncture the best that both Associations could hope for was that the DES would offer an explanation and account for its decision. The reporting of the issue in the professional press is strangely muted. Reference to the Conservative Government's rejection of all applications in October 1973, does not appear in Liaison until February 1974 and then only in the shortest of references.⁵² The Labour granting of powers in March 1974 is not reported at all and there is no indication in the

Library Association Record or Liaison that there has been a shift of policy until the June 1975 issues.⁵³ The Conference of Library Authorities in Wales met on 15-16 October 1974 and although the gathering was addressed by the President of the Library Association, Eric Clough, neither he nor any other speaker at the Conference referred to the matter of district library powers. In contrast to all of this the initiatives and correspondence of the Smaller Public Libraries Group were well judged and timed. At a crucial period, with a new administration barely in power, the SPLG worked effectively as a pressure group, lobbying Ministers and sympathetic members of Parliament. The SPLG was also able to present its case as a furthering of all applications and thus neatly avoided the pit-fall of special pleading on behalf of any one district authority in Wales.

There remains one consideration which above all else explains why the four districts were constituted as library authorities. It is almost impossible not to arrive at the conclusion that the ultimate decision to allocate library powers was a political decision, made by politicians who were influenced by political factors. The first of these factors would be the political composition of Wales after the February 1974 election: of the thirty six Parliamentary seats Labour had won twenty four, the Conservatives eight and the Liberals and Plaid Cymru had two seats each. Wales could well be described as a Labour stronghold an area which had once more delivered votes and members of Parliament to bring Labour to the brink of power albeit with no overall majority at Westminster. In such an atmosphere the arguments presented by Labour members on behalf of applying districts stood a very strong chance of being heeded. Secondly the four districts which finally became library authorities were all Labour controlled, and each had returned Labour members at the 1974 General Election with majorities which were among the highest in the United Kingdom. (In Aberdare Labour took 59.5% of the votes and

had a majority of 29.6%; in Llanelli the figures were 57.8% and 42.8% respectively; in Merthyr 64.2% and 42.4%; whilst in the Rhondda Labour had an astonishing 70.7% of the vote and a majority of 57.8% over the only other candidate⁵⁴). These were the very members of Parliament who complained vociferously at the October 1973 rejection and pressed hard on behalf of the districts as soon as Labour came to power. The influence of these individuals leads to a third point: Parliamentary constituencies in Wales approximated closely with the boundaries of the new district councils and this meant that members would automatically identify with and support the district case. On each occasion when the subject of library powers was raised in Parliament, the enquiries and calls for action came from members representing the district side, never the county. Fourthly one of the members in question (Ted Rowlands, MP for Merthyr) had been appointed by Harold Wilson as Under Secretary at the Welsh Office. Although the granting of powers was formally a matter for the DES it is evident that this time around the Welsh Office played a more prominent part. That being so it was surely helpful to have an accessible junior Minister at the Welsh Office who was also Member of Parliament for one of the applying districts and other districts naturally benefited from his wish to display his fair-mindedness. Finally it is pertinent to re-emphasise that all participants involved with the question of library powers were from March 1974 dealing with a government which could at any time be out-voted by an alliance of other parties. Moreover this was a government which during its first weeks in power had to resolve the miners' dispute and prepare a budget to tackle an escalating financial crisis. Against this background, the allocation of library powers in Wales would be an issue of minor proportions, a problem which could be resolved by political compromise from an administration more amenable to concession rather than confrontation.

Those who have charted the history and developments of public libraries have, not surprisingly found the whole matter odd and perplexing. For Kelly it was a 'minor anomaly'⁵⁵ while Whiteman sees the episode as bizarre and concludes that

The decision was quite irrational in the context of the [1972] Act as a whole and of the history of serious thought on units of library service.⁵⁶

Any assessment from the standpoint of professionalism and experience would find it hard to disagree with that statement. A shift to the political arena throws the decision itself into a new light and begins to explain why the four districts were from 1974 onwards a fact of life - a fact of life which had to be accepted by the counties and the library profession in Wales.

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CHAPTER FOUR

"With its [the local government World's] usual spirit of patriotism and its tradition of service to the community's needs, it is coming to realize that, for the time being at least, the party is over".

Anthony Crossland, Secretary of State
for the Environment, at a Civic Luncheon
at Manchester Town Hall, 9 May 1975

This prophetic statement revealed to officers, elected representatives and to local government in general that the ideals and objectives of reorganisation were to be swiftly modified by the harsh realities of economic stringency. Reorganisation was expected to usher in widespread improvement in a range of services: it had been claimed that the new large units would cut costs, reap economies of scale and that whenever two or more former authorities were merged the best features of each would be combined to establish a higher standard throughout the new authority's area. This levelling-up would give all local services, including libraries, an opportunity to work towards uniformly raised standards. That, in brief was the theory - practice was a somewhat different story. The early aspirations of librarians and other administrators were dashed by several factors. Reorganisation coincided with a sharp rise in costs of public and private services: in 1974 Britain's inflation rate shot up to 24.3%;¹ between 1973 and 1983 prices (as measured by the Retail Price Index) increased by 260%, an average annual increase of 13.6% and the fastest rise over such a period for over a hundred years.² Against this spiral of rising costs, local authorities, as a result of successive expenditure plans and rate support grant settlements, were forced to work within standstill or declining budgets. The Public Expenditure Survey Report published in February 1976 envisaged a planned reduction in public expenditure of £5,000 million between 1976 and 1980. The response of individual local authorities was varied with the cuts being far more draconian in some areas than others. An accurate picture of the fate of

libraries during the three years of financial restraint following reorganization is presented in the Six Counties Study.⁴ On the basis of information gathered the study pointed to a clear decline in the range of services offered; of greater importance was the possible cumulative effect of the deterioration in quantity and quality of bookstock if low levels of expenditure were to persist. This was exactly what was to happen

with the coming to power of the Conservative government in May 1979, the gentle constraint on total recurrent expenditure on libraries became an economic vice... After four years of steadily reducing budgets many authorities now found it impossible to trim services further. Major reductions in services, once the headline catching actions of a few maverick authorities, became widespread.⁵

The reaction of central government to this process of erosion was that the resources that were being made available to all types of libraries should be used to maximum benefit. This much was made clear in the Eighth Report of the House of Commons Expenditure Committee published in June 1978,⁶ a Report which called on the Department of Education and Science to investigate, as a matter of urgency the relationship between the Department and national, public, university and other libraries and Library Advisory Councils and to formulate policy in the light of that investigation. As the Library Advisory Council (England) had already established a Working Party to examine the areas pinpointed by the Expenditure Committee, the Secretary of State for Education and Science decided that it would be apposite for this Working Party to undertake the investigation called for. The outcome of the Working Party's deliberations, submitted to the Minister for the Arts in July 1979⁷ called for the adoption by Government of a more vigorously encouraging attitude towards library services; a strengthening in terms of membership and responsibility of the Library Advisory Councils; and an increase in the number and status of the DES Library

Advisers. These recommendations were amplified in a Select Committee Report presented to Government in October 1980.⁸ The main thrust of this document was that the Government should appoint a Minister of Cabinet rank to take responsibility for information policy and that a standing commission should be established to advise on the planning of a national information network. In its response⁹ the Government emphasised that the Arts Minister, having responsibility for libraries, should take the lead in all matters relating to information services, and that instead of appointing a standing commission the Government would extend the role of the Library Advisory Council by changing its title, increasing membership and by widening its functions. Accordingly it was announced in August 1981 that the Library Advisory Council (England) would be renamed the Library and Information Services Council (LISC) and that the advisory bodies for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland would adopt similar changes of title and responsibilities.

These developments were of course relevant to the United Kingdom as a whole, but there were also specific shifts of position in relation to central government's attitude to library services in Wales. On 4 November 1977 the Prime Minister announced that the Secretary of State for Wales would assume responsibility for a wide range of educational institutions and services: oversight of library policy and the work of the Library Advisory Council (Wales) was among the functions transferred. Thus, some thirteen years after its establishment the Welsh Office, a government department which controlled services such as health and education, traditionally the services with the most significant budgets, was finally able to add libraries to its responsibilities. The change is an example of grudging acceptance by government that areas such as the public library service should be in the care of the Secretary of State for Wales. This gradual process was described by Osmond thus:

the Welsh Office was born amidst scepticism and the rest of the 1960's witnessed a struggle to obtain for it the powers promised - a struggle that well illustrates the innate hostility of Whitehall towards decentralised administration.¹⁰

Responding to the fact that it was now accountable to the Secretary of State for Wales, the Library Advisory Council (Wales) submitted a report to that Minister in November 1979 entitled The Library System of Wales.¹¹ This review examined all types of libraries in Wales - the section on public libraries is particularly revealing. Working from CIPFA statistics the Advisory Council pointed to wide differences to the way apparent commitments to library services varied from one authority to another. The average increases in net expenditure from 1974-75 up to and including 1978-79 estimates was 70% but of the ten authorities for which statistics were available over this period, the range was from 37% to 114% with five authorities below the average and the remaining five on or above it. When net expenditure was expressed in £'s per 1000 population the largest budget in 1974 was about twice that of the smallest and this differential was only fractionally less in the 1978-79 estimates, but between different authorities. By the same expression, the expenditure on books alone showed a difference of over $3\frac{1}{2}$ times in 1974 and just under $2\frac{3}{4}$ times in the 1978-79 estimates. To remove such anomalies and to generally improve the lot of libraries in Wales, the report put forward several recommendations. The most important of these was that the Secretary of State should appoint a full time library adviser for Wales to replace the arrangement whereby the DES released a library adviser to work in Wales for a brief period each year. One of the chief tasks of this Welsh adviser would be to monitor the spending of local authorities on libraries to ensure that the service did not suffer undue harm, particularly as a result of rash cuts in public spending. The Secretary of State gave his response to the report on 21 October 1980:¹² he rejected the idea of appointing a separate library adviser for Wales and found it

unacceptable that he should monitor local authority expenditure on public libraries as this would constitute an unwarranted intrusion into local authority affairs. On a wider front the Secretary of State all but rejected each one of the recommendations put forward by the Library Advisory Council and he even deemed it inappropriate to stimulate further debate on the basis of publication of the report. This sharp rebuttal may be explained in two ways. The Advisory Council report had been prepared and presented to a Labour Secretary of State, but a General Election in May 1979 won by the Conservatives meant that the response to the report came from a Minister of a Government committed to even more severe reductions in public expenditure. Secondly the period between the preparation of the report, its presentation and ultimate response from the Minister had been characterised by a constant deterioration in UK economic performance. Arguments which might be tenable in 1978 were shorn of much of their validity with the passage of time. Whatever the reason the Library Advisory Council (Wales), the body charged with advising ministers on library matters, found that its advice was unwelcome. Whether the advice was tendered to the Secretary of State for Education and Science or to the Secretary of State for Wales was in one sense irrelevant: libraries may have been devolved into the care of the Welsh Office, but central government was still central government.

During the decade from 1974 to 1984 local government not only had to face economic difficulties, it also had to accept the possibility that its newly revised structure might be subjected to further investigation and reorganisation. The impetus for such change emanated mainly from the proposals for the devolution of power to Welsh and Scottish Assemblies. In April 1969 a Labour government had established a Commission on the Constitution under the Chairmanship of Lord Crowther (on his death in 1970, Lord Kilbrandon became Chairman). The Kilbrandon Commission Report¹³ published in October 1974 rejected separatism and

federalism but favoured a directly elected Scottish Assembly and presented several models which might be deployed to effect devolution in Wales. These proposals were given added significance by the growth of Nationalist representation in Parliament after the elections of February and October 1974. In November 1978 the Labour Government outlined its reaction to Kilbrandon in a White Paper:¹⁴ directly elected assemblies were to be set up in Scotland and Wales; the Scottish Assembly would have legislative and executive powers, the Welsh Assembly would be confined to executive powers. This important difference apart, it became clear that the Welsh Assembly would have control over a wide range of functions, including libraries.

The Assembly will be responsible for the Arts... and for national and local libraries, museums and art galleries.¹⁵

Although all of this only applied to Scotland and Wales, it became apparent that such far-reaching changes could not be implemented without in some way introducing a pattern of regional government in England. A second White Paper¹⁶ gave an indication of government thinking and made it clear that the debate on an ideal structure for local government, and the allocation of functions had been re-opened

There has been a good deal of criticism within the present two tier system ... The problems which have arisen under the 1974 structure do not affect all areas in the same way. A reform approach could start with a review of the tiers at which local authority functions are performed; desirable changes could take place selectively and if necessary with different patterns in different parts of the country.¹⁷

Ultimately however Labour's proposals on devolution and further restructuring were to come to nothing. Parliament¹⁸ effectively killed the former by requiring that 40% of the electorate vote in favour of the Welsh and Scottish Assemblies in a referendum held on 1 March 1979 (both

countries failed to meet this target); the latter proposals on the reform of local government were then rendered superfluous. The result of the referenda led directly to the fall of the Labour government, the 1979 General Election and the formation of a Conservative administration under Margaret Thatcher. From there on the emphasis had been on integration and centralisation and devolution was no longer at the head of the political agenda. This does not mean that the Conservatives have refrained from implementing changes in the structure of local government: under the terms of the Local Government Act 1985, the Greater London Council and the six metropolitan counties of Greater Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear, West Midlands and West Yorkshire were abolished in 1 April 1986. None of these authorities had responsibility for library services.

District library authorities in Wales had to consider all these changes and developments as they prepared their case in 1984 for re-affirmation of status as library powers. The four districts, Cynon Valley, Llanelli, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda knew that paragraph 8 of Section 207 of the Local Government Act, 1972 provided for a decennial review and that the review date was to be 1 April 1984. The major difference in the decision-making process this second time round was that as a result of the transfer of responsibility already mentioned, districts and counties would have to submit their cases to the Welsh Office and not the Department of Education and Science. The final decision was vested in the Secretary of State for Wales but as he approached the question he had to discover the fairest and least contentious means of arriving at that decision. The whole matter though minor in the overall context of Welsh Office responsibilities, was potentially a very sensitive issue requiring delicate handling if the Secretary of State was to minimise direct or even implied criticism of the local authorities and their associations. Several alternatives presented themselves to the Secretary of State.

He could invite representations from districts and counties, consult his civil servants and take an executive decision. This would represent a virtual replay of the 1974 process and would clearly lead to criticism from interested parties and from the library profession in general. The Secretary of State could also request the assistance of the body whose very task was to advise him on library matters in Wales - The Library and Information Services Council. A difficulty with this option was that the impartiality of the Council was compromised by virtue of the fact that its members included the County Librarian of Dyfed (directly affected by the re-application of Llanelli) and an ex-borough librarian who had led the campaign for district separation in 1974. The third alternative was to establish some form of independent inquiry which would examine the issue, report and advise the Secretary of State. This well-tried device would distance ministers from the decision yet give them a certain amount of flexibility in that they would not be bound to accept the advice of the inquiry. Such an independent investigation would depoliticise the question, would ensure that decision-making was more open than in 1974 and would mean that the whole process was less likely to antagonise all parties involved - local authority representatives and officers and librarians in Wales and beyond.

It is assumed that these were some of the reasons which led the Secretary of State to choose this third option to assist him in his investigation to consider the matter of district library powers in Wales. In February 1984 a Panel was appointed to

undertake a review of district library authorities in Wales and to advise the Secretary of State whether a change would lead to an improvement in library facilities in the district or in the county.¹⁹

The four members of the Panel were: Messrs Glyn Davies, ex-county librarian Clwyd and an ex-member of the Library Advisory Council (Wales) who was to act as Chairman; Ieuan Edwards county librarian of South Glamorgan; Peter Beauchamp, Library Adviser Office of Arts and Libraries (the library adviser who for a brief period each year worked in Wales) and the author of this study. To avoid accusations of bias members had to be carefully chosen. None of the four had any link with the counties or districts involved, nevertheless their impartiality was swiftly questioned. On 12 March 1984 Geraint Price Thomas Assistant Secretary (Wales) of the Welsh Association of District Councils wrote to Nicholas Edwards, Secretary of State for Wales complaining that of the four individuals selected one was a former county librarian and another the librarian of an existing county in Wales.²⁰ A 'county' bias was thus discerned and the ADC in Wales requested that the balance be redressed by the inclusion of a district representative. This was rejected by the Welsh Office.

The first task of the Panel was to establish how they would conduct their investigation. The closed nature of the 1974 decision meant that they had little in the form of precedents which could be used as guidelines. Some information was supplied by Welsh Office civil servants to amplify the original terms of reference but the Panel was to a large extent given freedom to decide how it would proceed. The chosen pattern was that the local authorities concerned were invited to submit written evidence conveying each case, this to be amplified by oral evidence at hearings at the Welsh Office. The original intention was that there would be a single round of meetings but as the districts complained at the short notice given they were offered the opportunity to submit further written and oral evidence. All of this was supplemented by visits to libraries in each of the districts and counties to gain first hand impressions of the library services provided. The Panel did not seek evidence from bodies other than the authorities involved but

they did take note of all correspondence and representations received from a wide spectrum of organisations and individuals. As to criteria the Panel laid great store on the requirements of Circular 6/73²¹, comparative statistical data provided by the CIPFA Public Library Statistics, evidence of recent developments in library services throughout England and Wales and the response of the districts and counties concerned to those developments. To structure their investigation and to ensure that all authorities were treated in an equal manner, the Panel decided to examine each library service under the following broad headings:

- (i) management and organisation of the authority and its library service at member and officer levels. This was seen to be a crucial issue, having the potential to affect in a positive or negative manner all aspects of the library service;
- (ii) expenditure: past and present budget and future prospects;
- (iii) staff and training;
- (iv) services and their uses;
- (v) premises;
- (vi) stock;
- (vii) Welsh language material;
- (viii) automation, with special reference to computerisation plans at the National Library of Wales;
- (ix) co-operation in the case of each district, especially with its adjacent county and the National Library of Wales;
- (x) future objectives and priorities.²²

All authorities were advised in advance that these would be the main areas of enquiry.

LLANELLI'S APPLICATION - FIRST DOCUMENT

Llanelli's application²³ (Appendix 17) rehearsed many of the arguments put forward in 1974. The central tenet of their case was that Llanelli stood apart from the remainder of Dyfed as a highly industrialised region; as such it required a library service specialising in technical subjects and easily accessible to local users. To this end the application claimed that Llanelli had the stock and staff expertise necessary to answer complex enquiries. The continued separation of Llanelli and Dyfed would in no way affect the capacity of the county to deliver an effective service: without Llanelli, Dyfed would still have as large a geographical area as almost any other Welsh county (a dubious advantage) and a population and a rateable value greater than two other counties in Wales. The application reviews the library services provided and asserted that these were delivered to a high standard and that the authority was committed to the maintenance of those standards. The very full statistical summary at the end of the application supports this argument to a large extent, revealing in brief that book purchase levels in 1975-1984 had been maintained at or above Bourdillon requirements, professional staff complement had been close to Bourdillon and that seven new branch libraries had been built between 1975 and 1984. Thus it was claimed that Llanelli had capitalised on the granting of powers in 1974 and that the resultant expansion and development more than justified the case for continued separation.

To further examine the question of performance, Llanelli's library service is now set against Bourdillon standards for staffing and book purchase levels (1 non manual member of staff for every 2,500 population served - 40% to be qualified - and a purchase level of 250 volumes per annum for every 1,000 population served.

TABLE 4.1
SUMMARY²⁴ AND EVALUATION OF THE LIBRARY SERVICE
PROVIDED BY LLANELLI BOROUGH COUNCIL 1982-83

Population served	75,200	
Professional Posts	11)	Bourdillon recommendation 12
	) 27	
Non Manual Posts	16)	Bourdillon recommendation 30
Total Book Stock	359,000	4.1 vols for each inhabitant
Books added to stock 1982-83		19,799
Bourdillon recommendation		18,800
Expenditure per 1,000 on employees		£2,837
Welsh Districts Average		£3,035
Expenditure per 1,000 on premises		£ 397
Welsh Districts Average		£ 493
Expenditure per 1,000 on books		£1,265
Welsh Districts Average		£1,005
Total Expenditure per 1,000 population		£6,244
Welsh Districts Average		£5,669
% Increase in total expenditure per 1,000 population 1972-1982		167%
Total expenditure per 1,000 Welsh Counties Average		£5,494

Llanelli could justifiably argue that it was providing a library service at the required standard. The only weaknesses were the slight drop in the number of volumes for each inhabitant between 1972-1982 (from 5.4 to 4.7) and the failure to meet the Bourdillon target on non- manual posts. It is striking that this application repeats the omission of the 1974 document in that it says little or nothing specific on how the library might serve Welsh speakers, and readers of Welsh language materials, in the Llanelli area.

DYFED'S RESPONSE

The county argument²⁵ (Appendix 18) centres on the need to establish a viable unit in terms of size and resources for an effective library service. It was argued that this need had been paramount at the time of reorganisation and was no less relevant ten years later. Dyfed had from the outset

attempted to maximise the benefits of integration by creating a Cultural Services Department with responsibility for libraries, archives and museums and by delivering a library service to an area coterminous with social services and education - including schools and colleges in the Llanelli area. The separation of county and district in 1974 had resulted in losses on both sides of the divide: Dyfed had lost the opportunity to provide an effective information service to industry and commerce, based on the resources already located at Llanelli; Llanelli had lost out on staff expertise and investment in information technology. Dyfed's response also claimed that the need to fix a special county precept for library services had a restraining effect upon the library service in the remainder of the county. The response acknowledges that Llanelli was spending more on its library service than Dyfed, but this should not automatically be accepted as valid evidence of a higher standard of service.

Certainly the spend per head in Llanelli is higher than in Dyfed, but this fact alone will not of necessity be indicative of a higher (or better) standard of service. Indeed the higher unit costs could well reflect the diseconomies of (small) scale in the Llanelli situation.²⁵

To pursue this question Dyfed's library service is now evaluated against Bourdillon recommended standards.

TABLE 4.2
SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF THE LIBRARY SERVICE
PROVIDED BY DYFED COUNTY COUNCIL 1982-83

Population served	258,300	
Professional Posts	27)	Bourdillon recommendation 41
	) 91	
Non Manual Posts	64)	Bourdillon recommendation 103
Total Book Stock	946,000	3.61 vols for each inhabitant
Books added to stock 1982-83		50,407
Bourdillon recommendation		64,575
Expenditure per 1,000 on employees		£2,728
Welsh Counties Average		£3,053
Expenditure per 1,000 on premises		£ 484
Welsh Counties Average		£ 583
Expenditure per 1,000 on books		£ 797
Welsh Counties Average		£ 882
Total Expenditure per 1,000 population		£5,269
Welsh Counties Average		£5,494
% Increase in total expenditure per 1,000 population 1972-1982		94%
Total expenditure per 1,000 Welsh Districts Average		£5,669

On almost all indices the summary reveals that the library service being provided by Dyfed County Council was below Bourdillon targets. Staffing and book purchase levels were not being met and Dyfed was below average in expenditure per 1,000 population when compared with other Welsh counties. Perhaps the most telling statistic is that although Dyfed had over $3\frac{1}{2}$ times the population of Llanelli, the number of books added to stock in the county was only $2\frac{1}{2}$ times the total in the district.

LLANELLI'S APPLICATION - SECOND DOCUMENT

A supplementary statement²⁷ (Appendix 19) focusses on some of the potential consequences of integration of Llanelli and Dyfed.

General standards of library provision in the Borough will fall in terms of bookstock and staff

and the quality and the range of services generally will be dragged down to the level of the County library service.²⁸

It is noticeable that in this second document the language is more strident (it is claimed for example that the special needs of Llanelli are totally different from the needs of the rest of Dyfed) and there is more overt criticism of the county library service. This apart, the central message is the same: Llanelli had deployed resources in the past to deliver a library service of a high standard - this policy would be maintained in the future. Joining district and county would place all of this in jeopardy and would inevitably lead to a deterioration of services.

CYNON VALLEY'S APPLICATION - FIRST DOCUMENT

This is no more than a brief outline of developments since 1974; the major initiative had been the provision of one new full time branch library.

TABLE 4.3
SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF THE LIBRARY SERVICE
PROVIDED BY CYNON VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL 1982-83

Population served	67,100	
Professional Posts	7)	Bourdillon recommendation 10.7
	) 28	
Non Manual Posts	21)	Bourdillon recommendation 26.8
Total Book Stock	211,000	3.1 vols for each inhabitant
Books added to stock 1982-83		10,541
Bourdillon recommendation		16,775
Expenditure per 1,000 on employees		£2,995
Welsh Districts Average		£3,035
Expenditure per 1,000 on premises		£ 519
Welsh Districts Average		£ 493
Expenditure per 1,000 on books		£ 784
Welsh Districts Average		£1,005
Total Expenditure per 1,000 population		£5,454
Welsh Districts Average		£5,669
% Increase in total expenditure per 1,000 population 1972-1982		210%
Total expenditure per 1,000 Welsh Counties Average		£5,494

Despite increases in expenditure between 1974-1982 Cynon Valley still did not meet Bourdillon targets on staffing and book purchase. Its failure to supplement book stock is demonstrated in two ways: by the fact that it was some 40% short of the Bourdillon requirement on book purchase and by the fact that its expenditure per 1,000 on books was some £200 below the average for Welsh districts. This weakness is made more apparent when placed in the context of overall expenditure: between 1974-82 this had increased by 210% - the book fund increase over the same period was only 50.9% and this at a time when librarians had been facing sharp increases in book prices.

SECOND DOCUMENT

This is a fuller expression of the authority's case²⁹ (Appendix 20). It opens with the history of the decision to grant powers in 1974 and then presents reasons why the status quo should prevail. Basically these reasons are founded on a review of the performance of the authority between 1974 and 1984 and the potential consequences for the library service if it were vested in Mid-Glamorgan. It is asserted that the authority had always maintained a positive outlook and had striven to provide a library service of a high standard. However even by the authority's own admission the reality fell somewhat short of this ideal. In terms of capital expenditure and development the service had all but stagnated; on current expenditure the claim that

the book fund has been consistently increased year by year to keep pace, as far as possible, with inflation.³⁰

is considerably devalued in the light of the earlier analysis. The submission is heavy with hopes of what might be if more resources were available, the main reason for failure being central government restrictions on local government expenditure. Two rather odd characteristics reveal the anachronistic attitude of the authority towards their library service. Firstly the Libraries Committee was a committee of the whole council; whilst it was claimed that this pattern enhanced involvement of elected representatives it is equally likely that it would lead to increased bureaucracy and inter-ward factionalism. Secondly (and indicative of this factionalism) Cynon Valley was still in 1984 financially supporting three workmen's Institute Libraries which were not under the full control of the authority. On the question of transfer of powers to the county, Cynon Valley argues that it would be far better for hard-pressed Mid-Glamorgan to concentrate on the provision and improvement of library services in the area already under county control. Under no circumstances could Borough

Council Officers and elected representatives conceive of a situation where change would lead to improvement.

MERTHYR TYDFIL'S APPLICATION - FIRST DOCUMENT

Document is again something of a misnomer as the first submission is no more than a letter amounting to a page and a half with supporting statistics. Even this brief communication reveals that the authority had reduced the book fund and that there had been minimal capital development between 1974 and 1984.

TABLE 4.4
SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF THE LIBRARY SERVICE
PROVIDED BY MERTHYR TYDFIL BOROUGH COUNCIL 1982-83

Population served	60,600		
Professional Posts	8)	Bourdillon recommendation	9.6
	) 21		
Non Manual Posts	13)	Bourdillon recommendation	24.2
Total Book Stock	127,000	2 vols for each inhabitant	
Books added to stock 1982-83			10,938
Bourdillon recommendation			15,150
Expenditure per 1,000 on employees			£2,851
Welsh Districts Average			£3,035
Expenditure per 1,000 on premises			£ 388
Welsh Districts Average			£ 493
Expenditure per 1,000 on books			£1,005
Total Expenditure per 1,000 population			£4,196
Welsh Districts Average			£5,669
% Increase in total expenditure per 1,000 population			
1972-1982			282%
Total expenditure per 1,000 Welsh Counties Average			£5,494

Merthyr was below Bourdillon standards on staffing and book purchase levels. The tendency apparent in the case of Cynon Valley is also present here: whereas total expenditure per 1,000 population had increased by 282% between 1972-82 expenditure on books within the same period had only grown

by 114%. Merthyr also compares badly with the other Welsh districts on expenditure on books, spending some 50% below the average.

SECOND DOCUMENT

Having outlined the historical background this submission³¹ (Appendix 21) gives the authority's own estimation of the library service provided between 1974-1984. An analysis of their account indicates that nothing had been done by way of providing new branch libraries because other capital projects were considered to have a higher priority; future plans were little more than tentative aspirations. This review of performance is punctuated by frequent open-ended statements which give no indication of the specific plans of the authority

The Council believe that modern technology will play an increasing role in the library service and are prepared to meet this challenge.³²

How exactly the challenge would be met is not explained in detail.

The alternative arrangement whereby Merthyr Tydfil would be assimilated into Mid-Glamorgan is contemplated with considerable apprehension. The borough asserts that it had a proven commitment to the library service within its locality; Mid-Glamorgan, meeting the needs of a larger area could not secure and deliver the same standard of service it was argued.

RHONDDA'S APPLICATION - FIRST DOCUMENT

This was essentially a situation statement giving a list of service points together with a statistical survey and staff structure.

TABLE 4.5
SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF THE LIBRARY SERVICE
PROVIDED BY RHONDDA BOROUGH COUNCIL 1982-83

Population served	81,800	
Professional Posts	12)	Bourdillon recommendation 13
	) 37	
Non Manual Posts	25)	Bourdillon recommendation 32.7
Total Book Stock	218,000	2.6 vols for each inhabitant
Books added to stock 1982-83		26,519
Bourdillon recommendation		20,450
Expenditure per 1,000 on employees		£3,386
Welsh Districts Average		£3,035
Expenditure per 1,000 on premises		£ 639
Welsh Districts Average		£ 493
Expenditure per 1,000 on books		£1,320
Welsh Districts Average		£1,005
Total Expenditure per 1,000 population		£6,409
Welsh Districts Average		£5,669
% Increase in total expenditure per 1,000 population 1972-1982		339%
Total expenditure per 1,000 Welsh Counties Average		£5,494

Rhondda all but met the Bourdillon target on professional posts but was below standard on non-manual staff. The target on book purchase levels was exceeded by some 6,000 volumes and Rhondda was an above average spender when compared with the three other Welsh districts.

SECOND DOCUMENT

This submission³³ (Appendix 22) is a fuller statement, presenting a review of the library service provided by the Borough and discussing the consequences of integration. The document claims that the cost per head of providing a library service to the three districts already served by Mid-Glamorgan was £4.90, Rhondda was already spending £6.20 per inhabitant. Thus the county would have to increase their level of spending to maintain Rhondda's present service. Information is given on capital development and

the growth of the mobile library service. On current expenditure statistics reveal that between 1979-80 and 1980-81 the book fund was cut from £80,000 to £45,000; the reason given for this sharp reduction is that this was a period of severe restrictions on all aspects of the authority's expenditure and the library service could not be exempt from this wider pattern. There is some justification in this argument; with a relaxation in restrictions the book fund had climbed back to £91,800 by 1981-82. A service was being provided to primary and secondary schools, this having foundation in Rhondda's previous status as an accepted district for education and in the lack of a county wide school library service from Mid-Glamorgan. In conclusion the authority stood by its record and asserted that assimilation with the county would only serve to damage the present level of provision and future development plans.

MID-GLAMORGAN'S RESPONSE

The county reaction³⁴ (Appendix 23) to the district's claims for continuation of powers places the question in the context of the 1974 decision and then moves on to review the present position in Mid-Glamorgan. All major aspects of the library service are discussed: the authority acknowledges that there was no formal county wide school library service and admits to continued support for seven library centres administered by various Workmen's Institutes.

The county library provided collections of books in these centres and contributes towards the running costs of the buildings and the salary of the local librarian who is responsible to the Institute Committee and not the county library.³⁵

The county submission also accepts that the net expenditure per 1,000 population was higher in two of the districts than in Mid-Glamorgan (Cynon Valley £5,342, Rhondda £6,254, Mid-Glamorgan £4,854, all 1982-83 figures). This evidence is however subjected to a county interpretation with the authority claiming that

These figures indicate clearly that the Mid-Glamorgan library service is being provided more economically than most county authorities in England and Wales and much cheaper per head of population than in all but one of the districts within the administrative county.³⁶

Mid-Glamorgan could place at the disposal of the residents of the whole county a more extensive bookstock, (in quantity and quality in terms of expensive items) the advice and assistance of a substantial cadre of qualified staff, including specialist posts and a well developed infrastructure. On the latter the authority had incurred capital expenditure on purpose built branch libraries at six locations since 1974 and had purchased sites at eleven other locations. This record of current and capital expenditure leads the authority to outline the case for a county wide library service at the end of its submission. The large unit of service could perform efficiently and achieve economies by curbing duplication and waste in expenditure on materials and staff. The integration of county and district would bring benefits to library users and residents on both sides of the divide.

All of the four present library authorities in Mid-Glamorgan have a worthwhile contribution to make to the well being of their respective communities. Each of these libraries holds valuable materials and employs good quality staff. It is only when these resources are assimilated into one cohesive unit that all of these benefits are made available to all of the inhabitants in all of the communities within the county.³⁷

Mid-Glamorgan's library service is now assessed against Bourdillon requirements.

TABLE 4.6
SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF THE LIBRARY SERVICE
PROVIDED BY MID-GLAMORGAN COUNTY COUNCIL 1982-83

Population served	329,800		
Professional Posts	40)	Bourdillon recommendation	52
	) 113		
Non Manual Posts	73)	Bourdillon recommendation	131
Total Book Stock	613,000	1.8 vols for each inhabitant	
Books added to stock 1982-83			58,894
Bourdillon recommendation			82,450
Expenditure per 1,000 on employees			£2,733
Welsh Counties Average			£3,053
Expenditure per 1,000 on premises			£ 592
Welsh Counties Average			£ 583
Expenditure per 1,000 on books			£1,012
Welsh Counties Average			£ 882
Total Expenditure per 1,000 population			£4,988
Welsh Districts Average			£5,494
% Increase in total expenditure per 1,000 population 1974-1982			
Total expenditure per 1,000 Welsh Districts Average			£5,669

Mid-Glamorgan was below target on Bourdillon Standards for staffing and book purchase. It also spent 9.2% less per 1,000 population on its library service than the average figure for other Welsh counties but perhaps the most significant statistic is the Mid-Glamorgan expenditure per 1,000 on books where the figure was almost 15% above the average for Welsh counties.

The presentation of written submissions was the initial stage in the decision making process in 1984. Before leaving these documents several other factors, relevant to the cases of all districts and counties should be considered. Firstly it becomes apparent that the library authorities separated by the allocation of powers in 1974 had adopted an insular approach to their services for the remainder of the decade and that cooperation between district and county had been minimal. In one sense this is

not surprising: the last minute decision in 1974 had been greeted with bitterness by the counties affected and there was a natural reaction of withdrawal to county boundaries, leaving districts to their own devices. On the other hand these were authorities in close geographical proximity with the individuals most immediately concerned being members of a profession which has always emphasised the benefits of co-operation. Be that as it may, links between the authorities in question has been tenuous to say the least.

Co-operation from 1974/84 has not gone further than the normal courtesies observed between neighbouring libraries.³⁸

and again

the lack of professional or service liaison between the four library authorities has been a somewhat bad feature of the last ten years.³⁹

(It is to the credit of the counties that they at least acknowledge the omission whereas the districts are virtually silent on the matter).

The second point that arises is that despite the fact that a statistical summary and evaluation has been provided for the districts and counties involved, it should be stressed that such an evaluation must be treated with caution. The relevance of Bourdillon standards, formulated over twenty years previously, could be questioned. Nevertheless they are mentioned in more than one of the district submissions and were still taken to be important by those librarians as they presented their cases. It should also be borne in mind that statistics, as always, are open to more than one interpretation. Both Dyfed and Mid-Glamorgan deploy the argument that although district spend per head was higher it had to be higher to sustain the extra costs of independence (centralised services, duplication of staff and expensive material). While this assertion has some validity it cannot be over-supported and one must accept the converse argument that one or two districts were spending at a high level

because they had made conscious policy decisions to provide a high quality service. When the statistical analysis provided here is placed in a wider context, the disparity of funding noted in the Library Advisory Council (Wales) study of November 1979 is still evident in later appraisals of the performance of public libraries in the United Kingdom.

In Wales the overall expenditure figures per person are also very low: 80p per person in the Welsh counties and 75p per person in the districts ... Only one authority exceeded the national average, one improved its spending and one maintained it. Expenditure in one district sank as low as 42p. the depletion of book provision by 53 per cent in Dyfed is a particular cause for concern.⁴⁰

The third point relevant to all submissions is that the county case had a higher professional content than the district argument. There is wider and more extensive use of recent reports and studies undertaken by other libraries and library advisers. It is also evident that the county submissions had been prepared by the county librarian whereas the district case had been compiled by another officer - usually the Chief Executive of the authority.

The second stage in decision making was the series of meetings held between members of the Review Panel and district and county representatives. In all, panel members held ten meetings at which districts and counties were given the opportunity to present and amplify their case, this total of ten comprising of one meeting for both counties and two meetings for each district. As indicated earlier the original intention of the Review Panel was to restrict all representatives to one meeting, but because of district protests these authorities were allowed a second hearing. All the discussions took place at the Welsh Office and the Secretary of the Review Panel acted as note-taker. Although there is therefore some written evidence of the progress of meetings and discussions it is not the intention of this study to refer to any of that evidence. There are two

reasons for this decision. Firstly records of the meetings are brief and are confined to the requirements of the Review Panel at that time; they provide a summary of the general drift of argument and points raised but are not full verbatim accounts of the proceedings. Secondly, and more importantly, a large proportion of what was said was communicated in confidence and its use in the context of this work would be a breach of trust.

Nevertheless it is possible and relevant to provide a general account of how the meetings were conducted, the nature of representation at those meetings and their overall contribution to the decision making process.

The meetings were always chaired by the Chairman of the Review Panel. After greeting county or district representatives the first set of discussions would follow the plan outlined in the Review Panel Report,⁴¹ with the objective of giving equal treatment to all authorities. Basing each consultation on this framework also meant that no single authority could accuse the Panel of raising issues beyond the scope of the Review. This is not to suggest that the discussions were rigid and inflexible: points particular to the case of each authority developed naturally and were dealt with as they arose in the course of that discussion. The sequence of events was that districts gave a defence of their service at their meeting, with the counties then presenting the counter case. Districts were allowed to have sight of county submissions and were given the opportunity to rebut county claims at their second meeting. There the consultation process ended with Panel members feeling that there was little to be gained from a further round of discussions with the counties.

On the question of representation, the Review Panel met a total of twenty three individuals - ten councillors, seven officers and six librarians. Officer participation was significant with the districts calling on Chief Executives

or Deputy Chief Executives and one of the counties on an Assistant Director of Education. It is interesting that neither of the counties thought it valid to bring elected representatives to the meetings. Dyfed's case was put by the Cultural Services Officer (County Librarian) and Mid-Glamorgan's by the County Librarian supported (as indicated above) by the Assistant Director of Education. This lack of county councillors was in stark contrast to the pattern of the districts who brought ten elected representatives to the meetings. It is also noticeable that the districts substantially increased the number of councillors at their second round of meetings. The only possible conclusion is that these councillors were redoubling their efforts to hold on to library powers and were anxious to communicate the strength of community feeling on the issue. They saw their task as providing a defence for their library service against county take-over and the threat of a change of policy on the part of the Welsh Office. To this end their participation embraced many of the traditional functions of the councillor who chairs (or sits on) the library committee or other committees of the authority.

Elected representatives 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.⁴²

The contrast between the approach of district and county may of course be viewed in reverse. Heavy representation at elected and officer level undoubtedly brought benefits for the districts, but such participation clearly had the effect of placing the librarian at the periphery of discussion. At county meetings both librarians were the crucial individuals; they took responsibility for presenting the county case and support from other officers was negligible.

The contribution of meetings to the decision making process was four-fold. They gave Panel members the opportunity to

seek clarification on points made in written evidence. Secondly, and at the same time, the meetings enabled the discussions to move forward within the agreed framework with all authorities continuously presenting evidence to strengthen their case. Thirdly, the consultations were a means whereby Panel members could gauge the strength of feeling on the district and county side, probing beyond the standard and dispassionate arguments of the written submissions. Fourthly, the meetings, and in particular the second set of discussions with the districts, were an opportunity to pursue matters arising out of Panel visits to the libraries involved.

This last function leads to an examination of the relevance of visits to the work of the Review Panel. From the outset Panel members thought it important to gain first hand experience of the library services provided by districts and counties. The visits were used to corroborate claims made in written and oral submissions and were an occasion whereby the authorities could provide tangible evidence of development and progress. All visits were undertaken by Panel members, the Panel dividing into two groups to accomplish the work within an agreed time scale. The need to work quickly reveals that the visits could in no way be regarded as similar to the inspections or surveys undertaken by the DES library advisers. Half a day was allocated to each district library service with tours of headquarters and one or more branches; the counties were visited for a full day taking in headquarters and a list of branches. Within this time-span Panel members could do no more than sample the nature of the service on offer, but they were able to pay close and quick attention to location and fabric of buildings, and the arrangement, nature and turnover of book stock. No systematic attempt was made to solicit the views of users as a valid study would require an investigation beyond the resources of the Review Panel enquiry.

Although the Panel did not invite submissions from bodies other than the authorities involved, it did receive representations and letters from other organisations and from individuals. The Association of District Councils had stated in 1983⁴³ that its policy was for transfer of library powers to all districts in England and Wales. The early attempt of the Welsh Association of the ADC to challenge the composition of the Review Panel has already been noted; this Association went on to establish a Working Party to take overall responsibility for the issue and maintained pressure on the Welsh Office throughout the course of the Review Panel enquiry. The Welsh counties sub-committee of the Association of County Councils discussed the subject at its meeting on 21 March 1984 and reaffirmed its policy that the library service in Wales should be administered at county level. The Welsh Library Association made its standpoint clear at a meeting with Wyn Roberts, Under Secretary of State at the Welsh Office in November 1983. The WLA delegation indicated that the Association's support was for the counties and emphasised that the following points should be carefully considered in any future debate on the re-allocation of library powers.

The larger unit of the county enabled the service to be provided in a more professional manner, with all the benefits of the economies of scale. This was seen to be particularly important at the time of financial restraint.

The larger unit had greater and easier access to modern technology which was crucial in improving the accessibility and effectiveness of the library service.

A national information policy called for larger units rather than a fragmentation of resources.

Placing libraries at county level would bring the advantages of co-terminous boundaries with county education and social services departments and would facilitate co-operation.

The main conclusions of discussions on this issue prior to the 1972 Act had emphasised the importance of integrating urban and rural resources within larger authorities. The same argument applied in 1984.

The opinion of the Library and Information Services Council (Wales) was formulated at a special meeting of that Council held on 26 April 1984. Two papers were given by council members - one by Harold Prescott, ex-borough librarian at Llanelli arguing the district case and the other by Geoffrey Thomas County Librarian of Dyfed putting the county side. These papers represented many of the points raised in district and county submissions and quite naturally had the effect of polarizing any subsequent discussion. This polarization was reflected in the minutes of the meeting (Appendix 24) and in the vote on two specific motions.

It was the view of LISC(W) that no further District Councils be designated as library authorities (four in favour, two against).

That LISC(W) wishes the Secretary of State by order to provide that as from a date specified, the District Councils in Wales operating library services cease to be library authorities and no other district authorities are designated as library authorities.⁴⁴ (Three in favour, two against).

LISC (Wales) therefore provided support for the counties but their stance lacked the weight of full council backing and was by no means unanimous. Attendance at the meeting was low with just over half (seven out of twelve) members present. Voting was inconclusive and reflected the vested interests of individual members. This is particularly true in the case of the second motion: it can be speculated that the three in favour would have been the county councillor, the county librarian of Dyfed and the ex-county librarian of Powys; the two against would have been Harold Prescott and one other with two abstentions, one presumably being the Chairman. Taken together all of this undermines the force

of the LISC (Wales) resolutions. A view had been formulated and expressed but it could hardly be described as a ringing declaration of faith in the counties.

The establishment of a Review Panel had the effect of removing decision making from the political arena with a subsequent decrease in the potential influence of Members of Parliament. MPs could not, as in 1974, use the well-oiled machinery of the old-boy network nor could they call on political affiliations in an attempt to sway the outcome of the Panel's deliberations. This time round political factors were irrelevant: Ministers and civil servants at the Welsh Office continuously stressed the independence (and thus impartiality) of the Review Panel and rejected out of hand any suggestion that they might influence the enquiry. Nevertheless two members of Parliament (Ted Rowlands, Merthyr and Allan Rodgers, Rhondda) and one member of the Lords (Lord Elwyn-Jones, a native of Llanelli) wrote to the Welsh Office in support of their respective districts and copies of these letters were passed on to Panel Members. (Appendix 25 , with a reply from Wyn Roberts is a typical example). A small number of individuals and officers of local organizations - all again on the district side - expressed their views on the matter and Rhondda Borough Council presented a petition which ran to more than 400 pages and contained, at an estimate, well over 10,000 signatures. This district lobbying served to further express community feeling underlining the arguments already presented by officers and elected representatives.

Armed with written and oral submissions, information conveyed at meetings, the experience of visits and the evidence of interested parties, the Review Panel could move ahead to prepare its report. It is pertinent to state that the ultimate content and format of the document was totally in the hands of the Review Panel. As already indicated it had a Secretary at its disposal, but there was no secretariat in the sense of a body of individuals who would work on the ideas of Panel members and produce a form of words for

rejection or approval. Sections of the Report (usually corresponding with authorities) were allocated to a member or members of the Panel and that person(s) would have responsibility for the initial shape of that chapter. All members worked to an agreed formula (which reflected the original framework of discussions with the authorities) and they would bring a draft to the Panel for consultation, further debate and amendment. Stylistic consistency was ensured at this stage of preparation and the material was then gathered together into a final version.

Having explained its terms of reference and general approach the Report devotes separate chapters to each district and county. The key paragraphs in each chapter are the observations and conclusions of the Review Panel as these represent a distillation of findings and an appraisal of the service being provided. In the case of Cynon Valley the Panel are highly critical of several aspects.

We are concerned that there is a low level of funding for the library service, especially as regards the book fund the present level of which denies users a sufficiently wide selection of new publications.

Attention needs to be given to the staffing structure of the library department to allow for increased professional input and motivation.

The reference library and its book stock are in urgent need of revision and updating and this service should revert to open access at the earliest opportunity.⁴⁵

These and other factors led the Panel to the conclusion that

Cynon Valley Borough Council over the last ten years ... have failed to come to terms with their duties and responsibilities as a library authority.⁴⁶

Merthyr Tydfil had made

many hazy promises ... in reaction to this review, indeed those developments in mind ... do not seem to have been thought through and their realization

is a long way off. The location of the library service within the Leisure Services Dept, has resulted in the library service being afforded a lower priority both in terms of capital and revenue expenditure.

there has been a serious erosion of the book fund over the ten year period.⁴⁷

bringing the Panel to the conclusion that

Development of the Service has been negligible since 1974.⁴⁸

Moving on to the Rhondda, the Panel stated that

The library service in the Rhondda is an integral part of its Recreation and Amenities Committee. It is thus disheartening to note that there has been a significant decrease in the proportion of funding from this Committee for the upkeep of the library service - from 31.9% in 1974-75 down to 20.3% in 1983-84. This has had most unfortunate repercussions in relation to reduced book stock maintenance, staffing numbers, professional training and lack of service development.⁴⁹

Of the districts Llanelli alone is singled out for praise

During the last decade this authority has continuously attempted to provide a comprehensive and efficient service. To this end they have expended significant resources - both capital and revenue to safeguard the status of the library service. Of the 4 district library authorities under review this is the only one that has consistently attempted to fulfil the obligations imposed upon it by the Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964.⁵⁰

The chapters on the two counties are also critical of certain aspects of the service offered, or on the organization of the library department. In Mid-Glamorgan

The Panel was concerned at the low status of the County Librarian... It is felt strongly that if an integrated library service for the whole county were to be established, the librarian should be a chief officer with a separate libraries committee.⁵¹

It also becomes clear that the Panel had some doubt as to whether Mid-Glamorgan could take over the district services and maintain standards throughout the county as a whole.

Whilst we have been made aware of the goodwill of the County Authority to support such an integral service, we are concerned lest financial restraint might militate against their capacity to achieve the aim of equable integration.⁵²

In its assessment on Dyfed the Report notes the disparity of expenditure on books between county and district.

Llanelli is spending approximately 33% more per thousand population on the purchase of books than Dyfed. Dyfed's overall total expenditure of £198,600 on books in 1984/85 is higher but not that much higher considering the population and area served.⁵³

In general the county summaries point to the theoretical benefits of integration but are less sure whether these benefits would materialise in practice. Mid-Glamorgan striving hard to rationalize book stock management and development service points would have to extend this policy to other areas of the county on integration. Dyfed's book fund had suffered badly in the period immediately preceding the review and the county had also been forced to reduce opening hours in many of its libraries. Within such an environment it was difficult to suggest that the high level service already on offer at Llanelli would be maintained in the event of a county take-over.

The Report reveals that the standards at Llanelli (and indeed the poorer performance of the three other districts) had been bought at a price. The chapter on Statistical and Financial Considerations details the high cost of autonomy.

Statistics show that between 1974/75 and 1982-83 Welsh county libraries have achieved considerable development while containing their overall average increase in expenditure to 167%. The average increase in cost for the four autonomous districts

for the same year was 214% - a 28% higher increase. If the comparison was extended to include estimated expenditure for 1983/84 it can be seen that the average increase in the Welsh counties on libraries was 169% while the increase in expenditure in the 4 Districts was 231% - a 37% higher increase.⁵⁴

The next paragraph develops the point in relation to specific districts and demonstrates that the four compared badly with Welsh counties in terms of relative expenditure on certain aspects of the library service. The districts being smaller should be able to deliver a service at relatively lower cost - in fact the opposite was often the case. This was, in essence, a more exact expression of the argument deployed by Mid-Glamorgan and Dyfed in their submissions to the Panel: districts were spending at a higher level than the counties in question, but they were having to spend at this level to maintain the credibility of independence. When this analysis is coupled to the fact that high spending in districts had not always yielded a high level service the only logical conclusion would appear to be assimilation of districts by counties.

What emerges in the two pages of Recommendations (Appendix 26) at the end of the Report is in fact a compromise. Although the Review Panel was clearly unhappy at the level of provision in several districts it was not prepared to go as far as an outright recommendation that these authorities should be divested of their library powers. A way forward, the compromise, is sought by recommending that each district be allowed to retain their library powers only if they were prepared to give a written assurance to the Secretary of State for Wales that they would meet certain general and specific conditions. The general conditions are imposed on all four districts and relate to co-operation with neighbouring counties and to a need for continuous monitoring of district library services by the Welsh Office. The specific requirements relate to different ways of raising the standard of service in each individual district with the progress of improvement again

to be monitored by the Welsh Office. The Panel's authority to impose these conditions is given force of law by virtue of Section 207(6) of the Local Government Act, 1972 which states that

An order under this section constituting a district council a library authority may impose on the district council such conditions as the Secretary of State thinks fit for securing the performance by them of their functions under the Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964.⁵⁵

The Secretary of State for Wales accepted the Review Panel's Report in its entirety, communicated its recommendations to the local authorities involved and made public his decision on Friday, 27 July 1984. A brief piece on an inside page in the Western Mail announced that

The four Welsh districts that run their own library services have been told that they can keep the function by the Secretary of State for Wales.⁵⁶

The release of the Report into the dog-days of a closing Parliamentary term was adeptly managed by the Welsh Office. Publication on 27 July left just three working days before the commencement of the summer recess on 1 August; this gave no opportunity for the issue to be raised in Parliament and no Welsh Office minister was questioned on the Report or its recommendations. Maintenance of the status quo with all four districts retaining library powers meant that no standing orders had to be laid before Parliament as these were only required at the initial granting or withdrawal of powers.

The Report received scant attention in the professional press. One article,⁵⁷ a politic review of the Chairman of LISC (Wales), confines itself to the factual and expresses no opinion on the ultimate recommendations of the Report. A second article by Philip Whiteman goes much further and is overtly critical of the course of action commended by the

Review Panel. Panel members, though sound on methodology had, in his opinion only partially fulfilled the obligations placed upon them. Whiteman concedes that they had thoroughly reviewed the library services of the districts and counties in question, but having discovered that all was not well they shied away from the logical and inescapable conclusion: that all districts should be divested of library powers leading to the establishment of a county wide service throughout Wales.

What actually emerges is the kind of report, beloved of civil servants which minimises the difficulties for the responsible minister. Things are not good, but they could be worse. Tell the districts they must cooperate with the county for the benefit of all. Make them submit regular progress reports ... being generous one can say that the Panel has fudged the issue. Being more severe one can properly call their work a significant disservice to library development.⁵⁸

At first sight it would seem that Whiteman's judgement is justified. The tenor and content of the Review Panel's Report does lead one to expect that at least some of the districts would have lost their library powers. Yet, as already indicated, the Panel takes the middle ground and recommends that the four districts continue as library authorities providing certain conditions are met. What caused Panel members to select this option instead of transfer to the counties? Its Report per se yields few clues and the answers that are now provided are based on supporting evidence and upon personal experience of the decision making process.

There are firstly a set of answers which relate to the claims and counter claims of specific districts and counties. Most notable in this category are the arguments presented by Llanelli Borough Council and some of the admissions of Dyfed County Council. The Panel's report indicates more than once that spending per capita was higher in Llanelli than in Dyfed. Dyfed also came to the review

process in the wake of adverse press comment⁵⁹ on reduction in the book fund, early closure of area libraries on Saturdays, the total closure of twelve village library centres and an ensuing downward spiral in borrowing and library use in general. Within this context and in view of the fact that Llanelli had been praised for providing a high quality service, transfer of responsibility for that service to the county would have been hard to justify. At a later stage, after publication of the Report, the Cultural Services Officer for Dyfed more or less admits that he accepted the Panel's findings: at a meeting of the County Cultural Services Committee, especially convened to debate the Review Panel Report he made this comment

By the next review date of 1994 one wonders whether post mortem might not be a better term than Review if the decline in library services in Dyfed continues at the rate experienced in recent years.⁶⁰

Moving to Mid-Glamorgan the issue is not so clear-cut. Two of the districts were clearly providing a sub-standard service and had little to show for ten years independence. The third - Rhondda - could argue that it was an above average spender when compared with other Welsh districts and that it was spending £1.30 more per capita on its library service than Mid-Glamorgan. Why therefore was it not possible for the Panel to recommend that at least two districts be assimilated into the county? A difficulty here was that the county could not guarantee (more than any other local authority) increases in expenditure which would maintain and, more importantly, improve the library services in those assimilated districts. Statistics⁶¹ reveal that for 1983-84 the approved rate precept for Mid-Glamorgan was the second highest of all of the Welsh counties and that expenditure for that year would be £7 million above the target set by central government. Whilst the Welsh Office was able to inform the Panel that transfer of the library function would lead to block grant adjustments and would enable the county to levy a library precept over the

assimilated areas the Panel could not be sure that these adjustments would be directed at library services or that these alone would secure the necessary improvements in the library service. Mid-Glamorgan would have to spend at a higher level still and this would be difficult for a county which already levied a high rate precept and where expenditure was above target.

This leads to a second set of answers which relate to all four districts and the two counties. The most important of these is that it was within the Panel's jurisdiction, by virtue of Section 207(6) of the Local Government Act, 1972 to place conditions on the districts, but it was not within its jurisdiction to place any such conditions on the counties. The Panel could demand that library powers would only be granted to the districts if those authorities complied with the stated conditions. A re-examination of these conditions demonstrates that their specific objective in each instance was an improvement in the standard of service provided. To seek these improvements the Panel could turn to Section 207(6) and place obligations on the districts to raise their book funds and/or implement other changes. At the same time the Panel could request that these developments, and their effect on the library service, be monitored by the Welsh Office. All of this was within the capacity of the Review Panel: it was not within its capacity to call on the counties to follow any course of action as there is nothing in Section 207 which empowers any review exercise to impose conditions on the counties. This anomaly arises from the fact that Section 207 had been drafted to cater for a process whereby library powers would be transferred from county to district and not vice versa. This anticipation of a one-way only process reflects the whole ethos of the Local Government Act 1972 whose prime objective was rationalization within a unified structure; where escape clauses such as Section 207 were provided, considerable obstacles were placed before individual local

authorities to prevent or to discourage them from stepping out of line. Although the Section does specify

1 April 1984 and every tenth year thereafter.⁶²

as a review date it fails to countenance that the process at that date could operate in reverse with counties requesting the return of library powers from districts. The inability to place any conditions on the counties restricted the options open to the Review Panel. This failure clearly placed the counties at a disadvantage in the 1984 review exercise and unless the Section is amended this disadvantage will persist, quite possibly affecting the outcome of any subsequent reviews.

It must be acknowledged that the strength of community feeling and its effect on the Panel's thinking was almost all on the district side. A large cohort of councillors and officers travelled to the Welsh Office to argue the district case. These were the very individuals who would be required to take heed of the Panel's insistence on conditions. The call for improvements had already been outlined during visits and across-table discussions and district representatives knew that they had to respond positively if they were to present a credible defence in ten year's time. The districts were well supported by their members of Parliament and by correspondence from a wide cross section of inhabitants. The counties chose to rely on their county librarians, the advice of one other officer and the support of the Welsh Library Association. This argument is in no way intended as a denigration of the contribution of individual officers, indeed the county case often had a higher professional content and was able to demonstrate professional backing. The failure of the county case was its inability to impress upon the Panel that elected representatives and the community in general were unanimously of the opinion that library powers should be transferred to Dyfed and Mid-Glamorgan.

A final factor which affected the outcome of the review exercise was a tendency towards maintenance of the status quo. It has been stated in an earlier chapter that the four districts were from 1974 onwards a fact of life and had to be accepted as such. Their creation at that time had caused upheaval and a certain amount of ill-feeling. If improvements in services could be achieved by other means there was little point ten years later in creating further upheaval and more ill-feeling by transferring powers from the districts to the counties. The Panel realized that the pragmatic approach reflected the attitude of Welsh Office politicians and civil servants whose policy inevitably sought means of minimising conflict with local authorities.

Throughout their deliberations the Panel was guided by one simple but all-embracing consideration: what pattern of arrangements for library powers would deliver an improved service to the reader? They decided that their objective would be best served by perpetuation of district control coupled to effective monitoring of future performance by the Welsh Office.

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CHAPTER FIVE

"Ten years on, it can be seen that Section 207 of the Local Government Act, 1972 does not provide a sound framework for the effective management or development of public library services in Wales".

Report of the Panel Appointed by the
Secretary of State for Wales

The Welsh Office, local authorities and the library profession in Wales knew that the question of allocation of library powers was by no means closed with the publication of the Review Panel Report in July 1984. By virtue of paragraph four of Section 207 it was open to all districts in Wales with a population substantially above 40,000 to lodge an application to be constituted as library authorities. These districts were given a period of six months from the review date (1 April 1984) to apply which meant that all claims would have to be submitted to the Welsh Office before the end of September 1984. In addition to meeting the population qualification all districts were required, as before, to pay close attention to the criteria laid out in Circular 6/73¹ and to consider in particular the necessity for continuity in the provision of a library service and the effect of separation on the adjacent county.

Although the Circular did not spell out the precise nature of the population qualification, a measure of guidance was available by examination of the size and nature of the four districts which had been re-awarded powers in July 1984. The smallest of the four was Merthyr Tydfil with a population just below 60,000; this figure could be taken as a base line, authorities below this line would probably find it difficult to argue an effective case for separation. Twenty two Districts in Wales (59.4%) had populations above this base line. A more realistic benchmark was the average population of districts re-awarded powers, at 70,525. Fifteen Districts (40.5%) cleared this second higher figure.

The Welsh Office of the Association of District Councils had written to all District Chief Executives in March 1984 advising them of their right to apply and reminding them that it had long been ADC policy that district councils should be responsible for libraries. The ADC arguments were naturally reinforced by the decision to re-award powers to four districts in Wales. This lobbying coupled to the aspirations of individual authorities led ten Districts to submit claims to the Welsh Office prior to the deadline of 30 September 1984. The number was swiftly reduced to nine with the early withdrawal of Carmarthen District Council situated in the county of Dyfed. The nine definite districts (representing 24.3% of districts in Wales) with adjacent counties, are listed below in increasing order in terms of population.

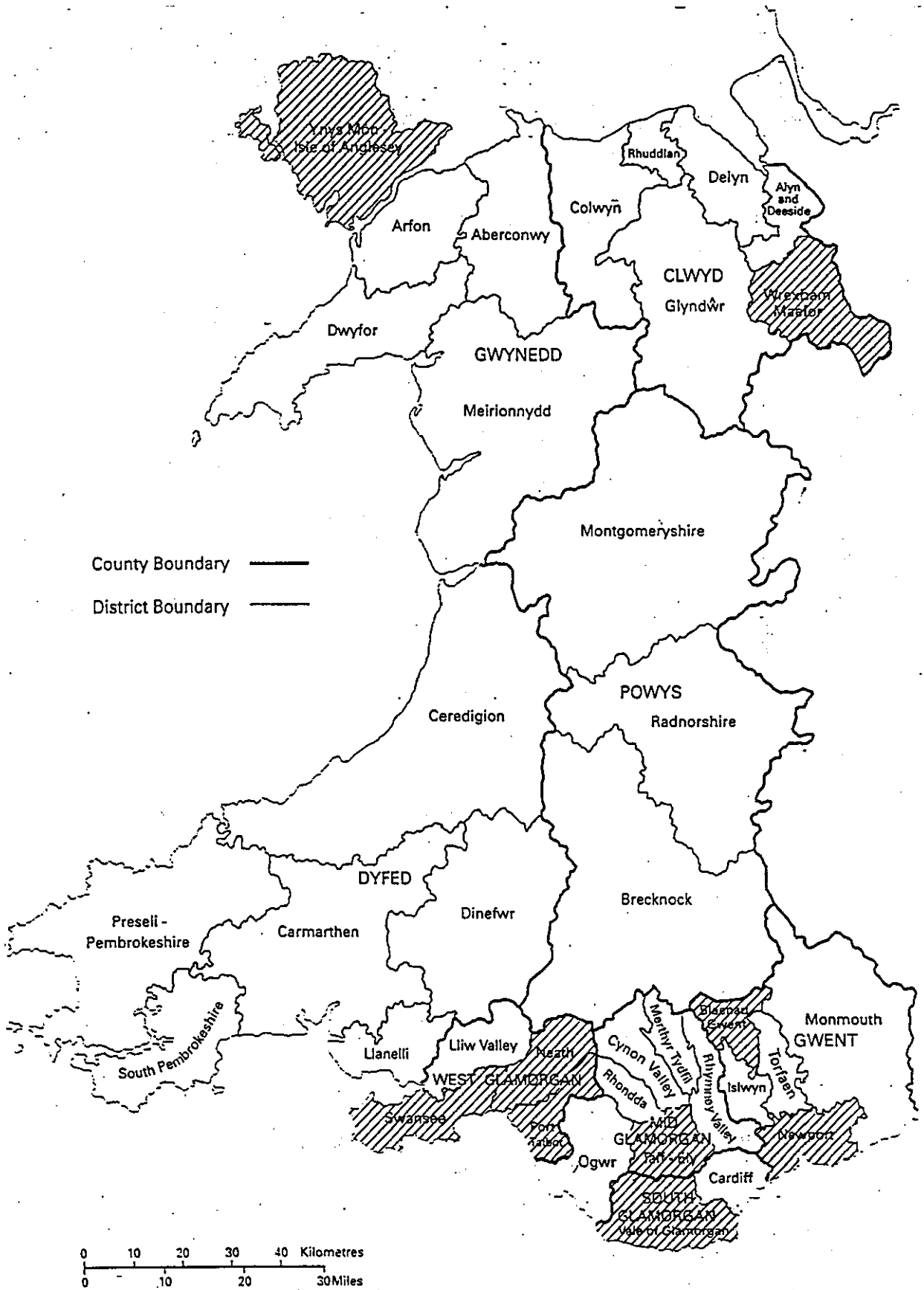
TABLE 5.1
DISTRICT COUNCILS IN WALES APPLYING FOR LIBRARY POWERS
SEPTEMBER 1984

	DISTRICT	POPULATION ²	COUNTY
1.	Afan	53,000	West Glam
2.	Neath*	65,700	West Glam
3.	Ynys Môn*	68,400	Gwynedd
4.	Blaenau Gwent	78,700	Gwent
5.	Taff Ely	94,300	Mid-Glam
6.	Vale of Glamorgan*	111,900	South Glam
7.	Wrexham Maelor*	113,900	Clwyd
8.	Newport*	130,200	Gwent
9.	Swansea*	187,900	West Glam

* Authorities who submitted claims in 1974

These applications would affect six counties in Wales - Dyfed and Powys would be the only counties not affected by this group of claims. One district (Afan) fell below the population base line and another two (Neath and Ynys Môn) had populations below the average of existing district library authorities. All applicants, with the exception of Blaenau Gwent, had been responsible for a library service in the pre-1974 reorganization of local government structure.

MAP 5.1
GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF DISTRICT COUNCILS
APPLYING FOR LIBRARY POWERS SEPTEMBER 1984



As in 1974 the granting of applications would have an effect on the county library service, indeed it could be argued that this effect would be more marked in 1984 than a decade earlier. Local government structures and the place of libraries within that structure were now well established with the trauma of reorganization long past. The pattern of applications would also effect individual counties in a dramatic fashion. Mid-Glamorgan faced the loss of a further district with the prospect of only two districts remaining under County control; South Glamorgan without the Vale of Glamorgan District would essentially revert to the pre-1974 pattern, with the county serving the city of Cardiff and its immediate environs; if all applications were granted in West Glamorgan the County library service, with only one district under its control, would virtually disappear.

Once again it is possible to illustrate the potential consequences of separation in three ways: loss of population to the county, loss of land area, and loss of rateable value.

TABLE 5.2
POTENTIAL EFFECT³ OF SEPARATION
ON COUNTY LIBRARY SERVICE

(1) IN CLWYD	POPULATION LOSS	LAND AREA LOSS (HA)	RATEABLE VALUE LOSS
District Wrexham Maelor	28.2%	15.1%	28%

The separation of Clwyd and Wrexham Maelor would entail a loss of 28% of population and rateable value and 15% loss of land area. Although it would be difficult to argue that Wrexham was the focal centre of the county, this authority was the most populous district in Clwyd. The district is also, in population terms, the largest borough in North Wales.

(ii) IN GWENT	POPULATION LOSS	LAND AREA LOSS (HA)	RATEABLE VALUE LOSS
Blaenau Gwent	17.8%	9.4%	12.4%
Newport	29.5%	13.7%	41.8%
Blaenau Gwent & Newport	47.3%	23.1%	54.2%

The most marked effect here would be the loss of Newport; granting powers to the two districts would further weaken the county with a loss of almost half of its population and more than half of its rateable value.

(iii) IN GWYNEDD	POPULATION LOSS	LAND AREA LOSS (HA)	RATEABLE VALUE LOSS
Ynys Môn	29.4%	18.4%	29.8%

Gwynedd would lose almost 30% of its population and rateable value if library powers were granted to Ynys Môn. Although its loss was the same in percentage terms as the potential consequences for Clwyd the separation would tend to have more profound consequences for a large, sparsely populated county such as Gwynedd.

(iv) IN MID-GLAMORGAN	POPULATION LOSS	LAND AREA LOSS (HA)	RATEABLE VALUE LOSS
Taff Ely	28.6%	26.5%	33.9%

The crucial fact here is that the separation of Taff Ely would further weaken Mid-Glamorgan, a county which already contained three districts responsible for library services. Granting powers to Taff Ely would leave Mid-Glamorgan serving only two districts in a six district county.

(v) IN SOUTH GLAMORGAN	POPULATION LOSS	LAND AREA LOSS (HA)	RATEABLE VALUE LOSS
Vale of Glamorgan	28.5%	71.2%	25.8%

The separation of the Vale of Glamorgan and South Glamorgan would mean that the county would emerge as a one district authority with a population of almost 280,000. This would be eminently viable and manageable but would represent an odd entity in County library terms.

(vi) IN WEST GLAMORGAN	POPULATION LOSS	LAND AREA LOSS (HA)	RATEABLE VALUE LOSS
Afan	14.4%	18.2%	22.1%
Neath	17.9%	25.2%	16.3%
Swansea	51.2%	30.4%	48.9%
Afan, Neath & Swansea	83.5%	73.8%	87.3%

Granting powers to Swansea alone would deprive the county of just over half its population and just below half of its rateable value. Granting powers to the three districts would all but wipe out the county library service with West Glamorgan retaining responsibility for just one remaining district.

It was more than likely that the Welsh Office would depend once more on the Review Panel method to handle and decide on this second round of claims. This arrangement was now tried and tested; a change could have aroused hostility and could detract from the credibility of the first exercise. For the sake of consistency and continuity the ideal solution would have been to re-appoint the Panel en bloc. This however was not possible: the applications of Wrexham Maelor and South Glamorgan meant that two members of the first panel (Glyn Davies ex-county librarian Clwyd and Ieuan Edwards, County Librarian South Glamorgan) had a vested interest and so could not be called to serve. The other two who had assisted with the first investigation (Peter Beauchamp, OAL, and the author of this study) were invited; they were joined by Bruce Shard, Director of Administration Cardiff City Council who was to act as Chairman. The three individuals selected met Welsh Office Civil Servants on 7 November 1984 and decided on their approach and

methodology. As before districts were requested to forward applications, these would then be passed to the counties who would then present their responses. Written evidence would be followed by meetings at the Welsh Office with both sides being given the opportunity to put their case to the Review Panel. The composition of the Panel was formally announced on 16 November with communications to local authorities and Welsh Members of Parliament and press releases to the national press and to professional journals. Yet again the composition of the Panel was swiftly criticised. This time the target of discontent was the Chairman who being in the employ of Cardiff City Council (the largest district in Wales) was seen as a district representative. The Welsh Counties Committee and several county chief executives complained to the Welsh Office and made their views known to the press.⁴ As before the Welsh Office stood firm and replied that no member of the review team had been appointed to further any interest; members had been invited to serve in an individual capacity taking into account their relevant experience.

The application of each district and the response of the county will now be considered in alphabetical order.

IN THE COUNTY OF CLWYD

Wrexham Maelor's application

Prior to 1974 part of the applying district, Wrexham Municipal Borough, was a library authority, but extensions and amendments to boundaries meant that the authority now encompassed rural areas that had been previously served by Flintshire and Denbighshire County Library Service.

In its application⁵ (Appendix 27) the Borough Council stresses that the district area is an ideal unit in terms of size, topography and population to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service, moreover they assert that it had the will and resources to provide a service to the highest standards. To substantiate their claim it points to

the fact that it more than met the population qualification and that Wrexham Maelor had an urban centre where some 36% of the population resided, with a further 47% living within a radius of 6 to 10 miles of this centre. On the question of resources, working from 1983-84 CIPFA statistics and from figures made available by the County Treasurer, the borough calculates that the estimated cost of providing a library service in the Wrexham area is £606,700 or £5,326 per 1000 population. This is compared to Clwyd's per 1000 expenditure of £6,165, a Welsh counties average of £5,359 and a Welsh districts average of £5,542. On the basis of this comparison the district argues that savings could be effected and that it could deliver a library service more economically to the residents of the borough. The application then presents a critique of the service provided by Clwyd County Council, leading on to proposals for improvement. These are divided into immediate and long term: immediate proposals would entail a take over of staff and buildings and maintenance of the existing level of service to the public; long term development (no timescale is specified) would centre around further progress at Wrexham area library, increased opening hours to cater for local demand and enhancement of the library service to housebound readers. On the question of provision of materials the district sets a target book fund of £100,000 per year based solely upon estimates of present county expenditure in the Wrexham area.

This somewhat simplistic analysis reveals a flaw which undermines the rationale of the district application. The borough council cannot at the same time suggest that savings can be effected and argue the case for improvement. At some point those two objectives would be bound to conflict yet the application nowhere concedes that an increased level of service could only be funded by increased expenditure. The application also concentrates on the leisure role of the public library perhaps at the expense of the education/information role. The borough pays scant

attention to the needs of rural users suggesting that it continued to see itself as a pre-1974 municipal based library service. Finally there is little or no reference to the development instigated by Clwyd library service, but this is perhaps no more than might be expected from a document outlining the District case.

CLWYD'S RESPONSE

The counter argument⁶ (extracts Appendix 28) opens with the implications of segregation. The consequences would be most apparent in two areas: loss of economies of scale and the breakdown of effective links with other agencies and statutory bodies. In respect of the former, Clwyd provides evidence that it had invested in areas such as information technology; if the district was given independence such investment would have to be duplicated creating extra expenditure for county and district. Another example cited is the build up of a centralised reference collection at county headquarters

if Wrexham as an independent authority was to provide an equivalent level of provision it would be necessary to duplicate the headquarters library of some 13,000 major reference works.⁷

On the issue of cooperation with other agencies the County challenges the District to explain how it would provide a school library service and how it would maintain links with county council departments such as Social Services and Industrial Development.

Clwyd's response then moves on to deal with the District submission section by section, refuting many charges and arguing, as indicated above, that the application contains an inherent contradiction. Wrexham could not call for an increase in the number of branches and their opening hours and simultaneously assert that employees and premises were both expenditure headings capable of being reduced by efficient management. Clwyd concludes that it had a proud record as a progressive and efficient library service:

separation of the two authorities would be a retrograde step endangering standards in County and District.

The library service provided by the county is now appraised against 1983-84 Public Library Statistics.⁸

TABLE 5.3
SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF THE LIBRARY SERVICE PROVIDED BY
CLWYD C.C. 1983-84

Net Expenditure per 1000 population	Clwyd	Welsh C Average
Total	6,705	5,669
Books	989	990
Staff	3,905	3,254
Premises	681	576
Number and categorisation of staff		
Number of staff in Post		
Professional	56 (27%)	286 (25%)
Other non manual	127 (62%)	738 (63%)
Total	205	1,166
Staff to population ratios		
Professional	1:7060	1:8831
Other non manual	1:3113	1:3422
Total	1:1928	1:2166

Clwyd are in the region of 20% above average on total expenditure, staff and premises and on the average for books.

The County response also revealed that 17% of total staff were based in the Wrexham area, this percentage being reinforced by headquarters staff having county wide responsibilities. In summary Clwyd were confident that they were delivering a high quality service: this confidence is borne out by the statistics provided here and by their own analysis.

IN THE COUNTY OF GWENT

Blaenau Gwent's application

No local authority in the Blaenau Gwent area had experience of operating a public library service in the pre-1974 structure. It is revealing that only six local authorities, of varying status took up library powers in the old county of Monmouthshire; the figure in neighbouring Glamorgan was 18.⁹ A significant reason for this disparity was the early establishment in Monmouthshire of Workmen's Institute Libraries, the pattern of growth being particularly strong in Blaenau Gwent.

Tredegar was a typical institute in the inter-war period; its library committee, whose chairman in the early 1920's was Aneurin Bevan, spent £300 per annum on books of which £60 was set aside exclusively for the philosophy section.¹⁰

In the light of such provision the smaller municipal authorities in Monmouthshire would have viewed adoption of the library acts and the starting of a service as duplication of what was already available in the Institute Libraries. The usefulness and value of these libraries was likewise accepted by Monmouthshire itself with the county using several of them as branches and supplying them with material well into the 1960's.

Despite their lack of experience Blaenau Gwent's application¹¹ (extracts Appendix 29) presents arguments backed with frequent reference to professional standards of provision. The basic tenet is that the county library service was unsatisfactory and did not meet the needs of the inhabitants of the Borough. Gwent had failed to devote sufficient resources to the library service and the expenditure was below the average for Welsh counties and districts. This resulted in inadequate levels of staffing (professional and non professional), low expenditure on books and an almost total lack of capital development.

The Borough acknowledge that the necessary improvements could only be effected if more money was spent on the service. Should they be given powers Blaenau Gwent District Council would

set a ceiling of expenditure, at its average the expenditure of the four independent Welsh districts which is currently accepted by the Welsh Office.¹²

This is a calculated ploy: the arguments and reasoning of the first review exercise are used as evidence and criteria with the authority asserting that a borough based library service should be established on criteria which had already been accepted by the Welsh Office. Setting expenditure at this Welsh district average would mean that the Borough could spend at least £75,000 per annum extra on the library service. The immediate objective would be a raising of staffing and book purchase levels to reach accepted standards. In the long term service points would be reviewed and one of the main targets of a development programme would be a new central library with a full range of facilities.

Newport's application

Newport Municipal Borough was an early provider of a public library service in Wales, adopting the Free Libraries Acts in 1870. The authority was granted county borough status in 1891 and was, as such, responsible for a wide range of services in the pre-reorganization structure. On reorganization in 1974 Newport became a second tier authority in the county of Gwent and responsibility for its library service was transferred to the county.

The District's application¹³ (extracts Appendix 30) raises many points similar to those of Blaenau Gwent but their arguments go further and assert that the library service had experienced slow but sure deterioration under county control. Central to Newport's case is the charge that Gwent spent far less, per capita, on its library service than

almost any authority in Wales - county and district. This resulted in low expenditure on books, poor level of staffing (particularly professional staff) and negligible capital development.

Having painted such a bleak picture Newport recognise that they must present a credible alternative. The application accordingly goes on to make very specific proposals on all aspects of the library service. The authority would appoint a Borough Librarian at third tier level, the post to be based in the Leisure Services Department, with the Librarian directly accountable to the Director of Leisure Services. The first task for the Librarian would be to re-establish a progressive service after ten years of stagnation under county control. Such progress would require commitment and the application pledges increases in capital and revenue expenditure. In the former category resources would be available from the leisure services budget as the authority had all but completed its programme of development in this area. Revenue expenditure would be increased to the average of county library authorities in Wales giving Newport an estimated expenditure of £750,000 on its library service in 1984-85. An increase to this level would enable Newport to strengthen staffing complements and to raise spending on library materials.

GWENT'S RESPONSE

Although Gwent presented two documents¹⁴ (Appendix 31) a good deal of material is duplicated and both responses are here considered together.

The fundamental contention by the county is that the library service could have been improved if extra finance had been available. This rather obvious stance ignores the fact that it was Gwent's responsibility since 1974 to provide for increased resources and adds weight to the District charges that the County had at best maintained a standstill position over the decade. The inadequacies are revealed when Gwent's

service is appraised against 1983-84 Public Library Statistics.

TABLE 5.4
SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF THE LIBRARY SERVICE PROVIDED BY
GWENT C.C. 1983-84

Net Expenditure per 1000 population	Gwent	Welsh C Average
Total	4,723	5,669
Books	845	990
Staff	2,639	3,254
Premises	565	576
Number and categorisation of staff		
Number of staff in Post		
Professional	30 (15%)	286 (25%)
Other non manual	137 (71%)	738 (63%)
Total	191	1,166
Staff to population ratios		
Professional	1:14663	1:8831
Other non manual	1:3210	1:3422
Total	1:2303	1:2166

This meant that for every 1,000 inhabitants Gwent spent some 17% less than the Welsh Counties average; the differential in 1974-75 was 11% demonstrating a steady deterioration over a ten year period.

The staffing structure in Gwent was unbalanced. This, the most highly populated county in Wales was providing a library service for its residents with the minimum of professional expertise, opting instead for a substantial non-manual input.

The overall impression is that Gwent's responses lack detail and are thin on convincing arguments. The county reaction coupled to statistical analysis reveal that many District fears and assertions were well founded.

IN THE COUNTY OF GWYNEDD

Ynys Môn's application

Ynys Môn's area corresponded exactly with the territory served by the old Anglesey County Council - the pre-1974 library authority. In a comprehensive submission¹⁵ (extracts Appendix 32), the district outlines the shortfall in the existing service provided by Gwynedd County Council and moves on to describe the basic requirements for what Ynys Môn refers to as an adequate library service - this with constant reference to professional surveys and reports. These requirements are formulated into proposals divided into two district categories: immediate and development programme. The former category concentrates on a new staffing structure, increased opening hours and enhanced book provision. On this point Ynys Môn is specific with a recommendation to establish a district bookfund of £100,000 per annum, initially at 1984-85 prices. The development programme centres on new service points or enhancement of provision at existing service points.

The authority concedes that an improved service would require increased expenditure but asserts that it is prepared to finance such improvements from monies at its disposal from the levies raised on the importation of crude oil at the Amlwch Oil Terminal situated on Ynys Môn. An agreement¹⁶ between Shell UK (who operated the terminal) and the district council provided the authority with an annual income of £800,000; this was expected to increase to £1¹/₄m from 1988-89 onwards.

GWYNEDD'S RESPONSE

In an equally comprehensive document¹⁷ (extracts Appendix 33). Gwynedd rebuts many of Ynys Môn's charges and comments on the district submission. The most important sections of the response are those which deal with the cost of transfer of library service from district to county and the resultant effects of such transfer on the library service provided in the remainder of Gwynedd. Working from its 1985-86

estimates Gwynedd states that a county wide service would cost £7,022 per 1,000 population; Ynys Môn's proposals would entail a per 1,000 figure of £7,773 for the same year. Were Ynys Môn given library powers Gwynedd would then have to sustain expenditure from a smaller population base with its per 1,000 figure rising to £7,502. The alternatives for the county would be to increase spending, exceeding GRE targets or decrease spending by cutbacks in the county service (several possible areas are listed). Gwynedd's terse conclusion is two fold: separation would increase county costs with no resultant benefits for users; Ynys Môn's enhanced expenditure was to a certain extent dependant on oil resources which could not be guaranteed in perpetuity.

The county library service is now appraised against 1983-84 Public Library Statistics.

TABLE 5.5
SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF THE LIBRARY SERVICE PROVIDED BY
GWYNEDD C.C. 1983-84

Net Expenditure per 1000 population	Gwynedd	Welsh C Average
Total	6,358	5,669
Books	978	990
Staff	3,499	3,254
Premises	656	576
Number and categorisation of staff		
Number of staff in Post		
Professional	27 (23%)	286 (25%)
Other non manual	77 (66%)	738 (63%)
Total	115	1,166
Staff to population ratios		
Professional	1:8592	1:8831
Other non manual	1:3015	1:3422
Total	1:2017	1:2166

Gwynedd are above average on total expenditure, staff and premises; below average on expenditure on books.

IN THE COUNTY OF MID-GLAMORGAN

Taff Ely's application

Prior to 1974 a large part of this district received its library service from Pontypridd UDC, an authority which adopted the library acts in 1887. The district application¹⁸ (Appendix 34) contends that the pre-1974 service was of a high standard and that Taff Ely was now well placed to recommence responsibility for libraries. The district point to their record in leisure provision and assert that an independent library service would be a natural extension of this provision. The submission contains some complaints concerning the county service concentrating in particular on the lack of capital development within the district. The weakest aspect of Taff Ely's case is its lack of appreciation of the essentials of a modern library service. The few proposals for improvement that are presented are rendolent of a by-gone age with little or no understanding of how libraries had moved on since 1974.

MID-GLAMORGAN'S RESPONSE

The county's response is effective and workmanlike. The present organisation of the county library service is explained together with expenditure patterns and resultant deployment of material, staffing and capital resources. The meat of the response is contained in the two final sections¹⁹ (Appendix 35): here the case for a county wide service is argued point by point followed by a firm rejection of district arguments for further disintegration. Mid-Glamorgan had already suffered the loss of three districts in 1974 and 1984; granting powers to one more district would exacerbate ensuing problems and in terms of logistics would cause severe difficulties for the county library service. The response throughout claims that the county, being able to reap economies of scale was best placed to deliver a cost effective service.

TABLE 5.6
SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF THE LIBRARY SERVICE PROVIDED BY
MID-GLAMORGAN C.C. 1983-84

Net Expenditure per 1000 population	Mid-Glam	Welsh C Average
Total	5,014	5,669
Books	1,092	990
Staff	2,846	3,254
Premises	445	576
Number and categorisation of staff		
Number of staff in Post		
Professional	40 (31%)	286 (25%)
Other non manual	73 (56%)	738 (63%)
Total	129	1,166
Staff to population ratios		
Professional	1:8235	1:8831
Other non manual	1:4512	1:3422
Total	1:2553	1:2166

Mid-Glamorgan's total spending per 1,000 population is 12% below average; it is 13% below average for expenditure on staff and 23% below average for premises. Expenditure on books is however 10% above average.

Taken together the figures reveal that despite its lower than average spending on staff Mid-Glamorgan had a higher than average number of professional staff in post. At least two conclusions are possible: that the authority employed a relatively high number of qualified librarians at low salaries or indeed, as the county response had suggested, that Mid-Glamorgan could deliver the best service at a lower cost.

IN THE COUNTY OF SOUTH GLAMORGAN

Vale of Glamorgan's application

The former Barry Borough Council and Penarth UDC operated library services within this district prior to 1974. These were essentially town based and would represent but a nucleus of the area relevant to this application. The

District submission (Appendix 36) is brief and superficial. The basic contention is that there had been little if any development in the Vale of Glamorgan's area since 1974 and that in some respects there had been a reduction in the quality of services. In view of expressed grievances it is surprising that proposals for improvement are couched only in the most general of terms. There is for instance no indication of planned financial provision, target bookfund or potential staffing structure. This lack of basic information undermines the credibility of the District's application for library powers.

SOUTH GLAMORGAN'S RESPONSE

The county underpins its case²¹ (Appendix 37) for a county wide service by constant reference to its record since reorganisation in 1974. Policy on bookstock management, capital development, services and staffing is fully explained all points being supported by a statistical summary in appendices. The response then moves on to comment on the Vale's application. Here two central arguments are brought to bear: the District had benefited from an equitable allocation of resources since reorganization; the case for independence was based largely on theoretical assumptions with minimal supporting evidence. The County also points out that the District had representation (with voting powers) on South Glamorgan Library Committee and that agency powers made available to the district on reorganisation had been voluntarily relinquished in 1979. This leads to the conclusion that the Vale must have been satisfied with library services at that time leading in turn to the question, what now was the root cause of the reversal in attitude which had led the district to lodge a claim for library powers?

TABLE 5.7
SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF THE LIBRARY SERVICE PROVIDED BY
SOUTH-GLAMORGAN C.C. 1983-84

Net Expenditure per 1000 population	South Glam	Welsh C Average
Total	5,669	5,669
Books	1,233	990
Staff	3,282	3,254
Premises	547	576
Number and categorisation of staff		
Number of staff in Post		
Professional	42 (22%)	286 (25%)
Other non manual	117 (61%)	738 (63%)
Total	192	1,166
Staff to population ratios		
Professional	1:9326	1:8831
Other non manual	1:3347	1:3422
Total	1:2040	1:2166

South Glamorgan was thus above average on expenditure on books (by 24.5%) and staff and below average on expenditure on premises.

IN THE COUNTY OF WEST GLAMORGAN

Afan's application

Although the application²² (Appendix 38) states that Port Talbot Borough within Afan had been a library authority since 1915 this is only partially true. The adopting authority at that time was Margam Urban District, with this council itself relinquishing powers to Port Talbot in 1921.²³ Some information is given on this Borough service leading to the contention that since county take over in 1974 the library service had all but stagnated. The former Borough service is set against existing provision and the conclusion under each aspect of service (issues, opening hours, acquisitions etc) is that the position had deteriorated under County control. Were it to be granted library powers Afan would embark on a programme of short and

long term improvement. The former would aim to improve bookstocks - extend opening hours; the latter would investigate the feasibility of providing a new library at Port Talbot and improve facilities at other centres.

Neath's application

The Municipal Borough of Neath adopted the libraries acts in 1897; a year later the Urban District of Briton Ferry took the same step, but this authority relinquished powers in 1922 and joined with Neath to form a small Borough-based library service. This was the two centre operation taken over by West Glamorgan County Council in 1974. Neath's application²⁴ (Appendix 39) has much in common with Afan's submission. Weaknesses in the county service are highlighted with Neath asserting that the performance of the county was in many instances below that of other library authorities in Wales. To remedy the situation Neath would implement a set of proposals over a ten year period. These proposals are quite detailed (eg a full costing is provided of possible expenditure on takeover with a figure of £75,000 as a target book fund):

Swansea's application

In terms of population Swansea is the second largest conurbation in Wales. Within the pre-reorganisation structure Swansea had the status of a County Borough and had responsibility for libraries (adoption 1870 - one of the first in Wales) and a wide range of other services. In its application²⁵ (extracts Appendix 40) Swansea City Council asserts that the library service as provided by West Glamorgan since 1974 had not been developed to the same extent as other cultural and leisure facilities within the area; nor had it kept pace with the expanding needs of a public with increasing opportunities for leisure enjoyment. Swansea provided statistical evidence of alleged county weaknesses and contended that the library service would be better provided and would merge naturally with existing district cultural services. Under district control Swansea

would initially aim to increase book stocks, make better use of existing stocks and reorganise staff structures and responsibilities. In the long term the priority would be to build a new library in Swansea; an already inadequate building was being increasingly pushed into the periphery of city activity by commercial development in other areas of the city.

An examination of the applications by Afan, Neath and Swansea reveal that the three had co-operated closely as they prepared their submissions. The same catalogue of complaints (with minor variations) appears in each document and the proposals for improvement are almost identical. This common approach brings advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side it shows that each submission had been well researched and prepared and if three districts state that the county service was not up to standard, their complaints at least merit further investigation. In a negative sense one is left with an impression of collusion and that the whole process had been susceptible to a kind of domino effect with one application leading almost automatically to another.

WEST GLAMORGAN'S RESPONSE

The response²⁶ (extracts Appendix 41) asserts that the District claims were misguided and lacked substance. Each application had seen libraries as an integral part of leisure service; West Glamorgan since reorganisation had linked libraries to education and this relationship, it is argued, had brought benefits to both services. To support this line the response cites various official reports and circulars, and statements by the Library Association. Statistical evidence of deterioration is not accepted by the County: the statistics are invalid in that they are used selectively and do not compare like with like. To refute District charges West Glamorgan contends that the service had grown since 1974 and several items of evidence are given. To revert to District control would be nonsensical

and would ensure that many of the benefits would be lost. The main plank in the county response is that granting powers to any one District would damage the viability of the county library service; the loss of Swansea, as a focal and administrative centre would be particularly damaging. If the process of acceding to District claims progressed, a point would ultimately be reached where the whole rationale and basis of a county library service would be brought into question.

TABLE 5.8
SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF THE LIBRARY SERVICE PROVIDED BY
WEST GLAMORGAN C.C. 1983-84

Net Expenditure per 1000 population	West Glam	Welsh C Average
Total	5,860	5,669
Books	915	990
Staff	3,671	3,254
Premises	601	576

**Number and categorisation of
staff**

Number of staff in Post

Professional	51 (27%)	286 (25%)
Other non manual	111 (60%)	738 (63%)
Total	185	1,166

Staff to population ratios

Professional	1:7188	1:8831
Other non manual	1:3302	1:3422
Total	1:1981	1:2166

West Glamorgan are above average on total expenditure, staff and premises below average on expenditure on books.

This indicates that West Glamorgan was above average on professional, non-manual and total staff.

Looking again in general terms at all district applications it is obvious that they varied considerably in terms of length and content. The shortest submissions were less than ten pages while the longest document was forty four pages

with a further forty pages of appendices. Some districts depended heavily on professional reports and standards while others made no more than a passing reference to such publications. The inescapable conclusion arising from this variety of approach was that some Districts were far more serious and purposive in their determination to gain library powers. The political will to take over responsibility for libraries is manifest in all District claims but this is not always backed by careful research and the presentation of convincing arguments. On this point, it is noticeable that many submissions refer constantly to past achievements and thus emerge as little more than a faint echo of structures and services prior to 1974. This tendency is understandable but it does convey the impression that several Districts had failed to grasp that the notion of a library service had changed considerably within a decade. With regard to the future place of libraries within an existing District management structure almost all districts opt for location within leisure services. This again is natural, but it is significant that not a single applicant thought it necessary to establish a separate library department with the librarian as chief officer directly accountable to a Chief Executive. Finally, on the question of finance, the starting point for Districts was to see the matter as a straight transfer of resources (rate precept and grant related expenditure) from County to district. This unquestionably was the starting point, but districts had to recognise that the finance so raised would not be sufficient. In one sense districts were caught in a trap: independence would always cost more; further, the more they complained of County inadequacies the more they would have to spend to remedy those inadequacies. It was incumbent on Districts, not Counties, to explain where the extra money would come from.

Counties, with one exception, responded fully and authoritatively. Professional content was high and each authority was able to make use of post-reorganisation

guidelines which referred to the benefits of an integrated library service. Amongst these benefits was the advantage of linking libraries with education and the existence of effective relationships with other relevant county departments such as Social Services. Counties were able to argue that libraries and their place within the overall management structure was now well established and that it would be foolish to tamper with arrangements which clearly worked. In the same vein counties could point to their record of actual achievement over a ten year period - a course clearly not open to districts. This argument cut both ways: if the County service had grown and developed since 1974 all well and good; if service development had been moribund then Counties would tend to play down such omissions. On finance each County response did point out that divided responsibility for libraries within any one area would cost more for Districts and Counties. It was over simplistic to rely on a straight transfer of resources; someone, ultimately would have to meet the expense and the counties argued with conviction that someone would be the ratepayer.

Having presented their written submissions, Districts and Counties were given the opportunity to augment their arguments in meetings with Panel Members at the Welsh Office. The nine districts were all interviewed by the Review Panel within one working week between 21 and 25 January 1985. Of all the tasks undertaken by Panel Members this was undoubtedly the most arduous. The three members had to read and master each submission and supporting documentation, conduct a meeting of some two hours, marshal brief points and make notes of the meeting and then move on to repeat the exercise with another District in the afternoon. Four counties were interviewed along the same lines between the 20 and 22 February and the cycle of meetings drew to a close on the 18 April 1985 when representatives of the remaining two Counties visited the Welsh Office.

Quantitatively, district and county representation at the meetings followed the pattern outlined below.

DISTRICTS (9 authorities)		COUNTIES (6 authorities)	
18 Councillors	(41%)	11 Councillors	(38%)
26 Officers	(59%)	18 Officers	(62%)
TOTAL	44		29
AVERAGE NO OF REPRESENTATIVES PER MEETING	4.8		4.8

In terms of numbers District and County approach to the meetings fall into a similar pattern: the average number of representatives per authority was exactly the same and the division between Councillors and Officers was evenly matched for both authorities.

Qualitatively, both Districts and Counties fielded strong teams. District councillors in each case included the Chairman of Council and/or Chairman of the Leisure Services Committee, this being the committee which would embrace responsibility for libraries if powers were granted. At Officer level each District sent Chief Executives with backing from other officers such as Directors of Finance or Leisure. Counties were represented by Chairmen/Leaders and Chairmen of the committee responsible for the library service. County Officers included Chief Executives and Solicitors and of course the County Librarian; as in the first Review Exercise this last individual had a crucial role as the defender of the County Library Service. On the question of mounting an effective defence it is noticeable that only one county of the six (Clwyd) thought it relevant to bring the area librarian to the meeting at the Welsh Office. It is strange that more counties did not elect to draw on the experience and knowledge of this second tier of management - the very level of administration which was responsible for day to day operation of the library service within each applicant's area.

The diversity of written and oral evidence inclined Panel Members to the view that within this second Review only a few library services would be selected for follow up visits. It has already been indicated that certain districts had presented strong cases for independence; Panel Members felt that before they could move to any decision the claims of these more forceful districts had to be re-examined in the context of an on-the-ground examination of library services within those Districts. Pragmatically the three Panel Members also thought that they could lighten their task and complete the Review in a shorter space of time by curtailing the programme of visits. However well founded their intentions Panel Members were strongly advised by Welsh Office Civil Servants that selective visits would not be a wise course of action. The Welsh Office was adamant that all local authorities involved in the Review must be treated equitably. A decision to visit a few areas would undoubtedly be swiftly communicated along the local government grapevine in Wales and would be seen as unfair. Districts and Counties would infer that Panel Members had more or less made up their minds and were merely seeking confirmation through a partial programme of visits. This in turn would occasion misplaced optimism or pessimism in Counties and Districts. Accordingly the Welsh Office advised that Panel Members should undertake no visits or visit all the counties affected by district claims. The Panel opted for the latter course of action and arranged to visit the six counties involved between 21 May and 14 June 1985. One day was allocated to each county concentrating on an examination of centralised services and service points within the areas served by the applying districts.

Lobbying was more intense within the second Review Exercise than the first. The most significant reason for this was the nature of the conclusions of the first exercise and the publicity generated by the first Review Report.

Professional associations were swift to respond to the establishment of a second investigation and the Panel received communications from the Library Association, the Welsh Library Association, the Public Libraries Group of the LA, the Youth Libraries Group and the School Library Association in Wales. All of these bodies supported the counties and the letter of the Library Association to the Secretary of State for Wales (Appendix 42) accurately reflects professional opinion. The view of LISC (Wales) had been promulgated at the meeting of that body held on 26 April 1984, referred to in Chapter 4. Essentially this view was that responsibility for library services should lie with the Counties and that no further District Councils should be designated as library authorities.

The two main local authority associations involved - the County Councils Association and the Association of District Councils in Wales each fought their corner. In a letter to the Welsh Office Finance Division, the CCA refer to the Welsh Rate Support Grant Settlement for 1985-86 and stress that District claims should be viewed within the overall context of this settlement

in the present climate it is unlikely that expenditure on one service could be increased without corresponding reductions elsewhere, whichever tier of government undertakes the service.²⁷

The ADC urged the Panel to approach its task with an open mind and argued

that the Review of the Public Library Function could be a most useful exercise in the raising of standards as it is quite clear that there is at present considerable variation in standards between the six County libraries under scrutiny.²⁸

Four Members of Parliament wrote to the Secretary of State for Wales: John Marek (Wrexham, Labour), Gareth Wardell (Gower, Labour), Raymond Gower (Vale of Glamorgan, Conservative) and Keith Best (Ynys Môn, Conservative). The

latter was a tireless campaigner on behalf of his District and the letter of 7 December 1984 together with a reply from Wyn Roberts, Parliamentary Under Secretary at Welsh Office is typical of Keith Best's efforts (Appendix 43). The most telling section of Wyn Roberts' reply is his outright rejection of Keith Best's request for a meeting on the grounds that this would politicise the issue and compromise the neutrality of the Welsh Office. Within this second Review two County Councillors wrote strong letters of support for their County library services: one of these Councillors takes a trenchant line

For the past four years I have represented Menai Bridge as a Gwynedd County Councillor and during this period not one complaint or dissatisfaction has been registered with me concerning the local library.²⁹

The underlying question is inescapable: was Ynys Môn's (and other District's) case political opportunism or was that authority genuinely concerned about the provision of public library service within its boundaries? If the latter were true why did the District wait until the review process instead of raising the matter directly with Gwynedd officers or elected representatives?

This investigative stage of the second Review was completed by the end of June 1985. Within a period of six months Panel Members had received written submissions and oral evidence from nine Districts and six Counties and had visited libraries at thirty four locations throughout Wales. Following a summer recess the Panel reconvened in September 1985 and began on the task of writing its Report. As before there was no full time secretariat to turn to and the responsibility for the production of the document lay completely with Panel Members. Having decided on their overall approach each member was allocated sections of the Report to write and set to the work of preparing draft chapters. The only chapter written by all three Panel Members was the one dealing with General Conclusions.

The overall organisation of the document is straightforward. The terms of reference and general approach is explained with the Report then moving on to deal alphabetically with each county chapter by chapter. Within these chapters a brief overview of county library services is provided leading to a more detailed examination of services within the applicant's area. The District submission is then summarised followed by observations which concentrate on the implications of separation and a critique of standards of service in the county, paying special attention once more to standards in the applicant's area. All of this leads to the recommendation to accept or reject the district case. The whole body of the Report relies heavily on the evidence placed before the Panel and the information gleaned during visits: recourse to external matter is slight being confined to the use of statistics drawn from CIPFA and Audit Commission Profiles.

The Panel recommended to the Secretary of State for Wales that only one of the nine applying Districts namely Newport Borough Council should be awarded library powers. This is not to suggest that the arguments of the remaining Districts were easily dismissed by Panel Members and there were instances where a switch from County to District offered certain attractions. Dealing with each District in turn it is correct to suggest that the claims of Afan, Neath, Taff Ely, Vale of Glamorgan and Wrexham Maelor would have been hard to justify. A variety of reasons may be offered: weakness of the District case and/or the strength of the County service together with the effect of separation on the remainder of the county. Two Districts, Swansea and Ynys Môn would seem at first sight to be impressive candidates. Swansea's submission was effective and there were inadequacies in the County's service, the most obvious being a need for considerable capital development. The counter arguments were however stronger: granting powers to Swansea would have deprived West Glamorgan of 51% of its population, 30% of land area, and 49% of rateable value, all sizeable

portions of what was the most compact county in Wales. Panel Members were also mindful of the guidance offered in Circular 6/73

there would be serious objections to acceding to an application from a District which was the administrative centre or natural focal point of the county or which represented either by itself or collectively with other District applicants a significantly large portion of the County's population. Thus impairing the County Councils capacity to provide a comprehensive and efficient service in the remainder of the county.³⁰

and reveal in their Report that although Swansea had been a strong contender for library powers, the considerations outlined in the Circular had ultimately led to rejection.

Swansea is also clearly the administrative centre and focal point of the county - had not this been the case it would have been more difficult to reject the City Council's application.³¹

The attraction of granting powers to Ynys Môn were twofold: the outright professionalism of their submission and the fact as indicated earlier the District had at its disposal finances over and above rate precept and support grant which could be partly used to establish and operate an independent library service. The whole question of the agreement between Shell UK and the Borough was the basis of correspondence between Ynys Môn and Gwynedd and Panel Members, with the county seeking legal counsel's opinion on the matter. More important to the Review Panel was the inability of Ynys Môn to guarantee the perpetuity of this oil revenue: its loss would jeopardize many District plans and would require the authority to revert to traditional sources to finance an independent library service. For this³¹ and other reasons (most notably the consequences for Gwynedd) the Panel recommended that Ynys Môn should not be granted library powers. This left two Districts - Blaenau Gwent and Newport, both in the county of Gwent. Although the former were serious contenders in terms of their

submission, several points had to be considered: the District had no experience whatsoever of operating a library service and would have to grapple with the whole question anew; standards of service provided by the county were not as low in Blaenau Gwent as they were in Newport; and finally the decision to allocate powers to Newport made it almost impossible to recommend further fragmentation in Gwent. If the claims of both districts had been accepted the implications for the viability of the remaining county library service would have been serious. Gwent would be left with responsibility for three districts with a population of 227,600; this would result in the county being the next but lowest populated county for library purposes in Wales. In one sense therefore, but only in this one sense, Blaenau Gwent failed because of Newport's success. Such success was however dependent on Newport's acceptance of six conditions stipulated in the Review Panel's Report.

- (i) the Council shall be prepared to co-operate in any arrangements, especially in the introduction of new technology, for compilation of records of holdings of all public libraries within the County area;
- (ii) the Council shall be prepared to co-operate with the County authority in making arrangements whereby the resources both of library materials and staff expertise in the District and the County can be built up and used for the benefit of users in the District and County as a whole;
- (iii) the Borough Council shall not impose any charges on County readers which it does not impose on its own readers;
- (iv) the facilities of Newport Central Reference Library shall remain available for the use of all legitimate library users of Gwent County Library Service without any additional charges or restrictions to those placed upon Newport Borough Council users;
- (v) the Council shall co-operate with the County Education Authority and the county Library Service in the provision of a library service to the schools in Newport;

- (vi) the Council shall be asked to submit regular reports of development and progress, and to maintain a continuous flow of information to the Welsh Office.³³

There is one other section of the Second Review Report that merits attention namely the final chapter outlining the Panel's general conclusions. Here Panel Members concentrate on three issues: the legislative framework; monitoring of public library service in Wales; and the need for enhanced co-operation between County and District authorities on library matters. In relation to the legislative framework the view is that the possibilities offered by Section 207 hamper rather than favour effective management and development of public libraries in Wales. It is stated that the Section has weaknesses in three areas: the legal requirement for decennial reviews leads to an atmosphere of uncertainty; the reviews could also lead to heightened interest in library matters and provide an opportunity for District power-broking; and finally, as has been stated, the whole ethos of the Section is inequitable in that conditions could be imposed on existing and/or applying Districts but not on the Counties. Whilst the Panel recognized all this to be true, it was pragmatic enough to accept the Section as a fact of life and that its weaknesses were unlikely to be remedied by legislative amendment. This being so the Panel further recognised that as matters stood at that time the whole question of library powers would have to be re-examined in 1994. To fill the time gap between the 1984-85 investigations and 1994 and to overcome some of the weaknesses of Section 207 the Panel's call for effective monitoring of all public libraries in Wales by the Welsh Office. The crucial word here is all; the task of monitoring starts within the four Districts re-awarded powers and within Newport (if the Panel's recommendation is accepted) but then extends to all library authorities in Wales. The objective of such monitoring would be to place Districts and Counties on an equal footing and the exercise would give the Welsh Office a continuing and balanced approach. On the final issue of co-operation, the message

is clear: more harmonious co-operation between Districts and Counties would lessen the likelihood of Districts lodging a claim with a resultant diminution in the power-broking outlined above.

Welsh Office civil servants were not happy to include this final chapter, the only section of the whole Report to encounter such resistance. The chapter is mildly critical of the Welsh Office on the question of monitoring.

The Panel note with some concern that, despite Ministerial acceptance of the first report, this important task has not necessitated the establishment at a senior level of a full time post of Library Adviser for Wales.³⁴

Though carefully expressed this call for wider and more effective monitoring represents in all probability the main reason for Welsh Office unease. The department was to lose the occasional services of an OAL library adviser and was seeking ways of decreasing rather than increasing its public library responsibilities. In the end, the general conclusions were accepted and included in the Report, albeit as an expression of sentiments as opposed to firm recommendations.

As with the first Review Report, the timing of the release of the second document appears to have been adroitly managed by the Welsh Office. Although Panel Members presented a final draft to Welsh Office civil servants early in February 1986 and although the document bears the imprint March 1986, its contents were not made public until 24 July 1986. The summer recess commenced on the same day leaving no opportunity for Parliamentary questions or debate. The release of the Second Review Report was also overshadowed by a far more contentious publication issued on the same day. This was a report from the Commons Defence Select Committee on Westland PLC concentrating on the conduct of government in relation to the future ownership of that company. The Westland Affair had already led to the resignation of two

senior Cabinet Ministers.³⁵ The Select Committee Report was eagerly awaited and naturally when it appeared it scooped media attention, pushing all other topics into the background.

That much said, the Review Report did receive some attention in the Welsh national press and in professional journals. On the day following its publication the Western Mail carried the story on an inside page under the headline "Outdated libraries come under fire".³⁶ The article concentrates on faults within individual county systems and gives considerable space to Gwent's failings and the consequent recommendation that Newport to take up powers. As the strength of the Western Mail's circulation lies in South and West Wales, it is not surprising that the case of the two North Wales Districts, Wrexham and Ynys Môn, is summarily dismissed in one sentence at the end of the article. The piece makes no reference to the final Chapter of the Review Report which the Panel Members had seen as being central to the whole question of District bids and Welsh Office reaction.

As to the next stage in decision making, one clue is offered when Wyn Roberts, Under Secretary of State at the Welsh Office is quoted as saying that consultations relating to the Newport proposal would now take place with Gwent. The Library Association Record refers to the matter in its July 1986 issue.³⁷ The Panel's recommendations are outlined, together with the view of the Library Association and the Welsh Library Association that Counties were the appropriate authorities to exercise library powers in Wales. The professional associations were given an opportunity to reinforce their views when an LA/WLA delegation met Wyn Roberts on 25 November 1986. A document was presented to the Minister (Appendix 44). The central theme and stance was the same; counties were best placed to run public library services and both Associations regretted

the Review Panel's decision to recommend acceptance of the application for library powers by Newport Borough Council.

We would argue strongly that the right course of action is for Gwent to be given the opportunity to improve library services over the County as a whole.³⁸

The matters raised by the delegation were reported in the Library Association Record March 1987; while this article makes it clear that consultations between County and District were continuing in Gwent, there was some indication that the Welsh Office was inclined to a particular course of action.

Mr Roberts said he was "very impressed" with the Review Panel's Report and the LA party came away with the impression that the decision was likely to be in Newport's favour.³⁹

Analysis of decision making within the second Review exercise and the likely consequences of awarding powers to Newport is presented in an article in Y Ddolen,⁴⁰ the Journal of the Welsh Library Association and by Evans and Tunley in the November/December, 1986 issue of Public Library Journal.⁴¹ The second piece attempts to present both sides of the argument with Evans explaining how the Review Panel went about its work and how it arrived at its final conclusions; Tunley is more critical, questioning the recommendation to award powers to Newport and wondering whether this course of action is worth the risk. His criticism aligns with LA/WLA thinking and leads him to argue that the Panel would have acted more responsibly had they reprimanded Gwent, obliging the County to accept close monitoring by the Welsh Office to raise standards throughout their area. A further point of criticism from Tunley is that the Review Panel had relied on limited and sometimes subjective evidence: there was little or not attempt in their Report to go beyond CIPFA statistics and no reference is made to documents such as the LAMSAC Staffing Standards.⁴² Two members of the Review Panel (Peter

Beauchamp of the OAL and the author of this study) were invited to address delegates at the Annual Conference of the Welsh Library Association on 13 May 1987. Having presented their papers, both Panel Members had expected a lively and searching discussion which would centre on the efficacy of the review panel method as a forum for decision making. The result was otherwise. The audience divided into County and District camps: the former criticised the Panel for awarding powers to Newport; the latter group lauded the decision and argued for retention of Section 207 as a method of reviewing public library standards in Wales. As perhaps might be expected, the debate continued on these narrow lines and rarely rose above the level of factionalism.

Meanwhile the tripartite consultation between Welsh Office, Gwent and Newport Borough Council continued. The library profession in Wales felt that a decision was long overdue, but it should be remembered that the Welsh Office had to resolve substantial problems such as transfer of staff and property before it could move to a final recommendation. This came in an announcement on 24 February 1988 - nineteen months after the release of the Second Review Panel's Report. Wyn Roberts accepted the Panel's findings and gave formal blessing to a transfer of powers from Gwent to Newport - the changeover to be effective from 1 April 1989. The decision was reported in the Western Mail⁴³ and the Library Association Record.⁴⁴ The article in the latter make it clear that Wyn Roberts had stipulated that the granting of powers was dependent on the acceptance of eight conditions by Newport. These were essentially an amplification of the requirements presented in the Review Panel's Report.

- (i) To co-operate with the County Council especially in the introduction of new technology, on the compilation of records of holdings of all public libraries within the country area;
- (ii) to co-operate in making arrangements to build up resources of library materials and staff

expertise in both district and county to be used for the benefit of the users throughout the county area;

- (iii) not to impose any additional charges on users from elsewhere in Gwent;
- (iv) to keep Newport Central Reference Library freely available to all users of Gwent County Library;
- (v) to co-operate with the county education authority and the county library service in the provision of a schools library service in Newport;
- (vi) to submit to the Welsh Office regular annual reports of development and progress, including a three-year rolling development programme for the library service;
- (vii) to appoint a principal officer as borough librarian to reflect 'the status, duties and responsibilities of the post'; and
- (viii) in future proposals on staffing, to take account of the formula published in the DES Report on the staffing of public libraries (1976).

On 27 October 1988 The Local Government (Council of the Borough of Newport, Gwent, Library Authority) Order 1988⁴⁵ (Appendix 45) was laid before Parliament. This gave legal force to the transfer of library powers and stated that on acceptance of certain conditions Newport Borough Council would on the 1 April 1989 be constituted a library authority. Two of the most important sections of the Order are clauses 15(a) and 15(b) which state respectively that persons living in the County of Gwent outside the area of the Borough of Newport should continue to have full access to the resources of Newport Central Reference Library and should not be subject to any charges for the use of library facilities within the Borough.

At the close of this chapter it is necessary to explain the context of this second round of decision making and why in particular the Panel took the bold step of recommending that Newport Borough Council be awarded library powers. As to

context the most obvious factor here was again a tendency towards the status quo. In both investigations Panel Members fully realised the difficulties facing local authorities and if District and County had a reasonable record of achievement and could show that they had specific plans for improvement, it seemed wiser to leave matters alone rather than recommend wholesale change. This approach of not changing anything as a result of the 1984 and 1986 investigations (which was basically the Welsh Office line) was tempered by the view prevalent in the second investigation that the whole process would have appeared rather pointless if everything had been left exactly as before. This is not to suggest that members of the second Panel opted for change for change sake, but it is correct to suggest that they did feel that if Section 207 and the consequent review process had any validity, they should respond to that validity and commend a particular course of action. They could of course only respond in the light of all the evidence placed before them and in this respect, the context of the second investigation differs significantly from the first. The first Panel could examine the record and oral and verbal testimony of District and County and move to a decision. The second Panel had to rely on the promises and future plans of applying Districts and align these with the record of the County. Promises and plans which appeared plausible on paper could easily be wrecked by changes such as a decision by central government to recalculate yet again the rate support grant formula. Whilst this reliance on aspirations caused problems for the Panel it inevitably meant that would-be providers of a library service had the well-nigh impossible task of proving that they could do better. The context of decision making within both Reviews was also sharply defined by the effects of any change on the remaining County Library Service, but once again there were differences. The first Review Panel were presented with the consequences for the County as an established fact; the Second Panel had the power and

potential to create such consequences and this would clearly have a bearing on their recommendations.

To turn to the granting of library powers to Newport, there are a set of related circumstances that may be offered in explanation. Firstly it became increasingly obvious as the investigation progressed that the service in Gwent was weak and that this weakness was particularly prevalent in Newport. Gwent's case on paper was thin and lacked convincing arguments and there was an awareness at Welsh Office meetings that the county was ill-prepared. Visits to Newport central library and other service points confirmed the suspicion of neglect and inadequacy. Secondly, and in complete contrast, Newport's impressive submission was effectively and vigorously presented to Panel Members. The Borough's contention was clear: it was dissatisfied with what the County was providing. The Borough's intention was equally manifest: it argued cogently with supporting facts that it could and would raise the standard of provision. Thirdly the Panel came to the conclusion that although separation would weaken Gwent (loss of 30% of population, 14% land area and 44% rateable value) the County would remain a viable unit. Gwent minus Newport would have a population of 305,800, some 3% below the average for Welsh counties. In rank order terms, the loss of Newport would still leave Gwent with a larger population than three other Welsh counties, Dyfed, Gwynedd and Powys. Fourthly, and finally, it should be stressed once more that the Panel had to work within the confines of Section 207. It could not (as the Welsh Library Association and other commentators had suggested) reprimand Gwent and simply hope that things would get better. As already explained in the preceding Chapter, the Panel could not formally commend a particular course of action to Gwent or any other county in Wales. It could, by virtue of legislation, commend transfer of powers to a District and impose strict conditions on that transfer and the subsequent standard of service.

In the last analysis the reasoning and objectives underlying decision making within the 1984 and 1986 reviews centred on one fundamental question - what authority would deliver the best service to the reader? Though the thinking was constant the second Panel encountered and ultimately accepted a higher element of risk by recommending the transfer of powers from an existing library authority to a non library authority. Their action had no precedent. Although the Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964 provided for such a transfer, the powers have never been used in the past and are unlikely to be used in the future.

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CHAPTER SIX

"There are three kinds of lies - lies, damned lies and statistics".

Mark Twain Autobiography

This chapter attempts to place the effects of the 1984 and 1986 Reviews in a wider context by examining library expenditure in Welsh public library authorities between 1979 and 1989. Trends in expenditure with particular reference to bookfunds, additions to stock and level of stock are explored. The overall objective is to compare the performance of Counties and Districts and to distinguish where possible the costs and consequences of separation. To place this analysis in a broader perspective comparisons are also made between Welsh authorities and selected English public library authorities. The English counties selected for comparison were, as far as possible similar in size in terms of population to the Welsh counties. Some of them share other characteristics of Welsh authorities; for example Cumbria and Northumberland are counties with a large geographical area and low density of population and thus have much in common with the Welsh counties of Powys, Dyfed and Gwynedd. Comparison between Welsh Districts and English authorities is unwise due to disparities in size. For example the average population of English Metropolitan Districts is 307,526; the comparable figure for Welsh Districts is 68,275 (both 1988 figures). It should also be borne in mind that there are special circumstances in the Welsh authorities (most notably the Welsh language) which always differentiate them from their English counterparts.

As always it should be remembered that statistics can be misinterpreted and cannot by themselves present a complete picture. For instance, in terms of library stock, statistics do not take into account losses due to fire, gains due to donations rather than to increased spending, or an increase in stock due to lack of stock editing rather

than an increase in additions. A further word of caution: the public library service is essentially a local service responding to local needs and demands and this factor can cast doubts on over-reliance on direct comparison between authorities.

The British Library Research and Development Department was one of a number of bodies to examine public library expenditure reductions in the 1980's. It undertook a survey¹ in 1980-1982 on the effects of the 1980 cutbacks on publically funded libraries. These reductions were being imposed on a service already cut back during the 1970's and were therefore likely to have a serious impact on service provision. The decline in resources since 1974 resulted in a base level of provision which was already depressed at the time of the cuts. By 1980, it was becoming clear that any further cuts were likely to cause staff redundancies, closure of branch libraries and withdrawal and cessation of certain services.

The British Library attempted to ascertain how serious the effects of the cuts would be. Most authorities reported cuts in expenditure in real terms resulting in staff reductions, frozen posts, reduced opening hours, closure of service points, reduction in special services, reduction in spending on materials and increased charging. Plans to cut book funds were mentioned by at least half of the respondents with cuts as high as 30% reported. Reduction of the bookfund is an obvious short term option since the saving is immediate but the results are not immediately obvious. There is no doubt however that the long term effects are detrimental. Reductions in staffing establishments were also made through frozen posts and early retirement. Fewer part-time staff were employed to cover busy periods. Although no redundancies were reported at the time of the survey, this form of action was felt to be imminent. There were also fewer promotion prospects for staff as posts become frozen and less opportunity for

training as funds were reduced. All of this quite naturally had the consequence of reducing staff expectations and morale.

There was little evidence to suggest that the cuts had been made according to long-term plans based on the aims and objectives of the service. Rather the reductions were effected in an arbitrary manner with little or no consistency and regard for the long-term consequences on other aspects of the service.

The Library Campaign was founded in 1984 to voice concern about threats to the standard of library provision. The Campaign produced a report in 1985 called Expenditure cuts in public Libraries and their effects on services.² The report, based on a further survey, discovered that spending in public libraries in real terms was broadly the same between 1979 and 1984 but several aspects of costs had increased at a rate higher than the rate of inflation. This was particularly true of book purchase costs. Thus although spending on libraries had not decreased in terms of the money provided, libraries were able to buy less with that money. The bookfund was found to be the most vulnerable item of expenditure in terms of making cuts. The Library Campaign survey linked the quality and range of material with the number of books issued and argued that deterioration in the former led to a decline in the latter. The conclusions of the survey were, that, despite broadly constant levels of funding, there had been a reduction in services due to increases in costs above the rate of inflation combined with pressures to expand the service. Further where such expansion into new areas had occurred it had been at the expense of other more basic services because resources were not increasing to account for the additional provision. On the question of allocation of resources, local and national factors were found to have an influence: at a local level the degree of support for the service, political commitment, skills of relevant officers

and union strength could have a bearing on decisions; the national context was set by central government and in particular the fiscal policies of government.

Many reports had noted the serious decline in the purchasing power of bookfunds. Some authorities had made drastic reductions: for example Tower Hamlets made a cut of 78% in 1980-1981 and a further cut of a third on its 1981-82 budget, with book and record provision going down by 80%.³ Incremental cuts over a period of years were more common (and this for the most part was the pattern in Wales) and these were equally devastating in the long-term. The results were shabby out-dated stock, fewer reference works and ultimately fewer borrowings - a kind of creeping death threatened by further cuts.⁴ In statistical terms the spending power of bookfunds declined by 34.2% from 1978-1979 to 1984-1985. This decline was fairly uniform throughout the United Kingdom: 33.6% in London Boroughs, 33.9% in English Counties, 32.8% in Metropolitan Districts, but the figure for Welsh counties was higher at 38.6%. This figure is worrying since the base level in Welsh Counties in 1979 was lower and thus Wales suffered a greater percentage decline from a lower base.⁵

There is some irony in the fact that a decade which was characterised by a reduction in the allocation of resources to public library services was also a decade of reassessment of standards of those services. The process of re-appraisal was approached in different ways in the component countries of the United Kingdom. In Scotland the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities issued its Standards for the Public Library Service in Scotland in 1986,⁶ based on best current practice. A similar course was followed in Wales and led to the LISC (Wales) Report of a working party on Public Library Services.⁷ This, like the Scottish document presented a modest upgrading of Bourdillon-type standards for all sectors of the service placing emphasis throughout on what was pragmatically

attainable. For the whole of the United Kingdom the Office of Arts and Libraries issued A Costing System for Public Libraries in 1987,⁸ followed by the long-awaited Performance Indicators for Public Libraries in 1990.⁹ The latter, offering quantitative methods of setting standards and assessment would clearly become an essential working tool for public librarians in the 1990's.

There is no doubt that new sophisticated measuring devices were necessary if public librarians in Wales (and the remainder of the United Kingdom) were to meet the challenges presented by changing socio-economic forces. Such forces in Wales manifested themselves in rural and urban areas.

Rural areas in Wales faced deprivation arising from lack of opportunities for employment and housing and reduction in the level and availability of a wide range of public services. Reduction feeds on itself: the closure of a village school leads to further population drift and the withdrawal of yet more services such as the village shop or public transport. The housing problem in rural areas has been exacerbated by the influx of English families who have bought holiday or retirement homes at prices well beyond the reach of local people. The lack of opportunity for a decent quality of life for inhabitants of rural areas has led - as in the past - to emigration from those areas to the urban areas of Wales or to England and to the newer phenomenon of immigration. This as Carter¹⁰ has indicated is the reciprocal to any migratory flow, being occasioned by the forces of rural-retreating or counterurbanisation.

The material and consumer ethos of the transactional city and its obsession with finance ... has brought about its rejection by some people. Those rejecting are of a great variety, ranging from drop-outs and hippies to artists. But many are simply those with enough money, especially after the sale of property at inflated prices, to settle in a more congenial environment at retirement age or well below it.¹¹

All of this can clearly have implications for public library services and other local services. For example with a large elderly population, health care and social services might be more relevant than leisure services. For a library authority, services to the housebound, large-print or talking books could be seen to be a higher priority than story times. In the long term, the shortage of young people with families has the potential to deprive libraries of a new generation of readers.

Urban Wales has witnessed a further contraction of its industrial heartlands. This has been partly compensated by inward investment by agencies of central government such as the Welsh Development Agency, but serious difficulties remain. The decimation of the coal industry has been particularly dramatic. In 1948 the South Wales region of the National Coal Board had

some 113,000 miners working at more than 200 pits and an output exceeding 22 million tonnes per year. At the end of 1988 only nine active pits remained employing some 6,000 men and producing around 5 million tonnes.¹²

The pattern of pit closures continues unabated. On 13 October 1992 British Coal announced the closure of 31 pits and the consequent loss of 30,000 jobs across the United Kingdom. As a result of the announcement Wales was left with just one pit employing 370 miners. Naturally this move and earlier contraction contributed to unemployment and a general deterioration of economic conditions, leading in turn to socio-economic deprivation. The effects are starkly apparent in the Cynon Valley which is recognised as one of the poorest regions of the United Kingdom. These changes have serious implications for the public library service. Enforced leisure and the general decline of community networks have led to new demands being placed on the service. Community information about jobs and welfare provision becomes a high priority. The library must also play an enhanced role in rebuilding the cultural life of the community in the absence of other cultural

institutions and often, other means of entertainment. The need to attract new industry has led some library authorities to establish and develop business information services. For instance, Rhondda Borough Libraries' Annual Report for 1987-1988¹³ notes that the reference department of the service was working in conjunction with the local Job Centre to provide information on employment opportunities.

All of the problems described so far have been experienced in other parts of the United Kingdom, although arguably, they are not as concentrated as they are in Wales. The one factor which distinguishes Wales from the rest of the United Kingdom, is the Welsh language.

The 1981 Census recorded 503,549 Welsh speakers, 21,283 of whom were monoglot Welsh speakers. In 1911 there were 977,400 Welsh speakers of whom 190,300 were monoglots. In crude terms this represents a proportional loss of 25%, from 44% in 1911 to only 18.9% in 1981. This inexorable trend of steady erosion has been extensively documented¹⁴ and is characterised by a shift from a strong heartland area, Y Fro Gymraeg to a series of fragmented nuclei - Ynys Môn, Llyn and Arfon, Merionydd-Nant Conwy, rural Dyfed and industrial south-east Dyfed/West Glamorgan. This retreat has been graphically described by one Welsh writer; he sees it as the

profiad o wybod, nid eich bod chwi yn gadael eich gwlad, ond fod eich gwlad yn eich gadael chwi, yn cael ei sugno i ffwrdd oddi wrthych, megis gan lyncwynt gwancus i ddwylo ac i feddiant gwlad a gwareiddiad arall (experience of knowing, not that you are leaving your country, but that your country is leaving you, is ceasing to exist under your very feet, being sucked away from you as it were by a consuming swallowing wind, into the hands and possession of another country and civilisation).¹⁵

Paradoxically the decade under review in this chapter, has seen an increase in interest in and commitment to the Welsh

language. The Education Reform Act, 1988 gave Welsh the status of a core national curriculum subject in Welsh-speaking schools and the status of a foundation subject in other schools in Wales. Total central government expenditure on the Welsh language can be difficult to quantify as it encompasses support for a variety of activities such as broadcasting, the Arts in Wales, the National Eisteddfod and publishing. The main beneficiary of central government money has been education. Since 1981 grants from the Welsh Office (under section 21 of the 1980 Education Act) have enabled LEAs and a large number of educational organisations to expand their service in the field of Welsh language education. The total annual grant in 1980-81 was £501,775; by 1990-91 the total was £3,303,000 - a five-fold increase over a ten year period.¹⁶ Once again the implications for public libraries are clear. As stated earlier in this study, public libraries in most parts of Wales have an obligation to provide a comparable service to English and Welsh speakers in terms of books and staff. This requirement persists in the heightened atmosphere of official support for the Welsh language but there has been little or no recognition on the part of central government that libraries, like education, need extra money to meet the needs of Welsh speakers and learners.

These then were the main challenges that presented themselves to Welsh public library authorities in the 1980's. The manner in which they met those challenges is now examined by analysis of statistics¹⁷ relevant to five aspects of the public library service:

- Total expenditure
- Expenditure on books
- Bookstock
- Additions to stock
- Issues.

Total Expenditure

A comparison of the total net expenditure per 1000 in all Welsh library authorities between 1979-80 and 1988-89 confirms the findings of reports and surveys referred to above that money spent on libraries had not declined but it had not increased sufficiently to meet the increased costs of running a service and the extra demands placed on the service.

The following table shows the Welsh counties and districts ranked according to the highest net expenditure per 1000 at the beginning and end of the decade.

TABLE 6.1
NET EXPENDITURE PER 1000 POPULATION IN WELSH COUNTIES
AND DISTRICTS 1989-80 AND 1988-89 (IN POUNDS)

	1979-80		1988-89
LLANELLI	4,642	RHONDDA	10,274
POWYS	4,615	POWYS	9,310
CLWYD	4,492	SOUTH GLAM	9,253
GWYNEDD	4,433	LLANELLI	9,016
DYFED	4,302	CLWYD	8,590
RHONDDA	4,090	CYNON VALLEY	8,472
WEST GLAM	3,846	GWYNEDD	8,367
SOUTH GLAM	3,788	MERTHYR TYDFIL	7,699
CYNON VALLEY	3,613	WEST GLAM	7,478
MID GLAM	3,462	DYFED	6,935
GWENT	3,302	GWENT	6,119
MERTHYR TYDFIL	2,939	MID GLAM	5,905

A rank order comparison places a district authority at the head of the table for both periods. With the exception of Llanelli all the districts have moved up the table by 1988-89 leading to the supposition that these authorities had allocated increased resources on the incentive of the reawarding of library powers and the monitoring of services by the Welsh Office. It is also salient that the two counties that contain district library authorities - Dyfed and Mid Glamorgan - slip down the table as the decade progresses.

It can also be seen that in 1979-80, there was a clear divide between the rural and Welsh speaking areas of mid and North Wales and the counties of the industrialised south. It could be concluded that the need to provide a service to a bilingual community and in some cases, in a sparsely populated area had required Powys, Gwynedd, Dyfed and Clwyd to spend more per head of population than the other counties. In 1988-89 the situation changes slightly. South Glamorgan rises to the third position in the rank order; part of that increase could be accounted for by the opening the new Central Library in Cardiff with the increase in expenditure that this would have entailed.

TABLE 6.2
ANNUAL EXPENDITURE INCREASES IN WELSH COUNTIES
AND DISTRICTS

1979-80/1980-81		1987-88/1988-89	
	%+ or -		%+ or -
CYNON VALLEY	31.7%	POWYS	21.3%
GWENT	20.8%	MID GLAM	13.8%
CLWYD	20.5%	RHONDDA	11.5%
GWYNEDD	19.2%	SOUTH GLAM	11.3%
WEST GLAM	15.9%	LLANELLI	10.9%
MID GLAM	15.8%	CLWYD	10.4%
SOUTH GLAM	15.1%	GWENT	9.2%
LLANELLI	13.8%	CYNON VALLEY	5.9%
POWYS	13.8%	WEST GLAM	5.3%
RHONDDA	13.7%	GWYNEDD	4.3%
MERTHYR	12.2%	MERTHYR	3.7%
DYFED	11.4%	DYFED	3.3%

The Retail Price Increase for 1979-80/1980-81 was 16.3%; for the latter period it was 6.0%.¹⁸ In 1979-80/1980-81 three counties and one district were being financed above the rate of inflation; by 1987-88/1988-89 five counties and two districts were in that position. Beyond this it is difficult to discern any clear trend, indeed there would seem to be a lack of consistency in some instances such as the 31.7% increase in expenditure in Cynon Valley, 1979-80/1980-81 and the 21.3% increase in Powys, 1987-88/1988-89. It is however noticeable that the same two authorities, Merthyr Tydfil and Dyfed are at the foot of

the table for both periods. At the end of the decade it could be stated that these library authorities were financing their services at a rate which was close to half the rate of inflation. This nullifies to a certain extent the comment made above about district authorities responding to the incentive of being reawarded library powers.

To compare the position in Wales with the situation in England, seven English counties of comparable population were selected. As stated earlier it is impractical to make direct comparisons with the Welsh districts but these four authorities are listed to see how they perform.

The average percentage increase in net expenditure per 1000 population between 1979-80 and 1988-89 was 105.1% in Welsh authorities and 96.6% in the English authorities selected. Clearly there is very little difference here. Of three types of authority - Welsh districts, Welsh counties and English counties, the highest percentage increase was in Welsh districts at 135.4%; the rate in English counties was 101.7% and in Welsh counties 92.3%. The range of increases across all authorities exhibited considerable fluctuation with South Glamorgan recording the highest increase at 144.2% and Shropshire the lowest at 44.6%. Averages can however disguise the real situation. For example, if Welsh authorities start from a lower base than the English authorities then despite a comparable increase in net expenditure, they would still be in an inferior position. The following table reveals how the Welsh authorities compare with their English counterparts.

TABLE 6.3
EXPENDITURE PER 1000 POPULATION IN ENGLISH AND WELSH
AUTHORITIES IN 1979-80 AND 1988-89 (IN POUNDS)

1979-1980		1988-1989	
Shropshire	4,961	RHONDDA	10,274
LLANELLI	4,642	POWYS	9,310
POWYS	4,615	SOUTH GLAM	9,253
Isle of Wight	4,533	LLANELLI	9,016
CLWYD	4,492	CLWYD	8,590
GWYNEDD	4,433	CYNON VALLEY	8,472
DYFED	4,302	GWYNEDD	8,367
Gloucester	4,174	Cumbria	8,252
RHONDDA	4,090	Northumbria	8,072
Northumbria	3,977	Isle of Wight	7,877
WEST GLAM	3,846	Gloucester	7,841
SOUTH GLAM	3,788	Cornwall	7,712
CYNON VALLEY	3,613	MERTHYR TYDFIL	7,699
Cumbria	3,547	Somerset	7,482
MID GLAM	3,426	WEST GLAM	7,478
Somerset	3,409	Shropshire	7,178
GWENT	3,302	DYFED	6,935
Cornwall	3,068	GWENT	6,119
MERTHYR TYDFIL	2,939	MID GLAM	5,905

In 1979-80, the Welsh authorities are spread across the table, but in 1988-89 there is a clear polarisation with seven Welsh authorities improving their performance against the English counties and moving to the head of the table. The Welsh districts also move up the table, giving further indication of a response to the reawarding of library powers. Three Welsh counties - Dyfed, Gwent and Mid Glamorgan move down the table and it is significant that these are the very authorities that were affected by the whole question of claims for library powers.

Expenditure on books

The provision of books remains as a clear cornerstone of the public library service. Electronic media have a distinct role in the pattern of provision, but these are restricted for the most part to the information function of the public library and there are indications that library patrons will have to pay for access to electronic sources.¹⁹ For leisure purposes there is little evidence to doubt the dominance of the printed word. The basic public library collection is therefore likely, for some

years to come to be an accumulation of works in the printed word. The Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964 stipulates that this collection should be comprehensive, so that the library service can function efficiently. Books are thus a major priority for expenditure, but despite this book funds have repeatedly been squeezed over recent years.

Having examined net expenditure per 1000 and the percentage increases over the decade this section looks at total expenditure on books and the expenditure on books as a percentage of total expenditure. Welsh counties will be examined first, then the Welsh districts with a comparison between counties and districts. The requirement to purchase Welsh language material which is incumbent on all library authorities in Wales is investigated. Finally the expenditure patterns of the Welsh authorities are placed in a UK context.

TABLE 6.4
EXPENDITURE ON BOOKS PER 1000 POPULATION IN WELSH COUNTIES
1988-89 (IN POUNDS)

	1988-1989
SOUTH GLAM	1,575
GWYNEDD	1,405
WEST GLAM	1,335
GWENT	1,268
POWYS	1,238
MID GLAM	1,236
DYFED	1,169
CLWYD	878
Welsh Counties Average	1,263

It is surprising to see Clwyd at the bottom of the table, spending less on books per head than any other county (and district as revealed below). As a county library authority, Clwyd is spending 79% less on books than South Glamorgan, the authority at the head of the table. This suggests that Clwyd, given its previous performance and its position in rank order tables above, is making reductions in its bookfund to finance other aspects of the service.

The percentage increase in expenditure on books also shows that Clwyd is near the bottom.

TABLE 6.5
PERCENTAGE INCREASE IN EXPENDITURE ON BOOKS IN WELSH
COUNTIES 1979-80 AND 1988-89

GWENT	158%
SOUTH GLAM	133%
WEST GLAM	105%
MID GLAM	95%
GWYNEDD	75%
POWYS	72%
CLWYD	48%
DYFED	42%
COUNTY AVERAGE	91%

The increase in Gwent was from a very low base. The figure for South Glamorgan confirms the pattern of expenditure for this authority noted above, while West Glamorgan and to a lesser extent Mid Glamorgan emerge as authorities placing a high emphasis on the purchase of library materials. The relatively low rate of increase in Dyfed reinforces the impression of a county library authority experiencing constant decline in terms of overall expenditure throughout the decade.

When spending on books as a percentage of total expenditure is examined, most counties maintain their position or experience a slight increase over the decade, although there are some exceptions.

TABLE 6.6
SPENDING ON BOOKS AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL EXPENDITURE IN
WELSH COUNTIES 1979-80 AND 1988-89

1979-80		1988-89	
DYFED	18.6%	MID GLAM	20.9%
GWYNEDD	17.9%	GWENT	20.7%
MID GLAM	17.9%	WEST GLAM	17.8%
SOUTH GLAM	17.1%	SOUTH GLAM	17%
WEST GLAM	16.4%	DYFED	16.8%
POWYS	15.3%	GWYNEDD	16.7%
GWENT	14.3%	POWYS	13.2%
CLWYD	12.7%	CLWYD	10.2%

In the Welsh districts, the pattern of expenditure on books does not reflect the pattern of total expenditure. Rhondda emerges as the highest spender, but Llanelli moves to the foot of the table.

TABLE 6.7
EXPENDITURE ON BOOKS PER 1000 POPULATION IN WELSH
DISTRICTS 1988-89 (IN POUNDS)

	1988-89
RHONDDA	2,242
CYNON VALLEY	1,708
MERTHYR TYDFIL	1,698
LLANELLI	1,575
Welsh districts average	1,805

The lowest district (Llanelli) spends exactly the same amount on the purchase of books as the highest Welsh county (South Glamorgan). The average percentage amount devoted to book expenditure is 43% higher in districts than in counties in Wales. This does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the districts are providing a service which is significantly superior in terms of book provision. It is equally tenable that the districts being that much smaller simply have to spend at a higher rate to establish and maintain a balanced book stock.

TABLE 6.8
PERCENTAGE INCREASE IN EXPENDITURE ON BOOKS IN WELSH
DISTRICTS 1979-80 AND 1988-89

MERTHYR TYDFIL	242%
RHONDDA	225%
CYNON VALLEY	203%
LLANELLI	31%
DISTRICT AVERAGE	175.2%

The highest rate of increase in Welsh counties was 158% and thus from one viewpoint the performance of three of the districts far exceeds that of all the Welsh counties. A more accurate appraisal would support the analysis that these three districts move from a position of relatively low expenditure on books at the beginning of the decade to

improved expenditure at its close. The reason for this enhanced performance arises in all probability from the response to the Welsh Office review exercise. The response of the fourth district - Llanelli - does not follow this common pattern and its 31% increase in expenditure on books over the decade places it below all the other library authorities in Wales when set against this criterion. Two conclusions are possible: that Llanelli felt that its book resources could be adequately maintained by this modest rate of increase or that the Borough Council was at the end of the decade placing a higher emphasis on other aspects of its services. The comments of the Borough Librarian tend to support the latter view

In Llanelli spending had stagnated for four years [1984-88]...There were other things to spend money on which were perhaps more important, such as the development of Pembrey Country Park, which is paid for by the same committee as the library.²⁰

Spending on books as a percentage of total expenditure presents the following picture

TABLE 6.9
SPENDING ON BOOKS AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL EXPENDITURE IN
WELSH DISTRICTS 1979-80 AND 1988-89

	1979-80		1988-89
LLANELLI	25.3%	MERTHYR TYDFIL	22%
MERTHYR TYDFIL	16.4%	RHONDDA	21.8%
RHONDDA	16.2%	CYNON VALLEY	20.1%
CYNON VALLEY	15.2%	LLANELLI	17.3%

These statistics are for the most part confirmatory. All the districts, with the exception of Llanelli are devoting an increased proportion of their resources to book purchase at the end of the period under review. Llanelli moves in the opposite direction with an 8% reduction in its allocation over the ten years. An all authority comparison reveals that districts as opposed to counties are allocating a larger share of total expenditure to book purchase in 1988-89.

The Public Library Statistics issued by CIPFA do not give details on expenditure on different categories of books and cannot thus be used as a basis for expenditure on Welsh language material. Relevant information is however available in The Book Trade in Wales,²¹ a report of a market research survey undertaken by The College of Librarianship, Wales on behalf of the three major organisations concerned with state patronage of publishing in Wales. Section 12 of the report dealing with Public Libraries and the Book Trade is based on a questionnaire sent to all public library authorities in Wales and gives a statistical snapshot of expenditure on Welsh language books 1986-87. (Although the authorities are not named in the list given, it is possible to identify them by a simple correlation to the stated number of Welsh speakers within those authorities).

TABLE 6.10
EXPENDITURE ON WELSH LANGUAGE BOOKS BY WELSH PUBLIC LIBRARY
AUTHORITIES 1986-87 (IN POUNDS)

	Welsh Speakers	(%)	Expenditure Total/Welsh	(%)
GWYNEDD	135,067	(57.8)	310,661/ 25,458	(8.2)
DYFED	109,312	(42.9)	292,952/ 22,378	(7.6)
CLWYD	69,578	(17.6)	334,070/ 22,000	(6.6)
MID GLAM	23,39	(7.1)	475,870/ 13,572	(2.9)
WEST GLAM	57,408	(15.6)	427,870/ 11,276	(2.6)
LLANELLI	36,901	(49.7)	115,000/ 6,500	(5.7)
POWYS	21,358	(20.5)	213,200/ 3,800	(1.8)
RHONDDA	7,489	(9.1)	115,000/ 2,708	(2.3)
CYNON VALLEY	7,130	(10.9)	79,600/ 1,600	(2.0)
SOUTH GLAM	20,684	(5.2)	526,520/ -	-
GWENT	10,700	(2.4)	437,500/ -	-
MERTHYR TYDFIL	4,720	(7.9)	85,000/ -	-
TOTAL	503,737		3,413,913/109,292	(3.2)²²

The conclusions of this section of the report are hardly surprising

The proportion of library expenditure on Welsh books in Wales is extremely small. The sum varies from authority to authority but, even in those authorities which are staunchest in their support of Welsh language and culture, expenditure on Welsh books amounts to less than 10% of the bookfund.²³

Placed in the context of the sums noted earlier in this chapter on central government expenditure on the Welsh language it could hardly be suggested that public libraries are reflecting an enhanced awareness of the need to support and sustain the Welsh language. On the other hand it may well be that the low level of expenditure arises from the paucity of Welsh language titles that are available, a view often cited by Welsh library authorities when defending this category of expenditure.

TABLE 6.11
WELSH LANGUAGE TITLES 1979-1989

	New Titles	Reprints and new editions	Total
1979	288	51	339
1980	258	43	301
1981	340	46	386
1982	390	26	416
1983	379	35	414
1984	336	24	360
1985	258	31	289
1986	302	44	346
1987	349	40	389
1988	416	72	488
1989	411	31	442 ²⁴

Although the totals demonstrate that the general trend in output is upward the number of Welsh language titles are still insignificant when compared with the output of UK publishers. The relatively limited numbers of new titles clearly makes it difficult if not impossible for library authorities in Wales to formulate and adopt any rigorously meaningful guidelines in relation to the purchase of Welsh language material.

How well do Welsh authorities compare with English authorities in terms of expenditure on books? The following table lists the highest and lowest spending authorities on the basis of amount spent per 1000 population.

TABLE 6.12
EXPENDITURE ON BOOKS PER 1000 POPULATION IN ENGLISH AND
WELSH AUTHORITIES 1988-89 (IN POUNDS)

	1988-1989
RHONDDA	2,242
NORTHUMBRIA	1,940
CYNON VALLEY	1,708
MERTHYR TYDFIL	1,698
CORNWALL	1,622
LLANELLI	1,575
SOUTH GLAM	1,575
ISLE OF WIGHT	1,564
GWYNEDD	1,405
SOMERSET	1,394
WEST GLAM	1,335
GWENT	1,268
CUMBRIA	1,267
POWYS	1,238
MID GLAM	1,236
GLOUCESTER	1,232
DYFED	1,169
SHROPSHIRE	1,079
CLWYD	878

Of the nineteen authorities listed, a Welsh district, Rhondda is the highest spender on books and the three other Welsh districts are on high positions on the list. Again two analyses are possible: the districts are anxious to establish and provide a high quality service on the basis of a strong bookfund; alternatively they may be seen as relatively small library authorities who being deprived of a county-wide bookstock and unable to derive economies of scale are in consequence, forced to spend at high levels.

Bookstock

Having examined expenditure patterns it is now possible to investigate the effects of changes in expenditure on the bookstocks of the selected public libraries. The reports discussed earlier in this chapter suggest that the size of bookstocks do not always reflect the expenditure on books since an increase in the size of the bookstock could be due to a lack of stock editing. A reluctance to undertake an audit of stock is to be expected at times of stringency: with no extra money for the purchase of new material, existing stock is almost automatically expected to work

harder, over a longer period of time. To begin with, the general trend over the ten years is revealed in the next table.

TABLE 6.13
TOTAL BOOKSTOCK PER 1000 POPULATION IN ENGLAND AND WALES
FROM 1979-80 TO 1988-89

	1979-80	1982-83	1985-86	1987-88	1988-89
COUNTIES (WALES)	2,836	2,805	2,827	2,744	2,620
INCREASE/DECREASE OVER THE DECADE			-7.6%		
COUNTIES (ENGLAND)	2,158	2,156	2,163	2,090	2,034
INCREASE/DECREASE OVER THE DECADE			-5.3%		
DISTRICTS (WALES)	2,970	3,214	3,328	3,346	3,486
INCREASE/DECREASE OVER THE DECADE			+17.3%		
AVERAGE	2,655	2,725	2,773	2,727	2,833

The reality for library users of county systems in England and Wales is now revealed: although these systems have, for the most part allocated increased resources to book purchase the increases have not kept pace with the rise in book prices and bookstocks have subsequently declined. The average price of books at the end of 1979 given in Whitaker's figures was £7.89; at the end of 1989 it was £19.15 - a 142% rise in prices over the decade.²⁵ A direct consequence is that a user of one of these county systems would find fewer titles at his disposal in 1989 than in 1979 and this within a period which witnessed constant growth in the output of UK publishing. Publisher's title output in 1979 was just under 42,000; in 1980 it leaped by 15% to over 48,000 and in 1989 the figure was 61,195 - a 45% increase in output over the decade.²⁶ District systems in Wales fare better with almost continuous growth in bookstocks (the exception being 1984-85) and a per 1000 figure which is 33% above that for Welsh counties. As usual averages can disguise the situation in individual authorities and it is possible that some library authorities have found it more difficult than others to protect their bookfunds and ensuing bookstocks.

TABLE 6.14
PERCENTAGE INCREASE/DECREASE IN POPULATION, BOOKSTOCK AND
BOOKSTOCK PER 1000 FROM 1979-80 TO 1988-89

	POPULATION	BOOKSTOCK	BOOKSTOCK per 1000
Counties			
CLWYD	+ 5.7%	-26%	-30.5%
DYFED	+ 9.6%	- 3%	-11.5%
GWENT	+ 2%	+ 0.1%	+ 4.1%
GWYNEDD	+ 5.7%	+19.2%	+12.8%
MID GLAM	+ 2.7%	-14%	-16.3%
POWYS	+ 0.07%	-13.7%	-19.7%
SOUTH GLAM	+ 3.3%	-11.6%	-14.4%
WEST GLAM	- 0.8%	+27%	+28.1%
Districts			
CYNON VALLEY	- 4.4%	-24.5%	-20.9%
LLANELLI	- 1.3%	+33.5%	+35.3%
MERTHYR TYDFIL	- 3.3%	+31%	+35.6%
RHONDDA	- 7.3%	- 9.7%	- 2.5%
English counties			
CORNWALLL	+ 9.8%	+ 2.8%	- 6.4%
CUMBRIA	+ 4.0%	- 9.8%	-13.3%
GLOUCESTER	+ 6.0%	+24%	+15.7%
ISLE OF WIGHT	+11%	+17%	+ 7%
NORTHUMBRIA	+ 3.7%	+31%	+26.8%
SHROPSHIRE	+ 8.4%	+31%	+21.4%
SOMERSET	+10.3%	+13%	+ 2.6%

Virtually all the Welsh counties experience an increase in population and with three exceptions a decrease in overall stock and stock per 1000 population. The three exceptions are Gwent (where the shift is minimal) and Gwynedd and West Glamorgan. Earlier analyses have shown these counties to be in second and third positions respectively in a rank order table of expenditure on books per 1000 population. This rate of expenditure in all probability explains Gwynedd and West Glamorgan's enhanced bookstock figures, but the other factor could be a less rigorous stock editing policy in these two counties as the decade progresses. Clwyd's low expenditure in books brings the expected consequence of a reduction of 26% in stock and a decrease of 30% in its stock per 1000 figure. The four districts also experience a decline in their population. The interesting aspect here is that despite the districts' high

levels of expenditure on books already referred to, this does not in each case result in an increase in bookstock. Rhondda was at the head of the rank order comparison of English and Welsh authorities' overall expenditure per 1000 and expenditure on books, yet the district experiences a 9.7% reduction in bookstock and a 2.5% reduction in bookstock per 1000. A possible interpretation is that the Rhondda has over the decade, allocated extra resources to book purchase and culled the existing stock - a combination of practices which must ultimately mean an improved service for readers. The other district which merits closer analysis is Llanelli, which of all the Welsh authorities returned by far the lowest percentage increase of expenditure on books, yet has a 33% increase in stock and a 35% increase in stock per 1000. This evidence leads to an almost inevitable conclusion: to maintain its high bookstock levels Llanelli is prepared to rely increasingly on ageing material - an exact reversal of the position in the Rhondda. (These patterns will be further analysed in the section below on additions).

The following table gives bookstock figures on a per capita basis.

TABLE 6.15
BOOKSTOCK PER CAPITA IN WELSH AUTHORITIES IN 1979-80
AND 1988-89 (VOLUMES)

	1979-80	1988-89
Counties		
CLWYD	3.3	2.3
DYFED	3.3	2.9
GWENT	2.0	2.1
GWYNEDD	2.0	4.3
MID GLAM	2.3	1.9
POWYS	5.0	4.0
SOUTH GLAM	2.8	2.4
WEST GLAM	2.0	2.5
Districts		
CYNON VALLEY	3.1	2.5
LLANELLI	4.0	5.5
MERTHYR TYDFIL	2.0	2.7
RHONDDA	2.5	2.4

The statistics are again confirmatory and show contrasting situations with some authorities increasing the number of books per person and others experiencing a decrease. There seems to be little difference between counties and districts with the exception of Llanelli which in 1988-89 had the highest number of books per person of any Welsh authority. It should be remembered that these figures will be affected by changes in population. A decrease in population will lead to an increase in the number of books per person even if the bookstock has not increased substantially.

Additions to stock

Examining additions to stock can be a more accurate way of assessing the impact of cuts than looking at changes in the bookstock since bookstock levels, as indicated above can be misleading. Such levels do not of necessity offer accurate assessment whether increases in stock are due to new stock or lack of stock editing and discarding of out dated material.

The first table in this section looks at additions to stock in Welsh counties and districts and provides comparable figures for English counties.

TABLE 6.16
ADDITIONS TO STOCK PER 1000 POPULATION

	COUNTIES (WALES)	DISTRICTS (WALES)	COUNTIES (ENGLAND)
1979/80	188	203	216
1980/81	196	175	202
1981/82	187	209	204
1982/83	192	238	203
1983/84	213	253	209
1984/85	205	226	202
1985/86	192	251	206
1986/87	171	226	208
1987/88	193	301	203
1988/89	194	338	215

The Welsh counties increase their annual additions slightly reaching a peak in 1984/85; across the decade the overall

picture is one of consistency underlined by the inescapable fact that these authorities were purchasing only six volumes more per 1000 population at the end of the decade than at the beginning. Much the same could be said of the English counties. For the Welsh districts the picture is more encouraging: again there is a pattern of peaks and troughs but this is relieved by a surge in additions towards the end of the period. The rate of increase is substantial: 135 extra volumes per 1000 population by 1988/89, representing a 66% increase over the decade. Further the Welsh districts perform better in the latter period with the real acceleration in additions coming in the last two years - a tendency which would support the argument of response to the commitments made at the time of the reawarding of powers and subsequent Welsh Office monitoring.

A more detailed examination reveals that some authorities are more successful than others in maintaining their level of additions.

TABLE 6.17
INCREASES/DECREASES IN ADDITIONS TO STOCK IN
WELSH AUTHORITIES BETWEEN 1979/80 AND 1988/89
(WITH SELECTED ENGLISH COUNTIES FOR COMPARISON)

COUNTIES	1979/80	1988/89	%Increase/Decrease
Clwyd	58,293	63,230	+ 7.8
Dyfed	66,177	49,527	-33.6
Gwent	51,025	64,976	+21.4
Gwynedd	55,977	53,422	- 4.7
Mid-Glam	67,358	85,332	+21
Powys	20,409	16,740	-21.9
South-Glam	74,919	99,992	+25
West-Glam	73,420	68,797	- 6.7
DISTRICTS			
Cynon Valley	11,159	20,587	+45
Llanelli	26,493	16,458	-60
Merthyr	8,515	19,383	+56
Rhondda	11,747	35,783	+67
ENGLISH COUNTIES			
Cornwall	88,506	97,429	+ 9
Cumbria	111,349	95,683	-16
Gloucester	90,455	117,625	+23
Isle of Wight	38,718	30,146	-28
Northumbria	57,255	78,719	+27
Shropshire	66,683	88,000	+24
Somerset	80,713	99,654	+19

A comparison of English and Welsh counties reveals that some authorities sustain an increase in additions. Within each sector there is considerable variation but the salient aspect of analysis against this criterion is that three Welsh districts (Rhondda, Merthyr and Cynon Valley) return the highest percentage increases in additions. However the fourth Welsh district (Llanelli) moves to the other end of the spectrum, with a decrease of 60% in additions. Although a word of caution concerning base lines must be applied there is nevertheless an impression of a distinct division between counties and districts in Wales. Furthermore it could be argued that the essential implication of this analysis is only revealed when the statistics are coupled to the information in Table 6.5 and Table 6.8. Percentage Increases in expenditure on books in Welsh counties and

districts respectively. These indicated that the average expenditure increase in counties over the decade was 91%; yet the average for additions for the same period is only 8.3%, giving a differential of 82.7%. The four districts returned an average expenditure increase of 172.5% and an additions increase of 27% with a resultant differential of 145.25%. While it may not be safe to conclude that the differential in total represents the inflation factor (other factors would be rises in salaries and capital costs) the tendency is clear. Welsh authorities were allocating increased resources for book purchase but a portion of those resources were being accounted for by an inexorable rise in book prices. The consequences for the ordinary reader (if there is such a person) are inescapable: fewer new titles on the shelves and a likely paucity of expensive items - two of the reasons which continue to represent the cardinal stimuli for public library use.

The LISC (Wales) Report of 1988 which has already been referred to in this chapter recommended an annual addition of 300 volumes per 1000 population. Relating actual additions to this standard (the latest available to librarians in Wales) gives the following information

TABLE 6.18
NUMBER OF ADDITIONS PER 1000 POPULATION IN
WELSH AUTHORITIES 1988/89

COUNTIES

Clwyd	155.3	volumes
Dyfed	180.5	
Gwent	145.8	
Gwynedd	223.5	
Mid-Glam	253.2	
Powys	145.6	
South-Glam	247.9	
West-Glam	189.6	
Counties average	192.6	

DISTRICTS

Cynon Valley	277.8
Llanelli	255.9
Merthyr	333.6
Rhondda	467.1
Districts average	258.6

The county/district divide is again clear. None of the counties reach the 300 additions per 1000 target; some such as Clwyd, Gwent and Powys reach only half this figure. The performance of the districts against the yardstick is better with Rhondda and Merthyr exceeding the target and Cynon Valley and Llanelli getting closer than any of the counties. In that the LISC (Wales) standards were based on best current practice it could be said that the districts had simultaneously set the standard and were strenuous in their efforts to attain it.

Issues

This investigation of issues has the objective of correlating the relationship between expenditure on services and library usage. It is accepted that this is but one measurement of output (albeit the most widely used) and that the library profession now has more sophisticated methods of evaluation at its disposal. An example is the Performance Indicators for Public Libraries (1990) which has already been referred to in this chapter; it is also significant that LISC (Wales) has established a Working

Group on Statistics and Performance Measures which is expected to formulate a set of recommendations for 1993/94. Valuable though they will be, these yardsticks are essentially a tool for the planning and assessment of library services in the future and for the period under review analysis based on Issue Statistics is more relevant.

TABLE 6.19
ANNUAL ISSUES OF BOOKS IN UNITS (THOUSANDS)

WELSH COUNTIES	UNITS '000s	% INCREASE/DECREASE
1979/80	26,320	+ 2.2
1980/81	26,347	+ 0.1
1981/82	25,295	- 4.1
1982/83	25,570	+ 1.0
1983/84	25,791	+ 0.8
1984/85	24,742	- 5.3
1985/86	23,990	- 2.0
1986/87	24,801	+ 3.2
1987/88	24,131	- 2.7
1988/89	23,431	- 2.9
Change over the decade		-12.3%
WELSH DISTRICTS		
1979/80	2,384	+ 0.7
1980/81	2,429	+ 1.8
1981/82	2,371	- 2.4
1982/83	2,434	+ 2.5
1983/84	2,384	- 2.0
1984/85	2,220	- 7.3
1985/86	2,194	- 1.1
1986/87	(Returns from 3 authorities; data not included)	
1987/88	2,261	
1988/89	2,181	- 3.6
Change over decade		- 9.3
ENGLISH COUNTIES		
1979/80	342,274	+ 0.8
1980/81	344,459	+ 0.6
1981/82	339,479	- 1.4
1982/83	339,595	+ 0.03
1983/84	342,393	+ 0.8
1984/85	334,947	- 2.2
1985/86	334,255	- 0.2
1986/87	327,389	- 2.1
1987/88	321,165	- 2.0
1988/89	309,517	- 3.6
Change over decade		-10.6

Commenting on the trend in issue statistics in a similar analysis, this is what Cope and Mann have to say

The decline in issues continues. For yet another year, the one year and five year comparisons are all negative and the size of the downturn seems to be increasing.²⁷

Further, when issues are set against demographic patterns the picture is even more discouraging

The extent of the decline in issues is shown even more clearly when related to the resident population. In every category of authority, fewer books were issued per head of population in 1988-89 than in the previous ten years and in the last four years not one category has seen even a temporary increase in issues.²⁸

A cross-authority comparison reveals a surprising uniformity: the Welsh counties experience a 12.3% reduction in issues over the decade, with figures of 10.6% and 9.3% for English counties and Welsh districts respectively. From one perspective the Welsh districts would seem to be performing better and that their increased investment in the service was yielding some returns. On the other hand the Welsh districts even with augmented expenditure are still facing a downward trend in issues.

As this chapter has already examined expenditure on Welsh books it is apposite to investigate the related use of Welsh language material in public libraries in Wales. It has also been stated that CIPFA do not at present request or include information on the provision and use of Welsh language materials, although it is becoming clear that this anomaly will be rectified in the near future.²⁹ In the absence of current data, analysis is based on the report The Book Trade in Wales³⁰ with the authorities being identified as before

TABLE 6.20
WELSH PUBLIC LIBRARY AUTHROTIES
WELSH BOOK ISSUES 1986/87

	Welsh speakers (%)		Issues Total/Welsh	Welsh % of total
GWYNEDD	135,067	(57.8)	2,356,000/181,209	7.6
DYFED	109,312	(42.9)	2,513,000/161,033	6.4
CLWYD	69,578	(17.6)	5,092,000/ 98,545	1.9
MID GLAM	23,390	(7.1)	2,750,000/ 19,690	0.7
WEST GLAM	57,408	(15.6)	3,293,000/ 21,973	0.6
LLANELLI	36,901	(49.7)	724,434/ 10,240	1.4
POWYS	21,358	(20.5)	1,045,000/ 11,212	1.0
RHONDDA	7,489	(9.1)	N.A / 3,518	
CYNON VALLEY	7,130	(10.9)	403,000/ 1,305	0.3
SOUTH GLAM	20,684	(5.2)	3,969,000/ 7,000	0.1
GWENT	10,700	(2.4)	3,779,000/ N.A.	
MERTHYR TYDFIL	4,720	(7.9)	413.574/ 258	0.06

Clearly Welsh speakers do not imply Welsh readers. In terms of the use of Welsh language material it is no exaggeration to state that for the public library service in Wales the concept of a Welsh heartland has already evaporated. No single public library authority in Wales manages to attain Welsh issues which represent 10% of the total and this includes areas with a high incidence of Welsh speakers such as Gwynedd and Dyfed. Given this high incidence and the relevance of factors such as the expansion of Welsh medium education it is depressing that the considerable investment in the Welsh language does not appear as yet to have yielded results for the public library service. The question of why some authorities with similar numbers of Welsh speakers do better than others remains unanswered; the Book Trade in Wales report draws attention to this variation in performance

The degree to which this difference reflects the attitude of different library services to Welsh books is a subject worthy of closer attention.³¹

This chapter has attempted to measure the performance of county and district authorities in Wales over a ten year period. Such measurement has also been the responsibility of the Welsh Office under its monitoring programme.

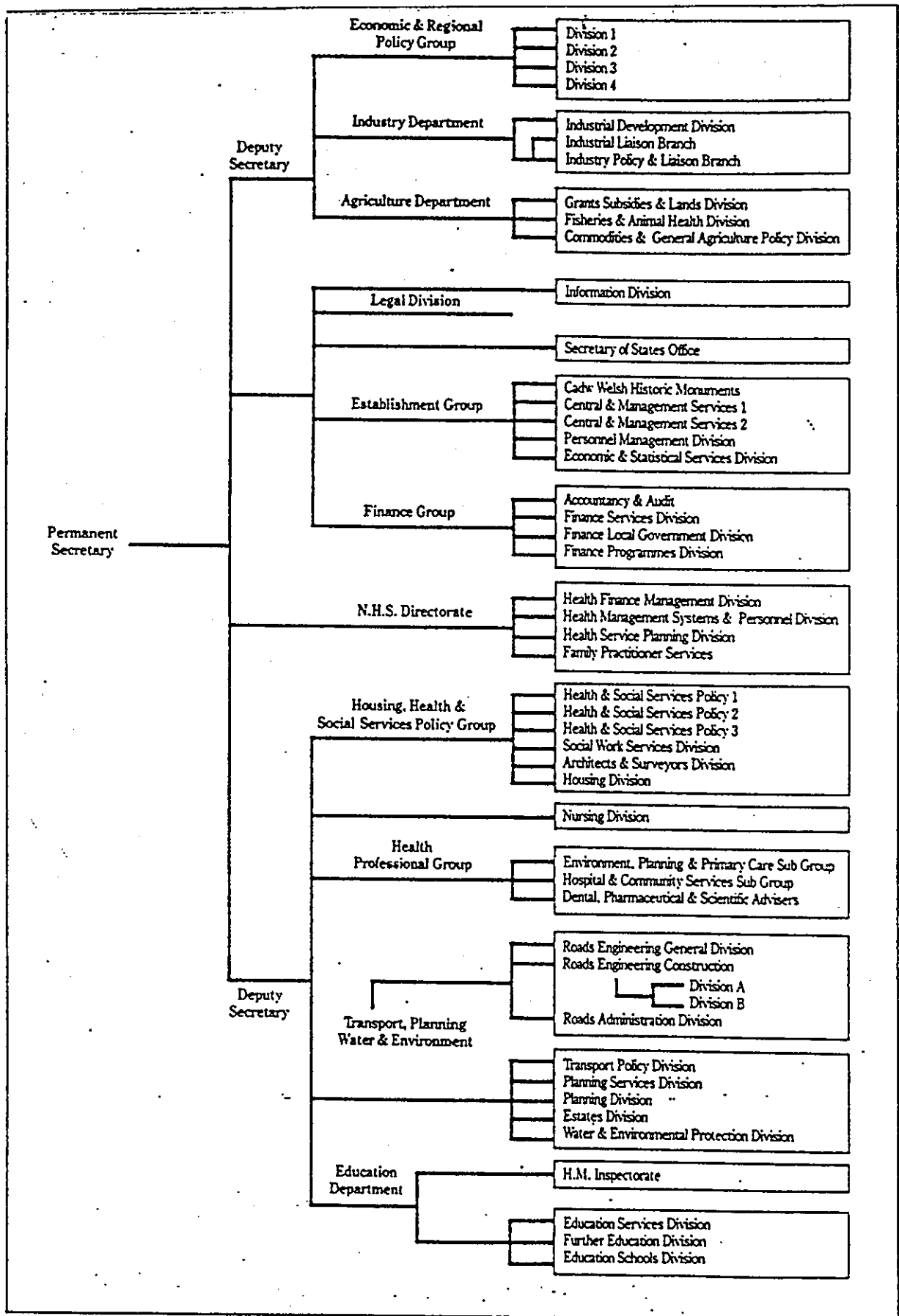
As this study has already indicated, when the Welsh Office was established on 1 April 1965, following the creation of the office of the Secretary of State for Wales in October 1964, it was a relatively small government department dealing only with matters pertaining to roads, housing and local government. Over the years more and more ministerial functions have been devolved to the Secretary of State and at the present time the Welsh Office is a multi-functional department administering and implementing a wide range of government policies (the prime exceptions are defence and foreign affairs). There has been no related constitutional devolution and power over a broad span of functions is vested in the Secretary of State and two Ministers of State with policy implementation being the responsibility of civil servants. In most matters a joint England-Wales policy is followed with adjustments made where necessary to meet the specific needs of Wales. This concept of joint policy formulation and thus the related question of the function of the Welsh Office is usefully illustrated by reference to the 1981-82 investigations of the Parliamentary Committee on Welsh Affairs. During the course of the investigations the Under-Secretary of the Welsh Office Industry Department was asked to state the advantages of his department's existence as opposed to the alternative, a Welsh regional office of the Department of Industry. The answer he gave could be interpreted as a statement of the overall role of the Welsh Office in all areas of policy in which it operates, including the administration of library policy:

In the first place, we seek to administer Government policy and the various instruments of development in an informed and sensitive way... it is part of our job to provide a point of access to industry within the Principality. It is important that industry in Wales should feel that it has access to central Government in an easy way...and I think that the Welsh Office does provide an extremely valuable service in having this accessibility... It also follows from this fact that we are accessible that we must take advantage of the information, the problems, the

views that are made known to us 'to fight the Welsh corner' within Government. This, perhaps is principally the role of the Secretary of State. As a member of the Cabinet, he is the Welsh voice who is there to speak when problems in the industrial sector that bear particularly on the Principality are under consideration.³²

The Welsh Office receives its departmental budget in the form of an annual block grant - in 1990-91 this amounted to over £2.2 billion excluding support for local authorities in Wales.³³ Most Welsh Office staff are located at various offices which form the headquarters in Cardiff. There is also a small office in London, used by the Secretary of State and other Ministers. At 1 April 1990, 2284 full-time equivalent staff were employed by the department (the comparable figure for the Scottish Office is 10,274). Despite the increase in responsibilities the staffing level at the Welsh Office has remained remarkably constant - the total in 1984 was 2185.³⁴ The official head of the department is a Permanent Secretary and he is assisted by two Deputy Secretaries and twelve Under Secretaries. In terms of structure the Welsh Office is divided into ten groups. Eight of these deal with specific areas of government responsibility and two, Finance and Establishment are concerned with the running of the office.

FIGURE 6.1
WELSH OFFICE ORGANISATION CHART³⁵



Within this structure responsibility for libraries lies in the Education Services Division of the Education Department under the ultimate control of an Under Secretary. The Division has wide-ranging responsibilities apart from education and these include the Welsh language, broadcasting, museums and the Arts. Despite the stated responsibility for libraries the task of monitoring the recipients of library powers - as called for by the two Review Panels - has in fact been undertaken by the Welsh Office Library Adviser.

Such a post is a fairly recent development, one which has only been in force since 1 April 1986. Prior to this, Wales was entitled to the equivalent of thirty days' service from an Adviser based at the then Office of Arts and Libraries in London. Late in 1985 the OAL informed the Welsh Office that their advisory role in Wales would be terminated in the following year and that the Welsh Office would have to seek ways of supporting the work independently. The announcement was seen as a retrograde step by members of the profession in Wales and this view was echoed by the Library and Information Services Council (Wales).

The proposal by the OAL that the Library Adviser support currently provided to Wales should be withdrawn at the end of this financial year, has been greeted by Council with dismay. It is considered that the efficiency and effectiveness of the Council is dependent upon adequate Library Adviser support.³⁶

In addition to the loss to LISC (Wales) the Welsh Office had to consider how it would meet the extra burden of monitoring as recommended by the Review Panels. The solution was to give responsibility for these and other tasks to the Librarian of the Welsh Office who was to be released for one day of every working week to act as Library Adviser for Wales. This was to amount to twenty five days in any one year and was thus a reduction on the previous arrangement. The solution appears to suggest that

library matters were not a particularly high priority for the Welsh Office and that in line with central government philosophy the direct and continuous monitoring of local government services should be avoided as far as possible.

Yet in the Welsh Secretary's Annual Report on Library Matters for 1987-88, an account of the Welsh Office Librarian's activities over the year is concluded as underlining the value of a Welsh Office - based Adviser post.³⁷

This is certainly true since having a person on hand in Cardiff was, in terms of accessibility at least an improvement on relying upon someone who was based in London. Beyond this it was still possible to question the wisdom of an arrangement which gave less than a month in any one year to the substantial task of monitoring the development of public libraries in Wales and the tendering of subsequent advice to the Secretary of State.

It is difficult to obtain precise details on how the Welsh Office has met its obligation to monitor the performance of district library authorities. The Welsh Office Library Adviser/Librarian was approached by the author of this study but responded by saying that the whole process was subject to formal Civil Service regulations on confidentiality. The only information which is in the public domain is included in the Annual Report which the Secretary of State for Wales is required to deliver to Parliament on the exercise of his functions under the Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964. Although recent Reports have been more substantial it is clear that the Secretary of State supervises and superintends in name only. The concept that a Cabinet Minister whose post requires him to undertake duties in other crucial, high-profile areas should be responsible for overseeing the entire Welsh public library system is clearly untenable. The Welsh Secretary is stated in the Reports as having

overall responsibility but the work is carried out by civil servants. The Reports (1987-) are signed R. H. Jones, Under Secretary, Welsh Office, revealing that even this function can be carried out by someone else on the Welsh Secretary's behalf.

As indicated, on the mechanics of monitoring the information is somewhat superficial and non-specific, but here are the relevant paragraphs from a series of Annual Reports.

The Library Adviser has continued to monitor the performance of the District Library Authorities in Wales within the recommendations made by the 1984 Panel Report. Visits were made to all 4 district authorities in respect of stock-provision, policies and practice. The Adviser has also contributed to the Department's assessment of the 1896 Panel Report. In April, the Minister of State accompanied by the Library Adviser visited the central library and two branch libraries in the borough of Llanelli. He was impressed by the authority's commitment to the development and ongoing support of the library service in their area.³⁸

The Library Adviser has ... continued his role in the monitoring of the performance of district library authorities in Wales and draft reports on the assessment of their progress are in preparation. In this context the Adviser has participated in discussions with officers of Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council on the provision of a new central library at Merthyr. He has also visited Ferndale Court, Rhondda which houses the temporary premises of the library service following fire damage in 1987, and has discussed plans for a new building with Rhondda Borough Council.³⁹

Agreement was reached between the Adviser and District Library Authorities on the submission of annual 3 year rolling plans showing their proposed developments and the first of these have now been received. The Library Adviser met with the District Librarian of Mid Glamorgan and the County Librarian of Mid Glamorgan to discuss the formulation of a computer strategy for the County. The Adviser has also had discussions with and visited Newport Borough Libraries since the appointment of the Borough Librarian. Visits were

also made to Gwynedd and West Glamorgan County Libraries during the year.⁴⁰

Monitoring visits were made to the 4 District Library Authorities as recommended by the 1984 Report on District Library Services on Wales, and discussions were held with the Chief Librarians regarding objectives, rolling plans and the level of provision of specific services. A preliminary visit was also made to Newport Public Libraries....

Visits were also made to Mid Glamorgan County Library and to libraries in the Pontypridd and Caerphilly areas. In all these libraries there was an accent on thorough stock revision, resulting in an immediate increase in book issues.⁴¹

Support and advice has been provided throughout the year by the Library Adviser. Monitoring Visits were made to four district library authorities following which confidential reports on their progress since 1984 were sent to each district. The object was to make a formal re-assessment of the district library services in order to ascertain how far the criticisms of the 1984 report had been met.⁴²

What do these quotations from the reports show? More specifically what light do they throw on the question of how the Welsh Office has attempted to monitor the progress of the recipients of library powers? The following points can be made:

- visits to libraries have regularly been undertaken by the Library Adviser and in one case by a Minister and the Library Adviser;
- although the visits have concentrated on the four districts (and later on the fifth district, on the take-up of powers), neighbouring counties and other county library services have also been visited;
- the Library Adviser has called for evidence/data from each district, and later in the monitoring exercise moves to call for annual 3 year rolling plans showing proposed developments;
- again at a later stage in the monitoring exercise confidential reports on progress since 1984 were sent

to each district, giving the authorities an element of feedback.

All of this can be presented - albeit in a restricted way - as an interventionist policy with a central government department monitoring the progress of a local government service. This is in stark contrast to the stance of the Office of Arts and Libraries in England, which has sought to drastically curtail its role as a monitoring agency within the period under review

This is the positive interpretation based on the evidence which is available. Because that evidence is meagre it is not possible to show what performance indicators have been used (if any) nor to estimate the exact consequences of monitoring by noting the responses of district library authorities. Comments in their annual reports are vague - the following is a typical example.

The Welsh Office began its monitoring of the District Library Service in October, and once again the Borough Library Service was subject to scrutiny. Mr. Malcolm Ranson, Senior Librarian at the Welsh Office visited Treorchy, Ton Pentre and Tylorstown libraries on 4 October 1985, and with few exceptions it was possible to show that many of the criticisms have already been answered.⁴³

This implies significantly that criticisms had been made, conveyed and considered, but by what means is impossible to ascertain.

At the end of this chapter it is relevant to restate its overall objective - to compare the performance of counties and districts and to distinguish where possible the costs and consequences of separation. In an attempt to move to an inference it is necessary to reiterate some of the basic conclusions that can be deduced from the statistical analysis which is the basis of the chapter.

On net overall expenditure per 1000 population a ranking of Welsh counties and districts places a district authority in a lead position at the beginning and end of the period under review. Over the decade three out of the four districts move up in a ranked-order table leading to a conclusion that these districts allocate increased resources in response to the awarding of library powers and Welsh Office monitoring. In contrast the two counties that contain district library authorities, move down the table as the decade progresses.

On average percentage increase in net expenditure per 1000 population, Welsh districts record an increase of 134.4%, Welsh counties 92.3% and English counties 101.7%

A comparison of expenditure per 1000 population in Welsh counties and districts and selected English authorities 1979-80 and 1988-89 reveals that almost all Welsh authorities improve their performance at the end of the period. Accelerated expenditure patterns by Welsh districts could be taken as further indication of response to the awarding of library powers. Measured against this criterion the three Welsh counties directly affected by the question of library powers witness a deterioration in performance.

On expenditure per 1000 population on books, 1988-89, the lowest spending district spends exactly the same as the highest Welsh county. Again in 1988-89 the average percentage amount devoted to book expenditure is 43% higher in districts than in counties in Wales.

On percentage increase in expenditure on books between 1979-80 and 1988-89, the highest rate of increase recorded by a Welsh county was 158%; the rates recorded by three of the four Welsh districts was 242%, 225% and 203%. Thus it could be argued that the performance of these three districts far exceeds that of all Welsh counties.

A comparison of expenditure per 1000 population on books in Welsh counties and districts and selected English authorities 1988-89 reveals that of the nineteen authorities reviewed a Welsh district is the highest spender on books and the three other Welsh districts are in high positions on the list.

On total bookstock per 1000 population from 1979-80 to 1988-89 Welsh counties experience a decrease of 7.6%, English counties a decrease of 5.3% and Welsh districts an increase of 17.3%

On additions to stock per 1000 population Welsh counties were only purchasing six volumes more at the end of the decade than at the beginning. The comparable figure for Welsh districts is 135 extra volumes per 1000 by 1988-89, this representing a 66% increase over the decade.

A comparison of increases in stock in all authorities places three Welsh districts at the head of the table and underlines the impression of a distinct divide between counties and districts in Wales. A coupling of this rate to increases in total expenditure supports the argument that although Welsh authorities were allocating increased resources to book purchase, a substantial portion of those resources were being denuded by a constant rise in book prices.

On the standard of 300 additions per 1000 population recommended by LISC (Wales) in 1988 the county/district divide is again clear. None of the counties reach the standard, two districts exceed it and the other two districts come close. In that the standard was based on best current practice it could be argued that the districts had simultaneously set the standard and were striving to surpass it.

A cross-authority comparison on book issues discloses a uniform pattern: Welsh counties suffer a 12.3% reduction, English counties 10.6% and Welsh districts a 9.3% drop. Though the loss is slightly lower for the districts it nevertheless poses a question which has considerable bearing on the county/district debate in Wales. Despite the efforts of the districts to increase overall expenditure and expenditure on books with a subsequent rise in bookstocks and additions, Welsh districts cannot protect themselves from a decline in issues. The reality for them (and for their county counterparts) is that higher expenditure does not of itself deliver more customers. The money must be spent and librarians have to constantly fight for increased resources and yet the resources will not automatically guarantee returns. Beyond this it is granted that the correlation between expenditure and usage is complex and is open to a diversity of forces which would differ from one area to another.

What conclusions therefore can be drawn from these points? The districts are clearly spending more, but why are they spending more? Are they responding to the challenge of retention of library powers and attendant monitoring or does their increased expenditure in reality merely represent the costs of independence?

Firstly, and as stated at the outset, every library service, county or district is in one sense a local service designed, costed and provided to meet local needs and circumstances. The statutory obligation on authorities is notoriously vague and although the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, states that all authorities must provide a comprehensive and efficient library service the Act is deliberately quiescent on standards of provision. The legislation may have been given sharper focus by the later promulgation of standards and the calculation of performance indicators, but none of these has the force of law. As a result the response of authorities has been

varied and this much was acknowledged by a study which though wayward in many of its arguments did at least state one truism

what is actually spent on the public library service is a matter for each individual authority to decide in the light of its own priorities.⁴⁴

The lack of a clear statutory obligation can make the level of funding of the library service discretionary (as opposed for example to a high profile service such as education) and would help to explain differences in that level between individual authorities.

A second factor which could have a bearing on expenditure patterns is the overall management structure of the authority and the place of the library service within that structure. The influence of structure is underlined in an investigation by Midwinter and McVicar⁴⁵ of 20 Scottish library authorities which shows that 70% of the successful services in terms of budgetary growth were in what are described as stand-alone library departments. Such departments would be accountable to a single service library committee giving the librarian direct access to other chief officers and to the political system within the authority. The library service of the four districts reawarded powers is administered within the following pattern:

Cynon Valley	-	Leisure Services
Llanelli	-	Recreation Services
Merthyr Tydfil	-	Leisure and Amenities
Rhondda	-	Recreation and Amenities.

In that these four subsumed library services have still managed to increase their levels of expenditure the factor of structure appears to be not so significant in Wales as it is in Scotland. This however begs the question whether the four would have done better still within a stand-alone department. There is also some evidence that one of the

four (Llanelli) suffers because resources are directed to other developmental aspects of recreation services.

A third factor which could influence performance would centre on political considerations, both explicit and implicit. This study has argued that it was political considerations above all else that brought Cynon Valley, Llanelli, Merthyr Tydfil and the Rhondda into being as independent library authorities. It could also be argued that politics dictated the decision to fight for retention of library powers and the subsequent response of councillors to the funding of the library service. Each of the four districts is Labour controlled, (in Cynon Valley, Labour hold 68% of the seats, in Llanelli 57%, in Merthyr 63% and in Rhondda 87%)⁴⁶ which would inevitably give that party the chair and majority on the committee responsible for the library service. On a wider front and contrary to this, evidence shows that the overall pattern of applications for library powers in Wales transcended party lines and could be more accurately presented as an aspiration of a particular level of local government rather than the aim of any one particular party.

Linking the factors of structure and politics it is relevant to refer to the relative status of the library service within the authority - in other words how the service is perceived by the key-players - councillors and officers. This factor of status is central according to Midwinter and McVicar and they emphasise that best performance in budgetary terms is achieved in authorities where the library service is not

competing with big-spending departments such as education, social work, police and roads, which tend to attract considerable political support. By contrast, the library service is a major service in district council terms...This makes the service a valuable jewel in the districts' crown.⁴⁷

There is little doubt that this is a crucial factor and that Cynon Valley, Llanelli, Merthyr and the Rhondda would indeed see their library services in the way described above. Further, the timing and level of their allocation of increased resources within the period under review is a clear response to the challenge of retention of library powers and attendant monitoring. The final question - how much of this increased expenditure is swallowed up by the costs of independence - is all but impossible to answer. Each district must have spent money on aspects of the service which would benefit from economies of scale in a county structure - computerisation, bibliographic and reference/information services are prime examples. Nevertheless the statistical analysis shows that the four districts have improved their performance in key areas with resultant advantages for users. In that this was the prime objective of the 1984 and 1986 Review Exercises it could justifiably be argued that the objective has been met.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

"Local government needs reorganisation like it needs a hole in the head".

Chris Patten
Secretary of State for Environment, November 1989

At the commencement of this study it seemed highly unlikely that central government would give the slightest consideration to a further round of local government reorganisation. As recently as 1989 the Conservative administration had no plans for change and their lack of enthusiasm for reform is more than evidenced by the comment of Chris Patten the then Secretary of State for the Environment. In five years much has changed. Chris Patten lost his seat at the 1992 General Election and was appointed as the last Governor of Hong Kong. More relevant, as this study draws to a conclusion, is the fact that local government in England, Scotland and Wales is contemplating a process of reorganisation which has the core objective of replacing the existing two tier structure with a single pattern of unitary authorities.

Why therefore, the shift in central government policy? More specifically, why have the Conservatives moved full circle to advocate the creation of Redcliffe-Maud type unitary authorities which they themselves rejected over twenty years ago?

The 1972 Local Government Act, which introduced the two tier system of non-metropolitan government was almost from the outset a source of dissatisfaction. The promotion of arguments for change were initially confined to the former county boroughs. This dissatisfaction was reflected in a Labour government White Paper Organic Change in Local Government published in 1979¹ which accepted that some re-introduction of comprehensive, most purpose authorities in non-metropolitan cities might be appropriate. The General Election held on 3 May 1979 was won by the Conservatives and it soon became apparent that the incoming

administration's priorities for local government were more directed at expenditure management and accountability than structural change. Slowly however, a number of reasons forced local government reorganisation back on to the political agenda. The shift was characterised by a gradual accumulation of policies which ultimately brought central government to a position in the early years of the 1990's of advocating total reorganisation of local government in England, Scotland and Wales.

The first set of reasons emanate from criticisms levelled at a particular tier of the post 1974 structure by central government. The direct consequence of this criticism was The Local Government Act, 1985 which abolished the Greater London Council and the Metropolitan County Councils, making unitary authorities directly responsible for most functions in London and the metropolitan counties. In a similar vein The Inner London Education Authority ceased to exist in 1990. Although the Government claimed that these new arrangements led to savings estimated at some £100 million per annum and some 6,500 posts in the first year, there is little doubt that this swathe of reform was occasioned more by political spleen rather than a desire for rational restructuring. Be that as it may, the abolition of the metropolitan counties in itself gave momentum to the reform process and led to the posing of the question - if two tier government was seen to be unnecessary in complex urban areas, why was two tier government necessary elsewhere? There is evidence that the then Prime Minister herself saw the logic of a unitary structure as early as 1985. In her memoirs The Downing Street Years, Lady Thatcher reveals that a single tier structure was one of the recommendations suggested by a Department of the Environment team examining local government finance (an exercise which ultimately led to the ill-fated community charge). This is what Lady Thatcher has to say about the proposal to combine financial reform with the establishment of a single tier structure

Then and later, I was to be attracted by this on the grounds of the transparency it would have brought to the community charge figures. But we could not do everything at once.²

These significant words show that the restructuring of local government was being considered at the highest level and if the final sentence is taken at face value, the move towards restructuring was only a question of time.

A second set of reasons concentrated on the factor of blurred accountability between counties and districts - with the planning function usually being cited as the most notable or notorious example.

Thirdly, former county boroughs and large conurbations in England were angered by the anomalies of the post 1974 structure. Cities like Bristol (population 377,700) lost the significant spending functions of education and social services while small metropolitan districts such as South Tyneside (population 155,700) retained them. For the library function the whole question was placed in even sharper focus. The average population of the Welsh districts who fought for and gained library powers in the post 1974 structure is just over 68,000; cities such as Nottingham (273,500), Southampton (197,600) or again Bristol had no library escape clause available to them in the 1972 Act and had to accept the loss of library powers to adjacent counties. Of the 296 second tier districts in England, 241 (81%) have populations above 68,000. In the face of such comparisons the rationale of reform becomes hazy and almost unsustainable.

Fourthly, anger at these idiosyncrasies was exacerbated by financial factors: although district authorities lost powers in the 1974 shake-up, they still, as collectors of the rates got the blame for the spending decisions of the bigger councils. Anger turned to outrage with the introduction of the Poll Tax in England and Wales on 1 April 1990. The counties were the heavy spenders

(particularly on education - 47% of total UK local government spending, 1990-1991 ,according to CIPFA), yet the districts were left to pick up the bill - or more exactly to collect the bill. Local outrage fuelled political frustration at Westminster over the difficulty of making councils accountable, when extravagant spending in Labour Avon could push up the Poll Tax in Tory Bath.

A fifth cause of resentment, was that the 1974 reforms failed to recognise local communities and their sense of place and history. Local resentment and local voices rose up over the unloved artifice of authorities such as Avon, Cleveland, Humberside and Hereford and Worcester. Although Ministers may not have initially supported outright reform, they were sensitive to these feelings of disenchantment. In 1989, Nicholas Ridley, Chris Patten's predecessor as Environment Secretary asked the Local Government Boundary Commission to consider the desirability of scrapping Humberside. Finally and within this context of discontent, county administration was castigated for remoteness - physical and psychological distance from those it attempted to serve.

All of this indicates that the unease at the inadequacies of the 1974 restructuring came in the first place from the county boroughs; this dissatisfaction became more widespread until it permeated the whole of the district, second tier level. The districts' quest for reform was expressed in concrete proposals in the Association of District Councils document, Closer to the People³, published in May 1987. This is a key exposition of the District case, proposing the creation of a single tier of most-purpose authorities, which would exercise all of the functions then exercised by districts and counties. Highlighting the criticisms which are discussed above, the document asserted that a single tier of local government would facilitate accountability, minimise bureaucratic duplication and thus eliminate waste. Particularly

interesting as a foretaste of central government thinking, Closer to the People argued that restructuring should be freed from the dogma of the past and that variations of administrative patterns in different parts of the country should be seen as a strength of local government rather than as a cause for concern. The Council of Welsh Districts (CWD) published a separate set of proposals for Wales and these also argued for a single tier of 37 unitary authorities - based on the existing districts in Wales. The Council pointed out that Wales, because of certain features, would require special consideration in any future reform process

It has a distinctive political environment. It has a unique system of government within the United Kingdom. Wales has a distinctive cultural and linguistic environment. The circumstances of Wales make clear the case for a vibrant system of local government that can respond to local needs and differences.⁴

The ADC documents were followed by a set of feasibility studies which applied district arguments to geographical areas and one of these (by Barry Jones, University of Wales, Cardiff) concentrated on Wales. This investigation concluded that although the post 1974 structure had not been the disaster which some critics prophesised

this is to say no more than councillors and chief officers are making the best of a bad job.⁵

Jones pointed to regular conflicts over the division of functions and used district claims and county counter-claims over library powers as an example of such conflict. The Welsh study closed with a comment that proved to be mistaken (but hindsight is an easy science!)

any reform proposal is likely to provoke the opposition of those organisations which prefer the devil they know to the deep blue sea of future change. For this reason Wales is unlikely to be a pathfinder.⁶

Closer to the People represented the start of ADC's highly successful campaign to abolish county government. The Association of County Councils and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities responded with reports which accepted the need for reform while concentrating on a defence of the county level of government. For example, by February 1991 the Association of Welsh Councils had produced a statement which favoured the creation of 8 unitary authorities in Wales - clearly based on the existing counties. In this typical county/district wrangling it became apparent that the district case had wider acceptance and that the Association of District Councils was making the running in the discussion of any plans for reorganisation. In Wales echoes of the Association's demands could be discerned in Labour, Liberal Democrat and Plaid Cymru policy. At its 1988 annual conference the Welsh Labour Party unanimously adopted a policy document which proposed the abolition of county and district councils and the creation of between 17 and 25 most purpose authorities. In its 1983 manifesto the Liberal Democrats (then the Alliance) in Wales expressed cautious and very generalised support for reorganising the Welsh local government structure; in subsequent policy documents this proposal was refined and made more specific until it also advocated multi-purpose authorities. Plaid Cymru endorsed a long held principle of government by community and its 1988 annual conference accepted that this could be best achieved by the establishment of a single tier system to supplant counties and districts. Thus by 1988-89 all political parties in Wales, with the exception of the Conservatives, were calling for local government reorganisation which would replace the existing two tiers with a single tier of unitary authorities.

The clamour for reform was also taken up by the Adam Smith Institute, the right-wing pressure group which was known to have considerable influence on ministerial thinking (it was the Institute for example that had pioneered the idea of

have considerable influence on ministerial thinking (it was the Institute for example that had pioneered the idea of contracting out local government services). In March 1989 the Institute published two reports⁷ which said that the existing two tiers of local government should be merged into one, moving towards a new pattern of local councils related to natural communities which people identified with. The average population of these new authorities would be in the order of 40,000 to 60,000 and the Institute reckoned that there would be around 100 of these councils in Scotland and between 700 and 800 in England. No figure was offered for Wales.

Despite this near unanimity of opinions Ministers repeatedly said that local government reform was not on the agenda and the Government tenaciously stuck to the line that the post 1974 structure would stay. For public library authorities in Wales this meant that the implications of Section 207 of the Local Government Act, 1972 would persist and that the Welsh Office would continue to comply with the requirements of that section. This was the stance of the Welsh Office even in March 1990, as indicated by the answer to a parliamentary question put down by Dr Dafydd Elis Thomas the then Plaid Cymru member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy.

To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, whether he intends to amend section 207 of the Local Government Act 1972 in respect of the provision of library services in Wales. Mr Wyn Roberts: My rt. hon. friend has no present intention of doing so.⁸

Outside the Cabinet however there was evidence that the Government's own Members of Parliament were anxious for change. A survey of the Conservative parliamentary party undertaken by the local government periodical, Municipal Journal⁹ in 1990 revealed that 62% of Tory MPs wished to see a reform of local government after a General Election and that 52% wanted reform to be a manifesto pledge. The

abolish the counties	- 27%
create totally unitary authorities, with abolition of counties and districts	- 25%
abolish the districts	- 3.8%
revive the old county boroughs	- 26%

This almost equal division of response may be partly explained by the fact that parliamentary constituencies approximate for the most part to district councils. To place this response in a Welsh context: there was little political mileage in fighting for the counties of Dyfed or Clwyd; on the other hand, with the constituency party watching every move there was kudos in the battle for Ceredigion or Delyn.

Despite the effective lobbying of the Association of District Councils and despite cross-party support for restructuring, the impetus for local government reform was in the last analysis driven by political factors which required the Government to abandon the fiasco of the Poll Tax.

As John Major took over as Prime Minister on 28 November 1990, his immediate domestic political priority, with a general election looming on the horizon, was to replace the Poll Tax with a more acceptable and equitable method of financing local government. Michael Heseltine, the other main contender for the Conservative leadership was appointed Secretary of State for the Environment in the new Cabinet. This appointment was significant in that it added a personal dimension to the rapidly accelerating move towards reform.

It was part of the vision (and personal election manifesto) of a contender for the leadership of the Conservative party, who (as it turned out) became instead Secretary of State for the Environment, where he was given the scope to implement his own personal manifesto.¹⁰

Under the direction of Michael Heseltine events moved swiftly. In April 1991 the Department of the Environment issued two consultation papers. The first A New Tax for Local Government¹¹ outlined proposals which subsequently culminated in the Council Tax. The second, The Structure of Local Government in England¹² gave a clear commitment to a single tier of unitary authorities and explained how the Government proposed to implement the process of change. A warning was given that there was no intention that either county or district councils should be abolished wholesale; the aim rather was to achieve a structure which best matched the particular circumstances of each area.

The changing role of local government has significantly altered the presumption, widely current in the years leading up to the Local Government Act 1972, that there is an ideal size of authority for the most efficient delivery of services.¹³

and further

Where new unitary authorities are established there should be no presumption that they will all be either smaller than counties or bigger than existing districts. The government would expect a range of sizes to emerge according to local circumstances.¹⁴

Having presented these as central tenets of its thinking the Government could not, by force of logic, then give any guidelines on the ideal size for the new authorities. Further, these comments mark the abandonment by central government of the core principle that had guided all prior investigations into local government reorganisation - that the whole process had to be founded on the question of size of postulated authorities, usually measured by population. A succession of reports - McColvin, Roberts, Bourdillon, Redcliffe-Maud and indeed the two Panel Review Reports - had all worked from the starting point of the size of individual authorities and how size affected the capacity to deliver services. It was obvious that size was still important, but it was no longer the sine qua non, the all-

embracing criterion which would fashion and mould the whole reform process.

If size was not to be the motor of change, the next question that arose was how the Government would decide on the geographical boundaries and population of the unitary authorities? The consultation paper stated that a new independent body, a Local Government Commission would be established with a brief to consult affected parties, issue guidelines on costings and advise Government on the best course for reform. Past attempts at restructuring would suggest that such a body was not the ideal vehicle to bring about speedy change. As this study has shown the English and Welsh Local Government Commissions established in 1958 moved at snail's pace and became bogged down in procedure. The credibility of the English Commission was seriously eroded when its proposals on the abolition of the county of Rutland were rejected. Both commissions were wound up in 1966 having failed to move a single border despite, or perhaps because of their tortuous procedures. The Structure of Local Government in England made it clear that the government intended to work to a more demanding timetable, envisaging the establishment of the first new unitary authorities by 1 April 1994.

As well as moving away from size as the central determinant of reform, the consultation paper argued that the proposed unitary authorities should see themselves more as enablers rather than direct providers of services. This switch in philosophy was presaged by the government's attitude to public services, an attitude which was given focus in related proposals for Compulsory Competitive Tendering. In the consultation paper the recommendation on enabling was gathered into two brief paragraphs which were in essence the repetition of the clear message which had been dinned into the ears of local government over the past decade.

Local authorities are undergoing a fundamental transformation from being the main providers of services to having responsibility for securing

their provision....The private and voluntary sectors should be used to provide services where this is more cost-effective than direct provision by the authority.¹⁵

Beyond this the consultation paper said little or nothing about functions and indeed it could be argued that a document which advocated all purpose unitary authorities had no need to say any thing about functions. What it did say was confined to individual services with a list of current functions and responsibilities. The Government emphasised that it had no plans to change the general structure of local government in London and the metropolitan areas. This is not surprising as these areas were to all intents and purpose already administered by single tier authorities which provided most council services. Finally the consultation paper stated that if the new unitary authorities covered a large area there might be a case for enhancing the role of parish councils - this could be especially relevant in rural communities.

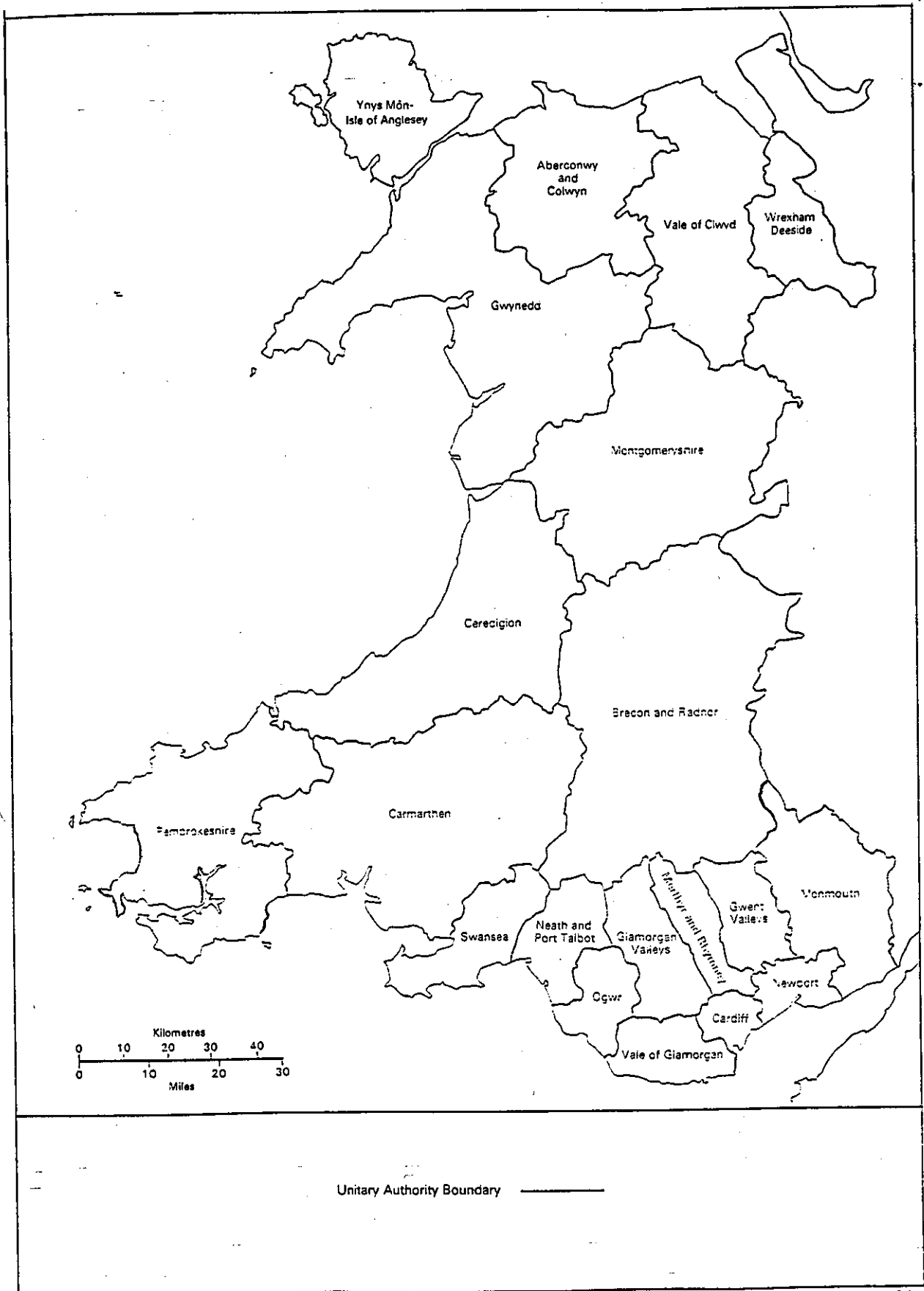
It was clearly untenable that the process of reform should be confined to England and the Government stated that separate consultation papers were to be produced on the structure of local government in Scotland and Wales. The Structure of Local Government in Scotland,¹⁶ published in June 1991 was widely criticised for its superficiality (a publication of only 9 pages) and as being a document which simply presented the fact of change as opposed to being a reasoned case for change. This was followed by the much more substantial Shaping the new Councils¹⁷ which announced that the Scottish Office hoped to have a unitary system of local government in place in mainland Scotland by April 1996. The second Scottish consultation paper also moved the argument forward by including four possible structures based on 15 units, 24 units, 35 units and 51 units.

The first accurate¹⁸ indication of Welsh Office thinking became available in June 1991 with the publication of its

consultation paper, The Structure of Local Government in Wales.¹⁹ In this document the Secretary of State for Wales, David Hunt, laid out three options - 13, 20 and 24 unitary authorities. His preferred option was to replace the existing eight counties and thirty seven districts with twenty unitary authorities (see Map 7.1). The recommendations of the consultation paper restored single - tier government to major cities and towns such as Cardiff, Newport and Swansea. The proposed authorities varied in population from Cardiff (285,000) to Montgomeryshire (52,000) with ministers suggesting that units below this level would find it difficult to deliver sophisticated services such as education and social care. As in the English and Scottish documents the Welsh consultation paper was muted on the question of functions: a table matched responsibility for service delivery to tier of authority and a section on cooperation and partnership raised the prospect of specialising lead authorities who would contract their services to others. Restructuring in Wales was to be based on what was described as a district building block approach and it was clear that this, to all intents and purposes would be the pattern of any future reform.

By June 1991 therefore the Government had issued separate consultation papers for England, Scotland and Wales. Each of the three documents espoused the common objective of a single tier of unitary authorities but there was divergence in the way this objective might be attained. England was to have a Local Government Commission which would investigate and produce draft proposals area by area. Scotland and Wales were denied their own Commissions - a decision which provoked an outcry. The Welsh counties in particular viewed the lack of a Commission as an attempt by the Secretary of State to short-circuit the whole process. Perversely the very existence of the Commission was criticised by districts in England, with these authorities asking the pertinent question - if no Commission was

MAP 7.1 **20 UNITARY AUTHORITIES**



required in Wales (and Scotland), why was one needed in England? All of this meant that the process of consultation in Wales - which was to last until October 1991 - would be undertaken directly by the Welsh Office.

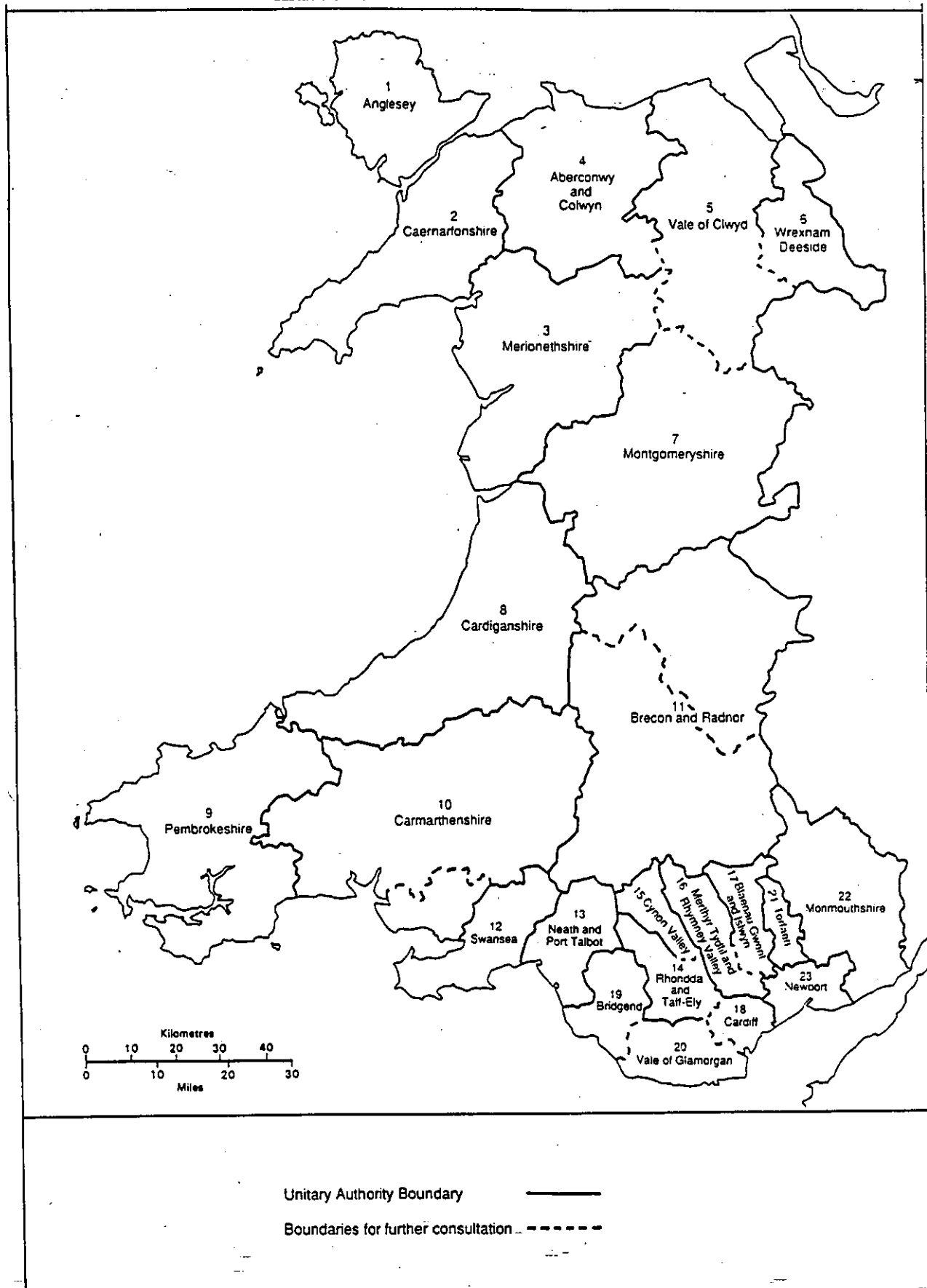
The six months between the publication of the consultation paper in June 1991 and the deadline for comments in October was a period of frenetic activity for local government in Wales. The formal machinery of consultation was centred on the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government (WCCLG) which had been established by the Welsh Office in April 1991. This ad hoc grouping, chaired by the Secretary of State consisted of leaders of the 8 counties and 8 representatives of the Council of Welsh Districts who were in the main district leaders. Naturally both counties and districts responded to The Structure of Local Government in Wales: the counties continued to press for 8 unitary authorities based on the existing counties; the districts, perhaps realising that the argument was going their way agreed on a compromise plan of 27 unitary authorities which would allow for the retention of many existing districts. The next set of submissions came from the local authorities themselves with each individual county or district fighting their corner. In general terms the counties stressed the importance of size and the related benefit of economies of scale. The districts - especially those with small populations - countered by emphasising good management skills, which in turn demonstrated their capacity to run sophisticated services and their closeness to the communities to be served. In addition to the reactions of the local authorities and their associations there were a large number of responses from other sources. Amongst these were comments from the Welsh Library Association and while the Association took a neutral stance on the merits or otherwise of unitary authorities it did point out that the fragmentation of the current large units would inevitably create problems which could only be partially overcome by the expenditure of substantial capital and revenue sums.

The WLA further argued that there was no satisfactory and equitable way of dividing an integrated bookstock and that similar problems would be encountered in trying to disentangle related computerised records. All very much an argument for the retention of the status quo on county lines.

At the centre of the debate between counties and districts was the cost of any new structure. Not surprisingly both sets of authorities presented different estimates of the costs of change and the varying savings that would emanate from that change.²⁰ Beyond this divergence on costs the counties and districts had differing viewpoints on three related issues. Firstly the question of size: the counties consistently argued that only county type units had the resources to plan and deliver services such as education, economic development and highways with the districts countering that equally efficient delivery was possible via cooperation and joint arrangements. This in turn led to different approaches to service management: the counties relied on existing strategy whereas the districts sought more radical solutions such as the creation of arms length companies. To this end and thirdly, the districts gave more prominence than the counties to the concept of enabling which they saw as the gateway to new methods of working based on partnerships between authorities and between authorities and the private sector.

Further indications of what the White Paper would contain became available on 3 March 1992 when the Secretary of State for Wales, David Hunt made a statement in the House of Commons.²¹ His new proposals would replace the existing 8 counties and 37 districts with 23 all purpose authorities. This was an increase of 3 on the preferred option of the June 1991 consultation paper with independent unitary status now being given additionally to Merioneth, Torfaen and Cynon Valley (see Map 7.2). David Hunt also

MAP 7.2
UNITARY STRUCTURE OF 23 AUTHORITIES
ANNOUNCED 3 MARCH 1992



stated that he was open to persuasion on whether to split Brecknock and Radnor in two, whether there should be a separate council for the Vale of Glamorgan, and whether Llanelli should be a part of Carmarthenshire. In his statement the Secretary of State confessed that he had retained the district building-block approach and that he expected the new unitary authorities to provide the full range of local government services which were then being provided by county and district councils. Whatever the final outcome, the Minister's words and in particular the increase in the number of unitary authorities from 20 to 23 showed that the flow of argument was once again running in favour of the districts and that they, rather than the counties, were more in line with Welsh Office thinking on the eventual shape of local government in Wales.

The move towards formulation and expression of more definite policy commitments was interrupted by the General Election held on Thursday 9 April 1992. Although the election had this disruptive effect it may also be seen in a positive light in that it required all political parties to state their intentions on local government reorganisation in their manifestos. The Conservatives promised that they would

set up a commission to examine area by area, the appropriate local government arrangements in England²²

with any such commission paying close attention to local loyalties and interests. Their plans for Wales reiterated the comments of the 1991 consultation paper The Structure of Local Government in Wales

We shall change the structure of local government ... by establishing unitary authorities in place of the two tier authorities we have at present.²³

The Conservatives went on to state that the new authorities in Wales would align with community needs and aspirations

and would perform all the functions currently performed by the existing two tiers.

To simplify local government in England, Labour would establish most purpose authorities generally based on district councils.²⁴

Labour acknowledged that they favoured a flexible approach which would see a county-wide authority in some areas and the amalgamation of districts in others. They were more specific in their Welsh manifesto giving a commitment to

create a single tier of 25-30 unitary authorities.²⁵

The exact number and size of these authorities would be determined by the Secretary of State for Wales after appropriate consultation.

The Liberal Democrats intended to

reform principal local councils into a unitary system based on natural communities and the wishes of local people.²⁶

and this intention would be extended to Wales by replacing the existing counties and districts with a single tier. There was no commitment to a specific number - the Liberal Democrats saw the new authorities in Wales emerging as a result of historical, cultural and economic factors.²⁷

Plaid Cymru envisaged

a tier of about 25 to 30 principal authorities with boundaries drawn to reflect local communities.²⁸

Restating long-standing policy, Plaid Cymru advocated the devolving of certain powers from their principal authorities to community councils - all very much along the lines of the Swiss canton model. Thus as they approached the General Election all of the major parties

had common cause in their clear unqualified support for a single tier structure for local government in England and Wales. Labour, Liberal Democrat and Plaid Cymru coupled their plans to proposals for a separate Welsh Assembly, with local government being accountable to that body rather than the Secretary of State. It was almost natural for a party whose full title is the Conservative and Unionist Party to reject such a proposal.

The relatively low status of local government reorganisation within the totality of policies is indicated by the amount of space given over to it and its location in each of the manifestos. Nowhere does it merit more than a few paragraphs and these are placed towards the end, following a lengthy list of other high priority commitments. Nor was reorganisation an important issue in the lead up to the General Election. The evidence to support this statement is available in work done by Communications Research Centre, Loughborough University during the three and a half weeks of the campaign. The investigation, commissioned by and extensively reported in The Guardian²⁹ monitored the output of the media throughout the campaign. This monitoring revealed the tactics of each party, the selection and prominence of issues to sustain those tactics and the reaction of the media to attempts at agenda setting. The dominant themes of the 1992 election were the handling of the economy, the health service and as the campaign entered its last week, the ratings of the parties in opinion polls. Local government was a lost topic with only six items relating to the topic broadcast over the whole campaign - less than 1% of the total. In one sense this is no more than what might be expected but on the other hand it is surprising that the subject of local government reorganisation which had the potential to directly affect large numbers of voters was given such scant treatment. This lack of attention was symptomatic and in essence the 1992 election was no different from several of its predecessors in that the real

issues which touched the everyday lives of the electorate were engulfed by a tide of negative campaigning and name calling.

Most opinion polls had predicted a closely balanced parliament generally giving Labour a narrow lead. In the event the Conservatives led by John Major won a fourth consecutive term of office - the first such instance since the early 19th century. The Conservative overall majority was reduced from 88 (the figure at dissolution in March 1992) to 21 but its share of the vote at 41.93% was very close to the 42.22% gained in 1987. In Wales Labour remained the dominant party winning 27 of the total of 38 seats.

On the 11 April John Major announced an extensive Cabinet reshuffle: in the new 22 member Cabinet only seven members, including John Major himself, retained unchanged responsibilities. Michael Howard was appointed Secretary of State for the Environment with John Redwood as Minister for Local Government. David Hunt was re-appointed Secretary of State for Wales.

The Conservative victory at the General Election and the fact that David Hunt returned to the Welsh Office ensured a continuity of policy development. The Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government continued with its work over the summer of 1992 and created a number of sub groups to deal with particular aspects of reorganisation. In all twelve sub groups were established and one of these dealt with Leisure and Culture including the library service. Libraries had originally been placed with Education but after some protests the Welsh Office agreed to the relocation, placing libraries with museums, the arts and other leisure services. The Leisure and Culture sub group was chaired (as all the others) by a Welsh Office civil servant and had strict parity of membership with three

representatives from the counties and three from the districts. Its exact composition was as follows:

COUNTIES

Chief Executive, Clwyd C.C.

Director of Tourism, Clwyd C.C.

Director of Libraries, South Glamorgan C.C.

DISTRICTS

Chief Executive, Llanelli D.C.

Chief Executive, Montgomery D.C.

Deputy Chief Executive, Cardiff D.C.

The sub group paid close attention to the problems of library service delivery by small authorities and concluded that the strengths of the existing service could only be retained through joint working and cooperation. These recommendations, and those of the other sub groups were major inputs into the White Paper which would represent the next stage in Welsh Office policy making.

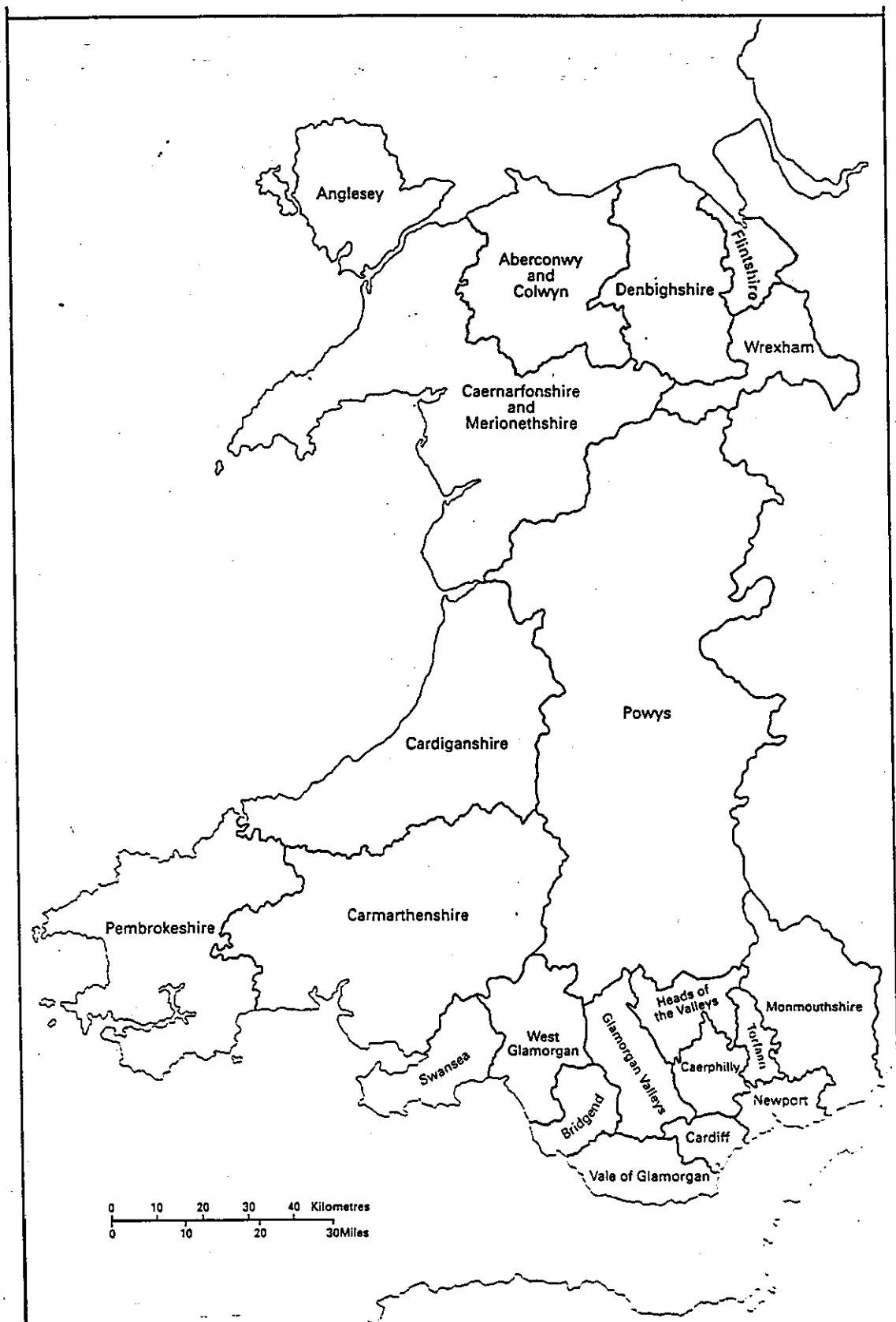
The question of the costs of any future reform was given added focus with the publication in February 1992 of a costs report³⁰ which had been commissioned by the Welsh Office. The report, drawn up by Touche Ross management consultants, examined four hypothetical structures of 15,18,23 and 27 unitary authorities. The main Touche Ross conclusions were that transition costs for any new system would range from 61m to £154m for 15 councils and from £67m to £152m for a 27 unitary council system. These costs, which all participants had accepted as being an inherent consequence of reform, would be offset by savings over a 15 year period. This was more or less confirmed by Welsh Office reaction to the Touche Ross report with David Hunt and his civil servants concluding that reorganisation would pay for itself within this 15 year period.

After much speculation the White Paper, Local Government in Wales: a charter for the Future³¹ was finally published, appropriately enough, on 1 March 1993 - St David's Day.

The White Paper did three things: it retained the approach of a single-tier unitary structure; it described the boundaries of the proposed authorities; and it explained how local government services would be delivered under this new structure with heavy emphasis on cooperation and further development of the enabling principle. On the central question of number and size, the White Paper proposed 21 new authorities (full details are given in Map 7.3). In the main the pattern favoured by the first consultative document and the March 1992 statement was carried forward. The White Paper made some changes in the South Wales valleys, Clwyd now faced a three way split and Caernarfonshire and Meirioneth were brought together to create a unitary authority along the north - west coast and peninsula of Gwynedd. The most significant change was the almost complete retention of the existing county of Powys - the only county authority in Wales to emerge relatively unscathed from the reform process. In Powys the Welsh Office faced the dilemma of matching service delivery with geography and the recommendation to retain the county virtually as before is a tacit admission that the rationale of reform can only be taken so far. Populations of the new authorities vary from 66,700 in Cardiganshire to 295,400 in Cardiff and this range reveals yet again the near abandonment of the idea that has permeated all prior attempts at reorganisation - that there is an ideal size for an effective and efficient local authority.

On the question of library authorities the situation in Wales - as this study has shown - is further complicated in that responsibility for public library services is already divided between eight counties and five districts by virtue of Section 207 of the Local Government Act, 1972. These districts (Cynon Valley, Llanelli Merthyr, Newport and Rhondda) could in one sense be seen as precursors of the whole restructuring process. In reality - and again as this study has attempted to argue - the initial awarding of powers to the districts and to a certain extent the

MAP 7.3
STRUCTURE OF 21 UNITARY AUTHORITIES
RECOMMENDED MARCH 1993



retention of powers, were acts of political expediency and pragmatism rather than a lead towards wider reform. There is some irony in the fact that if the White Paper proposals are implemented, four of the five districts will lose the independence which they fought for in 1974 and 1984: Llanelli becomes part of the unitary authority of Carmarthenshire; Rhondda and Cynon are brought together in the Glamorgan Valleys; and Merthyr is one of three existing districts which will form the Heads of the Valleys unitary authority. Clause 8 of Section 207 places a legal obligation on the Welsh Office to undertake a third review of district library powers in 1994. In the atmosphere of a commitment to totally restructure local government, such a review now seems to be a remote possibility.

The White Paper devotes one brief paragraph to the question of the provision of public library services. Indeed so brief are the comments that they may be quoted in full:

The new authorities will be responsible for the provision of public library services. In many cases authorities will need to work together to secure comprehensive, efficient and effective services. The Secretary of State will continue to have reserve powers to use if he considers these responsibilities are not being discharged satisfactorily.³²

These rather bland words offer little guidance to librarians in Wales as they begin to plan for library services within a new unitary structure. Comprehensive and efficient do no more than echo the sentiments of the Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964. The comment on reserve powers is somewhat akin to a legal caution: the Secretary of State has never had occasion to use these powers in Wales. And although the paragraph contains the phrase working together there is no elaboration on how authorities should work together to secure the delivery of comprehensive and efficient public library services. As a White Paper Local Government in Wales: a charter for the future is of course the final statement on central

government thinking prior to the introduction of legislation. The philosophy of earlier documents is developed but in essence the approach is the same. There are the usual and expected comments on the buying - in of services (now given a sharper edge via compulsory competitive tendering), cooperation with the private and voluntary sector and the continuous exhortation that the new unitary authorities should see themselves as enablers rather than providers.

Following the publication of the White Paper the process of reform in Wales gained a certain inevitability and perhaps unstoppable momentum. Though the existing counties asked the Secretary of State to scrap his proposals entirely and although David Hunt (unusually in the context of a White Paper) invited further comments, it became increasingly likely that the structure and units already outlined represented the future shape of local government in Wales.

In a Cabinet reshuffle announced in June 1993 David Hunt was succeeded at the Welsh Office by John Redwood (with John Gummer to head the Department of Environment). John Redwood's appointment as Secretary of State for Wales was greeted with some trepidation in local government circles. The cause of anxiety was twofold. Critics pointed to Mr Redwood's total lack of Welsh connections and argued that his appointment gave further credence to the belief that the Secretaryship of Wales was now no more than a step on a ministerial career ladder to higher things. The second and perhaps greater cause for concern was that John Redwood was a determined advocate of privatisation. Leaving these issues aside it was relevant that the new Secretary of State came to the Welsh Office from a post at the Department of the Environment which gave him specific responsibility for local government. In his handling of the local government brief in England John Redwood had consistently emphasised the need to adhere to the stipulated timetable and he indicated in his first days at

the Welsh Office that he would not deviate from the fast-track approach of his predecessor.

Despite this avowal of continuity John Redwood introduced one new concept into the restructuring formula. At his first appearance before the Welsh Grand Committee on 14 July 1993³³ he announced that the proposed unitary authorities might be allowed to devolve some functions to area committees, preserving local identities. This would entail:

- councillors being elected on a dual mandate to serve both on an area committee and unitary authority;
- area committees carrying out similar functions to the existing districts, but without the ability to raise revenue;
- councils applying to the Secretary of State to adopt the devolved system.

As this idea arose from pressure placed on the Welsh Office by the three districts of Brecknock, Radnor and Montgomery in the county of Powys, the whole scheme has become known as the Powys Model (and as the Powys pudding by its detractors). John Redwood also stated that a similar pattern of devolution could apply in a handful of other areas, citing the South Wales valleys and the proposed unitary authority of Caernarfon and Meirioneth as likely candidates. In a subsequent Parliamentary reply,³⁴ the Secretary of State offered greater detail on the concept of a dual mandate. It was now to be applicable to all of the 21 proposed unitary authorities. More devastating was the fact that an area committee could be established wherever ten members of the shadow authorities requested one and that the decisions of an area committee made within its delegated powers could only be overturned by a 90% majority of the full unitary council. These proposals - which represented John Redwood's single new contribution to the reform process - were greeted with derision by counties and districts in Wales. They castigated the Powys model as a

recipe for chaos and confusion in the crucial lead up period to change. In a particularly perceptive critique³⁵ the Welsh Districts pointed out that the 90% rule would ensure that the area committees had virtual autonomy within their delegated powers recreating a two tier structure of mutually independent authorities - the inherent weakness of the present system. This must be acknowledged and it is dispiriting that at the very time when all local government officers (including librarians) were seeking ways to make the new system work, the principal idea to emerge from John Redwood and the Welsh Office had the potential to create disunity and to lessen the opportunities for working together - the very quality which was called for in the March 1993 White Paper.

As indicated, David Hunt and his predecessor had constantly maintained that the timetable for reform would be unchanged. Their stated intention was to introduce the necessary legislation early in the next Parliamentary session, certainly before the end of November 1993. By March 1994 the Bill would have passed all stages and received Royal Assent, with the expectation that elections for shadow unitary authorities would be held in May/June 1994. These would then work alongside the existing councils, preparing for the total assumption of powers by the unitary authorities on 1 May 1995. This tight schedule could be affected by a variety of circumstance - the inability to fit the legislation into the Parliamentary time - table for example. Further, elections for the European Parliament had to be held on 9 June 1994. Bearing in mind the administrative complexities and the potential for voters' confusion it was almost inconceivable (but not impossible) that elections for the European Parliament AND the shadow unitary authorities be held on the same day.

Parliament reassembled on 17 November 1993 and a section of the Queen's Speech stated that the government would bring forward legislation to reform local government in Scotland

and Wales. Five days later, on 22 November, John Redwood indicated in a Commons statement that the time-table for reform would move forward one year with the new councils now taking up powers in 1996 - an immediate abandonment of the fast-track approach. Though not admitted, the reason for the postponement was clear - government business managers had refused to give the Bill paving the way for reform sufficient priority to guarantee its swift passage. The Local Government (Wales) Bill was introduced in the Lords on 30 November in a manner described by the Municipal Journal as "decidedly low-key".³⁶ Moreover the introduction of the Bill in the Lords as opposed to the Commons lent weight to the interpretation that John Redwood had failed to convince his Cabinet colleagues that the legislation was of the highest priority.

The Bill,³⁷ which was published on 1 December 1993 contained few surprises. There were some minor boundary changes but the thrust of the proposed legislation was in essence the same as the White Paper, Local Government in Wales - a charter for the future. These are the main clauses of the Bill:

From 1 April 1996 Wales was to have 21 unitary authorities (styled principal councils in the Bill) serving the following areas:

- Aberconwy and Colwyn
- Anglesey
- Bridgend
- Cardiff
- Cardiganshire
- Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire
- Caerphilly
- Carmarthenshire
- Denbighshire
- Flintshire
- Heads of the Valleys
- Mid Wales
- Monmouthshire

Neath and Port Talbot
Newport
Pembrokeshire
Rhondda, Cynon, Taf
Swansea
Torfaen
Vale of Glamorgan
Wrexham

(Clause 1)

The establishment of these authorities and election of councillors to be on a date in 1995 fixed by the Secretary of State.

(Clause 4)

The statutory functions of existing counties and districts to be transferred to the new principal councils.

(Clause 17)

Any new principal council may enter into an agreement with another such council for the provision of services which the principal council requires for the discharge of any of its functions.

(Clause 24)

By 31 March 1996 every new principal council should prepare a service delivery plan for each of their functions.

(Clause 25)

If at least ten members of a new principal council so request then the Secretary of State may direct that council to prepare and submit a decentralisation scheme for the establishment of area committees.

(Clause 26)

The Secretary of State may at any time before 31 March 1999 direct any new principal council to provide him with information on the performance of specific functions. On the basis of such information the Secretary of State could direct a principal council to enter into an agreement with another council or an external body for the exercise of those functions.

(Clauses 28-30)

As indicated above, these, and other clauses were much as anticipated. The principal councils commended in the Bill are in terms of size and number essentially the same authorities as those proposed in the White Paper. The clause on the contracting of services from one authority to another raises the prospect of a Labour council being required to buy services from a Conservative controlled council by the direction of the Secretary of State. More relevant perhaps is the reaction of a council - having fought long and hard for full unitary status - to the loss of any powers to a neighbouring authority. The acrimony and ill-feeling over the whole question of library powers demonstrates that this is an issue fraught with problems. As already suggested, the clauses commending area committees (John Redwood's only real innovation to the blueprint bequeathed to him by David Hunt) are a retrograde step - and this is the view of existing county and district authorities in Wales. The counties see them as a tacit admission that the 21 unitary authority structure is inherently inadequate, requiring some bolt-on machinery for the efficient delivery of services. Districts view the proposal as a means to perpetuate the inefficiency, confusion and inflexibility of the existing two-tier system. The clauses on the reserve powers of the Secretary of State to impose joint working and/or the hiving off of functions to the private sector are also interpreted in different ways by counties and districts. Counties argue that the powers to impose joint arrangements is another admission that the 21 authority structure is flawed from the outset. The districts offer a different interpretation on these reserve powers - they see them as a set of stages with the imposition of joint arrangements as a last resort. The division of opinion between counties and districts would surely be reflected as the Bill progressed through Parliament but it would be unlikely to have any major effect. Although the Government did not have a large majority its record on recent legislation³⁸ showed that this majority was more than sufficient to get measures

through the House. Thus the expectation must be that barring major accidents, the Local Government (Wales) Bill would survive largely intact.

In England the whole issue of reform was in a constant state of flux as the Local Government Commission continued its county by county review. Draft proposals had been issued for several areas - Isle of Wight, Cleveland and Durham, Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, Avon, North Yorkshire and Somerset and Gloucestershire. As might be expected, the proposals became mired in confusion and contradiction: for example, a two tier model was commended for Lincolnshire but discarded for Somerset and Gloucestershire. To instill an element of direction and urgency the Department of the Environment issued revised guidelines to the Commission on 1 October 1993.³⁹ These stated that:

the review process should be completed by the end of 1994;

more weight should be given to proposals drawn up through local consensus;

the status quo should be the exception, not the rule; unitary authorities should not be confined to urban areas;

plans to make existing councils all-purpose should be given special scrutiny;

large unitary councils would need special justification in community identity terms.

The question of what was meant by large was clarified in a subsequent statement from the Local Government Commission that it expected the new all purpose shire counties to fall within a 150,000 - 200,000 population range. The guidelines were given added substance in November 1993 in a letter from the local government Minister, David Curry to all English members of Parliament. The minister reiterated the view that the Government placed heavy emphasis on local opinion and that authorities - particularly the county councils - should be more responsive to that opinion.

I think that the county councils would be well advised to seek to develop a reform structure which is based on larger unitary structures with a significant degree of devolution of practical administration rather than opposing the process of change and arguing for the status quo.⁴⁰

The minister also revealed that the Government expected that elections for 30% of new English shire authorities would take place in May 1995, with the remaining councils following exactly the same pattern one year later.

The Local Government Reform (Scotland) Bill was introduced into the Commons on 9 December 1993 (the fact that it was introduced in the Commons rather than Lords leads to the inescapable conclusion that the Scottish legislation had a higher priority than that pertaining to Wales). The Bill's main provisions are:

- the creation of 28 single tier councils to be in place from 1 April 1996;

- the new councils to be elected in shadow form on 6 April 1995;

- the new councils to prepare and implement decentralisation schemes for area committees.

The pronouncements of the English Commission, issued at an accelerating rate and the introduction of the Scottish and Welsh Bills meant that the Government had a clear legislative commitment to establish a reformed structure of local government in England, Scotland and Wales. Shadow unitary authorities would be elected for the whole of Scotland and Wales and parts of England in April/May 1995 with those authorities taking up full powers in April 1996.

In Wales a structure of 21 unitary all-purpose authorities seemed inevitable. At the close of this chapter it is relevant to ask what sort of public library service would evolve from and within this structure over the subsequent five to ten years? An answer has to be couched in the most

general of terms, but it is at least feasible to set any analysis against two possible scenarios.

The first is a negative scenario. The most prominent feature of this scenario at national level is the growing influence of a large number of unaccountable but powerful QUANGOS. Although the Conservatives hold only 6 of the 38 parliamentary seats in Wales, the Government effectively controls vast swathes of Welsh affairs through nearly 100 bodies largely controlled by nominees and direct appointees. The number of quangos in Wales has more than doubled during 14 years of Conservative rule with an attendant and dramatic increase in public expenditure by these non-elected bodies. A recent study⁴¹ shows that £2.1 billion or 34% of Welsh Office spending was dispensed by quangos in the financial year 1993-94. The entire revenue budget for Welsh local authorities for the same period is only a little higher at £2.5 billion. Against a background of shifts of power and resources to these nominated bodies there is little wonder that Wales has been dubbed Quangoland.

At a local level, reorganisation will bring a preponderance of medium to small unitary authorities - and here the question of size must be addressed. The 21 unitary authorities listed in the March 1993 White Paper ranged in population from 66,700 (Cardiganshire) to 295,400 (Cardiff). This chapter has argued that size is no longer the pervasive shaper of reform; it must also be accepted that size does not of itself deliver a comprehensive and efficient library service. Size must be combined with history and a purposeful spending record to create what David Liddle has referred to as a critical mass. To attain that critical mass an authority must demonstrate that it has the will to operate a comprehensive and efficient library service and is able and prepared to match that will with resources. As Liddle comments, the crucial point is

that there can be no guarantee that this factor will manifest itself in the new unitary structure in Wales.

What is different about the likely outcome of this new reorganisation is that library authorities will be created where no such critical mass exists, which have not come about as a result of a process of growth and development...and which will begin with an entirely inadequate resource base with which to provide a public library service.⁴²

Moreover it is a distinct possibility that the new unitary authorities will not have a great deal to do. This may seem a strange proposition until one remembers the White Paper's comments on councils as enabling rather than providing bodies and its emphasis on links with the private sector via compulsory competitive tendering. Further, it is no exaggeration to suggest that education - the most important (and expensive) function undertaken by the existing counties - could be severely curtailed in the proposed unitary framework. In April 1993 control of further education in Wales was formally taken from LEA's and given to a Quango - The Further Education Funding Council for Wales. The 1993 Education Act which received the Royal Assent at the end of June 1993 established a second Quango - a Funding Agency for Schools (FAS), to be responsible for what the government anticipated would be a growing number of grant maintained schools. When more than 10% of pupils in an area are in grant maintained schools the FAS will share responsibility for planning with the local education authority. When 75% of pupils are in opted - out schools, the FAS takes over the functions of the local education authority. Another clause of the Act required governing bodies in all schools to hold annual ballots on the move to grant maintained status. The direction of this legislation - which the Government sees as the blueprint for the subsequent 25 years - is abundantly clear. Local Education Authorities would become minor players and education a minor function in the new unitary structure. The link between the process of local

government reform and the pressure on schools to move to grant maintained status was stressed in a statement by Sir Wyn Roberts, the Welsh Office Minister with responsibility for education. Speaking at a conference organised by the Welsh Office to give information to schools about grant maintained status he said that

A key issue for schools...is whether to establish a new relationship with their unitary authority or take that opportunity to break away from LEA control completely and become grant maintained.⁴³

Even if they resist central government blandishments to opt - out, individual primary and secondary schools will have increasing responsibility for their own affairs.

The drastic realignment of responsibility for education could leave the unitary authorities with social care, housing, planning, environmental services, and cultural and leisure services - including libraries. Many of these services could be contracted out with actual provision being in the hands of the private sector or Quango type agency. Within such an atmosphere it is perfectly conceivable that the unitary authorities could take up all the powers that are available to them - and control of library services could be high on the list. Add a desire, fired by civic pride, to bolster newly found independence, leading to minimal cooperation and it is possible to assemble the main ingredients which make up this first negative scenario.

The second scenario is more positive and encouraging. Here the new, but relatively inexperienced unitary authorities could realise that they can only move on from existing strengths. This had already begun to happen as the present counties and districts, recognising the inevitability of reform, began to formulate policies for a post 1995 environment. Though such planning is obviously necessary, there appeared to be a realisation that the transfer of powers to the unitary authorities would not be

characterised by wholesale change and that an element of continuity could persist. Two factors are important here. The first is the professional advice and guidance that will be available to the new authorities: the librarians who were running the public library service in Wales would for the most part be the same librarians would shape and mould the service within a unitary framework. The second is the location of library services within the overall management structures of existing counties and districts . At time of writing, this is the existing pattern:

AUTHORITY	CONTROLLING COMMITTEE	RESPONSIBILITIES
Clwyd	Community Development	Libraries/Archives
Cynon Valley*	Leisure Services	Recreation/ Libraries
Dyfed	Cultural Services	Libraries/Archives Museums/Arts
Gwent	Educational Services	Libraries/School libraries
Gwynedd	Culture and Leisure	Libraries/Archives/ Country parks
Llanelli*	Leisure and Amenities	Libraries/Museums/ Arts
Merthyr*	Community Services	Libraries/ Recreation
Mid-Glam	Further Education	Libraries/Further Education
Newport*	Community Services	Libraries/ Recreation
Powys	Community Services	Libraries/Cultural Support/Youth
Rhondda*	Recreation/Amenities	Libraries/ Recreation
South Glam	Library	Libraries/Arts
West Glam	Education	Libraries/ School libraries

* Districts

The list reveals that there is a diversity of management structures. Several county library services are subsumed under education - the traditional approach. There has however been a shift from education to community services/leisure and Gwynedd and Powys are examples of this shift. Moreover these re-locations have occurred only very recently and are patently influenced by the approaching reorganisation of local government and the far-reaching changes in LEA's which have already been referred to. The district library services are all administered within leisure/amenity directorates and this in one sense was and is their natural home. These districts are also experiencing change: Merthyr for example had adopted a three department structure of legal, financial and community services. It is noticeable that the counties (and some other districts in Wales, which are not library authorities) were showing an inclination to move from leisure towards community services - the latter presumably being a more acceptable term for the existing and emerging local government philosophy. All the evidence indicated that public libraries in the post 1995 structure would be located within a community services directorate and this again would appear to offer a positive opportunity. Libraries would be relatively large players (and spenders) and the public library service would be the only service within any such directorate which carried a statutory obligation. This obligation - and its wider implications - took on a new relevance in July 1993 with the announcement of the National Heritage Minister that he intended to establish a new Library Commission. It was more than likely that one of the first tasks of the Commission would be to co-ordinate strategic research and development of all library sectors including the newly established unitary authorities.

The Library and Information Plan for Wales⁴⁴ offered, as one would expect, a powerful boost to the cooperation argument. The publication of this key document was timely

in that it filled a policy vacuum and appeared in the crucial lead up period to reorganisation. The Library and Information Plan also accepted the inevitability of reform but moved on to argue that the whole process:

provided a unique opportunity for the library and information community to influence the shape of service provision;

provided a first time opportunity to coordinate public library services and other local authority information services within one tier, making for literal one stop access;

provided for the heightening of the information function in any new structure;

provided for a new awareness of the necessity for joint arrangements between the new authorities and beyond this a recognition of a need for regional and national planning of public library services.

The reality of reform was likely to be somewhere between these negative and positive interpretations. Some areas - close approximations to existing library authorities - could face fewer problems and should thus fare better than others. Nevertheless it was almost certain that there would be fragmentation of resources and expertise. In the lead up to reform, librarians in Wales had to ponder over a multitude of decisions: who should have a valuable local history collection; who should maintain an expensive European Information service and even mundane operating matters such as the schedule of the mobile library service within totally new boundaries. Within such an atmosphere those same librarians may well concur with Chris Patten that

local government needs another reorganisation like it needs a hole in the head.⁴⁵

**CHRONOLOGY OF MAIN EVENTS IN THE PROCESS OF LOCAL
GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN WALES, 1990 - 1996**

Date	Event
November 1990	John Major becomes Prime Minister Michael Heseltine appointed Secretary of State for the Environment. David Hunt, Secretary of State for Wales.
January 1991	David Hunt invites comments from Welsh local authority associations on future functions, structure and finance of local government in Wales. David Hunt also indicates that there will be no Local Government Commission for Wales.
April 1991	Assembly of Welsh Counties and Council of Welsh Districts give their support in principle to the concept of unitary authorities for Wales.
June 1991	Welsh Office consultation paper, <u>The Structure of Local Government in Wales</u> . Three models based on 13, 20, and 24 unitary authorities. Secretary of State favours 20 unit model.
March 1992	David Hunt announces a structure of 23 unitary authorities.
9 April 1992	General Election - Conservative victory John Major, Prime Minister. Michael Howard, Secretary of State for Environment. David Hunt, Secretary of State for Wales.
1 March 1993	Welsh Office White Paper, <u>Local Government in Wales: a charter for the future</u> - 21 unitary authorities proposed.
June 1993	John Redwood appointed Secretary of State for Wales.

14 July 1993	John Redwood announces plan for area committees - Powys model.
4 November 1993	Parliament re-convenes. Queen's speech contains proposals for the reform of local government in Wales.
22 November 1993	John Redwood announces that reform would move forward one year, with new councils taking up powers in 1996.
30 November 1993	Local Government (Wales) Bill introduced in the House of Lords - 21 authority pattern retained.
1995	Election of shadow unitary authorities, at a date to be fixed by the Secretary of State.
1 April 1996	Full take-up of powers by the 21 unitary authorities.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

POSTSCRIPT AND CONCLUSIONS

"The most evident change has been the demoralisation of local government... the whole trend of government reforms is towards removing responsibility from local councils... The British are now almost unique among western nations in the weakness of their local representation".

Anthony Sampson

The Essential Anatomy of Britain: democracy in crisis, 1992

There has been a long and almost axiomatic tendency to link evolution and change in local government structures with the growth and development of the public library system. In essence the argument can be summarised thus: reorganised, viable structures are the precursors of reorganised, viable library systems. In the argument the key-word is reorganisation

Reorganisation...will do as much as the mere expenditure of money, and money will not be spent lavishly in these frugal days. The merit of such a reorganisation is that so many and so great values will be secured at a minimum cost.¹

Those comments were made in 1924. There was also the assumption that though the process of reorganisation might be fraught with problems the ensuing advantages were worth the struggle. Kelly, writing in 1977, obviously subscribes to such a view

However painful the transition...it is to be expected that local government reform will eventually operate to the benefit of the library service.²

To be seen as viable, local government structures and the units which made up those structures had to be of a certain size, and size tended to be being measured in terms of population. A whole sequence of reports and investigations sought to establish the optimum size of a local government unit which would act as a foundation for the delivery of a comprehensive and efficient library service.

The Kenyon Report (1927) gave a population of 20,000 as the base line for an efficient library service and recommended that authorities at or below this base line should surrender their powers to the counties or enter into co-operative arrangements with county or urban library systems. At the time of the publication of the report 84% of all Welsh urban and parish library authorities served populations below 20,000 and 65% populations under 10,000.³ Kenyon saw voluntary co-operation as the way forward and went on to commend the grouping of public libraries around regional centres which would generally be the well-established urban libraries.

The McColvin Report (1942), produced in the darkest days of World War II, was an uncompromising personal statement. McColvin reported on what he observed and led to conclusions which though logical were at times unrealistic. In his opinion a nation-wide, co-ordinated, adequately financed library system called for the creation of larger and more efficient library units. Across the United Kingdom the 604 existing library authorities would be replaced by 93 units based where possible on large towns and with a population range of between quarter of a million and one million. The remedy for Wales was drastic. The 67 library authorities then in existence - a mixture of counties, county boroughs, non-county boroughs, urban districts and parishes - would be reduced to just 5 library units. The severe reduction was necessary to meet McColvin's population targets but it had the effect of creating units based almost exclusively on population with minimal consideration being given to other criteria. This is best exemplified in the unit postulated for Mid-Wales; to attain a population of 540,000 its borders had to encompass the whole of the western seaboard and the unit had to embrace more than 80% of the land area of Wales.

Population was also chosen as a criterion of effectiveness by the Roberts Report (1959). In the opinion of that

investigation it was unlikely that library authorities serving populations of less than 40,000 would be able deliver an effective service and in particular to meet the stipulated standard of annual expenditure on books - £5,000 or 2s per head of population. In an introductory overview Roberts pointed out that of the 484 library authorities in England and Wales, 167 (34%) were serving populations below 30,000 and 123 of these (25%) were serving populations of less than 20,000 - Kenyon's base line for effectiveness. In Wales only 18 (34%) of the 52 library authorities had populations above 40,000 and there were 17 authorities (32%) serving less than 10,000 people. Not one library authority in Wales met the stipulated standard on book expenditure. At first glance the number of small, nonviable library authorities would appear to be approximately equal in England and Wales, but Roberts disagreed

a large number of Welsh library authorities are characterised by very small populations, modest financial resources and inadequate expenditures on books. These conditions are not peculiar to Wales and there are many parts of England to which they apply; where the difference lies is in the higher proportion in Wales of libraries serving tiny populations with slender resources.⁴

This was the first time that an official government investigation had acknowledged that the problem of small, nonviable library authorities was particularly acute in Wales.

Roberts recommended that counties, county boroughs and metropolitan boroughs should continue as library authorities. Other existing library authorities (and it was at this stratum that the problem of smallness was most prevalent) would be entitled to apply for continuance of powers if they met the expenditure stipulation.

The next step in the quest for a suitable definition of viability was the Bourdillon Report (1962). Bourdillon

sought a way forward by postulating what was described as a basic library unit - the smallest unit capable of providing an adequate library service for the population served. Adequacy was defined in terms of annual purchase (or input expenditure) levels - 250 volumes for every 1000 population served with a related minimum proviso of 7,200 volumes as targets for every independent library service. Though Bourdillon placed less emphasis on population, a comment in the body of the Report suggested that these minimum levels would be beyond the reach of a library authority serving below 30,000 population. Of the 47 Welsh library authorities listed in an appendix to the Report, 26 (55%) were below the 30,000 base line.

The core recommendations of the Roberts and Bourdillon Reports were given legislative force in the Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964. The Act was short (26 clauses) and seemingly straightforward. It placed a legal obligation on every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient service and vested responsibility for the oversight and promotion of that service with a central government department. Parishes were deprived of their library powers and a population of 40,000 was laid down as the dividing line between viability and non-viability. Non-county boroughs and urban districts below this line might be deprived of library powers if this would result in an improvement in library services; on the other hand non-county boroughs and urban districts not holding library powers but above the 40,000 line, could apply for constitution as library authorities.

Although the Public Libraries and Museums Act occasioned neither wholesale withdrawal or granting of library powers it did reduce the number of library authorities. As indicated the Roberts Report had in 1959 recorded 484 such authorities in England and Wales; by 1965, the year in which the legislation came into force that total had come down to 419 - a 13% reduction. In Wales the 1959 figure

was 52, reducing to 42 by 1965. Whilst it is true that the disappearance of parishes as library authorities partly accounted for this reduction there was also a voluntary relinquishing of powers by small urban districts as they came to realise that they would find it difficult to meet the requirements of the Act.

The Public Libraries and Museums Act was to a certain extent overtaken by events. Its enactment was contemporaneous with wide ranging investigations into the structure of local government in England, Scotland and Wales. The first consequence of this investigation was the Local Government Act, 1963 which completely reformed local administration in London. Seventy three authorities were reduced to 32 most-purpose boroughs with an average population of 200,000. The London restructuring was also the first time that the reform process worked in reverse to bring about the dissaggregation of a large library authority - the county of Middlesex, which was widely acknowledged to be providing a comprehensive and efficient service.

The Redcliffe-Maud Royal Commission was in all probability the most penetrative investigation ever to have been undertaken into local government structures and functions in England. Its Report (1969) ran to three volumes, backed by twelve volumes of written evidence and nine volumes of Research Studies. Redcliffe-Maud sought to unite town and country by the creation of a single tier of unitary authorities with an average population of 250,000. This key recommendation would have established 110 library authorities in England. Initial proposals for the restructuring of local government in Wales took a divergent path from the unitary pattern advocated for England. By 1970 however a newly elected Conservative administration had promulgated a uniform and unifying policy for England and Wales. For reasons which were more to do with politics than the rationale of any reform process, the Conservatives

rejected the Redcliffe-Maud proposals opting instead for a two-tier structure of counties and districts. Within this structure library services were to be the responsibility of counties and metropolitan districts in England and counties in Wales, with the possibility of Welsh districts also being constituted as library authorities by virtue of Section 207 of the Local Government Act, 1972.

The new structure came into being on the 1 April 1974. Immediately prior to reorganisation there were 343 library authorities in England; reorganisation reduced that total to 107 - 39 Counties, 36 Metropolitan Districts and the existing 32 London Boroughs. In Wales library powers were allocated to the eight counties and then through Section 207 to four Welsh Districts, to give a total of 12 library authorities.

Section 207 and its consequences ran counter to the flow of events. In general each attempt at the reform and rationalisation of local government moved public library systems and services in England, Scotland and Wales in one direction. This direction was characterised by a constant and at times dramatic reduction in the number of library authorities and a consequent increase in the size (in terms of population) of each individual authority. The direction was the natural outcome of the official and professional view that larger authorities were better. This view is perfectly exemplified in these comments in a DES information paper published immediately prior to the 1974 reorganisation

the creation of library authorities to serve larger populations and with larger total resources will facilitate the co-ordinated developments of library services over wider areas than has hitherto been possible. These new authorities will therefore be able to meet the needs of their communities for comprehensive facilities.⁵

Local government reorganisation as proposed for England and Wales in 1993-94 reverses the direction of reform. Instead of the aggregation of units to create larger, more powerful (and thus more viable) local authorities, the reform process will occasion the separation of units and the subsequent break-up of a pattern of service delivery. Although the number of library authorities will be reduced in Scotland the reform process here also ushers in a period of uncertainty and change. On a wider front, this change will occur at different times and in different ways in England, Scotland and Wales. The pattern and direction of reform is sharply revealed in this pre- and post-reorganisation analysis of the number and types of library authorities.

TABLE 8.1
PRE-REORGANISATION/POST-REORGANISATION
STRUCTURES AND NUMBERS

ENGLAND (excluding London)

Pre-reorganisation		Post-reorganisation	
Counties	39	Unitary Authorities	178
Metropolitan Districts	36	(Extrapolation from Local Government Commission figures)	
TOTAL	75		178

SCOTLAND

Regional Districts	6	Unitary Authorities	29
Districts	35		
TOTAL	41		29

WALES

Counties	8	Unitary Authorities	22
Districts	5		
TOTAL	13		22*
GRAND TOTAL	129		228

* The Welsh reorganisation Bill proposed 21 unitary authorities. A late concession by the Secretary of State gave unitary status to Merthyr increasing the total to 22

As to methodology England was granted a Local Government Commission with an area by area investigation leading to policy formulation. The elections for Shadow Authorities are expected to take place in May 1995 and May 1996. Scotland was not granted a Commission and policy was formulated by the Scottish Office. Elections for Shadow Authorities are scheduled for April 1995 with a take-up of powers on 1 April 1996. Similarly the call for a Commission was rejected in Wales and policy was formulated by the Welsh Office. Again elections for Shadow Authorities in May 1995, with a take-up of powers 1 April 1996.

At the end of this study it is appropriate to attempt to provide a set of conclusions on the place and significance of the public library service in Wales in relation to earlier schemes for the restructuring of local government and particularly within the context of the latest proposals for the reform of local government.

1. In the past, the basic criterion for the evaluation of effectiveness of local government structures in general, and more specifically the public library service within those structures, was size. There may have been a division of opinion about the ideal size for a local authority, but there was little doubt that local authorities had to be of a certain size. Big was beautiful, and minimum size, it was argued was directly related to an authority's ability to deliver a wide range of advantages - the ability to exploit ever advancing technology, the ability to offer specialised services, the ability to reduce wasteful duplication and the related ability to reap economies of scale. Each one of these advantages (and others) could be, and were, applied to the public library service.

2. Within this scenario, the inclusion of Section 207 in the Local Government Act, 1972 and the resultant granting of powers to four, and then five district library authorities in Wales was an aberration which ran counter to all the arguments about size. It is important to add however that it was a politically motivated aberration introduced by government for short term, disproportionate political gain. The Welsh Office, counties and districts and the library profession in Wales then had to respond to that aberration.
3. The decision to grant powers to the four Districts in 1974 was an eleventh - hour affair, taken in less than an open manner. The excellence, or otherwise, of District claims were peripheral to decision making. Once again, the whole question was heavily influenced by political factors and the ultimate decision was a perfect example (if perfect is the word) of an incoming government under pressure, conceding on an issue of minor importance.
4. The Review Exercises undertaken by the Welsh Office in 1984 and 1986 to investigate the whole question of district library powers had one fundamental objective: to create from the illogicality of Section 207, a pragmatic way forward which would ensure a higher standard of library service in both district and county. And to a large extent this would appear to have happened. It could also be argued that the 1984 and 1986 Review Exercises had four other conclusions: they depoliticised the matter of allocation of library powers; they moved decision making on to more rational ground; they brought the whole process more into the open; and they placed an obligation on the Welsh Office to monitor standards in the affected districts and counties.

5. Although statistical analysis shows that the four districts reawarded powers in 1984 have increased expenditure in key areas, such analysis cannot completely and categorically answer a crucial question - was such increased expenditure a reaction to monitoring or were the Districts simply having to spend at a higher level to meet the extra costs of independence?
6. The post-1990 proposals for the reform of local government sought to establish a different set of criteria of evaluation. Size was all but abandoned as the yardstick of effectiveness, and it was certainly not the core motivator of reform. The consultation paper, The Structure of Local Government in Wales (June 1991) posed the question whether there were optimum sizes of area or population for authorities to meet the distinctive needs of particular areas in Wales. No answer was given - indeed the document stated that no single answer could be applicable in all circumstances. At various points the consultation paper did make reference to the size of the proposed unitary authorities, using phrases such as relatively large or too small but no real explanation was given of what was meant by large or small in this context. The expressed preference for a 20 authority unitary structure with population range of 52,000 to 285,000 offered some guidance on the question of size. The White Paper, Local Government in Wales: a charter for the future (March 1993) paid no attention to the question of size, but once again revealed its approach by commending a 21 unitary authority structure with a population range of 66,700 to 295,400. Four of the 21 proposed authorities had populations below 100,000, two-thirds fall within a band 100,000 to 170,000 and three authorities were over 200,000. As far as it is possible to conclude anything from this diversity it can be argued that 66,700 is the base line for a

viable unitary authority within the new structure. Beyond this there are few clues regarding Welsh Office thinking on size and both documents - the Consultation Paper and the White Paper - are vague on this key issue. What, for example is the rationale for the range of 13 to 24 unitary authorities and the selection of 20 as the optimum number in the Consultation Paper? Again what is the basis, in terms of number and population range, of the White Paper's selection of 21 unitary authorities?

7. In the absence of a cogently argued case on the question of size, the documents placed heavy emphasis on the related concepts of enabling (local authorities identifying requirements, setting priorities and standards, but not directly delivering services) and joint working (local authorities specialising in certain services and the subsequent purchase of services one from another). This would appear to be fine in theory, but the experience of operating any joint service, including the library service, is likely to be fraught with problems. The 1984 and 1986 Review Exercises into district library powers unearthed ample evidence of the difficulties and tensions of joint working. Further, a structure placing heavy reliance on joint working, will almost certainly be a structure characterised by small authorities being forced to purchase services from the large. The concepts of enabling and joint working cannot eradicate the anomalies and inequalities which emanate from size. In the new structure, as in the old, there will be large, well resourced (and often geographically compact) unitary authorities which will be far better placed than their smaller neighbours to meet the challenges of reorganisation.
8. Past attempts at the reorganisation of local government have acknowledged, to varying degrees, the

place and significance of the public library service within that reorganisation process and the right of the library profession to influence that process. In contrast, the post - 1990 reform proposals paid minimal attention to the service. It was not mentioned in the Welsh Consultation Paper; the White Paper devoted four lines to the public library service. Much the same could be said of the policy documents for England and Scotland. The Library Association, and its counterpart organisations in Scotland and Wales attempted to influence policy, but it was clear that any professional response would have to face a fundamental difficulty. How is it possible to argue for the need to maintain large authorities (basically the Library Association stance) without rejecting the whole reform package? There was also a reluctance to accept the inevitability of reform coupled to a mistaken, if natural tendency to protect the status quo. The net result was that policy was shaped and formulated elsewhere with the library profession having to react to that policy.

9. To broaden the discussion on policy formulation, there is little evidence to suggest that there was widespread clamour for the restructuring of local government. The reaction of the public to the proposals for change was either opposition or apathy. A survey undertaken in Wales on the government's reorganisation plans showed that :

47% of the respondents were against the proposals
20% supported the proposals
13% were neutral
20% were don't knows.⁶

To summarise - 80% of those surveyed were either against, neutral or apathetic in their reaction to the proposals for reform. This can hardly be said to align with the government's assertion that there was considerable support in Wales for the reorganisation.

The reaction was similar in England and Scotland. In the local elections held in selected districts in England, Scotland and Wales in May 1994 reorganisation was a non-issue and the campaign centred on party standing and/or the record of individual authorities. If this is so, why has the government moved ahead with its reform proposals? Some answers to that question have been given in the preceding chapter. Beyond that, one fact is clear - the sector which more than any other has driven and accelerated the reform process is the sector which has most to gain from that process - the District Councils of England, Scotland and Wales. Through their professional bodies, most notably the Association of District Councils, this stratum of local government has assiduously presented the case for reform and constantly lobbied for change. The county associations have, like librarians, been pushed into a position of reacting to policy agendas set by others. This again is easy to understand - the counties, basically had nothing to gain from change and all of their arguments were on the last analysis, based on a retention of the status quo.

10. As indicated above, the reform process sought different solutions in England, Scotland and Wales. In England a Local Government Review progressed on an area by area basis and reported to the Local Government Commission, whose recommendations, coupled to a further round of consultation would then form the basis of policy. Scotland and Wales were denied Commissions. The Welsh Office claimed that no Commission was required because Wales was so small. Leaving aside once again what is meant by small in that context, the necessity or otherwise to proceed by means of a public Commission has nothing to do with size. It has everything to do with genuine and open public consultation leading to policy based on expressed need - a much vaunted principle which the

government asserts is central to the whole reform process. The Welsh Office did invite responses to each one of its policy documents and indicated that that response had been substantial (including comments from the Welsh Library Association). Despite all this there is little evidence to suggest that the Secretary of State for Wales amended his proposals in the light of that response. The three stages of policy formulation - Consultation Paper, White Paper and Bill exhibit a continuum of approach and philosophy and the only significant changes (such as the constitution of Merthyr as an unitary authority) were wrested from Government as a result of political pressure at the legislative stage. Welsh reform policy reflected the views of the Secretary of State. This was what the government wanted and this was what the government made sure it got - without recourse to a time-consuming, unpredictable Commission.

11. With no widespread call for change (indeed leading members of the Government itself were vocal in their opposition) it is possible to argue that the whole process of local government reform has evolved into a classic example of policy drift - the survival of a policy initiative beyond the time when there is any real political commitment to it. When one considers that the initial reasons for this swath of reform were for the most part political, one has to ask, if that political commitment has evaporated, what else is left? What is left is a policy which has gained a life of its own, a policy drifting forward by different methods and divergent routes towards its inevitable target of complete reorganisation of local government in England, Scotland and Wales. Within this atmosphere of policy drift the process of reorganisation has become fundamentally flawed because:

- of a distinct lack of clarity and consistency in the guiding principles of the Departmental Reviews in Scotland and Wales and of the Commission in England;
- of an excessive concentration on boundaries, coupled with a tendency to decide on boundaries first and then progress to a consideration of other issues such as service delivery. In this respect the latest proposals for reform have differed little from all previous attempts;
- of a reluctance to rigorously examine the major issue facing the government of local communities: what services can and should be provided at what level, and how precisely to define 'local' services;
- there has been no attempt to link the restructuring of local government with any restructuring of central government, most notably the potential establishment of national assemblies in Scotland and Wales (another failure inherited from the past);
- the process of reform and the ensuing policy has given little or no thought to the essential nature and role of local government and has signally failed to ask (and thus answer) the basic question, what is local government for?

12. Over and above all of this there is a real concern that the reorganisation will lead to a further centralisation of power. An earlier chapter of this study has highlighted the rapid expansion in the power of Quangos in the governance of Wales. The Local Government (Wales) Bill (which received the Royal

Assent on 5 July 1994) contains a substantial body of reserve powers available to the Secretary of State. A possible appraisal of reorganisation in Wales would see the whole process creating 22 small to medium sized unitary authorities increasingly tied to detailed Welsh Office policies. This shift in power in Wales is but one example of the trend which has been astutely described by Anthony Sampson in the quote given at the beginning of this chapter. Sampson goes further and suggests that Britain now stands almost unique among western nations in the weakness of its local government structures and representation. This is a damning indictment, unless of course one accepts that the whole object of the reform exercise is to create small unitary authorities, with few real powers, controlled in all but name by central government.

To summarise at the end - it is possible to suggest that the public library service in Wales has already moved through two stages of development and growth. The first stage saw the adoption of the Library Acts and the take up of powers by a diversity of authorities ranging from the city of Cardiff (1862, population 83,000) to the Civil Parish of Llanuwchllyn (1895 population 1,056). Llanuwchllyn was the first parish authority in Wales to adopt and this largely at the instigation of the noted Welsh educationalist, Sir O M Edwards. The scale of operation and extent of service in Cardiff and Llanuwchllyn were obviously on a vastly different scale. And yet, one must admire the citizens of Llanuwchllyn (that quintessential Welsh community) in their determination to fight off opposition and establish by plebiscite, an independent library service

Every effort has been made to frighten the farmers and labourers, who are many of them poor, about the heavy rates which would be sure to follow. The voters tramped, in some cases, a distance of six or seven miles through snow and bad weather.

A cause of admiration therefore, but this eagerness on the part of small parishes to emulate other better resourced authorities and adopt library legislation, led to what Munford was to refer to as the "seeds of bad development".⁸ It also led to the second stage - a stage of rationalisation and standardisation to secure uniform growth and development. This second stage was characterised by a sequence of investigations into the public library service and the local government structures which underpinned that service. The outcome of those investigations were twofold: the passing in 1964 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act, which as stated, placed a statutory obligation on local authorities to provide a comprehensive and efficient service; and the passing of the 1972 Local Government Act which brought into being the present pattern of library authorities in England and Wales. Section 207 of the 1972 Act also gave the opportunity for the constitution of four (and later five) District Councils as library authorities in Wales. There is some irony that the districts' quest for independence, which has occasioned division and rancour in the library profession in Wales, may in one sense be seen as the precursor of widespread reorganisation with library powers consequently being vested in the 22 unitary authorities. There is further irony that this very reorganisation will bring about the demise of three of the existing five district library authorities.

Within these two stages of development library authorities in Wales and most notably the librarians that they employ have met and responded to different challenges over a period of some 130 years. In the first stage the library service had to be established - often on the basis of meagre resources. The second stage was one of planning and consolidation within larger units to provide a range of rather more sophisticated services. The public library service in Wales now faces a third stage and it is a stage characterised by doubt and uncertainty. Those same

librarians will have to ensure that as little as possible of the growth, development and consolidation of the past is lost as they respond to the challenge of service management and delivery within a totally new unitary authority.

It is strange that at its close, this study can return with some justification to its opening quotation from McColvin, who with some foresight and vision struggled almost single-handedly to plan for the post-war reorganisation of the public library service

the Lord is not on the side of the large armies.
We shall not promote improvement merely by
creating large areas of service.⁹

To paraphrase McColvin, the Lord is no longer on the side of the large armies nor for that matter on the side of small armies. The next round of local government reorganisation all but abandons the concept of large armies and small armies and puts in their place a range of unitary library authorities increasingly governed by the dual principles of enabling and joint working and increasingly controlled by the forces of the market place.

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