

The LIBRARY *Campaigner*

Supporting friends and users of libraries



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debate and fighting for the future of public libraries...**



SUMMER 2009
No. 78

PRICE £2.00
ISSN 0266-6065

THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN – AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

To advance the lifelong education of the public by the promotion, support, assistance and improvement of libraries through the activities of friends and users groups.



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Thanks to ...

- **Unison**, for its continued and valued support.
- **CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals)** for permission to adapt certain material for this issue from its journal, **Update**.

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Officers and the Executive Committee meet regularly every two months, 1–4pm usually on a Saturday, usually in central London. Campaign members are always very welcome to attend. If you want to come to a meeting contact the Secretary to receive an agenda. We would like to hold more of these meetings in the regions, both to encourage members to come and to help those committee members who have a long journey to London. We have recently met in Lewes, Birmingham and Rotherham. If a local group would like to invite us to meet in their area, we would be delighted to come.

2009 MEETINGS

July 11; September 12; December 12

MEMBERSHIP FORM

I wish to join The Library Campaign and enclose a Cheque/PO for £..... for one year's membership.

Name.....Tel:..... Email

Address.....Post code.....

GIFT AID: I confirm that I am a UK tax payer and pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax at least equal to the tax to be reclaimed in the tax year. I would like my/ our subscription (plus any donation) to be treated as Gift Aid.

Signed..... Date.....

MEMBERSHIP RATES

Individual £15.00 • Concessionary Rate £10.00 • Local Organisation £20.00 • Trade Union Branches £30.00

Local Authorities £200.00 • Company/National Trade Unions £100.00 • Others please write for details

Please make cheques payable to: **The Library Campaign**. It saves a lot of time and money if you pay by Bankers Order. If you are able to do this please fill in the form and return it to us.

BANKERS ORDER FORM

To The Manager.....(Name and address of your bank)

Please pay The Library Campaign (HSBC, Salford University Branch, The Crescent, Salford M5 4PB. 40-40-39, a/c 61277405) the sum of £..... every year starting on (date) until further notice

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Update for 2009

2009 is turning out to be a momentous year for public libraries. The Budget in April made it clear that big cuts in public services won't really happen until after the general election next year. But come they will.

Meanwhile, the recession is proving the worth of public libraries. All over the UK they are (surprise, surprise!) reporting strong increases in usage – ranging from people needing books/computers for job-hunting, to people making the elementary discovery that they can save a fortune by borrowing things.

This forms a powerful context for debate. In the last issue of the *Campaigner* (no 77, winter 2008) we outlined no fewer than three major reviews due this year.

In this issue, we are able to cover Unison's important report (see pages 8-9). Some time soon, the other two should finally appear: in June the official DCMS (Department for Culture, Media & Sport) report on 'modernisation', and in July the unofficial MPs' report on 'leadership and governance'.

But there's more – thanks to library users and campaigners.

In Wirral, the DCMS tried for months to ignore the uproar provoked by mass closure plans. But finally DCMS boss Andy Burnham has given in. He has commissioned an inquiry under the 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act.

This Act has been invoked for years by library campaigners, to no avail. The inquiry report is awaited with great interest – and it, too, is due in June!

Another huge row is going on in Swindon. The council wants to save £92,000 from its £4.5m budget by turning over four (or maybe nine) small branches to be run wholly by volunteers – or else be closed.

Here, a major issue is MLA (Museums, Libraries & Archives Council). The exact role of this government-funded independent advisory body has been rather a mystery for years. It has just re-launched as a more pro-active force, making local visits.

But what's still not clear is – who is it working for? The government? The local council? Local residents?

In Swindon, it advised the council to ignore a report by consultant Tim Coates, which users had wanted considered. To add insult to injury, campaigners say, it is now spending up to £10,000 on more consultants, to do another report! And all this activity has happened behind campaigners' backs...

The full stories in Wirral and Swindon are far more complex than these accounts can show. But they do share one central issue – consultation.

In each case, councils announced really drastic plans, with minimal consultation. Residents have had to fight and fight and fight to get even minimal recognition. Finally, current official plans will amount to getting in outside 'experts' to tell local people if their service is good enough or not.

The Campaigner has fully covered – more in hope than in confident

THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGNER SUMMER 2009, No.78

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expectation – the 'new' systems for local government that are meant to be based in 'community engagement'. Now we see the reality is little changed.

Thanks to all these issues, coverage of public libraries in the press is at a level not seen in years. Library users – and the Library Campaign – must make the most of this spotlight to make their case. Before the real axe falls next year.

RECONVENING OF ADJOURNED ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

SATURDAY 11 JULY 2009 from 2pm

Canterbury Hall, 12-18 Cartwright Gardens, London WC1H 9EE (map on www.halls.london.ac.uk)

ALAN GIBBONS (Campaign for the Book) HAS BEEN INVITED

AGENDA:

- Election of Chair for Campaign AGM
- Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 12 May 2008
- Annual report for the year ended 31 March 2009
- Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2009
- Election of Executive Committee: Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, six Ordinary members (of whom two shall be representatives of local groups.)
- Any other business.

Nominations for elections and items for other business should be sent to the Secretary by 27 June 2009.

It was necessary to reconvene the AGM originally held on 9 May as notice had not been given to all members.

The accounts and annual report will be circulated at the meeting and will be put on the Campaign website (www.librarycampaign.com). Members can also request them from the Secretary if they are not able to attend.

The reconvened AGM will be preceded by a guest speaker. The timing of the afternoon had not been finalised when this notice was written. Any member intending to come just for the AGM is advised to contact the Secretary in advance.

Exclusive preview ...

Lyn Brown MP was a welcome guest at our AGM on 9 May. Her views are not popular with everyone, but she is a real advocate for us in the public library movement. And she gave us an exclusive preview of the preliminary findings of her All-Party Group report. Here are some edited extracts...

Leadership for our library sector is needed now more than ever. Now when more people need their local library service as the recession begins to bite.

I can't be the only person who thinks that at the moment, public library

provision is statutory in name only. There is no definition of what a library is, no regulation to assess, inspect or demand improvement to it.

Public libraries provision and the cultural sector are always a soft target for cuts. And that's because some local

councils simply don't understand the power of what libraries can achieve.

Libraries continually fail to prove their value to our governments and our public. We fail to engage and promote ourselves as a sector. We fail to understand and respond to the real world of political campaigning.

I can't change this reality – not from an all party group – but what I can do is raise possibly uncomfortable truths, campaign to raise libraries' profile and challenge those responsible for its development.

Home from the sea. To what?

As some Campaigners know, I was out of the country from New Year and got back a week or so after Easter. With little access to the UK press and less still to library news, I was uncertain what would greet me on my return.

The answer seems to be more of the same, though there have been some interesting developments – in some or all of which the Campaign is involved.

First, though, what has not happened. The DCMS review of public libraries has not reported. Just before Christmas Kathleen Frenchman, Ron Salmons and I went to see Craig Westwood, the civil servant who heads the DCMS work on libraries. We had a discussion on the 'work streams' of the review and had hoped to put something in writing to support what we said.

Regrettably the preparations for my trip meant that this did not happen. However, we were told that when the report is published there will be a consultation around it, and we will play a part in that.

The other review is that initiated by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Libraries, Literacy & Information. Their focus is on leadership and governance. Lyn Brown (who chairs the group) spoke at the Campaign's AGM. At the time of writing, we are expecting to attend a round table discussion as part of that review.

Meantime, in the real world, a number of things which started to happen last year have got serious – principally the proposed closure of many libraries in the Wirral and four or more in Swindon. We applaud the efforts of those who have been trying to stop those things happening.

The DCMS intervention in the Wirral is also to be welcomed, though it seems to have come rather late. We would especially welcome views from Campaign members and supporters in that area as to what we should say to Sue Charteris, who is conducting that review.

Equally, in Swindon, all sorts of machinations seem to have occurred – including, most recently, the sacking of the councillor whose name was on the closure proposal (albeit he was not sacked for anything to do with libraries).

Just as interesting is the council's way of dismissing the independent report by Tim Coates, followed by the MLA's tender to find another consultant. It would appear that this story has some way to run too.

The last thing I want to highlight is the continued emergence of Alan Gibbons' Campaign for the Book. Alan is a children's author who first came to our notice over the sacking of a school librarian in Chesterfield and attacks on the public library service in Doncaster. As someone local to Wirral, he has been playing a role in that episode too.

On 27 June he is having a conference in Birmingham, which some Campaigners plan to attend, to see if we can forge some working links. You can find Alan at <http://alangibbons.net/> and on Facebook, where there is a Campaign for the Book group.

So the next few months promise to be busy for people in the library world. The Campaign will be part of that. Come to the reconvened AGM (see page 3) and discuss how we can do it. And if you are really (un)lucky you can see my holiday snaps...



*Andrew Coburn
Campaign Secretary*

What is the All-Party Group (APPG)?

It is what it says on the tin – a group of enthusiasts who come together to work upon a common issue. APPGs include members of both the Commons and the Lords, and have officers drawn from across the party spectrum. APPGs have no formal place in the legislature. They meet together in a relatively informal manner.

I was expecting around 25 responses [to our call for evidence]. I was absolutely delighted to receive 58: 30 from local authorities and the remainder from a range of organisations and individuals, including campaign groups.

What are the preliminary findings?

Although there is consensus around a few key points, the views are wide-ranging and at times opposing. Much of the debate – and the devil – will be in the detail.

Overall, far more weaknesses have been highlighted than strengths. Most responses paint a bleak national picture. But a number do highlight that in some areas, the public library service is developing and thriving.

There is broad agreement about three key fundamentals which are seen as non-negotiable: a statutory framework, a service free at the point of delivery and the local authorities as service provider.

As expected, there is a virtually unanimous ‘yes’ to the suggestion that

local communities should have a greater say. Comments include:

- Non-users (and even users) are not informed enough about their local libraries to have a meaningful engagement in decision-making. Customer updates by email and other basic communication tools are still the exception rather than the rule.
- Libraries are perceived as honest brokers and neutral ground. They must avoid one faith, culture or ideology dominating.
- Friends groups are sometimes involved in stock selection, refurbishment planning and staff interviews. (There is, separately, a fear that community ownership is often a result of budgetary constraint. I’ve talked myself of communities set up to fail.)
- Engagement tools cited included residents’ panels, surveys, focus groups, comment cards. Some emerging work involves volunteer groups, a young people’s management board, YouTube, Twitter and mobile phone portals.

Should central government intervene more? The majority view is that intervention by the Secretary of State should be used only in truly exceptional circumstances – but nevertheless is too little used. The definition of ‘comprehensive and efficient’ must be expressed more precisely for the power to be workable. A number of respondents suggested strengthening – or scrapping – this power.

There is a strong view that MLA (Museums, Libraries & Archives Council) is museums-focused and does not have a good record with libraries. A few think it may now be in a position to contribute more effectively to the library agenda, and should be given time. Others think it is too late.

STRENGTHS

- Local democratic accountability
- Best policy fit for local circumstances
- Powers of intervention by Secretary of State
- Strong public support (especially at times of crisis)
- National asset of 4,500 buildings and services
- Helpful, expert staff
- Diversity and innovation

WEAKNESSES

- No coherent national vision or grand plan
- No agreed national offer
- No definition of ‘comprehensive and efficient’ service
- Confusing array of bodies with a role in leading the public library movement
- Few local, and no national, leadership voices
- No co-ordinated programmes for advocacy, marketing or promotion
- Insufficient political and managerial clout at local level
- Loss/lack of standards and inspection regime
- Public Libraries Act requires overhaul
- Division between policy (DCMS) and funding (DCLG)
- Failure by Secretary of State to intervene
- Huge gap between the best and the worst
- Ill-equipped, unhelpful staff (as opposed to the helpful, expert staff in the strengths!)

REQUIREMENTS FOR CHANGE:

- One lead voice for libraries
- A national vision
- Improved marketing and promotion
- A library development agency or similar
- Library policy and funding placed together in a single government department
- Overhaul of the Public Libraries Act and provision of a regulatory framework
- An evidence base to show impact of a good service.

CAMPAIGN FOR THE BOOK CONFERENCE

Birmingham, Saturday, 27th June

Cost: £40, to Campaign for the Book, 13 Chatsworth Ave, Liverpool L9 3AX.

10.30–11am:

Author Celia Rees and school student Charlie Alcock on the importance of reading and writing.

11am–12.30pm:

Question Time with MPs Lyn Brown, Ed Vaizey and Richard Younger Ross (one from each party), plus author Alan Gibbons and Roy Clare from MLA. Chaired by author Steve Skidmore. You can send your questions in advance.

12.30–1.30pm: Lunch

1.30–2.30pm:

The pressures facing public and school libraries. Clare Broadbelt (school librarian made redundant), Cath McNally (Wirral librarian), a representative of Chief Librarians and Alan Gibbons.

How do we lobby and campaign for better services and to protect the ones we already have?

2.30pm to 3.30pm:

Sharing research and good practice on promoting reading.

*what are the factors affecting reading?

*senior management, teachers and librarians working together in schools.

Author Gillian Cross, Miranda McKearney from the Reading Agency, Marilyn Mottram from the UK Literacy Association and Martyn Coles, head teacher, City of London Academy.

3.30–3.45pm: Tea and coffee

3.45–4.45pm: **Workshops**

*Promoting reading nationally (including the Creative Reading Charter)

OR *Promoting school libraries

5–6pm: **Plenary**, with writers Beverley Naidoo and Frank Cottrell Boyce

Co-production – what’s that?

Frontline staff and service users can work together, and deliver the ‘reforms’ that public services really need. In doing so, they could revive the battered values of public life itself. These days, that’s a message that needs to be heard more than ever.

It seems like a heady concept. But to most of us, it’s just common sense. People on the ground can see what improvements are needed. More to the point, things improve automatically when staff and users are able just to get on with it.

Now the idea has a trendy new(ish) name – co-production. Unknown to most of us, this has apparently been a growing buzzword since the 1970s.

And the co-production movement is backed by Unison. Unison is carrying out its own review of the whole public service ethos (see box). It is also backing two new booklets on co-production by other bodies (Labour ginger group Compass and ‘alternative’ economists nef, the New Economics Foundation).

Significantly – at a recent launch event there was a warmly welcomed guest from the Cabinet Office. He was the government’s official ‘lead’ on – co-production! Views seem to be converging...

So what is co-production? Classic examples are patients’ self-help groups and time banks (where members swap

It’s a new way to say what we’ve all known for years... that library users and staff can work in harmony to make real improvements to public services.

free services that can range from baby-sitting to legal advice). The word was coined in the 1970s. The application to neighbourhood libraries is not hard to see.

A central idea is ‘the core economy’ – the vast fund of goodwill and bright ideas at grassroots level. This in reality is what keeps services, families and communities going. Organisations seldom value or use this resource.

Lucie Stephens from nef says: ‘Co-production is not more passive choice. Co-production is action taken. We need to re-focus on the relationships between individual people at the frontline, working as facilitators to release huge assets in the community – skills, talents, networks, social capital, reciprocity.

‘One-way transactions create dependency. But we are redefining work. We all have a role to play in developing solutions. It’s not new. We know people are doing this. Learn from what works.’

Compass argues that the whole concept of public service has been badly battered. Among the harmful pressures on services are: targets set from above, worship of ‘the market’, privatisation, short-term gimmicks, cost-cutting, constant reorganisations, meaningless ‘consultation’ and managers who don’t listen.

Users are treated as mere consumers of ‘choices’ provided from above. Staff are not seen as having any active role in reform.

Matthew Horne, the Cabinet Office ‘lead’ on co-production, says: ‘Government can’t impose or legislate for co-production. But it can do quite a lot to hinder it...

‘I’m fairly certain the government could do more – for instance, foster more collaborative relationships between people who work in and people who use public services.’ Funds, he said, should be devolved to the lowest possible level, with maximum autonomy.

Of course, working like this is not all plain sailing. Staff can disagree with users. Users can disagree with other users! Sharing power with users is a big change for some staff. And talk of ‘collaboration and empowerment’, says Compass, will seem pretty idealistic in some places, with ‘demoralised public servants struggling to maintain minimal service levels.

QUOTES from UNISON: Unison’s own vision is in tune with libraries’ moves to become ‘the heart of the community’. Adequate funding, decent working conditions and managers who respect their staff are also needed to make co-production work, it adds.

‘Unison’s agenda is: involving users and communities as much as we can; empowering public service workers to respond and deliver; building public capacity to deliver joined-up solutions; finding the resources to meet individual and social needs.’

‘Public services only exist because ordinary people campaigned for them and continue to defend and support them. And public services in turn give people the knowledge, skills, capacities and opportunities they need to play their part as active citizens.’

‘Today it is more important than ever that we engage citizens and communities in the development of our public services. This is partly because, rightly, members of the public expect to be respected and given a say about the services they receive.’

‘But it is also because public service workers need the active co-operation of everyone if they are to change lives and society for the better.’

‘For people to have meaningful control over their lives and the services they receive, they need the support of skilled, committed public service workers, working within effective and responsive systems.’



Shaping the Future: Unison’s vision for public services
For information or to feed in opinions: 020 7551 1114; positivelypublic@unison.co.uk

Library users will be aware of another danger outlined by Compass: 'The language of co-production could be used to cut back public services further, shifting burdens and risks on to

vulnerable individuals or volunteers.' Neal Lawson of Compass says: 'Co-production is not a panacea. This is the start of a debate.'

All the same, it's good to know that the

simple idea of staff and users working together – like...er... Friends – has a pedigree. And that it is not just fashionable these days, it is being taken a bit seriously by government.

QUOTES from COMPASS: Compass sees co-production as a practical way to 'overcome the sense of disconnection that has proved so problematic for the politics of public service renewal'.

'Co-production is simply the recognition that services can be, and are, modernised and reformed every day through the interaction of staff and users. It is already happening and working in thousands of places – only it is hardly ever recognised, rewarded or replicated.'

'Co-production happens naturally. All that is needed now is a context in which it can happen more often, in more places.'

'As we enter a period of threatened economic downturn where investment in public services is being squeezed, it has never been more urgent to strengthen their intrinsic values, and the social and the political alliances that can sustain them.'

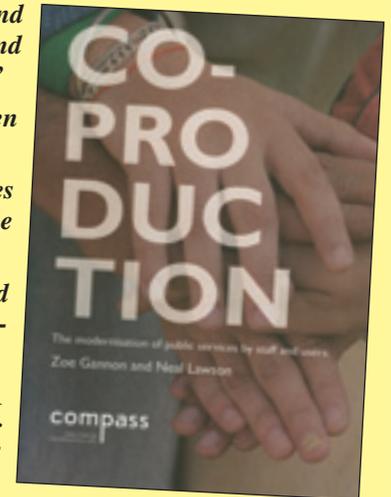
'A massive failure of the past 10 years has been the damage done to staff morale and commitment. Job satisfaction declined when trust was removed through target- and market-led agendas.'

'Privatisation and marketisation have weakened our most valuable institutions. A preoccupation with market transactions, and an assumption that service is only provided for profit, undermines the values that are essential to a healthy society. It undermines social networks, our sense of solidarity and our desire to support each other.'

'It is increasingly recognised that wellbeing is not associated with consumption but with relationships. Co-production forges relationships between people and expands the opportunities open to them, improving not only the services but the lives of all those involved through the experiences it gives and the social networks it builds.'

'Work patterns and central controls often get in the way of the flexibility, resources and skills front-line staff need to extend and deepen the essential relationship they have with users and communities. It is this alliance between public servants and members of the public that will provide the strongest and most durable basis for effective, responsive and popular public services.'

Co-production: the modernisation of public services by staff and users, Zoe Gannon and Neal Lawson, Compass



QUOTES from nef: nef traces the development of the co-production concept and its growing relevance to today's public services – and the role of professionals working in them.

'First comes a rejection that money and market price is the sole acceptable measure of value. [For instance] time-banking rejects price, valuing all hours equally. From that, it follows that co-production need not, and cannot, be limited to the labour wanted by professionals to make their human service delivery systems work better.'

'The reason today's problems seem so intractable is that public services, and autocratic management systems, have become blind to the most valuable resource they possess: their own clients and the neighbourhoods around them. When these assets are ignored or deliberately sidelined, they atrophy.'

'The point is not to consult more, or involve people more in decisions. It is to encourage them to use the human skills and experience they have to help deliver public or voluntary services... broadening and deepening public services so that they are no longer the preserve of professionals or commissioners, but shared responsibility.'

'Front-line staff are essential to delivery and empowerment. Their morale is as important as client morale.'

'Co-production demands that public service staff shift from fixers who focus on problems to enablers who focus on abilities... This is a challenge to the way professionals are expected to work and to policy-makers who are setting targets as indicators of success. It also helps to explain why things currently don't work.'

'By shifting professional practice in this way, the basic objective shifts as well. Delivering public services ceases to be merely about tackling symptoms and immediate needs. It depends on reaching out into surrounding neighbourhood to build the social networks that can tackle the underlying causes and increase the capacity of the core economy.'

Co-production: a manifesto for growing the core economy, foreword by Professor Edgar Cahn



Unison calls for united defence of libraries

Last December saw the launch of a new Unison report.¹ It was commissioned last spring – well ahead of the two reviews now being conducted (by the government and by MPs – see page 3). Given the events of 2009 (so far), the report seems even more relevant today.

The report outlines a six-point plan (see panel) that most people will support – at least in principle. And it sets out to show why – in practice – the answer is proper public funding.

‘One of the great strengths of the library service, and a source of the trust with which it is regarded in the community, is that it is not a commercial service. Public libraries are an integral part of local public services and should remain so,’ says the report.

Now, public libraries are needed more than ever. The network of local branches is ‘a priceless – if underused – link with the communities that elected members serve’.

The core argument is that public libraries are a public good, and a success. They are more popular than football or films. In their 150-year history they have forged ahead when decently funded, and held their ground pretty well when starved.

However, the sustained Conservative attack in 1979-97 has had long-term effects. Councils have usually preserved the basic public libraries structure – but undermined it with constant cuts in stock, hours, décor and staff quality. The resulting vicious circle has yet to be reversed.

New Labour continues the Conservatives’ love affair with the private sector. Could councils be pressured to bring in outside bodies to run their libraries? As public funds

Everyone must come together to defend public libraries, says Unison. It sees two clear dangers in 2009 – cuts, and bringing in the private sector.

plummet, Unison expects to see the dust-sheets come off a 2006 report² about the local services ‘market’, produced for the government by consultants PwC.

Unison strongly criticises PwC’s findings. At best, the case PwC makes for change is complicated and vague, says Unison. In fact, where the report mentions the benefits, it describes them, pretty weakly, as ‘potential’ – 62 times...

Unison’s report is a good read, mercifully short and clear. It is based on a long list of existing research results.

It discusses some familiar problems – public libraries’ fragmented structure, the lack of national standards, failure to demonstrate their deep social value.

And it does an elegant demolition job on private finance initiatives (PFIs). Briefly summarising a lot of research, it finds that evidence of benefit is ‘less than conclusive’.

The report also lists widespread instances of the down-grading of skilled staff. This is ‘short-sighted’, it says. Current staff – and union members – are not old-fashioned or anti-change. Where problems arise, the answer is to reverse the cuts in in-service training. Perhaps staff and library schools could discuss some changes in basic training, too.

Meanwhile, good people won’t want to work in public libraries in a climate of

What next?

The report was officially launched at the House of Commons, with education secretary Ed Balls as a speaker. A wide range of public library bodies were invited.

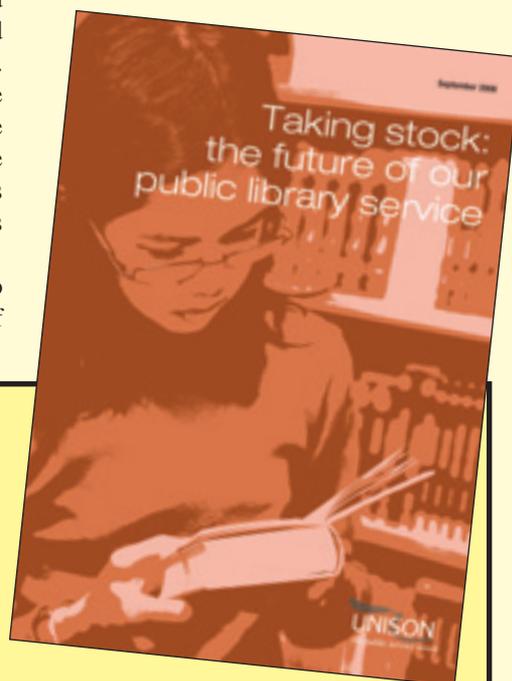
They were told: ‘We are not looking for confrontation. This is an agenda where all of us can work in partnership. This is not just a Unison campaign. It needs a strong coalition.’

‘And we don’t want the status quo. But best practice is not currently being shared. Some services are fabulous but nobody knows about them.’

‘The recession is also an opportunity to re-assess. The underclass is being left behind in a market-driven economy. Libraries help redress the balance.’

‘We need to raise the profile of public libraries with local communities – the people who know how good they are. If we get their support, we can and will succeed.’

‘low pay, uncertainty, the undermining of the public service ethos and staff cuts’, Unison says.



REFERENCES

- 1 *Taking Stock: the future of our public library service*
An independent report for Unison by Steve Davies, Senior Research Fellow, Cardiff School of Social Sciences. www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/17301.pdf
- 2 *Developing the Local Government Services Market to Support Long Term Strategy for Local Government*
PwC. www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/developinglocal

Are libraries seen as a soft touch for cash-strapped councils?

UNISON has always seen publicly-funded libraries as essential to the social, education, cultural and economic well-being of local communities throughout the UK.

People of all ages and backgrounds can visit libraries to read and borrow books, while children and young people take part in story time and homework clubs.

Many people have access to the internet and can borrow CDs and DVDs. Local community groups use libraries to organise events such as exhibitions and courses. Students find libraries and library staff supportive in their studies and research.

Tighter resourcing within local government continues to put pressure on libraries, which are seen as a minor activity by many local authorities.

It is easy to see, when budgets are cut, why care of the elderly and similar groups are seen as priorities that must be properly funded – if necessary at the expense of libraries.

However, communities are just as passionate in their fight against cuts to elderly services as they are about losing their local libraries. This is why Unison is delighted that the Secretary of State, Andy Burnham, has called for an Inquiry into the planned closures and cuts to services and, in particular, libraries in the Wirral (see page 3). It may be that other authorities considering closures or cuts may be wary of

Marian Boston explains why Unison feels it's time for everyone to come to the aid of public libraries.



so doing once the outcome of the Inquiry is known.

Behind all the facts and figures about library cuts, budgets and poor resourcing stands an army of dedicated and professional library workers, most of whom are represented by the public sector union Unison.

Unison is stepping up the campaign to maintain and improve the service both for users and the workers within it. Unison knows that improvements are needed – but not at the expense of the traditional services, including the staff providing them, who are so highly valued by local communities.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Libraries, Literacy & Information Management – under the guidance of Lyn

Brown MP – asked Unison to submit a response, along with other stakeholders, to its Inquiry into the Governance and Leadership of the Public Library Service in England.

Unison, in its evidence, drew attention to the lack of training, de-skilling and de-professionalisation of staff, and to our six-point plan for a publicly-funded library service fit to serve the needs of communities in the 21st century.

Marian Boston is Unison's Assistant National Officer, Local Government Service Group. She is a regular observer at the Library Campaign's planning meetings.

Unison is now contacting a broad coalition of groups and organisations who share a common desire to ensure that a library service continues, improves and develops in local communities. These include the British Library, the Women's Library, the Association of Senior Children's & Education Librarians and – of course – the Library Campaign.

Unison's 6-point plan

- 1 Adequate resources for services, staff & premises** – including bookstock, convenient opening times.
- 2 Empowerment of staff & communities to shape services together** – 'Libraries rest on a bed of goodwill from local communities.'
- 3 Partnership between libraries & councils to share information/good practice** – the goal is innovative delivery 'within a publicly accountable framework'.
- 4 Responsiveness to library users from all backgrounds** – the 'very best' services already 'reflect the society they serve'.
- 5 Staff training & professional development** – library skills (at all levels) should be valued, enhanced and made fully relevant.
- 6 Since the report was published, Unison has added a call for a sort-out at national level** – 'Improved cross-governmental co-ordination and partnership, working between central and local government to define objectives and standards and requisite funding for the library service.'

Volunteers: how can they help?

Volunteers make sense

More councils are turning to the idea of getting volunteers to help run libraries. A new project in London works well – with support, reports Patricia Richardson of LLL (Libraries for Life for Londoners).

LLL visited Woodberry Down Community Library, at the Robin Redmond Resource Centre, Hackney, in September 2008. This is an example of the borough's Satellite Library Service and is entirely volunteer-run. It is a prototype for Hackney's service, but its success means the idea may be extended to other needy areas in the borough. LLL felt that a visit would lift the cloud hanging over the idea of a volunteer library.

We were made very welcome by Ted Rogers, Hackney's Head of Libraries, Archives & Information, along with John Holland, the Operations Manager, who is responsible for service delivery.

They were well-prepared, frank and open about what had happened and how they had dealt with the inevitable pitfalls that occur with any new venture. There were also positive and optimistic results.

There had been a library at the Centre until 1996. Hackney Council fell on hard times. This led to its closure, together with several others in the borough. At the time, residents occupied the building for

several weeks to express their strong disapproval.

This severe rationalisation left seven static libraries in the borough. Recently, improvements have been made to the surviving libraries. Four of them now offer 63+ hours per week. In fact, visitor figures are up 20% since 1993 and issues are also up. But in Woodberry Down there was a low level of library membership/usership.

Woodberry Down is a municipal estate built just after World War II, with 10,000 residents. Sadly it is an area of deprivation and unemployment. Although Hackney is not a large borough, this section is somewhat cut off. Its closest static libraries are in Islington and Haringey. Transport links do not easily lead to libraries in the borough, and there are few local shops.

With regeneration investment available, a population increase expected and demographic changes linked to a mix of social/owned housing, the council was looking at services with fresh eyes. A survey was conducted to identify local needs. In Woodberry Down, libraries came third on the list.

The government is encouraging local authorities to 'outsource' services, to be run by 'the community'. As cash cuts bite, more and more library services are looking to volunteers to help stretch budgets further. Here we highlight two new volunteer schemes that give vital support to cash-strapped library services. In each case, they staff a library that would not otherwise be open. They are different in very many ways. But they have one thing in common: volunteers are fully supported by the library service, and they are not doing work that would otherwise be done by paid library staff.

The Library Development Strategy identified the need but not the money. (Fortunately there was funding for a new library near Dalston station (3,500 m²). Clapton library has undergone development/extension. These will be stand-alone libraries, but other compatible uses are envisaged for them.)

Woodberry Down Community Library, entirely run by volunteers, opened in March 2007 with 4,400 items in stock. Now, how did they do that? By using a window of opportunity!

The project has strong political support within the council. The officers formulated the concept of a community-led library, run by volunteers, owned by the community and requiring only low revenue expenditure.

Hackney Homes (an ALMO) now owns the Robin Redmond Resource Centre. This looked ideal. Funding was



VOLUNTEERS • VOLUNTEERS • VOLUNTEERS

Volunteer recruitment was initially approached on the estate by:

- 1 Advertising in the local press.**
- 2 Leafletting**
- 3 Local meetings – about a dozen attended each meeting. People were very keen.**

The staffing was planned according to the response.

gained by putting in a bid that emphasised the potential cultural, educational, health and employment benefits. SRB [regeneration] funding came up with £61,000 to set up the library, and there was match-funding of £10,000 pa from revenue, for rental and future stock.

The designated room was fitted out. £28,000 was spent on stock to provide a general collection for adults and children. There are no ESOL items (although these do exist at other libraries).

In November 2007 the library moved into a larger space, with increased stock and extra computers. Just as in any Hackney library, these are fully linked to the full Hackney library and information service. Hackney is part of the London Libraries Consortium. RFID [radio frequency identification, enabling self-service book issues] is on the cards, which will help with staffing.

By last September there were 600 registered users, covering a good cross-section of the community. The library is particularly favoured by children and members of the Turkish community. In the latest CIPFA [user satisfaction] survey, 76% of the children gave it a good approval rating.

In 2007-08 there were 24,000 visitors, with 5,200 issues. This success has led to thoughts of a purpose-built facility as part

of the regeneration programme – still volunteer-based but more central based and with a higher profile.

It is recognised that the council is not set up to accommodate volunteers. However, one man-day per week is allotted to an outreach officer post to organise the rota and deal with questions, needs and problems. John explained that the library operates with a pool of 15-20 volunteers.

Of the two people on duty at each session, one must be experienced. Rotas are arranged a fortnight in advance but, of course, gaps may occur and this may lead to closure. To increase options, the catchment area has been widened and use of the Hackney Voluntary Service has been included.

Volunteer means volunteer. THERE IS NO PAY, and seldom any expenses. A volunteer's level of commitment has to be high, and is crucial to success. Volunteer fatigue seems to be a known condition.

Potential volunteers are assessed from the point of view of their skills, commitment, temperament, underlying skills and confidence.

A good spin-off – but unfortunate for the volunteer pool – is that some volunteers move on to permanent jobs, quite a few within the library world. As skills-building and work experience are an integral part of the operation, this onward movement to better things will continue remorselessly.

Training comprises a morning and an afternoon spent in one of the local

libraries. There are also various in-service days and day releases to the library service. A great deal of learning occurs on the job. But the job is more limited than that of the average working librarian – dealing with issues, returns, taking fines and fees. A direct line to a range of support is provided from Stamford Hill, Stoke Newington and Shoreditch libraries.

Both John and Ted felt they had learned a great deal while working through this process. But they were aware of unresolved issues that would need to be resolved! Anyone considering volunteers has to be aware that they may feel isolated, and may need more support than may first be apparent.

It was made quite clear that this project was not intended to take the jobs of professional, qualified staff. The officers accepted that otherwise no library facility would exist at all, and the residents of Woodberry Down would still be excluded. This way, users actually get into the library world. The project has had positive spin-offs and other employment benefits for the volunteers.

Finally, the young woman on duty was asked by LLL why she volunteered. Her answer is a lesson in itself. She had used the original Woodberry Down library when she had been a young girl, and she wanted to ensure it was there for others.

Patricia Richardson is Minutes Secretary, Libraries for Life for London. Information on LLL: www.librarylondon.org

OPENING HOURS:

- **Weekend operation was found to be impossible and, anyway, the Centre itself is closed at weekends.**
- **There are 2 sessions a day, Monday to Friday, 9.30am–1pm and 2–5pm.**
- **There are 2 evening sessions Tuesday and Thursday, 5–7pm.**
- **Two people are on duty, plus the receptionist at the Centre. Users are 'buzzed' in. The Centre also operates its own health and safety rules.**

THANKS, CARL!

Carl Clayton of northern libraries group Sinto is our hero. Carl recently held a screening of a US film that's doing the rounds (among librarians, anyway). *The Hollywood Librarian* is a mix of clips from old movies and interviews with modern-day librarians. He says it 'went very well. We raised £400. Sheffield Hallam University has waived the room hire fee but charged us £100 for cleaning the room! (If I had known I would have gone round with a broom myself). That means £300 to divide between Sinto and the Library Campaign.' Many thanks, Carl ...

Volunteers can't do it alone

'The Dorset model' is sometimes suggested as the way to keep small local library services running, staffed wholly by volunteers, for multiple hours every week.

Such an arduous undertaking is far removed from the reality of the Dorset model. Here, with the support and encouragement of our county council, Friends groups in both Puddletown and Burton Bradstock (villages of about 1,000 people) have taken over merely four hours a week.

This is on a voluntary, unpaid basis – in both cases supplying less than half the hours that the two branches are open. Thus we still have the help and guidance of library staff for more than half our total hours of opening.

To do this, the county library service staged a comprehensive training programme for about a dozen members of the Friends groups from each of the two villages. In both, volunteers have for seven months been keeping their libraries open, without supervision, using two volunteers for each session.

The background is that Dorset County Council, faced with the need to save money on its library service, contemplated closing 13 of the smallest of its 34 branches. There was such an outcry, even from people who didn't use the libraries but were fed up with the decimation of rural services, that the councillors lost their nerve and opted for an across-the-board reduction in hours.

This was, from the perspective of the smaller communities, a better bet. But it still led to what we saw as unacceptable cuts. Here in Puddletown, for example, our library would have been reduced to six hours opening a week. We foresaw that the council could then use the inevitably reduced usage as the next stick with which to beat us... and could move to close us

**'Get volunteers to run it!'
Is this the answer to
providing small
community libraries? Mike
Chaney, chair of a
successful new volunteer
scheme in Dorset, sounds
a warning...**

again. So we resolved to keep to the previous opening hours by voluntary effort.

The new dual system came into force at the beginning of November 2008. As the co-ordinator as well as the chairman, I haven't had one complaint or one instance of crying off – and certainly no loss of enthusiasm.

Quite the reverse, as we are taking on new projects – from sessions exclusively

for pre-school groups (a local parent-run group for pre-school children now spend an hour in the library once a fortnight) to plans to teach computing to library users so far unable to take advantage of the two terminals in our library (see panel).

Although we do our best, we are conscious that there are questions we cannot answer and procedures we cannot undertake, so we leave details for our librarian to clear up next time the branch is open. We do not like having to tell people that they'll have to come back in two days' time, but it is occasionally necessary.

So far our library users have been gratifyingly tolerant, but there is no doubt that both villages still rely on professional input for their libraries to function effectively.

There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that the Friends groups in Dorset could not contemplate shouldering the burden of supplying much more than the four hours of opening they at present provide.

It would, in my judgement, require at least 60 trained volunteers to undertake the 18 hours of opening a week which Swindon council, for instance, is suggesting could be provided by volunteers at one small branch that it plans otherwise to close. And furthermore you would then still lack the professional input we so much depend on here.

The 'Dorset model' is, at best, an aid to keeping small branches open: it is not a wholesale take-over of those branches' duties.

And this gift of labour does raise other issues that, as a retired lifelong trade unionist, cause me some anxiety. If we can supplement the paid work of librarians, how long will it be before other cash-strapped councils will be expecting their citizens to work unpaid – to dispose of their rubbish, say, or keep their streets clean?

Mike Chaney is Chair of Friends of Puddletown Library, Dorset.



Mick Oddy (left) and Bill Maunder re-painted the shabby library lobby over the Easter bank holiday. A third FoPL member (who wants to remain anonymous) has offered to pay for the paint.

Libraries change lives!

One of the highlights of the library year is the **Libraries Change Lives Award**, run by CILIP, the professional association of librarians. It highlights what good public libraries can do for all kinds of people.

The award was established in 1992, and is organised by CILIP's Community Service Group. Previous winners have gone on to become important national projects. These include Bookstart (which gives books and a lot more to small pre-school children) and Book Share (which gets people in prison reading stories on tape to send to their children, helping to keep families together).

The quality of entries was higher than ever this year, say the judges for the 2009 award. The winning project receives a trophy

and £5,000 prize money. The two runners-up both receive a cheque for £2,000.

The winner will be announced on 15 July at CILIP's *Umbrella 2009* conference by Andrew Motion, just retired as Poet Laureate and now Chair of MLA (Museums, Libraries & Archives Council).

From 26 library-based entries, three very different projects were shortlisted. Above all, they highlight the sheer flexibility of public libraries – ranging from a very personal service for special needs families in their own neighbourhoods, to a national scheme that is using glossy publicity and books to make reading attractive to adults who struggle with it.

The Edinburgh Reading Champion Project: City of Edinburgh Council

This innovative city-wide initiative encourages reading for pleasure amongst children/ young people in residential care. These children have disability or communication problems, have experienced serious neglect or abuse, are excluded from school or present very challenging behaviours. Reading can improve their self esteem, educational achievement and sense of attachment to society.

The project employs a Reading Champion to develop 'bespoke' reader development programmes with looked-after children, carers, library staff and other partners. A central aim is to convince all staff on the relevance of reading for this group. The long-term aim is to effect 'cultural change' in which care and library staff promote reading as normal activity in all centres.

The development plan has had measurable outcomes. These include: more looked-after children reading for pleasure; more confidence in using libraries and bookshops; imaginative staff training; promotions and events; strong partnership working / sharing of resources. This type of work – and the impact on people's lives – is often long term, Edinburgh points out.



Sustainable support for Autistic Spectrum Disorders: Leeds Library & Information Service

About 300 families in Leeds have children with ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorders), including Asperger syndrome.

Another 25 pre-schoolers are diagnosed each year. These children have difficulty with social interaction, which can cause unpredictable behaviour. Their parents may not see libraries as a natural venue where they could come for information, advice or guidance.

Leeds libraries are working with Stars, specialists in autism and speech and language therapy, to change that perception. The project began after a parent requested Boardmaker software – a

picture tool that can enable parents and autistic children to communicate.

Under the ‘sustainable services and support’ scheme, families are assured that ASD and its problems are understood and accepted by library staff. Staff are supportive, offer practical help and run monthly advice sessions in partnership with the Stars team. Boardmaker software is freely available, and the books that Stars recommend are available from any of the 53 libraries in Leeds, supplementing the general collection on ASD.



The Six Book Challenge: The Reading Agency

This new annual scheme encourages adult ‘emergent readers’ to read for pleasure. If they read six books and record their reading in a diary, they are rewarded with incentives and a certificate. Sponsored by Costa Coffee at national level, the scheme is delivered locally by library services, working with partners such as FE colleges, prison education and trade unions.

Libraries play a central role: supplying appealing books, reaching out to participants, celebrating their achievements and helping them sustain their reading habit. Services featured in this application include Staffordshire, West Sussex, Warrington, Sheffield, Renfrewshire and the Western Education & Library Board, Northern Ireland.

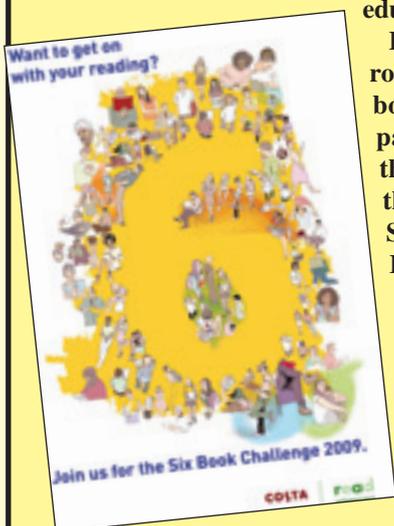
In all, 145 UK library authorities bought Six Book Challenge materials for 2008, and 152 (72 per cent) to date have done so for 2009. Most use the established Quick Reads series, specially published for less confident adult readers.

The Six Book Challenge has achieved its two main goals: to give participants positive experiences of reading; and to enhance literacy skills – in particular, though not exclusively, those related to reading for understanding, and those related to communication.

Website: www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk



Author Mike Gayle, patron of the Six Book Challenge.



More than ever, library users need to be informed! This FREE show – Birmingham NEC, 10-11 June – is a unique chance to check out new products, books and ideas, and quiz the people behind them. Plus free seminars for even more inside knowledge...



The Library Show
10-11 June 2009
Pavilion, NEC, Birmingham

In 2009 there are **over 120 exhibitors** – covering everything from RFID (self-service) to library design. The website or the free print catalogue (on arrival) will help you plan your fact-finding mission.

Independent publishers have their own IPG ‘village’, there’s also a mainstream **Publishers Zone** and three guest authors are speaking (and signing their latest books...).

Library users can expect to deal with some big ideas this year. Some services will argue that branches can be replaced with a mobile library, or staff with self-service. Some will propose huge ‘iconic’ new buildings, others will say they can’t afford the slightest upgrading of premises...

So you’ll want to see some of the new features this year. On show is a mobile library – beautifully decorated, it represents state of the art technology and an imaginative approach to serving communities. And there’s a display of photos and models of **new libraries**, planned or recently built.

Technology has its own theatre, with presentations from exhibitors including the latest on RFID. And there’s a special **Library Marketplace** – for the smaller, innovative library suppliers, with products on display ranging from storytellers to income-raising merchandise.

PLUS – OF COURSE, THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN’S STAND. COME AND CHAT! Information: www.lishow.co.uk

FREE SEMINARS: For full, up-to-date details, see the website. First come, first served. A variety of topics are covered, including school libraries. On public libraries, here are our tips for 2009...

WEDNESDAY 10TH, THEATRE 1

MLA (Museum, Libraries & Archives Council) – Future Direction. 10:35am

Roy Clare is Chief Executive of advisory body MLA (Museums, Libraries & Archives Council). After a year drastically reorganising, MLA is all set to... do what? Roy, with senior colleagues, will lead a presentation and discussion on MLA’s new role in public libraries – which is already proving controversial...

Bridging the Gap: young people with learning difficulties. 12:35pm

Judy Goodson, Staffordshire’s Principal Librarian (Books, Reading & Learning) describes a project that worked with a range of statutory and voluntary agencies to support these young people as they leave school.

Birmingham’s new library. 1:35pm

Brian Gambles, Birmingham’s Assistant Director, Culture, introduces the planned £193m new Library of Birmingham, which will ‘redefine the possibilities of the library in the 21st century’.

Fresh start - new approaches to the mobile library. 2:35pm

Ayub Khan, Warwickshire’s Head of Libraries (Strategy), and Janet Everett, Mobile & Community Services Manager, show how the much-maligned mobile library can be transformed in to an award-winner, using innovative technology to deliver 21st century services to both urban and rural communities.

WEDNESDAY 10TH, THEATRE 2

‘Say again?’ 10.20am

Amanda Crump, Co-Director, Action Deafness Books, explains how libraries can be made truly accessible to deaf and hard of hearing people.

The digital future for libraries. 11.20am

The ‘digital revolution’ offers all libraries major opportunities – but challenges, too. Dame Lynne Brindley, Chief Executive of the British Library, explains what the BL is doing to ‘remain relevant, innovative and accessible’.

Twitter for librarians. 12.20pm

Phil Bradley, internet consultant/librarian, explains how Twitter, the micro-blogging service, has ‘exploded into the library world’ in 2009. It’s surprisingly useful, he swears...

User power: creating library services with readers. 3.15pm

Miranda McKearney, Director, The Reading Agency, is always a tonic to see. This year her subject is of crucial interest to library Friends and users – how can we be really involved in shaping the reading services we want? Innovation comes with user power, including volunteering, says Miranda.

THURSDAY 11TH, THEATRE 1

Libraries, learning and the BBC. 11.35am

There’s a natural affinity between public services in libraries and broadcasting. The BBC has worked with public libraries for years on major educational projects. Judith Nichol, Partnership Manager, BBC Knowledge, talks about the BBC’s ambitions – and constraints.

Making the most of your primary school library. 1.35pm

From the reading charity Booktrust Allison Judge, Project Manager of Everybody Writes, and Madelyn Travis, Children’s Literature Consultant, outline research into primary school libraries provision and explore how Booktrust resources can help support reading for pleasure in primary schools.

THURSDAY 11TH, THEATRE 2

Getting social and interactive with reading. 3.15pm

Ruth Harrison, Senior Project Manager, The Reading Agency, says that libraries can harness social media to promote reading. A new networking website for young people (13-18) helps young people engage with reading and advises professionals working with them.

AUTHOR VISITS

Mike Gayle. Wednesday 10th, Theatre 2, 1.20pm

Best seller Mike’s new book, *The To-Do List*, is his first non-fiction. It follows 52 weeks tackling a 1,277-item ‘to do’ list! Mike has also worked as a journalist, reviewer, agony uncle and features editor for *Just 17* magazine.

David Calcutt Thursday 11th, Theatre 1, 2.35pm

Playwright, poet, author, director and storyteller turned children’s author, David introduces his new novel *Shadow Bringer*, a tense psychological thriller ‘with echoes of Stephen King’s *It*’. It tells of a boy’s struggle to face the emotions he wishes he didn’t have – anger, fear, and the pain of loss – made manifest in a terrifying, shifting form...

Lindsey Davis Thursday 11th, Theatre 2, 1.20pm

Lindsey is author of the best-selling Falco novels. Her new book, *Alexandria*, sees our hero swapping the splendour of Ancient Rome for the mysteries of Roman Egypt. Lindsey has written 19 novels, is past Chair of the Crimewriters’ Association, a Vice-President of the Classical Association, and has won the CWA Ellis Peters Historical Dagger, the Dagger in the Library and a Sherlock award.



www.lishow.co.uk
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