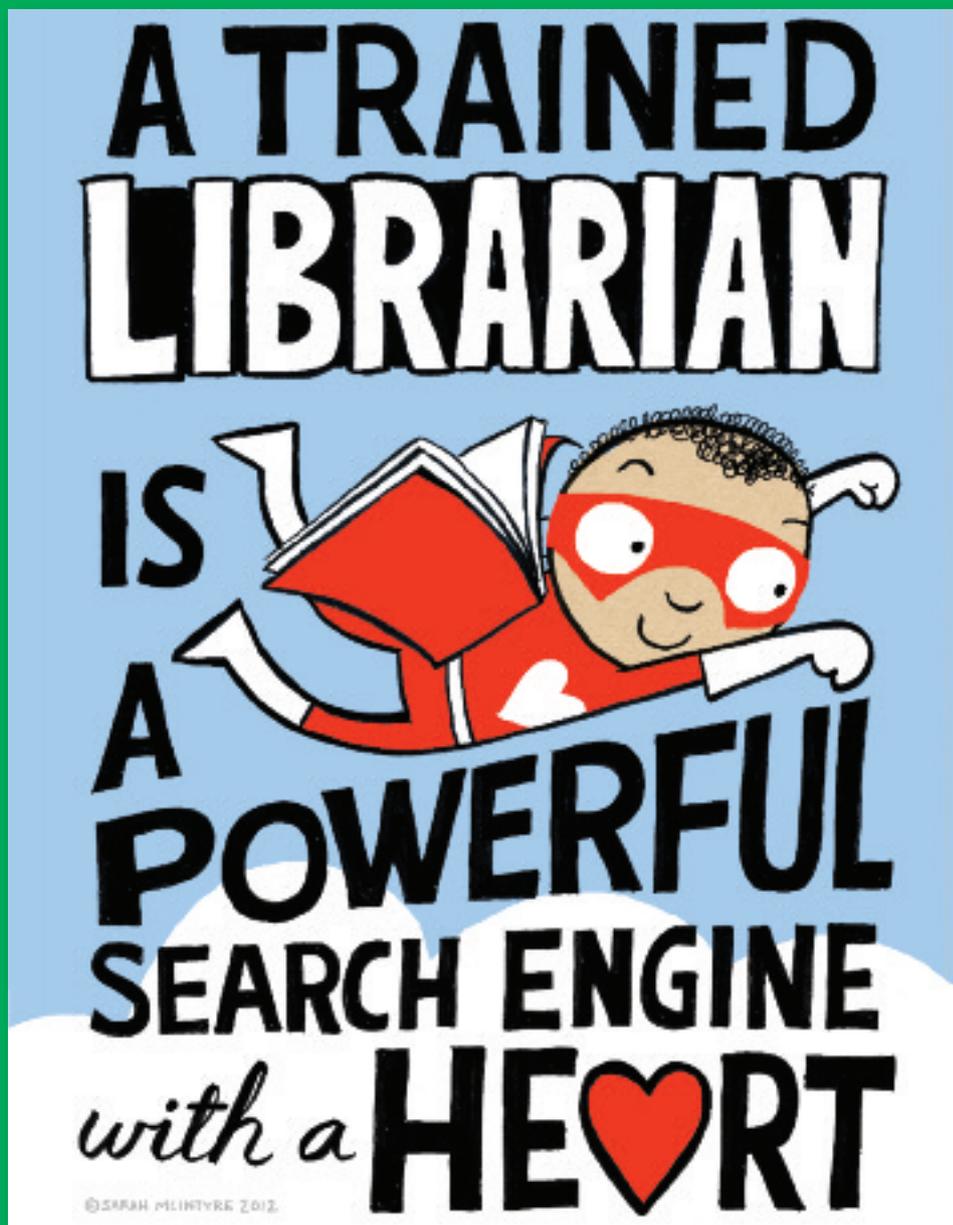


LIBRARY CAMPAIN

SUPPORTING FRIENDS AND USERS OF LIBRARIES

**WE
DON'T
WANT
DIY
LIBRARIES!**



SPRING 2013
No. 86



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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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The following organisations send representatives to attend steering group meetings:

Unison,

Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals (CILIP),

Association of University Teachers,

University of the Third Age.

JOIN US!

It costs you little. It makes
library users much stronger.

Our membership form is on
page 12. Get extra (and larger)
copies at:

[www.librarycampaign.com/
join-the-library-campaign/](http://www.librarycampaign.com/join-the-library-campaign/)

Queries: 020 8651 9552 or
thelibrarycampaign@gmail.com

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.

2013 MEETINGS:

Saturdays: 16 March, 18 May (AGM),
13 July, 21 September, 16 November.

WHO'S WHO?

Quick guide to some of the many things relevant to libraries ...

1964 Act (Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964) says all local authorities have a statutory duty to provide a public library service, which must be 'comprehensive and efficient' and available to all who wish to use it. Libraries are NOT optional. It gives the Secretary of State power to enquire – and intervene – if standards fall short. These powers have barely been used.

ACE (Arts Council England) now has 'responsibility for supporting and developing libraries'. As yet unclear what that means in practice.

CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals): the professional body for librarians in all types of library.

CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy) collects figures on library performance and on user satisfaction.

DCLG (Department for Communities & Local Government): the central government department responsible for local government. It provides most of local councils' funding. It does not determine how much of it is spent on libraries.

DCMS (Department for Culture, Media & Sport): sets central government's policy on libraries (among other things), but does not fund them. It is headed by the Secretary of State, with one minister more directly responsible for libraries (among other things).

LGA (Local Government Association) lobbies on behalf of local government. Does some useful work on public libraries, but ultimately sides with councils, not library users.

MLA (Museums, Libraries & Archives Council): ACE's predecessor.

NLT (National Literacy Trust): charity 'dedicated to building a literate nation' – which includes promoting reading for pleasure. Huge source of information, campaigns and projects.

SCL (Society of Chief Librarians): advises LGA on library matters. Does useful work on public libraries, but sticks to 'quiet diplomacy'.

Unison: the trade union for most public library staff. Good research and promotional materials.

TRA (The Reading Agency): charity to develop reading, especially via libraries. Dozens of projects to promote books, especially to key groups like children, reluctant readers, ethnic minorities etc.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Elizabeth Ash
Campaign Secretary



If you have not visited our website recently, please do. A lot of work has gone into making it busy and topical.

I am especially delighted that we now have a daily update of library news stories from all over the UK. This is thanks to our member Shirley Burnham, who works tirelessly behind the scenes and provides us with these invaluable links.

You can also follow her on Twitter (@ShirleyBurnham) - and The Library Campaign on Twitter (@LibraryCampaign) and Facebook (The Library Campaign).

We need to get out the message on all these media and more. But it does create a lot of work if it's just one person (ie, me). If members could help out, none need spend much time on it.

We are very open to new and existing members getting involved. As much or as little as they want ...

WE NEED PEOPLE WHO CAN JUST CONTRIBUTE AN HOUR OR LESS - to contribute on our social media, or do the short but daily task of uploading Shirley's links.

WE NEED PEOPLE TO SEND A QUICK MESSAGE if they know of a new (or old) Friends/user group that we may not know about.

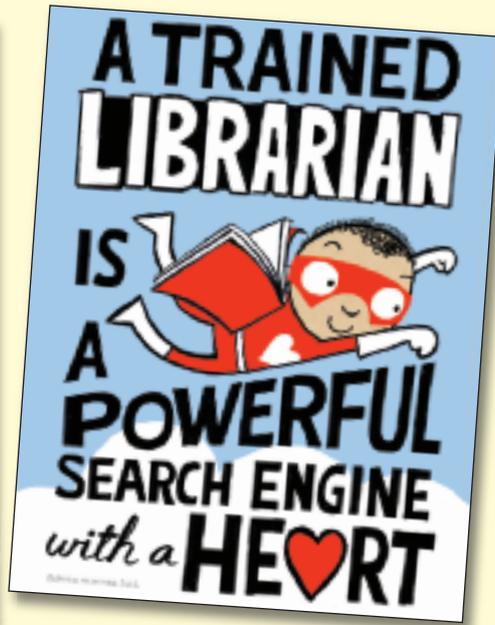
WE NEED PEOPLE TO TELL OTHERS ABOUT US. We can't afford to advertise! But the more members we get, the stronger we all are.

WE NEED SOMEONE WITH MORE TIME TO SPARE for a one-off task to update our whole list of Friends and user groups. This might be paid.

WE NEED EVERYONE TO SORT OUT THEIR STANDING ORDER. Please check your payments are correct (see form, page 12), and are going to our HSBC account (HSBC, Salford University Branch, The Crescent, Salford M5 4PB. 40-40-39, a/c 61277405). Small things like this help a lot! Revised SOs can be sent to me, to amend our records and forward to the bank.

PLEASE NOTE: I deal with membership, so please send any renewals or new memberships (see page 12) direct to me.

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Our cover poster makes a very good point. It's more relevant than ever, now that the official line (page 13) is that running your own library is just fine.

It isn't. We know it, Women's Institute volunteers (page 5) know it from experience, and people who actually DO run their own 'community libraries' (page 16) know it!

Librarians' organisations, to be honest, have not been very successful in getting across the value of what they do.

This is sadder than ever now they are bringing out a blueprint for action which is great (page 7) - but needs skilled staff to deliver most of it. Yet they are disappearing in droves.

This poster is one way to get the message across. It can be downloaded FREE from the website* of the artist who designed it - Sarah McIntyre. You can get it as a T-shirt or iPhone cover too (not free!)

Sarah designed it for the School Libraries Lobby last November. She was at the lobby (in red hat) with gloriously bearded writer Philip Ardagh and many others. Requests for a copy flooded in from librarians worldwide!

* <http://jabberworks.livejournal.com/525413.html>



THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGNER SPRING 2013, No.86

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DESIGN & PRODUCTION: Owain Hammonds

CONTRIBUTORS: Ian Anstice, Elizabeth Ash, Phil Bradley, Laura Swaffield, Alan Templeton

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THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN

maintains a
FREE LIST

of local
FRIENDS AND USER GROUPS
with their contact details,
on our website.

If you know of a new (or old!) group that is not on our list, please notify:
thelibrarycampaign@gmail.com

CHAIR'S REPORT

Laura Swaffield
Campaign Chair



It's a full-time job keeping up with public libraries news these days. Unfortunately, most of the work is being done by unpaid part-timers.

Neither the government department allegedly responsible for libraries (DCMS) nor its official development agency (ACE) provides any regular data on local services, good or bad.

News on plans, budgets, closures etc is collated daily for our website by campaigner Shirley Burnham (unpaid). Balanced comment and analysis are provided by librarian Ian Anstice (in his spare time). There's a mine of useful material on his website (www.publiclibrariesnews.com).

We're delighted to say we are now reproducing some of it in this magazine. It deserves a wider public.

Meanwhile, in January, librarian Frances Hendrix asserted that 'The agenda is largely driven by passionate, hardworking (and unpaid) campaigners', in professional magazine Post-Lib (issue 66).

She went on: 'Perhaps ... we need to challenge our professional bodies to do a lot more and a much better job at standing up for librarians and library assistants.'

'You don't change national and local government policies by "quiet diplomacy".'

You could argue back, of course, that these days you can't change national policies by any means at

all. The libraries minister is now infamous for his constant 'Crisis? What crisis?' speeches.

Some local authorities are every bit as bad. And it has become clear that the minister will not intervene, no matter how blatantly a council may ignore local people's attempts to work with it.

However – several library campaigners (including us, of course) were invited in December to meet SCL (Society of Chief Librarians). We really appreciated this initiative.

SCL does excellent development work (see page 7). But its style is very much 'quiet diplomacy'. Some say this is no longer working, if it ever did ...

We agreed to meet regularly, and exchange information. This is great.

We note from SCL's minutes – newly accessible on its website (www.goscl.com) as one result of the meeting – that SCL is now debating its role. We look forward to some new ideas.

We continue to try to begin a similar dialogue with ACE (Arts Council England). With limited success. So far, it is unclear whether ACE even sees users' needs as its concern ...

Meanwhile, stories in the non-specialist press have been instructive. Like the 'pole-dancing' furore in February!

Midlothian planned loads of fun events in its libraries, for publicity. They included a pole fitness class. The Telegraph harrumphed that it was shocking. I disagreed (but they misquoted me outrageously).

The story spread like wildfire. The debate aired key issues about libraries' role. But at least Midlothian got masses of publicity – far more than it's ever got for its book events, science festival etc!

Then author Terry Deary trotted out all the usual daft arguments why nobody needs libraries, initially via his local Sunderland paper.

You know the routine: 'everything's on the internet, everyone has unlimited online access, everyone can afford all the books they could possibly want'. See page 20 for a further illustration that he doesn't quite live in the real world.

Worse, he complained that he would make more money if only people were unable to borrow, and forced to buy, his books.

Again, the story spread nationwide, with Terry D comprehensively shot down in flames. But it's really scary that a (very rich) author doesn't 'get' – or care – what a public service is all about ...

EDITOR'S NOTE

There are two things The Library Campaign finds itself having to explain again and again.

The first is: **CLOSING SMALL LIBRARIES IS A STUPID WAY TO SAVE MONEY.**

The second is **WE DON'T WANT DO-IT-YOURSELF LIBRARIES!**

Both of these make clear and absolute sense to library users – the people whose views ought to matter most, no?

But time and again we are elbowed away by the 'decision-makers'.

This happens a lot at local level, as many of us have found out.

Recently, the same battle has been fought at national level. Report after report has come out.

Some reflect reality. Others do not – alarmingly, these include reports from the entities that are supposed to look after libraries, ACE and DCMS.

So, this issue gives you a handy update on them. The next will be about reality!

MORE MAGS?

MEMBERS CAN NOW order extra copies of this magazine. People in Friends/user groups are finding it a useful and compact record of what's going on – and a handy way to inform others about current issues. And extra sales will help us raise the funds to bring it out more often ...

Price £2.50 per copy (inc post & packing). Ask for a quote for bulk order discount.

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Local colour! Community engagement!



Tate South Lambeth Library is in London's 'Little Portugal' area. So in February the Friends laid on a celebration of the imminent carnival in Brazil, with a Brazilian band, a demonstration of capoeira, dancing from the London School of Samba and Brazilian food – sponsored by the local Tia Maria restaurant. The library is run by Lambeth council. And the Friends have absolutely no intention of taking it over themselves.

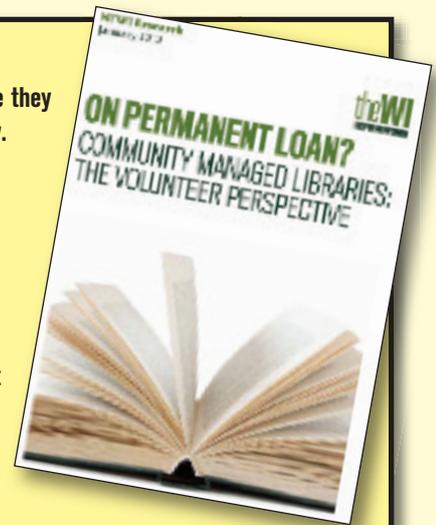
Photos: Paloma Diaz (www.palomadiaz.carbonmade.com).

Piecemeal service in peril

'Volunteers cannot continue being used as sticking plaster in the library service!' This clear declaration launched (in January 2013) a well-researched and thoughtful report by NFWI (National Federation of Women's Institutes). Its approach contrasts with the uncritical view of 'community libraries' put out by ACE (see page 13). To get its facts, it asked volunteers themselves. Here are some extracts. The report highlights the value of volunteers, and community-led libraries. But it is sharply aware of the pitfalls. And unless they are addressed, it sees a grim future ...

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

- Volunteers are doing admirable work. Often because they have been offered no other way to save their library.
- But there is much confusion, and support from councils varies wildly.
- Result – 'ever-increasing fragmentation in the way that the library service operates'.
- Result – an increasingly inconsistent, two-tier service with differing provision and standards.
- Result – danger that many who need libraries most won't have their needs met.
- Volunteers cannot be expected to replace a properly-run service.
- Many volunteers are not getting enough support.
- The overall situation is simply not sustainable. Nor is it desirable.



**GET THE FULL REPORT AT:
www.thewi.org.uk/_documents/public-affairs/love-your-libraries/on-permanent-loan.pdf**

Libraries run by volunteers and the community are not new; however, indications suggest that they are on the increase.

The Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964 places a statutory duty on library authorities to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service.

Community managed libraries have to date raised relatively little debate in terms of the 1964 Act.

Yet as the number of community managed libraries increases and local authorities struggle to balance their statutory duties with their budgetary ones, it is clear that local authorities are looking for new ways to discharge their statutory obligations and use the discretion that they have available to deliver services innovatively.

There are early indications that the community run library model is increasingly being considered by policy makers as an appropriate vehicle for delivering library services. Community managed libraries should not be used as a substitute for the publicly run network.

This apparent shift in emphasis is significant, in that it reinforces what we are already starting to see in practice – that the community managed model is one that policymakers at national and local level are keen to adopt in greater numbers.

Perhaps as expected, those we spoke to at each community-managed library had significantly different experiences in the assistance and support they had been afforded in setting up and running their library.

This included the relationship with the local authority, the way the library was administered and run and the expectations placed on the volunteers.

The majority of community managed libraries involved in [our] focus group had some form of agreement with the local authority in place, conferring certain duties, responsibilities and obligations on the community group running the library. These included opening hours, staffing, and monitoring and review of the service.

The corresponding obligations required of the local authority were more limited.

What also became obvious from our research was the sheer amount of work that was required on the part of volunteers to ensure the continued existence of many of these libraries.

This was exacerbated by the limited guidance available to volunteers, the specific skill set required to run a library, and confusion around legal obligations and training.

This was frustrated further by a dependency on several competing factors, many of which were beyond the control of volunteers.

As one of the participants explained: 'The current situation we've got of "maybe we'll work with you,

There is a risk that a two-tier service will evolve, with many communities accessing library services that fall outside the national network, with few common service standards and little systematic assessment of users' needs... those with less resource and capacity to organise and articulate their needs will not see them met.

maybe we'll give you access to the library management system and maybe we'll give you some money, maybe we'll give you some old stock to be getting on with" ... That gives you a confused situation ...'

The dedication of the volunteers we spoke to was truly inspiring. Most, though not all, were retired professionals, and in many cases their ongoing efforts to preserve and deliver a library service in their community constituted a full time commitment. All were motivated by a shared understanding of the value that maintaining a library service had for the local community.

This disparate approach means that a piecemeal jigsaw of library services is already developing, with varying levels of service provision existing within, and between, localities.

Without adequate guidance and mechanisms in place, this situation is only likely to become more acute as more communities find themselves at the front line of library services.

Furthermore as community managed libraries become more common, it is clear that this piecemeal approach is not fit for purpose.

The experiences of existing community managed libraries demonstrate that there are important lessons to be learnt, as well as difficult questions to be asked. Policymakers at both national and local level should take the opportunity to learn from these experiences, so that the library service can continue to be a thriving community resource.

Community managed libraries should be better integrated within the library service and be afforded the same opportunities across the authority. They should have the support of a professional librarian.

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT IS KEY

There are valuable lessons that service providers should learn from some of the difficulties that existing community managed libraries have experienced, some of which have been captured in this document.

Public libraries are a huge asset to any community, and the fact that numerous communities have gone to great lengths to prevent library services from closing down demonstrates this.

Unless there is a willing corps of campaigners, volunteers or fundraisers to fight for their library service, they may even find that the future of the library itself hangs in the balance. Often communities find that the only way to retain the service is to step in and take over the management of the library.

However, only certain communities have the resources to effectively set up and run a library and we are concerned that the proliferation of these models could effectively lead to a 'postcode lottery' of library services with the creation of a two-tiered system of library provision that undermines the benefits of skilled and trained library staff and underestimates the role that they play in both delivering an effective public service and supporting communities.

The testing economic environment has meant that library services have not been immune to local authority budgetary cuts. While there are many examples of innovation and creativity as the service has evolved to meet this challenge, it is also clear that the development of community managed libraries has been reactive.

With significant challenges presenting in areas that were relatively well resourced, it is questionable how realistic community managed libraries would be in more deprived areas and how sustainable they are likely to be in the long-term.

If, as looks increasingly likely, more libraries are going to be set up with a greater element of community involvement, this piecemeal approach is clearly not fit for purpose.

Many community managed libraries have been established in response to difficult choices and participants talked about the impossible situation



■ Ruth Bond, NFWI Chair, with their petition at our joint Speak Up for Libraries rally last year

they had found themselves in when told by the council that 'we are taking your library away'.

One participant recalled how the absence of discussion and debate had 'really motivated the community' and others talked about the 'conundrum' they faced, given their awareness that the choice was to take on the library or lose the facility entirely.

Volunteers at all levels need to be given adequate training, advice and support.

The NFWI does not believe that volunteers are an acceptable alternative to paid library staff, yet at the same time volunteers can and do make a tremendous contribution to the network.

The diversity and range of demands placed on volunteers – some of which we have covered in this document – risks diluting the professionalism of the service and placing an unsustainable burden on volunteers.

Professional support is key. This could well come in different formats as different models evolve. Community managed libraries now form a significant part of library service provision and it is clear that many are thriving and serving their communities well. Given the likely expansion of these models, it is critical that they are afforded an appropriate level of support and guidance.

There are huge opportunities for community managed libraries; putting the community in the driving seat means that they can tailor services to the needs of the community and adapt and react as the community changes. Less red tape can mean they can do this quickly and for less money.

WE NEED HONEST DISCUSSION ...

In the interest of users, library professionals and volunteers, there needs to be an honest discussion, spearheaded by the government, about whether and how community managed libraries will fit into the overall library service, with corresponding guidance for local authorities.

Many of the volunteers that we spoke to firmly believed that basic service delivery such as opening times, the quality and variety of books and outreach services had improved when the library was taken over by the community. Others cited examples of how the facilities were used much more flexibly and fully by communities.

Volunteers have an important role to play, yet there is a danger they will reach saturation point and in relying on volunteers to deliver day to day services, we risk losing sight of the added value that volunteers can bring to the service more widely, for example through assisting with reading schemes.

➤ Too many community managed libraries seem to be operating with a level of disconnection from the local authority. In effect this is distancing the community managed library from the wider vision behind the public library network as well as the practical resources, provision and service planning that is central to a good library service.

Where community managed libraries exist, local authorities must clearly articulate where they fit into the wider library service vision and practical delivery of the overall library service. Adequate provision to accommodate community managed libraries must be made.

We are calling on parliamentarians of all political colours to preserve the integrity of the 1964 Act and ensure that everyone in the UK, no matter where they live, is granted access to a library service that is fit for purpose.

➤ Volunteers at all levels need to be given adequate training, advice and support if they are expected to deliver library services. If the local authority deems it appropriate for a library to be taken over by the community, it needs to provide comprehensive support and guidance, at a minimum, a memorandum of understanding so that volunteers appreciate what is and isn't required of them, and adequate guidance so that volunteers aren't having to design the service from scratch.

➤ Community managed libraries should be better integrated within the library service and be afforded the same opportunities across the authority. They should have the support of a professional librarian.

Libraries of the 21st century?

... or offering a nice new dress to a plague victim?

A major joint effort to improve and protect public libraries has been launched by SCL (Society of Chief Librarians), much of it building on work done by TRA (The Reading Agency).

Ian Anstice reports ...

If you're looking for a really short summary: it's good. There's a lot of positive stuff in here.

It's also, thank goodness, not local but national – and with lots of partners. This offers easy wins when it comes to best practice and economies of scale.

It's ambitious in scope, and aims to demonstrate to all and sundry that libraries are still relevant and important.

Of course, if you saw the news reports, you'd think it was only about the launch (or rather re-launch) of Books on Prescription. This is where doctors etc can 'prescribe' self-help books to people with mild or moderate mental health problems. These are stocked by the library authority.

The books will include 30 medical volumes on specific conditions, and also 'mood boosting books' by people such as Jo Brand and Bill Bryson.

It started in Wales in 2003 and became national there in 2005. Some English authorities took it up, but it fizzled out in many of them. So we're only seven years behind the times!

However, I've seen it in practice and it works. It gets people into libraries who would never have gone in otherwise. And they keep on coming back.

Important role

There's a big difference between its first abortive introduction and now. Back then, it was an offhand 'that sounds like a good idea' promotion. Now it's a national thing.

It's also, very importantly, backed by some big organisations including MIND, the Royal College of Psychiatrists, the Royal College of Nursing, the Royal College of GPs, the British Psychological Society and the Department of Health's Improving Access to Psychological Therapies programme. And it will be signposted by NHS Choices, the Department of Health's public web portal.

Laura Swaffield, Chair of the Library Campaign, thinks this is important: 'Your enterprising head of service (if you've got one) can go to the NHS (if they can find it) or the council (it's got a public health role now, remember) and say: "Give me some lolly and I'll help you tick some boxes." That's the kind of game you have to play these days.'

There's a lot of that in this report. The SCL is learning to play the game. Faced with the extinction

of the profession, those at its top have put some serious work into this.

They are to be applauded. It's 'a response to the challenging times we find ourselves in. We're aware there are less of us as librarians, and we're trying to capitalise on strengths that we have,' says Janene Cox, SCL President.

Another big initiative that could save a building or two is the imminent role in delivering Universal Credit. This benefit is supposed to be claimed online by 'most people', says the government.

So when it comes into force later this year, there will be hundreds of thousands of people suddenly in need of an internet connection – and, probably, some help...

Where a library service signs up to it, libraries will be there helping them, providing internet access, filling in forms and signposting to local agencies.

Suddenly, libraries are going to have a very clear and important role, delivering a vital plank in the government agenda. Not bad. Not bad at all.

It looks like even the minister for libraries is on side. Ed Vaizey MP, Minister for Culture, was at the launch and said: 'The four Universal Offers clearly

show the range of services libraries now offer. This national approach will help ensure all libraries keep pace with these changing demands.'

Those behind the initiative have worked out that it makes sense to work together. It's cheaper and has more impact.

Those who have been banging on for years about the need for a national development agency for libraries – now a plank of the Labour libraries policy – will think their dream has come true. It's like everyone has got together and suddenly started singing from the same hymn sheet.

Collaborative work

It's certainly music to the ears of ACE. Nicky Morgan, ACE's Director of Libraries (until July) said: 'It is great to see how well the Universal Offers play into our future plans. We have found that this collaborative work is necessary to ensure that libraries thrive and survive in the face of this challenging economic situation, and technological and societal change.'

The libraries sector needs to have a joined-up approach – because together, we are stronger.'

Optimism permeates the report, even though there's an element of Third World War survivors working together in order to salvage what is good from a devastated landscape.

People who work every day looking at how to cut budgets have found the time to look up, and work out

► What is it?

Four 'Universal Offers' – lists of what people should expect to get from their library service. They cover: health, reading, information and digital. See pages 8–9 for the full lists.

► Is it compulsory?

Alas, no. Library authorities choose to 'sign up' to the offers they think they can deliver. For some, sign-up is as high as 98%. It's unclear who will ensure they deliver the goods. One to watch.

► How can it work?

At this time of savage cuts, not easily. But the package puts together a lot of research, and resources, and contacts, that have been painstakingly built up over the years in various projects – notably by TRA. Now every service can use these. This saves a lot of time and money, and leaves services no excuse for inaction.

► It's a bit late, isn't it?

Yes. This should have been done years ago. Still, it does help make the most of shrinking funds. And it clearly shows how useful public libraries are.

► What's the snag?

Apart from slashed budgets? Well, the offers mostly need to be delivered by trained/experienced staff. These are being sacked in droves to save money. As for the hundreds of 'community' libraries now run mostly or wholly by volunteers – no chance.



■ **Reading Offer:** small rewards encourage children to keep up their reading skills over the summer in The Reading Agency's hugely successful Summer Reading Challenge. Well proven and widely adopted. These are some fans in Greenwich.



■ **New this year:** to build adult literacy, The Reading Agency has a grown-up version of Summer Reading Challenge called the 6 Book Challenge. For 2013 the Rugby League is promoting and running the scheme - starting with a packed launch event in Leeds Central Library, with rugger hero Jamie Jones-Buchanan and the World Cup.

what their key sales points should be – now and in the future.

And they've gone for it. This is good, because libraries are pretty much doomed otherwise.

It's particularly reassuring to see Tony Durcan, someone who seriously knows cuts when he sees them – he's in charge of libraries and stuff for Newcastle – able to find a glint in the clouds: 'This age of austerity will end; we have to think about the future. Let's not implement cuts in a way that ends up with a uniformly grey, dull offer to the public, without any real social impact.'

'We must hang on to the sparkle in the new look reading service we're creating. There is evidence of a huge public demand for our reading groups, author events, rhyme times, reading challenges, festivals. The new strategy we're proposing is about us all putting our collective energy into a few really big things to keep the sparkle going.'

Ambitious

I want to pause for a moment, think about the words 'keep the sparkle going', cherish them, and then move on. OK, now I've recovered my breath, I'll continue.

There's some big offers in here. You'll find free online access as standard. You'll even find that lending out e-readers is mentioned.

That as a standard to aim for – coming at a time when almost no-one in the UK is doing it – is nothing if not ambitious.

Here's Laura Swaffield again: 'To be honest, it's a really good package, putting together lots of initiatives & resources. Some are new (and therefore even more impossible than the others).'

'Others have been rattling around for years in this or that authority, largely wasted because nobody has previously put them together into a coherent framework that other library services could access & use.'

Of course, she said a bit more than that but it was a bit more negative. So now, it's time, ladies and gentleman, if you dare, to delve into the dark side. Steel yourselves.

The problems, otherwise known as "offering a new dress to a plague victim".

The big one. The seriously big one is "too little too late". Laura went on from that nice quote above to say: 'It's just tragic that this potentially useful tool comes out when most library services are desperately fire-fighting, never mind improving their "offer".'

She also says it's 'like offering a nice new dress to a plague victim' (nice turn of phrase) and 'If they'd done it 10, five or even two years ago, it would have been a great way to give libraries tools to improve – and a great way to get through to councils what their libraries can do. It's a bit late now, alas, alas.'

There's a lot more in this vein. Here's campaigner Shirley Burnham: 'SCL, you should have fought to the death for your service – fought for your excellent staff – fought for greater funding of literacy and access to knowledge.'

... and here's campaigner Desmond Clarke: 'This initiative does nothing to help confront the crisis facing public libraries. CIPFA confirmed that 200 libraries closed last year and Public Libraries News reports that more than 300 will close or transfer to volunteer management this year.'

'Most worrying, some local government officers are saying that worse is to come as the cuts deepen.'

'The question being asked is when will the reality of what is happening in many authorities be recognised by the DCMS, SCL and ACE? And how do they intend to ensure a viable, comprehensive and efficient service?'

'That is the "universal" offer that should be available to all, whatever their postcode. It is also the duty prescribed in the 1964 Act.'

I'm an optimist at heart. But you don't have to have been reading my blog for long to realise that libraries are in a bad way. For some authorities, the libraries have effectively gone apart from the big money.

When Janene Cox says there are 'less librarians', she's not kidding. A lot of what is being planned relies on trained and qualified staff. Well, in some areas, sorry, there ain't any.

As the librarians' discussion list Lis-Pub-Libs says: 'Laudable aspiration, but will there be any experienced, qualified librarians left to deliver the offer?'

There's another a big problem with the Universal Offers. You see, they're not universal.

There's no compulsion to individual authorities to sign up to them. Nothing bad will even be said about authorities who don't.

Money talks

That's not the game. We're in a world of 'localism' where there are no standards and authorities can do what they like. Which means that if an authority has no money or other priorities, then the new Universal Offers can go whistle.

Let's look at the figures. While 98% have signed up to one of the offers, one-fifth have not signed up to the 'information offer'.

That's the one about Universal Credit. Why? We don't know. If you're a local library authority, you don't have to have reasons. But I bet they're in some way financial.

This also seems to be the reason why only half have signed up to the second part of the Digital Offer.

This is the bit which talks about the loan of e-readers and free internet access for all, at least for a bit of time. Money is involved. In an age of austerity, money talks and universality walks.

Having said that – hey, get real here. What did you expect?

As Laura says: 'As we will never get any proper standards for libraries – or any help from the DCMS, no matter how much damage is done to them – this voluntary signing up is the nearest thing people in England will get to a tool for measuring their service's performance.'

I've mentioned the lack of librarians already. There's volunteers about, and it's unclear as to how they fit in. At all.

Presumably those libraries which councils have declared are statutory (and, yes, that's largely how it now works) will also be part of the Universal Offer.

Or perhaps they won't be. We don't know. If they're not, then we're looking at yet another tier of service. We're going to have a Heinz library service with 57 different types, sometimes possibly in the same authority.

What are they smoking?

On Radio 4, Ed Vaizey waxed lyrical about how great volunteers are at giving health advice: 'Volunteers help out in Citizen's Advice Bureaus in terms of helping people with advice on a whole range of different issues, so I wouldn't denigrate the work of volunteers.' Now, there's a man with private health insurance.

Moving on, there's also people who plain don't agree that the policies of libraries should be focused on such things as health and benefits.

Campaigner Tim Coates says: 'There are some very clear priorities for what should be done in our public library service – and they are not these being vaunted by the DCMS, the SCL and TRA.'

'If times are austere and budgets have to be cut, those responsible must focus properly on the things that matter and not parade themselves in front of the grant givers and the fanciful social agenda makers of government departments. The public deserve much better.'

Finally, there's the 'What on Earth are they smoking?' criticism.

To campaigners on the ground, seeing libraries close (Bolton) or being outsourced to commercial companies (Croydon) or being passed to local people (Lewisham) this report looks disturbingly like Cloud Cuckoo Land.

Recipe for disaster

Patricia Richardson (Lewisham, and The Library Campaign) says: 'I fail to see how this deals in any way with the problems we are facing.'

'Lewisham lost five council-run libraries. The "community libraries" run by volunteers are not substitutes, and in no way compensate for what was lost. The remaining council libraries are hanging by a thread.'

'Do any of the people who write this stuff proof read it, and understand what it actually means to library users on the ground?'

'And it is not just Lewisham. The public library service is being killed off, and we are watching it happen.'

Elizabeth Ash, Croydon campaigner and Library Campaign secretary, says: 'Giving hard pressed library staff more to do, particularly where it requires increasing the amount of sensitive data held, is a recipe for disaster.'

'The hollowing out of services in Croydon has meant that even experienced staff have made errors, or perhaps they have not been properly trained ... God help us, what might unskilled, untrained volunteers do!'

'Of course none of this would be an issue in a comprehensive library service, run by sufficient numbers of professionally qualified and suitably trained staff working alongside volunteers.'

'It's a laudable idea but in practice I see many

pitfalls where badly damaged library services will struggle to live up to these offers.'

Geoffrey Dron, Bolton campaigner, says: 'Fiddling while Rome burns. Branch libraries – not sexy to ACE – are closing and will continue to close.'

'The service will not only not be comprehensive and efficient, but it will not be accessible to all who wish to use it, in breach of that all too frequently ignored limb of the duty imposed on local authorities under section 7 of the 1964 Act.'

Conclusion

I, for one, welcome our new Universal Offers. For one thing, it sits ill to criticise those in the SCL or ACE for not doing anything and then criticise them when they try to do something.

Faced with a crisis in libraries that now only the government refuses to recognise, we need all the help and ideas we can get.

Those on offer here are better than most. By linking in libraries to health and to benefits, senior librarians are throwing ropes out from the raft on to larger, more sturdy, vessels.

There's a pile of good ideas and proven initiatives here that are going to do a power of good.

Chief librarians are never going to rebel, they're never going to be campaigners but, here and now, they're being advocates and leaders and even semi-realistic ones, providing weapons for those still in the fight.

To finish: it may not be traditional, it may be too late – but it's better than nothing. And tradition (that is, keeping quiet, being complacent) partly got us into this mess in the first place. Well done, all involved.

Well, apart from Ed Vaizey, who needs to stop looking and sounding quite so smug.



■ **Health Offer:** research shows that offering carefully-chosen books, in a trusted setting, really helps people with mild mental health worries. This pioneering scheme won East Ayrshire libraries a CILIP award way back in 2007. Now it will be nationwide.



■ **Digital Offer:** free internet access, plus support for new users, has been available in libraries since 2000 (some are now having to cut down on it ...). Clever services develop ideas for special groups – like this 'older people's shopping' session in Harrow.



UNIVERSAL OFFERS!

This is what every library service should provide ... how does your match up?

This is a new planning framework which combines libraries' efforts to develop, deliver and promote reading services.

It builds on the success of libraries' reading work, which has seen children's book borrowing rise for eight years running, and which has been responding to public demand for community reading activities which bring reading alive, physically and digitally.

The Universal Reading Offer sets out what public libraries will offer in order to provide a modern reading service in their local communities.

It builds on public demand for a lively and engaging reading offer with reading groups, challenges, promotions and author events, alongside public engagement opportunities and services for specific audiences such as families and the blind and partially sighted.

It aims to combat the effect of cuts by working together as a network and focuses libraries' collective energy into some national shared reading programmes. It will also strip out the costs of duplicated effort, share best practice and attract the investment of partners.

The strategy enables libraries to enlist national partners' support and investment by working as a critical mass.

Partners in creating libraries' reading year offer to the public will include The Publishers' Association and 40 publisher partners, World Book Day, World Book Night, Share the Vision, Quick Reads and Booktrust.

The Universal Reading Offer also creates a shared evidence bank so libraries can strengthen their arguments for the impact of their reading work within local authorities' priorities.

The services are:

- Free books and reading resources
- Free community space
- Supported online access
- Community outreach
- Services for targeted audiences
- Access to local and family history resources
- Multimedia reading resources

New developments

It is estimated that 5.1 million people in England have inadequate literacy skills. National reading programmes can inspire adults and children alike to pick up a book and read.

For the first time, the Universal Reading Offer has defined the baseline elements of a contemporary reading service, which all library services have signed up to.



2013 developments include:

- The creation of a new package of year round volunteering opportunities for 11-19-year-olds, to build their life skills and confidence at the same time as supporting others to enjoy reading and join the library.
- A new digital skills sharing programme funded by Arts Council England, in which publishers help librarians improve their ability to build audiences for reading, using new digital methods
See www.readingagency.digitalskills.
- A partnership with the 2013 Rugby League World Cup, which will support libraries' adult literacy Six Book Challenge to encourage new audiences to engage with reading.

The focus of this offer is on supporting people accessing information and services online in life-critical areas such as careers and job seeking; health; personal financial information and benefits.

Central to this offer is helping people to use vital government online information and services. Recent research showed that internet users trust library staff more than most other providers of online support and information. Public library staff are second only to doctors in terms of the trust placed in them by seekers of information.

Public libraries already bring together in one place access to both national and local sources of information, and support for these life-critical issues.

For instance, someone seeking information about an illness will find not only links to reliable official online sources but also links to local advice and support networks.

The Universal Information Offer will:

- Bring together government and non-government sources of information, which have been researched by information professionals in public libraries, giving a level of quality assurance to the user.
- Ensure that public library staff and volunteers are continually developing their skills to provide help to people accessing information and services.

New development - Helping claimants of the new Universal Credit

The Universal Credit is a new single payment for people on a low income. It is being launched in 2013 and will replace income-based

Jobseeker's Allowance, Child Tax Credits, Housing Benefit, Income Support, Working Tax Credits and income-based Employment and Support Allowance.

Public libraries already provide significant amounts of information and support for people finding jobs. With the introduction of Universal Credit this year, libraries will provide internet access and support to complete the application and manage their account online, signposting claimants to local advice agencies where needed.





This defines the minimum that a public library authority should provide and that customers should expect from their public library. It helps support the delivery of all the Universal Offers.

In the first quarter of 2012–13, 16.3% of adults had visited a library website in the last 12 months, a significant increase from 8.9% in 2005–6.

In the past year, more than a million people have been helped to go online for the first time by their local library. Most public libraries already provide digital access, and have done so for more than a decade. This promise articulates what the SCL would see as a 'best practice' offer.

Every public library service will provide:

- Free access to the internet for every customer (for a minimum period of time)
- Clear and accessible online information about library services
- Staff trained to help customers access digital information
- Ability for customers to join online
- Ability to be contacted online/via email for answers to customer enquiries
- 24/7 access to services through a virtual library presence
- Ability to reserve & renew items remotely via an online catalogue.



New development – 21st century digital services

The Universal Digital Offer also sets out what every library authority should aspire to provide.

These services include:

- Opportunity for e-lending of digital books, audio and video, with remote access
- Social networking interaction/engagement opportunities
- A library app to allow full access to all library digital services from mobile devices
- Digital services that work with a range of assistive technology, such as speech programmes or magnifiers
- Free internet access for all wanting to use it, including WiFi
- Tailored digital information for each customer
- Training in digital information literacy and access for customers and staff, both locally and remotely
- Time-relevant, quality-checked digital content for the communities it serves, and support for communities to create their own content
- Loan of digital devices for those without other access
- Access to digitised local archive and local history resources
- Federated searching of locally held online resources
- Access to online learning opportunities (citizenship, theory driving tests, language learning etc.)

The Universal Health Offer is a new national strategy expressing the public library contribution to the health and well-being of local communities.

Public libraries already provide books for people who want to understand more about specific conditions. Many also have initiatives aimed at raising awareness of different illnesses.

For example, Stockton Library & Heritage Service has worked in partnership with schools and services specialising in dementia to develop a dementia awareness programme for children, using a story book as a focal point.

This new offer will see services to promote and enhance the health and wellbeing of local communities being rolled out in every public library in England and Wales. They include:

- A network of local hubs offering non-clinical community space
- Community outreach supporting vulnerable people
- Expert staff with local knowledge
- Assisted online access
- Self-help library resources
- Health and care information services
- Referral and signposting
- Public health promotion activity
- Social and recreational reading opportunities like reading groups
- Volunteering and community engagement activities



New development – Books on Prescription

Six million people in the UK are currently suffering from anxiety and depression. Two-thirds of these people are not receiving treatment, and are looking for quality assured health information.

A new Books on Prescription scheme for England (Reading Well), which is endorsed and supported by key mental health organisations in England, will be implemented in public libraries from May 2013.

The development of this scheme is being led by The Reading Agency in partnership with SCL and with the support of Arts Council England. It is based on a model developed in Wales by Professor Neil Frude.

GPs and other health professionals will be able to prescribe to patients cognitive behavioural therapy books from a quality assured national reading list, focused on mild to

moderate mental health conditions like anxiety and depression.

The books, which will be available in all public libraries in England, are tried and trusted resources which can help people understand and manage their conditions, either as part of a therapy programme or as a first self-help step.

The scheme will, for the first time, combine this self-help therapy from factual reading with reader-recommended novels and poetry in a shared library promotion called Mood Boosting Books.

The health benefits of reading groups will be promoted, supported by a collective website at www.readinggroups.org.

The English Books on Prescription scheme has been developed in collaboration with the Department of Health's Improving Access to Psychological Therapies programme; the Royal College of Psychiatrists; the Royal College of Nursing; the Royal College of General Practitioners; The British Psychological Society; the British Association for Behavioural Cognitive Psychotherapies and Mind.

It will be signposted by NHS Choices, the Department of Health's public web portal.

Is this the future? Does it work?



ACE (Arts Council England) has released what is effectively the official view on volunteer libraries. It has been widely criticised. Ian Anstice sums up the contents – and the comments.

What is it?

This Arts Council England report about community-managed libraries comes as three sections:

- Learning from experience: guiding principles for local authorities
- Learning from experience: summary briefing for local authorities
- 10 case studies

All at: www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/supporting-libraries/community-libraries-research

This set of reports will, in the final analysis, be key for public libraries – at least through the lifetime of the current government. So I would advise everyone to read it.

Firmly supporting the Big Society view, it suggests that 'community libraries' are a viable alternative to paid staff – and indeed may provide longer hours and more services.

It also states that volunteer libraries are statutory if they are free, receive some form of council support and the relevant council has decided they are statutory. It finds that each and every authority is approaching the subject differently. Even within

councils, different volunteer branches are doing things in their own way. However, this is seen as a positive thing, encouraging local solutions.

Indeed, 'positive' is the over-riding theme of the report. It acknowledges the current financial crisis – the over-riding factor, one imagines, in almost all cases of transfer so far. But this is seen as only one driver out of four. The other three? Technology, localism and joining up services.

Perhaps insufficient attention is given to the oft-reported view that people almost always volunteer simply to keep the library open – not because they think it's their job, instead of the council's.

Who is behind it?

The research was done, on behalf of Arts Council England, by Locality ('the UK's leading network for community-led organisations') working with Sue Charteris, independent expert on library services and author of the Wirral report 2009.

Also involved: LGA (Local Government Association), Cabinet Office, Defra (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, DCMS (Department for Culture, Media & Sport), DCLG (Department for Communities & Local Government), SCL (Society of Chief Librarians).

Anyone reading the report – without knowing what is happening to local government budgets – would think that unpaid staff are superior to paid staff, and councils have been wasting their money all these years.

Similarly, the ad hoc creation of unpaid branches, all different to each other, is seen as the best way of doing things.

To be fair, the report does concede that volunteering may not be the solution in some areas (presumably those with high family stress, which need libraries most).

Unsurprisingly, the report has been welcomed with open arms by the government. Eric Pickles, Secretary of State at DCLG, suggested in the official press release that councils should be making it easier for local people to take over their libraries. The release also points to a £30 million fund that has been set up to help such initiatives.

What does it say?

- Change is being driven primarily by four factors: cuts in budget, the digital revolution, localism, the desire to join up services.
- 5% of libraries had some form of 'community involvement' in July 2012. Most of these started in 2011 or 2012. The number is expected to more than double, to around 12%, in the 'near future'. It will then increase further.
- The 12% (425) figure is arrived at by counting 'community libraries' currently operating and those currently planned. [The number has already risen from 178 in July 2012 to 254 in January 2013.]
- There was a 70% increase in volunteers from 2006–7 to 2010–12.
- One in three authorities has a volunteer library. However, these tend to be the smallest, so their overall percentage of library use is a lot less than 5%.
- 95% of currently community-managed libraries are operating as partners with local authorities, and still count as part of the statutory provision.
- The 95% is split between 'community managed' (40%), 'community supported' (40%) and 'commissioned' (15%).
- Everyone is doing it differently. No two authorities have adopted identical models. This is seen as a good thing, as it means each is 'most appropriate to a community's needs, capacity for involvement, and interest'.
- A properly managed, volunteer-run library 'does not mean a poorer library service'. Case studies suggest many offer more hours and more services than the service they replaced.
- Volunteer libraries are statutory as long as they're free and the council supports them in some way.

'So, as long as a library is serving the public and not charging for lending its books, it can be considered as part of the local statutory library service if the library authority considers that the library is required in order to fulfil its statutory duties and wishes to provide on-going support for it. Local authorities should be clear as to whether any community libraries within their area are part of their statutory provision or not.'

The 10 case studies

INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY LIBRARIES

- **Grappenhall, Warrington.** Independent community library. Asset (building) transferred (from council to community). 50 volunteers, no paid staff. 600 borrowers. Opening hours maintained.
- **Primrose Hill Library, Camden.** Independent community library. Asset not transferred. 220 volunteer 'pledges'. 560 pledges of financial support totals £600,000, of which 80% has been honoured. Opening hours increased.

GROUPS OF CO-PRODUCED LIBRARIES: MANAGED OR SUPPORTED

- **Buckinghamshire.** Community managed, statutory. Example: Farnham Common Community Library, 30 active volunteers, 500 (sic) volunteers on database. Opening hours increased.
- **Bradford.** Community managed, statutory. The number of volunteers varies between libraries, at the time of the research it was reported Addingham had around 30 active volunteers, Denholme had 14, Wilsden 15, and Wrose 16. Opening hours increased.
- **North Yorkshire.** Community managed, statutory. Example, Barby Library. 25 active volunteers. Opening hours maintained.
- **Lincolnshire. Example: Saxilby Community Library.** Community supported, statutory. Not open yet. Plan for increased opening hours.
- **Telford & Wrekin.** Community supported, statutory. All have some professional staffing, supplemented by parish councils. Opening hours maintained or increased.
- **Northamptonshire.** Community supported, statutory. 36 libraries. All have (reduced) professional staffing 'with volunteers providing add-on, wraparound support'. 820 active volunteers.

CO-PRODUCED LIBRARIES: COMMISSIONED

- **Croxteth Community Library, Liverpool.** Commissioned. Usage increased.
- **Suffolk (entire service).** Commissioned, statutory. Hours maintained.

Guiding principles

ACE and LGA have come up with some 'guiding principles' for authorities planning to withdraw from running one or more local libraries:

- Take a strategic view across the whole service. There are many things to think about but the main headings are:
 1. What outcomes are you seeking?
 2. Which outcomes could community involvement contribute towards?
 3. Are you reviewing individual libraries or the whole service?
 4. Are you reviewing buildings or services or both?
- Locally appropriate solutions work best.
- Community libraries are testing out what works best.
- They may not work in the areas that need them most.
- 'Community interest cannot be assumed, but needs to be assessed. Some communities are less able to get involved with service delivery and are sometimes less interested. Often, such communities are the very ones that most readily benefit from the provision of library services. Therefore, councils should consider whether it is appropriate to offer additional tailored support in these areas.'
- 'Community libraries' often involve more than 'just volunteers'.
- 'Professionalism must be at the heart of any library service. Community managed libraries can be professionally run, usually involve unpaid volunteers and paid professionals working closely together and a number employ their own paid professional staff.'
- Library buildings and assets can be transferred into community ownership. 'Our research showed that the majority of community libraries are still run from buildings owned (or sometimes leased) and managed by the local authority. Approximately one in six community library buildings are now owned and managed by the community... In practice, this means that the community own the building's freehold or a lease of 20 years or more.'

Councillor Flick Rea, Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism & Sport Board, said: 'What's emerging is a picture of great innovation and diversity, as local libraries evolve to suit the needs of different communities. Learning best practice from each other will be increasingly important in the tough economic years ahead.'

Equally unsurprisingly, the report has been met with dismay by library campaigners. The Library Campaign immediately released a highly critical statement (see box, page 15).

FRIENDS OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE LIBRARIES



Others also point out the lack of the negative in the report. And there is little mention of the fact that legal action can be taken and has been – although, presumably, the report will improve the chances of councils winning any such legal actions in future.

One or two responses I have seen have been unprintable. But librarian John Kirriemuir said: 'That's the government-supported death of UK public library professionalism in one easy swoop.'

Librarians' professional association CILIP condemned the 'headlong rush to set up more community managed libraries without understanding the consequences'. It is 'deeply concerned that this report will be used to justify further library closures, and our communities will suffer greater damage'.

The report, says CILIP, 'does not cover the wide range of experiences recorded by library volunteers themselves, many of whom are in a difficult position of having to manage their library or lose it entirely. These experiences are not always positive...'

Can I have £30m please?

The government suggests councils use some of its £30 million support fund to further volunteer-run libraries.

This includes grant funding, an advice service with a telephone helpline (0845 345 4564) and an online contact form which is available through Locality's My Community Rights website (<http://mycommunityrights.org.uk/advice-service>).

There is no money for councils that want to preserve or improve their own services.

So CILIP is asking to see the raw data on which the report's less-than-credible findings are based. So is The Library Campaign.

Library campaigner Lee Godfrey said: 'The councils that have had their volunteer library plans scrutinised most have been Gloucestershire, Somerset and Surrey. In each case the plans have come up short.'

'Hundreds of hours have been spent scrutinising

the volunteer library model in these cases, not to mention days of argument in the High Court. Yet none of these cases or evidence has been used to inform this report. How can this report be described as comprehensive or well informed?'

Another campaigner, Dave Peddie, said: 'In essence then, there is suddenly a £30 million fund available to put people out of work and replace them by volunteers.'

Why is it important?

➤ ACE will probably be firmly behind volunteer-run libraries. It says: 'Together with... ACE's programme of research and debate on what the library of the future could and should look like, this latest research will help to define ACE's long term strategy for libraries.'

Alan Davey, ACE's Chief Executive, said: 'What this research illustrates is that community involvement, when coupled with support from local authorities, does not mean a poorer library service. However, there is still work to do. Together with our research partners, we need to work to ensure that this professional support continues, for the benefit of library users today, and tomorrow.'

➤ The government sees the report as vindication of the Big Society [ie, reducing public services] and wants to encourage the process further.

Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Local Government, said: 'This report shows that localism is alive and well, with more people and local groups playing a bigger part than ever before in providing local services whilst also saving taxpayers money.'

'Libraries can be at the very heart of any neighbourhood. This research shows the kind of contribution active communities can make. Councils need to be making it as easy as possible for people to take over buildings and services that are valued by the local community.'

➤ The report moves towards removing concerns that (a) volunteer-run libraries are not statutory and/or (b) that they are inferior.

➤ It attempts to codify different types of volunteer-run libraries

➤ It provides much useful guidance to councils on how to create volunteer-run branches, with links to websites, publications and organisations that can help.

NOTE: It provides no advice for communities that do not want to run their own libraries, or to see them closed or run down or starved of professional staff.

BRENT SOS



'Well, let's see how the service is operating in two years' time, when the volunteers get bored and find other things they want to do with their free time.'

'Anyone who has worked for any period of time in the voluntary sector (I have) will probably tell you that organising volunteers is a thankless task, that turnover can be considerable and that to maintain, in every aspect, a previously funded service on volunteers will require a pool of volunteers three or four times greater than the personnel they are replacing.'

'Good luck with that, then!'

HOVLAKE, WIRRAL



What The Library Campaign said

Nobody has a clue how – or if – community libraries will work. But the idea is being pushed – hard!

It's a gigantic experiment, on a vital public service, in the middle of a huge crisis.

The last time anyone did a report on 'community-managed libraries' only a handful existed, all very different one from another. So very little could be learned about this idea.

Arts Council England (ACE) has worked hard to find out what is going on now. But now, suddenly, there are hundreds of 'community libraries'. Scores have been created since this research was done, so it's out of date already. Hundreds more seem set to happen in 2013.

All of them are so new that there is no information on how well they work, or whether they will last. No two are alike. Even within the same borough. There are lots of different ways of running them. Nobody has a clue which might work best, where.

ACE has put them into categories and written up ten case histories. This just underlines the fact that the variety is bewildering.

'Community libraries' have mostly been created in haste and panic and conflict. They have mostly been created by communities desperate to do anything to avoid closing down their library completely. Their only choice was: 'Lose it or run it yourselves.' The Library Campaign wishes these people luck. They will need it. Nobody knows what chance they have.

And we note that there is advice for councils who want to offload their library services any way they can. But there is no advice for local people who DON'T want their libraries to drift out of public service control, DON'T want to pay their taxes but do all the work themselves and DO want councils to listen to their views and suggestions.

NB: It is surprising, when you look at the case studies, how little money these 'community libraries' save. All are heavily supported by their library authorities. And all are also taking money out of community or other public funds, ranging from parish councils to rural development grants.

Super stats!

www.cipfastats.net/librariesprofilesdcms

How good is your library service? How does it compare with similar services? Use this website and you'll get a better idea than has generally been possible before.

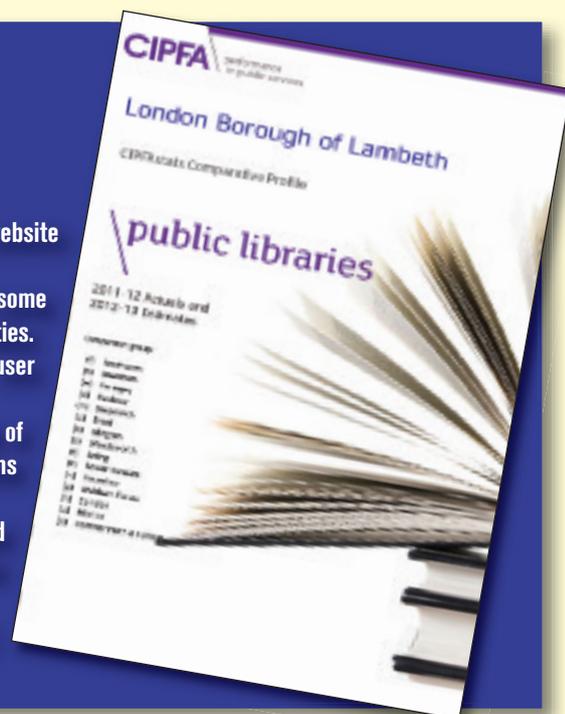
It has a short report for almost every library authority in England. Each report sets out some basic measures, and compares the service's performance against a group of similar authorities.

Things like stock, active users, visits, loans, branches/hours open, staffing, finances, user satisfaction ... and much more. And it's something useful from the libraries minister!

Every year CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy) collates a host of figures laboriously compiled by local librarians. They come out very late – and nobody seems to make much use of them.

They used to be analysed to show national trends (not much use if you are trying to find out why some services perform so much better than others). Then even that stopped. The full report is vast and is jealously guarded by CIPFA, which sells it hundreds of pounds.

But this year – at last – minister Ed Vaizey has paid for these comparison reports. They are a crude measure perhaps, but they are a very good start. Use them!



A bad deal all round

What some of us community volunteers really think. As told to Phil Bradley, CILIP President.

I have been chatting with the chair of one of the many 'Friends of' library groups. One email was so powerful that I asked permission to share it.

The person who wrote it very kindly agreed, but said that since they had to work with their council, would I make sure that I redacted any mention of who, what or where. I'm very happy to comply.

Anyway, here it is:

'As the Chair of one of the [place] libraries which are to become community-run this year, I can tell you first-hand that even those of us who have elected to take on our libraries rather than lose them altogether are under no illusions that this is anything but a very bad deal all round.

'The only minute consolation is that, despite the difficulties, having a profit-making commercial company taking over would be even worse.

'Needless to say, there was no real consultation. Any proposed scheme to make the same level of savings which did not conform to their pre-decided scheme was summarily dismissed. County councillors were overwhelmed with reports to ensure they did not appreciate the arguments.

'We are under no illusion that we shall be able to provide anything like as good a service as our village has enjoyed in the past.

'When the next round of cost-savings arrives, we shall watch with sadness the inevitable closures or community takeovers of those libraries currently deprived.

'The council expects us to hold a celebration on the day we take over in [named library] and will be surprised when we'd rather hold a wake. They seem to think they are doing us a favour in promoting 'community-managed' libraries.

'Have they been talking to the Arts Council, I wonder?

Mission creep

There's much, much more to find out about the Universal Offers, and how they are supposed to work.

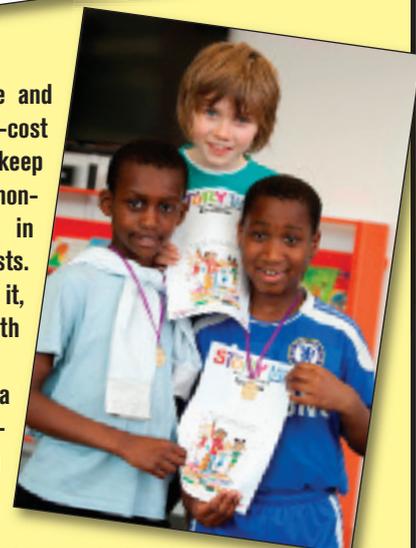
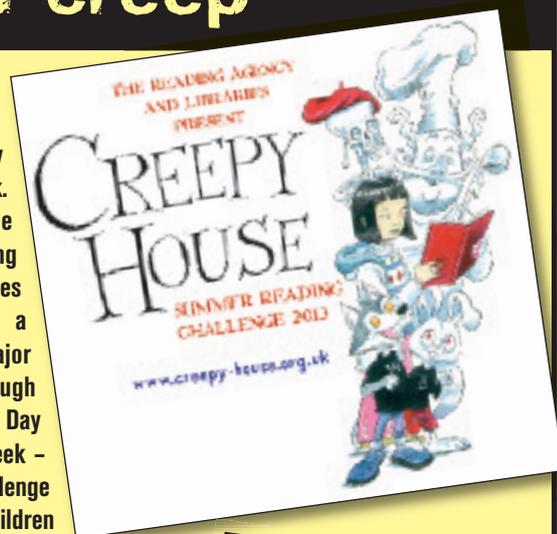
For instance – one element of the Reading Offer will be that all services will focus together on a limited number of major promotions, paced through the year. Like World Book Day (and Night), Bookstart Week – and Summer Reading Challenge (SRC). This encourages children to keep reading through the summer holiday.

Events, small prizes, a lively website and promotional material all add up to a low-cost campaign with proven results. Readers keep up their reading skills – and many non-readers find new joy and confidence in books. Mass take-up means very low costs.

The Reading Agency (TRA), who run it, are now finding ways to work with 'community-managed' libraries.

More news soon. But it does seem a good way to help save these libraries – and their communities – from becoming isolated and demoralised. Everyone would rather have a proper, professional library. But at least we might prevent the kids from losing out.

This year's SRC theme is The Creepy House!



www.creepy-house.org.uk

Nothing to do with us - gov

In the last issue, we set out the conclusions of the Commons select committee on public library closures. They were sound enough, but not very hard-hitting – and showed no sense of urgency. Now the government (DCMS) has responded.

Laura Swaffield is not impressed ...

We get the idea right away, in the DCMS's 'introduction'. 'The library service in England,' it chirps, 'remains strong and popular ... This is not a service in crisis.'

So that's all right. If you say it all the time, loudly, people will believe you. Unless, of course, they actually use libraries.

There's one bit of good news. Our cheery libraries minister (Ed Vaizey) has surprised us all by promising a little bit more than he did before.

In his oral session, he promised the committee he'd report at the end of 2014 on 'the cumulative effect on library services of the reduction in local authority provision and the growth of alternatives such as community libraries'.

Crash and burn

A bit late, since mass closures have been going on since 2011! Will there be anything left to report on? The committee was widely criticised for accepting this absurd proposal.

Well, maybe Ed noticed. He's now promised to do his first report at the end of 2013. AND every year from then on.

Are we grateful? Nope. This is still insultingly late to review three years of crash and burn. And too late to undo the damage.

Anyway, Ed will work 'with the LGA and the Arts Council', two bodies now well established as uncritical towards closures and all-out volunteering. And he's already famous for trilling that everything's fine, no matter what the evidence shows.

Almost everything else in in this brief response says, in essence: 'It's nothing to do with us, gov. It's down to local authorities.'

National oversight?

That's the response to everything said by the committee on the need for 'national oversight' and stronger advice to local councils. DCMS has 'no intention' of returning to the hugely popular national standards (2001–08), it says.

It will retain councils' statutory duty to provide a library service. That's something no government has ever dared to try dismantling.



■ Ed Vaizey, the DCMS minister who says everything is absolutely fine ...

DCMS does, it insists, do 'national oversight'. It does not agree that it is 'unwilling to use' its powers. As proof, it lists the fact that so far it has decided to do nothing in the four cases referred to it!

As for issuing useful guidance, forget it. The committee had drily noted that 'it is not cost-effective for policy to be made by judicial review'.

DCMS will 'circulate' ACE's controversial research (see page 13) – readily available online to anybody – and re-send some of its old letters (which had no effect).

Pure waffle greets the committee's point that 'wholesale closures are unlikely to facilitate an appropriate level of service'. A 'distributed service' is

still essential if libraries are to reach 'the whole population' as they legally must.

Same with the committee's point that councils 'must ensure' enough trained and/or experienced staff.

Same with the committee's sharp warning that: 'It is not clear how sustainable ... community libraries may be, nor what impact the change will have on some of the outreach work conducted by libraries, particularly in relation to children and reading ... they may wither on the vine and therefore be viewed as closures by stealth.'

Illusion

All these fears are now coming to pass, as shown by the WI report (page 5). But DCMS meets all these points with waffle.

'Professionally qualified librarians are key to the public library service ... community-supported libraries can present a creative way to manage resources in appropriate individual cases. They are a way of growing the library service, not replacing it.'

But they ARE replacing it - right, left and centre! Except on Planet Ed.

So it's 'no' to the committee's suggestion that someone does a proper evaluation of 'the effectiveness of the different models being developed round the country and ... an analysis for councils'.

No need, says DCMS, bizarrely. Councils can cobble together their own guidance from reports like ACE's latest disaster (see page 13) and 'correspondence between ministers and library authorities' (seldom revealed to mere library users).

Instead, DCMS talks up the role of ACE as the 'development agency for libraries' – and ignores the committee's point that ACE's budget has been slashed to ribbons.

So the government is determined to keep up the illusion that public libraries are just fine – no matter what everyone else says.

Apart from this role as denier-in-chief, it's hard to make out what on earth it thinks it is there to do.

**A curiosity for policy wonks – but a dangerous move: the government sneaks in its own re-
definition of the words 'comprehensive and efficient' (the last weapon of anyone trying to hold
a council to its duty under the 1964 Act).**

**This phrase, it now claims, 'represents the balance to be struck by each local authority in
meeting local needs within the context of available resources in a way which is appropriate to
the identified needs of the communities they serve'. There is nothing in the Act to say that
inadequate resources are an excuse.**

GET THE FULL REPORT HERE:

www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm85/8535/8535.pdf

Promises, promises ...

Labour's long-promised policy review on libraries came out in December 2012. Experience tells us that words in opposition don't often translate into action in power. But these are the promises (extracts, but wording exactly as in the review).

BASICS

- Libraries should be at the heart of our communities. Labour believes in One Nation communities, in which everybody has a stake, prosperity is fairly shared, and we value the institutions that underpin our common life.
- Libraries can make an important contribution to all of these ideals ... One Nation means preserving the institutions that bind us together.
- Libraries are not a luxury: they are a practical tool and vital public space for individuals and families.
- Labour's vision is to build on the potential libraries offer – to make them an asset rooted at the heart of every community, and responsive to its needs.
- We recognise the role they can play in education, in culture and in access to information; ensuring that everyone can gain the skills they need to learn, work and socialise.
- Government at all levels should aim to strengthen this traditional mission, but also to build on the unique ability of libraries to create new partnerships, anchor other services and be a more effective asset for the communities they serve – which in practice can mean anything from Baby Rhyme Time to business incubation.

WHY LIBRARIES ARE VALUABLE

- Community and regeneration – libraries should act as a focus for community life. They are a place to spend time and socialise for young people, students, parents, elderly people and others, no matter what your background.
- Social justice – libraries embody a basic principle of equality of opportunity, providing access to information and learning for all. They are ladders to improve social mobility.
- Education and literacy – libraries have an important role in encouraging reading and literacy, particularly amongst children.
- Digital exclusion – 23% per cent of households still do not have internet access. Libraries helped get 1 million people online last year [2011].

- Business and employment – The British Library ... provides information tailored for businesses and start-ups; other libraries provide ... start-up advice and mentoring, IT advice and CV and finance workshops.
- A trusted space and partner for co-location or anchoring other services ... Co-location can enhance a library's role as a centre of community life, while providing good value for money.

VOLUNTEERS

- Different communities require different services and the way in which these are delivered will also differ.
- Labour believes that volunteers can make a valuable contribution in a One Nation society, and can do much to improve the library service and to bring it closer to the needs of the community.
- Community, volunteer run, libraries should be encouraged and supported where there is genuinely no other alternative to closure. But too often ... the 'Big Society' has been a fig-leaf for cuts.
- We need to value and celebrate volunteering in its own right, not use it crudely as a substitute for important public services where government has failed to live up to its responsibility for providing them.

KNOWLEDGE/DIGITAL ECONOMY

- The services libraries can provide will be vital to ensuring the next generation have the skills required ...
- Commitment to the underlying principles of access, guidance and equality of opportunity will need to be more determined than ever ... Libraries must provide a space in which people can become both digitally literate and can access resources in a digital format.
- There have been concerns that libraries may become obsolete as society increasingly shifts to digital formats. This seems unlikely: the underlying principles of a library as a place to freely access



■ Dan Jarvis MP, shadow libraries minister

knowledge, learning and culture will endure, even if they must evolve. An e-book cannot host a children's reading group, provide a quiet space to study, supply expert help or ensure access to technology for all ...

- The evolution of technology should not be seen as an opponent to more traditional formats and roles, but rather as a stimulus for libraries to develop in tune with the needs of their communities.

LIBRARY STAFF

- As libraries evolve and adapt to the changing needs of their communities, the skills of library staff will also need to develop, around a core of professional knowledge.
- The contribution of librarians is often greatly under-valued. Their role remains vital.
- With the proliferation of information sources, the diversification of the work of libraries and the need to forge new relationships with communities and beyond, it has the potential to be broader and more valuable than ever.

GOVERNMENT'S ROLE

- Libraries are provided at a local level and councils rightly have the first claim to leadership. But the government has a clear duty to minimise the

BRIGHT IDEAS: The review also advocates*:

- Co-locate libraries with colleges, job centres etc to provide 'an access point for everything from IT to language training, job clubs to books on prescription, Healthy Living Hubs to theatre space'.
- Save money via 'combined back-office functions with other authorities'.
- Link libraries to other government services like health, education and employment. Work with relevant government departments.
- Work with organisations such as The British Library, Booktrust, The Reader Organisation, National Literacy Trust, CILIP and The Reading Agency.
- Set up 'a dedicated body to support development, innovation, best practice and ... efficiency savings, and increase impact, helping lessen the pressure for cuts' ... How? Re-shape existing bodies dealing with libraries, strengthen Arts Council's supervisory role.

* except for words in quotes, words in this box are The Library Campaign's.

damage being done to the library service, and to provide an overarching strategic vision ... [with] local government to work in partnership to fully realise the potential of libraries.

- Government has a responsibility to maintain standards and provide direction.
- At a time when libraries are withering on the vine in many communities, oversight is more critical than at any time before.

WHAT WOULD LABOUR DO?

[Labour] are looking closely at the following areas:

- A concerted effort to engage with councils and help them minimise the impact of cuts on frontline services – for example, through a stronger focus on co-location and support for sharing back-office functions.
- A comprehensive review of the services libraries could offer ... and of opportunities for collaboration with other departments and outside bodies.
- A long-term strategy, in partnership with local authorities, to suit an evolving, and increasingly digital, society.
- Ways libraries can engage with local communities to ensure they are responsive to their needs.
- An organisation working across government and in collaboration with councils to effectively promote better libraries – sharing ideas, encouraging best practice and new partnerships, raising awareness, promoting efficiency, providing advice to ministers and local authority leaders and supporting libraries.
- National reading and business challenges, and other measures to raise the profile of local libraries and increase usership.
- A clearer and stronger system for oversight and standards that strikes the right balance between effectiveness and avoiding bureaucratic constraint.

Super-users!

In December 2012, SCL (the Society of Chief Librarians) published a report to demonstrate that ‘libraries are no longer just seen as places that lend books, but as providers of multiple and wide-ranging services in local communities’.

‘A new analysis of internal library data over the past decade has shown that people are using libraries for more than just borrowing books,’ says SCL. It has identified ‘the five main users of libraries ... super-users’.

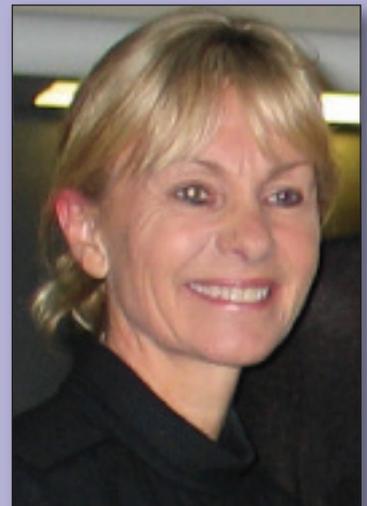
This knowledge, it hopes, will help to ‘demonstrate the multiple roles of libraries to local authorities’.

It follows a report by CIPFA which showed that library staff are second only to doctors in terms of the trust placed on them by seekers of information.

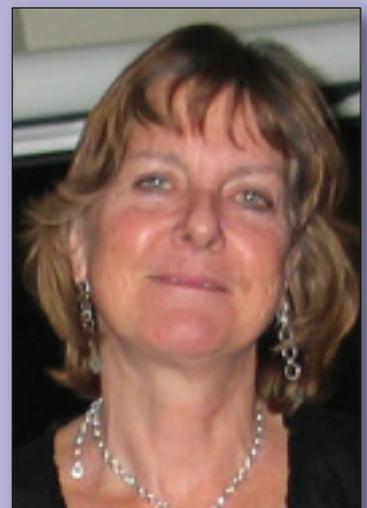
The report shows ‘the vital role the library service plays within local communities today’, said Janene Cox, the new SCL President. ‘That role has changed and developed, from something which was quite passive into a service which is now dynamic and interactive.

‘Communities are engaging with our services in lots of different ways and for lots of different reasons. What’s very clear is that the service is hugely valued, and the experience quite unique.

‘We hope the research will provide useful advocacy material at a time of great pressure,’ added Miranda McKearney, Director of The Reading Agency, a charity that works with SCL to develop reading programmes. We hope so too ...



■ Janene Cox



■ Miranda McKearney

So who are these super-users?

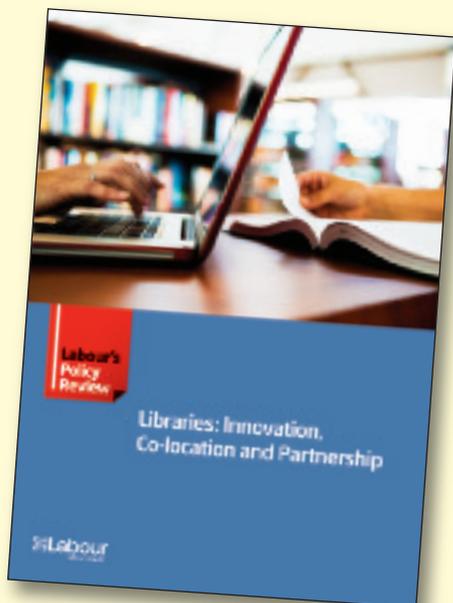
CAREER BUILDERS – people who use resources in their local libraries to write CVs, practise interviews in meeting rooms, and find out about self-improvement. The 10 Keys to Success by John Bird was taken out 9,526 times in the last 4 years.

HEALTH DETECTIVES – people who search for information about a condition affecting them or a friend or relative. In 2011, 8.3 million books about health and personal development were lent. The most popular included *Overcoming Anxiety: a self-help guide* by Helen Kennerley (lent 9,428 times) and *Overcoming Depression: a self-help guide* by Paul Gilbert (lent 8,430 times).

LITTLE LEARNERS – five-to-ten-year-olds who are devouring books, and keen to learn about the world. According to the Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 72.7% of children have visited a library in the last 12 months. 79 million children’s books were lent last year, the most popular book being *The Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson. According to Public Lending Right’s 2012 data, five children’s writers are among the Top 10 Most Borrowed Authors in UK libraries. They include Daisy Meadows (2nd) and Dame Jacqueline Wilson (4th, and also the UK’s most borrowed author of the last ten years, with at least 1m lent every year).

FRIEND FINDERS – people who are, often for the first time in their lives, experiencing isolation. Whether they have lost their jobs or suffered a change in their family life, they come to use libraries as a way of meeting other people. There are over 10,000 reading groups across the UK, and many small local initiatives such as Staffordshire’s ‘Knit and Natter’ groups in 13 libraries.

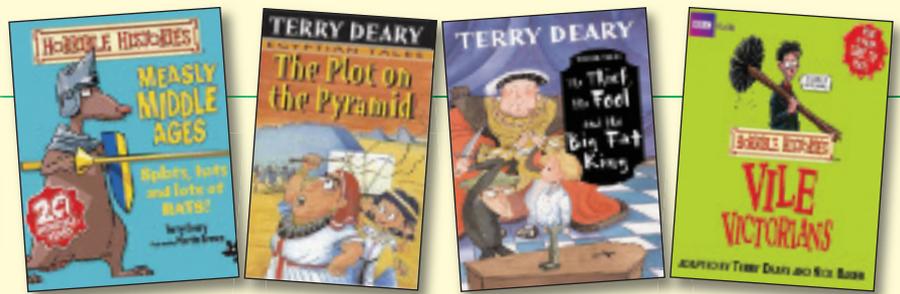
RESEARCH SLEUTHS – people who are keen to learn more about their family’s past or their local community. Often retirees, they access information about ancestry, local politics and issues that are relevant to them. In 2012–13, 16.3% of adults had visited a library website in the last 12 months, a significant increase from 8.9% in 2005–06. 76.6% of these people had searched and viewed online information.



■ Get the review here:
www.yourbritain.org.uk/uploads/editor/files/LIBRARIES.pdf

GET THE FULL REPORT HERE:
www.goscl.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Library-super-users-pack.Media-Materials.pdf

Oh Deary!



Terry Deary mass-produces popular 'horrible history' books for children. In February he caused a storm when he came out in support of the local government library blitzkrieg. Alan Templeton dares to give Deary a hearing ...

Welcoming a plan to close over half the public libraries in his home town of Sunderland, children's author Terry Deary told his local paper:

'Libraries have had their day. They are a Victorian idea and we are in an electronic age. They either have to change and adapt or they have to go. I know some people like them, but fewer and fewer people are using them, and these are straitened times. A lot of the gush about libraries is sentimentality.'

He added: 'The book is old technology and we have to move on, so good luck to the council.' *

One thing that can be said about Terry Deary is that he is a brave man. His is a lone voice in the loud, sometimes hysterical, response of authors to the knee-jerk reactions of many councils to funding difficulties.

Just because no other author has voiced the same opinion as Terry D, it does not mean that he is wrong. We need to carefully consider exactly what he has said, before making a judgement. To do otherwise is to join the packed ranks of officers, civil servants and politicians with closed minds.

Terry Deary statement 1: 'Libraries have had their day. They are a Victorian idea, and we are in an electronic age. They either have to change and adapt or they have to go.'

Actually, this statement cannot be faulted. Libraries, open to the whole population, were indeed an invention of the Victorians.

One of the great concerns of the Victorian reformers was widespread illiteracy. They fought a long, hard battle against establishment indifference to force into existence this simple remedy. Illiteracy and establishment indifference are still with us – and the battle has been restarted.

It is also true that public libraries have to adapt or they will wither away. However, library services are trying very hard to adapt. They are trying to adapt in an atmosphere of general chaos in the book trade.

The book trade has changed very little since the days of William Caxton. Until very recently, it saw no reason to move out of its long established comfort zone. Its initial reactions to the 'electronic age' were defences of existing practices. This was essentially against the public interest.

Thanks largely to the intervention of the US Justice Department, these have been nullified. With luck, we may be on course for a sensible outcome.

Part of that sensible outcome must be a mutually beneficial relationship between authors, publishers and library services. Terry D should look closer to home when he complains about resistance to change.

Terry Deary statement 2: 'A lot of the gush about libraries is sentimentality.'

It has to be admitted that there is an element of truth in this statement. But it is debateable whether 'a lot' is an accurate assessment.

What can be said with certainty is that library campaigners generally resist closures of existing library buildings, even when they are told they will get a smarter, more up-to-date building in exchange.

Of course people become attached to a building that has served the community well for generations – but they are not stupid. Some library buildings have no architectural merit. Some are positively ugly. Yet they are usually defended by their communities when the local council offers something different. The core reason for this almost universal rejection is distrust of the alternative.

Very few people believe that the new building is being offered purely to enhance services. They have been tricked too many times in the past to accept such assurances at face value.

This is not sentimentality, but a hard-headed judgement of the veracity of local government.

Local authorities always react to changing circumstances slowly, so we can be sure that the

population has already adopted any new technology long before senior council officers notice anything has happened.

These officers are never eager first adopters. They are always just followers of fashion. Therefore, the normal expectation would be that communities would welcome any move to update library buildings to accommodate new technology.

When the update is within an existing building, there is usually little resistance. The fierce resistance appears when the updating involves a new building.

Even duplicitous local authorities do not often claim that a simple library closure is a way to update the service to the public. But an accusation of sentimentality is one way they can try to discredit opposition.

As there are few real arguments to support library closures, the sentimentality issue has become one of the main weapons for politicians impatient with those who wish to defend what has taken many generations to build.

Terry Deary statement 3: 'The book is old technology and we have to move on.'

Of course the printed book is old technology. Essentially, it is the same as that used by Johannes Gutenberg over 500 years ago.

The greatest drag on the adoption of the new e-book technology is not provided by the library world, but by vested interests in the publishing world. These have kept the price of e-books artificially high.

Only after action by US authorities are the big publishers slowly coming to terms with the new realities. If Terry D is in favour of a fast adoption of the new technology, he would be better aiming his criticism at the big publishers. Or is that a target a little too close to his wallet?

* www.sunderlandecho.com/news/local/all-news/sunderland-libraries-facing-closure-under-850-000-savings-plan-1-5401946#.URogx-8V55M.twitter. * www.thebookseller.com/news/deary-libraries-have-had-their-day.html

Just after Terry Deary advocated library closures as the way forward, another part of the book trade turned on the big publishers and Amazon for their use of restrictive practices.*

Three small independent booksellers are suing these powerful businesses over their use of digital rights management (DRM) 'specifically designed to limit the use of digital content'.

Effectively, e-books sold by these big publishers can be read only on an Amazon Kindle.

This action is, of course, in the USA and is a necessary tidying-up activity, after the US Justice Department forced the dissolution of a publisher + Apple cartel intended to keep e-book prices artificially high.

It is not just library campaigners who see the world differently to Terry Deary.

* www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/digital/content-and-e-books/article/56042-indie-booksellers-sue-amazon-big-six-over-e-book-drm.html