

## **REPORT ON THE CONSULTATION ON THE PUBLIC LIBRARY ACCESS SCHEME ON LEGISLATION**

### **Introduction and Background**

In September 2004 Her Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO) consulted on the proposal to remove Public Library Subsidy (PLS) from print legislation. The subsidy is designed to ensure access to official materials. This review was prompted by the shift to online access and changing ways in which users find legislation that is freely available on HMSO's website HMSOnline ([www.hmsso.gov.uk](http://www.hmsso.gov.uk)). The proposals did not affect the annual bound volume services of print legislation which will still attract subsidy. By removing subsidy on legislation in print format, funding would be released that could be used within other Public Access Schemes to improve access to online legislative material reflecting users' requests to upgrade existing online services.

The consultation took the form of a jointly authored article with Howard Picton, Secretary of the Standing Committee on Official Publications (SCOOP) published in Update, the magazine of Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) on 9 September 2004 and on HMSOnline. The consultation period closed on 30 November 2004.

### **Results of the Consultation**

During the consultation period 938 users downloaded the consultation document on HMSOnline and 22,000 copies of Update magazine were circulated to the library community. Suppliers of Public Library Subsidy at source were also briefed. Presentations were made to representatives of SCOOP and the Scottish Working Party on Official Publications (SWOP).

Eight responses to the consultation were received, Annex A details the responses and the points made. In summary:

- Four of the responses were in favour of the proposed changes.
- Three responses had misinterpreted the scope of the changes proposed, believing that the whole Scheme was to be abolished. These received individual responses in explanation.
- One response was against the proposal, stating that smaller libraries had no PC access so their users would not be able to access legislation online.

### **Conclusions**

The consultation exercise attracted significant interest, especially via HMSOnline.

The number of responses received would indicate that of those who read the proposals few had specific comments to make.

### **Recommendations following the Consultations Exercise**

Given that only one response was against the proposed changes it is recommended that:

1. This report is published on HMSOnline and a copy circulated to the Editor of CILIP's Magazine, Update.
2. Subsidy is removed from print legislation that is available on HMSOnline from 1 October 2005 which is the date from which the new legislation contracts, currently being re-tendered, will be operative.
3. All libraries are notified of the change to the Schemes' remit giving them at least 6 months notice of the implementation date.
4. The suppliers providing PLS at source are also notified of the change to the Scheme's remit and are reminded of the changes as October 2005 approaches.
5. A response is sent to the single respondent against the proposal on the issues raised in their response.
6. The funding released (estimated up to £80,000 in a full year) is diverted to enhance and improve online legislation services to meet user demands and to maintain the level of service.

Carol Tullo and Howard Picton  
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Name	Organisation	In Favour of Proposal	Not in Favour of Proposal	Comments
Jenny Mainwaring	Buckinghamshire County Library	Yes		Due to overall budget cutbacks Buckinghamshire County Library has already cut the amount of legislation they purchase by 75%. They can no longer afford to purchase material that is freely available online, although they do now pick up public IT use charges. They are in support of the proposal providing user services are enhanced.
Tola Dabiri	London Borough of Sutton Library Service	Yes		Agree that Legislation should be removed from the PLS scheme as this is available online at no cost. They request the savings made from the withdrawal of legislation should be used to provide better access to educational resources i.e. road maps and citizenship information. They suggested that the removal of subsidy on legislation should be thoroughly researched in each library authority, the public, and library staff to make sure there are no regional or demographic 'pockets' that may become disadvantaged.
Ann Laskey	London Borough of Barking & Dagenham Central Library	N/A	N/A	The representative of this library thought PLS was to be withdrawn completely not just on legislation. When advised of the actual issue no further comments were received.
Pauline Black	Birkenhead Reference Library	N/A	N/A	The representative of this library thought PLS was to be withdrawn completely not just on legislation. When advised of the actual issue no further comments were received.
Mike Dobbing	Doncaster Library	N/A	N/A	The representative of this library thought PLS was to be withdrawn completely not just on legislation. However the response made the following points: large Acts etc take a long time to download and to scroll and view on screen therefore public PCs would be tied up for an unacceptable length of time. He wanted to know how long government information will be available online. Will Government computer space become full up so deletion will be inevitable?
Sue Thomas	St Helen's Council Library	N/A	N/A	St Helen's use the scheme rarely but are active members of LADSIRLAC therefore have a vested interest in Liverpool Central Library who do purchase large amounts of legislation in hardcopy. Access to the material in libraries is dependant to a large extent on the quantity and availability of PCs to the public. They also stated that some customers are unhappy using electronic/online sources. A request for all legislation to be linked into specific topics was requested as well as having it available by year and Statutory Instrument no.
Steve Wood	Birmingham Central Library	Yes		Birmingham Central Library will not be too disadvantaged by the proposed changes, they would however have to alter purchasing patterns and improve access for customers to access online resources. They support the change if it led to substantial enhancements to the HMSOnline service provision mainly legislation being available in PDF format. They requested that PLS was not withdrawn from annual bound volumes

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				as these are key resources and will only be purchased at a subsidised rate. It was stated in their comments that large Acts will still be purchased even if PLS was withdrawn as customers do not wish to access large pieces of legislation online. They also requested that PLS remain on Parliamentary Papers, Bills, select committee reports [these papers are unaffected by the proposals set out in the consultation].
Dr Kay Munro	Convenor of the Scottish Working Group on Official Publications (SWOP)	Yes		Following a meeting, SWOP members had no real objections to the proposed changes. They were concerned about the potential impact on the public library community in Scotland. Members also cautioned against any further withdrawals from a vitally important scheme.