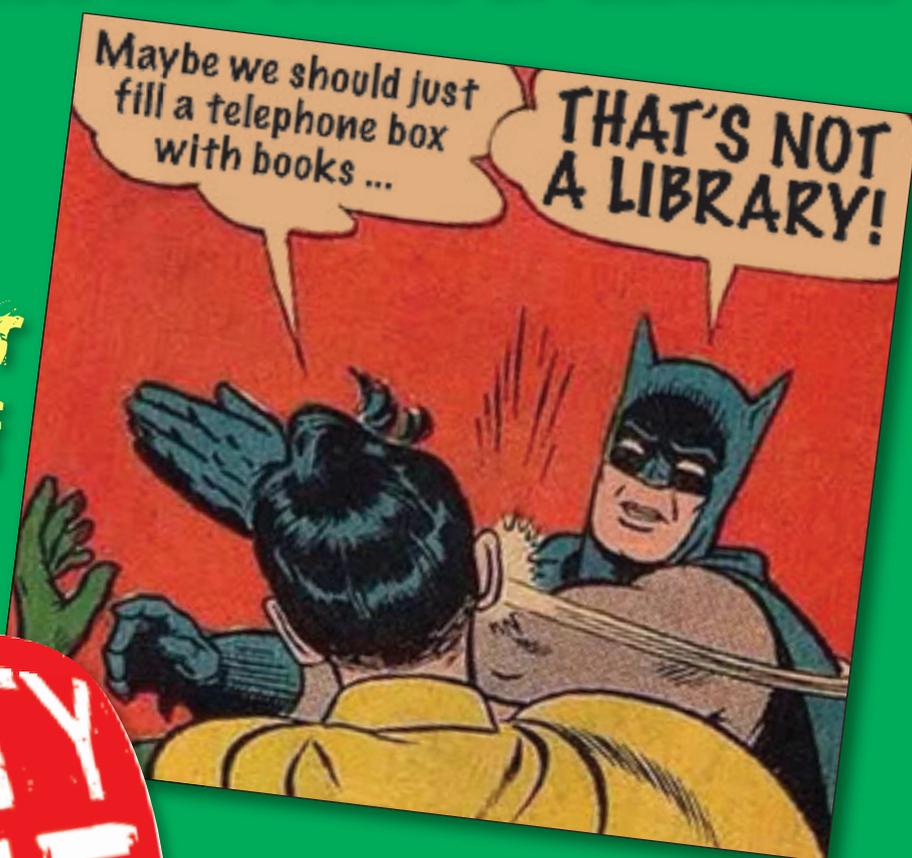


LIBRARY CAMPAIGN

SUPPORTING FRIENDS AND USERS OF LIBRARIES

What does
the future
really hold for
do-it-yourself
libraries?

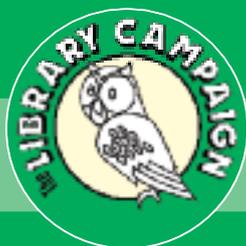


REALITY
ISSUE

What's really
happening in
public libraries?

Does the government really care?

SUMMER 2013
No. 87



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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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FRIENDS GROUPS LIAISON AND CO-ORDINATOR: Vacant – if interested, please contact the Secretary

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 20. 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: 29 June (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.



**Your chance to question Brian Ashley,
the new libraries director at Arts Council England**

2.00 – 4.30pm, 29 June 2013

University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HY



Brian Ashley has taken over the lead libraries job at Arts Council England at a crucial time, with the release of 'Envisioning the Library of the Future'. So who is he? And what can he do for libraries?

Join the Question and Answer session led by prominent library campaigners including Ian Anstice, Desmond Clarke, Trevor Craig & Alan Wylie

FOLLOWED BY THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (MEMBERS ONLY) 4.30 TO 5.15pm

All are welcome but numbers are limited so please email thelibrarycampaign@gmail.com to confirm attendance

Find out more about the Library Campaign at www.librarycampaign.com



Transport: Northern Line: Euston, Warren Street, Goadge Street stations. Piccadilly Line: Russell Square station. Victoria Line: Euston and Warren Street stations. Circle, Metropolitan and Hammersmith & City Lines: Euston Square station. **Buses:** Gower Street (10, 24, 29, 73, 134, 390); Euston Road (18, 30, 91, 205, 253, 476); Woburn Place / Southampton Row (59, 68, 91, 168, 188).

29 JUNE: HURRY!

Library Campaign members get priority.

You need to let the Secretary know you are coming.

Call 020 8651 9552 or email thelibrarycampaign@gmail.com

We need new blood!



The Library Campaign has never been busier. And it has never been more badly needed. We have vacancies on the executive committee. Especially for people who live outside London.

The main task is to attend meetings every two months, to report what is happening nationwide and discuss policy and tactics. We pay reasonable travel expenses. (We are exploring the use of technology such as Skype, so that people don't have to attend in person every time).

It is too late to nominate yourself for election at the AGM, but the committee has power to co-opt extra members – so, if you haven't responded before, we'd still like to hear from you!

To find out more, contact the Secretary (details on the page opposite).



This issue is a pretty doomy one. That's for a reason. The Library Campaign is well aware that great stuff is daily done by libraries – both public and volunteer (and those in between). We are all about good libraries – and community involvement.

However, right now there is a more urgent job to do. We need to provide some balance against the insouciance of the two bodies that are supposed to look after libraries.

DCMS (Department for Culture, Media & Sport) has done some useful things. But in the face of mass closures – changing the face of provision for ever – it just looks away.

ACE (Arts Council England) has also done some good things. But its main effort has gone into waffling about the future of libraries – without noticing that this has already changed drastically.

We support all libraries and library users. We applaud those who are fighting closures. We applaud those who feel forced to run libraries. In practice, there's no clear distinction between the two.

But we do think somebody up there should notice what's really going on. And do something that actually helps. Hence this reality issue...

Laura Swaffield

**THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGNER
SUMMER 2013, No.87**

EDITOR: Laura Swaffield

DESIGN & PRODUCTION: Owain Hammonds

CONTRIBUTORS: Ian Anstice, Jim Brooks, Shirley Burnham, Mike Chaney, Trevor Craig, Mick Fortune, Sally Prentice, Laura Swaffield, Alan Templeton, Ed Vaizey. COVER PICTURE: Ian Clark

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- 5 **The Library Campaign's call to action** This is what is needed to start dealing with the libraries crisis. Now – who will do it?
- 5 **ACE of duds?** Laura Swaffield outlines Arts Council England's latest failure to see what's really happening.
- 6 **Falling off a cliff?** Shirley Burnham & Trevor Craig spot some scary, little-noticed implications of turning over libraries to volunteer control.
- 8 **Why she won't help** Ian Anstice analyses the Secretary of State's reasons for not intervening to save libraries.
- 9 **Hanging on** A new survey from Unison shows public library staff struggling to run a good service despite many problems – especially cuts. And it's certain to get worse ...
- 13 **Domesday scenario** Councillor Sally Prentice says librarians must re-think and re-skill to survive today's unrelenting pressures.
Boo hoo Librarian Ian Anstice thinks she's right.
- 14 **Self-service? Watch out!** Mick Fortune points out that some big problems loom for public libraries – so heaven help volunteers.
- 15 **Missing link** Alan Templeton marvels at libraries' neglect of an obvious tool – publicity.
- 16 **Set up to fail?** Jim Brooks' community library is very successful. But the current rush to create these all over the country is, he says, disastrously misconceived.
- 16 **Need help?** Little Chalfont Community Library is hardly a national resource. But it's about all there is to help people forced to try to run their local library.
- 17 **'No cost to the council'** How Little Chalfont Community Library succeeded, and what was learned.
- 18 **Death of the public library system?** Mike Chaney helped set up another volunteer library – but fears this is directly contributing to the death of an irreplaceable national system.
- 19 **E-loans, by gum!** Laura Swaffield welcomes (limited) progress
- 20 **Join us!** Application form to join The Library Campaign. Together, libraries are stronger.

Dear Minister ...

A sorry tale, told in letters to and from Laura Swaffield ...

**REALITY
ISSUE**

When Mr Vaizey attended the Locality conference on 5 March, I questioned him on the fact that nobody at the conference had said they were happy to provide their own library service, no matter how well it seemed to be working, and that all had said they would prefer the professional service they had had before. He replied that his experience, visiting community libraries all over the country, had been different. Videos of this whole day conference, including Ed's speech (and Laura's question) are at <http://libraries.communityknowledgehub.org.uk/resources>

20th March 2013

Could you please provide a list of the libraries that are known to be happy running their own libraries, in preference to having a professional service, so that we can contact them.

The next issue of our national magazine will focus on community libraries, and I am most anxious to provide balanced coverage of the issues.

Many thanks.

Laura Swaffield
Chair, The Library Campaign

14th April 2013

Can we please have a reply to our letter of March 20.

I am anxious to give this issue balanced coverage. But I have still not been able to find a volunteer library that has been willingly set up in preference to a professional service, or for any reason except that they have been offered no other way to save it.

Many thanks.

Laura Swaffield
Chair, The Library Campaign

30th April 2013

Dear Ms Swaffield

Thank you for your e-mail message of 20 March requesting a list of community libraries content to be running their own libraries, in preference to having a professional service.

As I said at the Enterprising Community Libraries event in March, community involvement in libraries is not new. Most authorities have welcomed and benefitted from the support and commitment of their communities in the library service. Community libraries play an important part of urban and rural life and are a way of augmenting the library service, not replacing it.

In my view examples of where this is evident include Chalfont St. Giles Community Library in Buckinghamshire and also Cholsey Community Library from within my own constituency. In this former example I know that those involved with the process of running the library have enjoyed the experience and they have received a number of enquiries from communities across the country looking to establish a community library.

I trust that these suggestions are helpful for your article.

Ed Vaizey MP
Minister for Culture, Communications
and Creative Industries

17th May 2013

Dear Ed,

Thank you for this. I'm sorry. It's not terribly useful.

I know about both these libraries. The work that both do is stunningly admirable, I grant you.

However, at Chalfont St Giles, the volunteers (in person, on their website and on YouTube) are clear:

'We fought tooth and nail for the library not to shut. In an ideal world you would want it to be run by the county ... a well-funded traditional paid staff library is likely to be the best option for any community ...

'The model that we have followed in Chalfont St Giles is not universally applicable. Our library is small with light to moderate use.

'Buckinghamshire is a relatively prosperous county with a sufficient pool of people with the time and skills to operate the local library. Trying to follow the same model in a busy town library in a deprived area would, I think, be unlikely to succeed.' Etc etc.

At Cholsey, the people created a library where there was none before, Oxfordshire having decided that none was viable.

This is not a case of cheering as the council library closes, and itching to take it over.

Their excellent enterprise does not seem to me to provide all that a proper library does, as it is completely independent - ie, completely cut off from county and national collections and networks.

And, like Chalfont St. Giles, it is in an affluent area with a good number of retired people with a wide range of professional skills. This is not a replicable model.

If this is all that is offered as an alternative to the mass library closures now taking place - those who need a library most will be the losers. I am astonished that you can't see this.

I am also amazed at the complete dearth of support for those who are being forced to take on a library, as the only way to save it.

If you and the Arts Council really think volunteer libraries are such a great idea, why are you not providing advice and support?

Why are you not working to solve the common problems that we have identified? The resulting mess is wasteful - and cruel.

I append a list of the most obvious, screaming needs. They are very much your responsibility.

I'd very much like to know what the DCMS will do about them.

Yours sincerely

Laura Swaffield
Chair, The Library Campaign



■ Above: Chalfont St Giles Library

■ Left: Cholsey Library - the original shared building. Local volunteers are now moving into a much better building - which the council declined to use for a library itself.

The Library Campaign CALL TO ACTION

1. The Library Campaign is getting a constant stream of requests for help & advice from communities trying to take over libraries (with or without council support). It is hard to give them what they need.
2. Moreover, we have the absurd and wasteful situation where many library services are having to deal individually with a large number of new problems that are, in fact, common to all. Some could be answered by an expert panel, and standard fact sheets. Others need proper agreements at national level.
3. Also needed is a means of maintaining awareness of what a proper library service is, especially among those who now can only easily access a "community-run" facsimile. We suggest a checklist of what a full service offers, to be ticked at each site, so that all can see what is available on site, remain aware of what is available at the 'central' library, and perhaps aspire to restoring a full service in time. A good example of the genre is the 'model of service' checklist-cum-development-plan produced by the Reading Agency in 2007 for their improvement programme for youth libraries (Fulfilling Their Potential). See pp 7-10, Campaigner magazine Winter 2007-8: No 75 on www.librarycampaign.com.

BASIC STARTER LIST OF ISSUES

1. Need for proper access to/analysis of CIPFA figures.
2. PLR (relationship to national system, possible extra costs to non-statutory libraries, etc).
3. Real implications of /requirements under legislation covering health & safety, equalities, human rights, TUPE, copyright (eg, photocopying), licensing for events/music/films/alcohol, data protection. Etc.
4. Insurance
5. Protection of children & vulnerable adults, CRB etc.
6. Handling cash/security.
7. RFID.
8. LMS – small individual or linked to council system.
9. IT systems – as above.
10. Access to borough/national catalogues & inter-library loans.
11. Status of the Universal Offers & other national reading schemes, eg Summer Reading Challenge.
12. Ability to help with online benefit claims, job applications etc (IT provision, staff training, ethics/legality of volunteers handling personal information).
13. Access to national schemes like the Reference Online discount deal.
14. Access to reading group sets, music & playsets.
15. Training required to deal with all the above.
16. Organisational kit – draft constitution etc.
17. Volunteer policy.
18. General advice on funding/sustainability;
19. Safeguards for communities that can't run their own library.
20. Guidance on support by that is needed by volunteers.
21. Advice on which general model to adopt in running a "community" service.
22. Stock management (eg, dealing with additions, exchanges and withdrawals for stock provided by the library authority).
23. Not least, numerous health & professional issues for trained staff having to train/work with large numbers of untrained staff.

ACE of duds?

A fresh start with ACE (Arts Council England) is desperately needed, says Laura Swaffield

There's widespread interest in our meeting this month with Brian Ashley, new libraries director at ACE. He's new in post. He can't undo ACE's past failures. But we need to tell him that ACE must get real. Public libraries have been badly let down – just when they have most needed help.

The last straw, for many, is the final part of its long-drawn-out 'Envisioning' research. We have commented on previous bits (So far, so obvious!).

The new bit comes with a 'response', ironically titled The Library of the Future². We won't analyse it here. This is our 'reality' edition.

But, tragically, reality is never addressed in this report. It pushes four 'priorities':

- 1 Place the library as the hub of a community
- 2 Make the most of digital technology and creative media
- 3 Ensure that libraries are resilient and sustainable
- 4 Deliver the right skills for those who work for libraries

Well, duh! Nobody disagrees with this report. It's what everyone has said, again and again, in endless unused reports.

However, the context has changed. The library landscape is now radically different. This trend will accelerate for years to come. But ACE seemingly hasn't noticed it at all.

Hundreds of communities have lost their 'hub'. Hundreds more will do so. 'Resilient and sustainable'? How, exactly? We'd love to know.

Some libraries are being replaced by a hotch-potch of 'community libraries' that might do anything – or nothing much. Some people now have only a long bus-ride they can't afford, to a distant mega-hulk library.

We already knew that digi-stuff is important. Libraries already work against the odds to fund it. Where will the extra money come from? Do tell.

And those expert staff to develop IT (and new skills)? They are being sacked in droves. Those left are running flat out just to stay still. And how do you impose all these skills on volunteers?

Somebody must identify the real issues in this very new library world.

We already have (see left). It took just a few minutes (plus, obviously, prolonged contact with library staff, users and volunteers out in the real world). We were repeatedly turned down when we tried to be involved in ACE's research.

We are trying to fill the huge gap left by DCMS and Arts Council inaction. Unpaid, in our spare time. If ACE can't see this is a crisis – it's time they actually looked.

¹ Campaigner no 85, on www.librarycampaign.com

² <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/supporting-libraries/library-of-the-future/>

Falling off a cliff?

Trevor Craig and Shirley Burnham analyse events at a Swindon volunteer-run library – and examine some of the issues that arise ...

In early February 2009, Swindon's cabinet announced that Walcot Library would be run by local volunteers, whilst another small library would face closure if it did not follow suit.

A spokesman for Walcot Library said: 'Our volunteers are for the most part local residents who are willing to do something for their area. This is in marked contrast to the residents of Old Town who, having been offered a similar deal, have turned it down.'¹

Walcot Library was re-opened on 16 April 2009 as a combined library and community shop, staffed by volunteers. Its new configuration was the brainchild of two prominent councillors, one of whom has served it as a volunteer ever since.

Teething problems at Walcot motivated the cabinet member with responsibility for libraries to declare nearly two years later that Swindon's libraries 'should have a hard-core of paid staff' and that 'each library needs to have a paid staff member on the rota – and not just volunteers'².

Ten hours of frontline staff time were subsequently re-introduced to Walcot, to supplement the existing purely administrative support, stock management and other assistance provided 'behind the scenes' by professional staff from another library nearby.

Despite the library's continuing existence, the book issues – still the *raison d'être* for libraries – have fallen off a cliff. These results cannot in any way be categorised as a success.

Has the local authority exercised proper oversight of the library? What do Swindon Libraries do to promote its usage? Most crucially, is it a 'model' that should be emulated by others?

Undoubtedly, the building continues to serve a vital social function in what is a very deprived area. But its performance as a public library has suffered significantly.

Local authorities have not only 'hollowed out' libraries under their control, as would seem to be the case in Walcot, but many have rushed to embrace the idea of volunteers setting up and running libraries – largely based on evidence from a couple of examples in Buckinghamshire [see pages 16–19].

It should, therefore, be noted that the Chairman of Little Chalfont Community Library has never advocated the indiscriminate rolling out of the Buckinghamshire model. He has described it in the past as suitable only for affluent areas.

He told libraries minister Ed Vaizey: 'To run a library like ours you need financial backing, a pool of

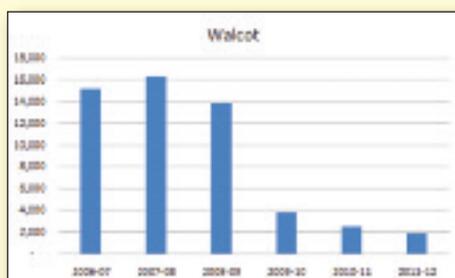
REALITY ISSUE

people with business skills and support. If you haven't got this, it will fail.'³

There is no hard statistical data, apart from the aforementioned libraries in Bucks, to suggest that the approach works and is sustainable.

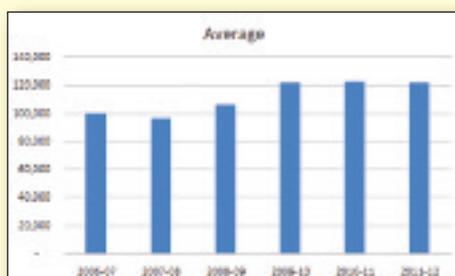
Cutting the smaller branch libraries also saves very little money, as they are staffed by low paid library assistants and junior managers.

The relentless dismemberment of public libraries



■ Above: Walcot Library's book issues. Spot the year when volunteers took over.

Below: average book issues in Swindon-run libraries over the same period.



has gained momentum on the back of the now discredited notion of the 'Big Society' – a Conservative policy at the 2010 general election.

Notwithstanding this, ACE (Arts Council England), SCL (Society of Chief Librarians), Locality and other bodies support a model of library provision where the local authority pulls back and volunteers are forced to step in as 'social entrepreneurs', as co-operatives or other models that do not involve the local authority.

We can identify several principal problems with community-run libraries. First, technically, they are not actually legal. The 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act states that it's the duty of the local authority to provide a library service – not the community which has already paid for it.

Second, it creates a postcode lottery. This may not even be a two-tier service. On the contrary, a patchwork service is created. If you're lucky enough

to be able to get to the central library, you get a grade A service. If not, then it's pot luck.

Third, if a library is not provided by the local authority but by a community (say, a small number of individuals giving up their free time), the neutrality of the library could well be at risk. We all have our own beliefs, some held more strongly than others.

What if a militant atheist group took over a library and refused to stock the Koran, Bible or other holy books? What if a creationist group took over a library and refused to stock any books that they saw as undermining their beliefs, such as those by Richard Dawkins, Charles Darwin or Stephen Hawking?

Does this sound far-fetched? It has already occurred: the Hebron Evangelical Church in Carlisle has shown interest in taking over community services like libraries. Whilst they state that they will not discriminate, they have said: 'Faith groups have a lot to offer. The problem I see developing in society is that when you marginalise Christianity then you've got no external reference point for morals.'

'We have a responsibility to provide guidance and help. We also have a responsibility to show what Christianity is about.'⁴

Neutrality is, thereby, lost.

In Croydon, Labour advocates co-operatives to run libraries, no doubt with local party members on the steering groups.

Will they really be able to remain impartial and keep politics out of the library? What if a member wanted to read one of Thatcher's books? Alternatively, what is to stop a group comprising Tories taking over the library and quietly getting rid of the books that promote the ideologies of the left?

Or might they divert the library's focus away from reading and literacy? This seems to be the case in Walcot. This behaviour should not be tolerated, but there will be no-one to stop it.

Another example to illustrate that volunteers 'running' libraries might jeopardise neutrality is that of Primrose Hill. Library fundraisers are reported to have refused a donation from a retailer because they disagreed with its decision to open a store locally. In spite of the volunteers having acted conscientiously, it seems that their stance led to a decision to which others were opposed.

Libraries are supposed to be completely free from such conflicts of interest. Like the civil service, they were envisaged as impartial and neutral.

But small groups of individuals, given a free hand, will always have views that can compromise those principles. This is why public libraries have been, and should continue to be, a major cornerstone of democracy, untainted by ideology and 'isms'.

There are legitimate issues of accountability related to all these matters. If the local library is doing something wrong who is accountable?

In a fully supported library, councillors and officers are responsible. If the library is, instead, led by local co-operation, social entrepreneurship or another



■ To deny the evidence all around us suggests we have become resigned, and treat it as a fact of life ...

group, there is no accountability via the ballot box. As a result, a library could well be used to push volunteers' own agendas – and who could stop them?

When Shirley was critical of Swindon library service cuts in her local newspaper this year, she used the phrase 'dregs of a two-tier service' to describe the proposed reduction in library-staff hours.

Walcot library volunteers interpreted this as insulting their efforts, and threatened to close it if a public apology was not forthcoming. Although the incident was resolved amicably, it might be seen as raising an important question.

Whilst, by law, an individual cannot libel a local authority (an important safeguard which allows citizens freely to hold those they elect to account), on how secure a footing would an individual be when criticising a library released from local authority control? Could pressure or intimidation result, and could that be a means of stifling legitimate complaint?

When Trevor recently asked the lead volunteer at Walcot to comment on the disappointing six-year book issue figures, he received this response via email: 'Times are changing and the library staff must try to move with the times. What we offer is what people want, and they don't want books.'

'I do not agree with you that "libraries should be

staffed and supported by the council rather than volunteers". Libraries should provide what people want and that is IT, not books. We have enough libraries full of books and paid staff in parks and the town centre to satisfy those local people who want to borrow books. We do not need any more.

'I think your interpretation of the data could be seen to show that there is no longer a requirement for a library in Walcot apart from the IT section.

'What I intend to do now is to speak to the leader of the council and his cabinet to see if we could increase IT and reduce or remove most of the books.'⁵

Whilst this may well be the volunteer's personal opinion rather than the council's, it seems bizarre that anyone who has ever valued their public library could subsequently be against the re-introduction of paid staff and an improved book stock.

As authorities contemplate the introduction of more 'community-run' libraries, there will, no doubt, be further upheavals, more volunteers' sensitivities offended and a general exacerbation of anxiety.

To deny the evidence all around us suggests we have become resigned, and treat it as a fact of life. Such a denial undermines our universal, shared sense of humanity and is, ultimately, a manifestation

of prejudice. We urge people to carry on the fight for what they hold dear.

The 1964 Act is clear: 'it shall be the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof.'

It does not contemplate provision by volunteers, social entrepreneurs, co-operatives, trusts or for-profit companies. It recognises the merits of a universal service provided by the local authority.

There are reasons for that!

Notes

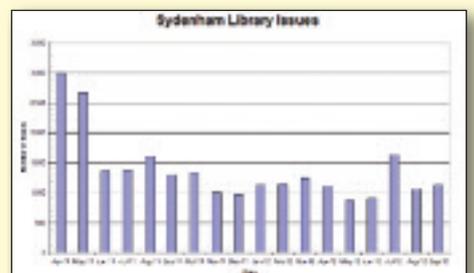
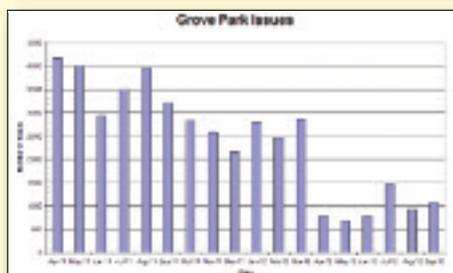
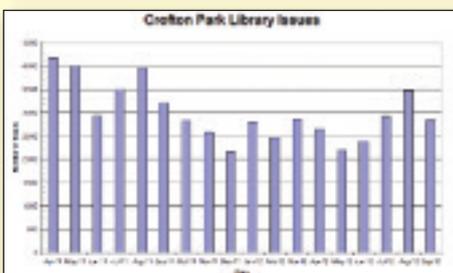
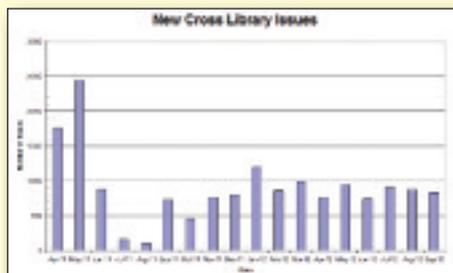
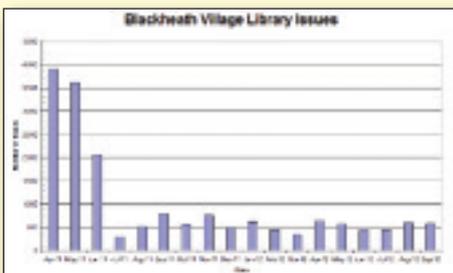
- 1 Swindon Advertiser, 13 February 2009
- 2 Swindon Advertiser 26 January 2011
- 3 Amersham & Buckinghamshire Advertiser 2 Feb 2011
- 4 News & Star 18 Jan 2011
- 5 Correspondence quoted at: <http://questioneverythingtheytellyou.blogspot.co.uk/2013/04/we-will-economise-on-beaches.html>

Is this a trend?

Laura Swaffield says: Who knows how DIY 'libraries' are performing? Info is hard to find. And hard to analyse fairly. Alan Templeton created these charts of book issues in five Lewisham libraries that have been variously disposed of.

Ian Anstice's full comments are on: <http://tinyurl.com/of7mz46>. Very briefly ... A charity in affluent Blackheath (top left) got £870,000 but issues have crashed out ... Impoverished New Cross (top right) got very little, but local volunteers now run it as a smaller library plus lots of other things, so issues are lower...

The other three went to a small local business, which also uses the buildings for other activities... so again, overall, issues are much lower. So – nice, but less functional as libraries.



Why she won't help



Ian Anstice analyses the reasons given by the department responsible for libraries for doing what it always does about drastic closures – nothing.

Surprise! Surprise! In April, the latest Secretary of State responsible for libraries, Maria Miller, finally announced her decision over the cuts to Lewisham's library service. She will do nothing.

In some ways, this news is purely academic. The cuts were made long ago. Maria's DCMS (Department for Culture, Media & Sport) has consistently done nothing for years. Nothing for this campaign, and nothing for any other campaign.

However, many hopes are still set on two duties underpinned by the full force of the law (that's the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964).

The first duty is that every library authority **MUST** provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service to all in the borough who wish to use it. The second is that the Secretary of State has full power to intervene if that's not done.

A number of campaigns have tried to use this Act. They have even gone (painfully and expensively) to court to try to force the Secretary of State to take an interest.

No dice. Campaigners sent detailed arguments to DCMS, often with worked-out alternative budgets, while their libraries were still open.

After some months, DCMS civil servants usually met the campaigners (and council) and seemed to listen. Otherwise nothing – except a standardised letter (sent to every such campaign) to say the situation was under review.

The libraries closed. Last December the Secretary of State followed up with more precise news, sent to all the campaigns. She had decided she was 'minded' to do – nothing.

And if anyone disagreed, they must present further arguments in two weeks flat. After a huge outcry, campaigners were kindly allowed a bit more time to make a final attempt to invoke reason.

Maria's April letter shows just how worthwhile all the campaigners' hard work has been.

Her reasons are in bold below, with Ian's gloss in normal type.

* To see what the original intentions of the 1964 Act were, see 'The man who wrote the Act', page 12, Campaigner magazine no.82, on our home page – www.librarycampaigner.com

REALITY ISSUE

➤ At the seven borough libraries, opening hours have been maintained or improved.

IA: In addition, the new Deptford Lounge library has seen an increase in hours and usage.

➤ Not every alteration in library provision will justify a costly local inquiry and the uncertainty that it brings.

IA: The DCMS has not ordered an inquiry for any authority, despite the deepest cuts to provision in peacetime history and unprecedented public protest. This therefore, again, can be seen as a catch-all line against intervention.

➤ For the purposes of her assessment as to whether to order a local inquiry, the Secretary of State has based her view solely on the seven borough-run libraries, and the home library service.

IA: Interestingly, the withdrawn libraries were not considered. The council's record is acceptable just on the performance of the surviving council-run branches. However, the decision states as evidence that 'No libraries have closed'.

➤ The Secretary of State has also noted the absence of any response from residents in areas where libraries have been taken over by community groups.

IA: This is taken as evidence that everyone is happy with the current arrangement rather than as lack of evidence either way.

➤ The transfers to community libraries were based on a library review.

IA: There was a fair public consultation [A lot of locals disagree! – Ed.] and a detailed Equality Impact Assessment. Proper provision has been made for vulnerable groups. This, as the judicial reviews against some councils has shown, is crucially important.

➤ Finally, the core libraries are accessible – Lewisham is an urban area with a good public transport network.

IA: This may therefore not bode well for library services in similar urban settings. The positive in this report is that Lewisham Council has continued to invest in its surviving libraries.

This appears also to be the case in another authority – controversial Brent. This authority closed down half of its libraries despite mass protests and the stated desire of campaigners to run them on a voluntary basis.

The aim was to concentrate dwindling resources on the remaining branches. According to Brent's latest statistics, this tactic has led to an increase in visits but a small decrease in issues (the refurbishment of Kilburn Library has contributed to these figures).

➤ The Secretary of State's view is that decisions about local issues should ordinarily be taken by democratically elected local representatives accountable to local voters.

IA: Thus, there is a presumption at the most basic level against intervention.

➤ The Secretary of State also notes that the local authority is entitled to take account of cost in deciding whether a proposal is efficient.

IA: The 1964 Act makes no mention of cost: just that the service has to be 'comprehensive and efficient'. This is therefore a reinterpretation of the law. It also, given the current widespread cuts to local government spending, also again gives a blanket presumption against intervention.

➤ The Secretary of State has also borne in mind that too ready an intervention would risk preventing or discouraging prompt and efficient reforms of library services.

IA: This, again, could be argued to fit all authorities and all circumstances.

➤ The withdrawn libraries have seen a reduction in use [after leaving council control] but 'were comparatively little used ... Between April and September 2012, visits to the community libraries increased by 33.5%, but issues were down by 35.4%'.

IA: The council claims that this decline may be because of 'visitors reading at the library, and taking advantage of the better facilities there (e.g. cafes)' and thus taking out fewer books. Surprisingly, this explanation appears to have been taken seriously by DCMS (presumably a lot of winking went on when this interpretation was conveyed).

The increase in visits combined with a decrease in borrowing also suggests a radical change in usage of the facilities, away from library activities. This ties in very well with the addition of other services to the withdrawn libraries such as computer recycling and charity work.



Hanging on

What's the real situation in our council-run public libraries?
A new survey from librarians' trade union UNISON shows many staff are struggling to run a good service despite serious problems – usually because of cuts.
And it's certain to get worse ...

WHO DID THEY ASK?

The workforce is a long serving one, with a long term commitment to the job, and to public service as an ethos.

- Only 80 (4.4% of the sample) reported working for trusts or contractors. This reflects the fact that this is a relatively under-developed area in a rapidly changing position.
- Most respondents work at a branch library (48.4%) or a central library (22.7%).
- The sample is well educated. Only 1% have no formal qualification. Almost half (48.1%) report that their highest qualification is a degree or a higher degree (usually a Masters or PhD).
- Almost a third (29%) hold a professional librarianship qualification.
- Over 80% (84.3%) report that they engage with the public every day, and just 0.5% never engage with the public.
- Just under half (44.8%) supervise other staff in their daily work.
- 51.6% of respondents have worked in the library service for 15 or more years (40% for 20 years or more).
- Most are long time members of UNISON: 57.2% for 10 years or more, a third for 20 years or more.

HEADLINES

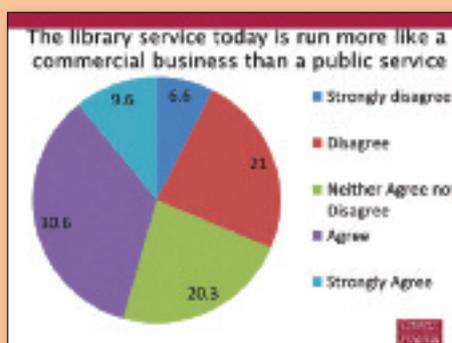
- 79% of the overall sample feel they have to work harder to maintain the same standards as existed before the cuts.
- 57% agree or strongly agree that since the cuts they are unable to maintain the same standards.
- A third report that their library has introduced charges for services that were previously free.
- Over a third (36%) report a decrease in library opening hours, although 11% report an increase.
- 61% report a decrease in the number of full-time posts in their library; 55% report a decrease in part-time posts.
- Over half (55%) of all respondents report that their libraries use volunteers.
- Of those that work in libraries that use volunteers, 73% report that their use has increased since 2010.
- 40% of the overall sample agree or strongly agree that the library service today is run more like a commercial business than a public service.



THE BACKGROUND

Since the coalition government took office in May 2010, there has been a concerted programme of cutbacks in local government funding. This has had a clear impact on UK public libraries. CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy) reported that:

- Net expenditure has declined: £1,066,410,000 (2010–11); £1,011,506,000 (2011–12); £963,284,000 (2012–13 estimate).
- There was a net loss of 201 static or mobile libraries in 2011–12. This follows a cut of 146 in 2010–11.
- There was also a reduction in library staff, visits by the public, 'active borrowers', books issued, web visits, terminals with library catalogue/internet access and electronic workstations.



THE SURVEY

The survey was carried out by Steve Davies of the School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University. There were 1,831 valid responses. This is a significant response, but it is not possible to provide an accurate response % as the number of potential respondents is not known. CIPFA reports that in 2010–11 there were 23,681 full time equivalent staff in UK libraries. UNISON claims to represent most of these. The total has certainly declined since then, and there is an unknown number of part-timers. Despite these caveats, the sheer number of respondents provides some reassurance about the representativeness of the sample. So does the widespread geographical cover, with responses from 191 out of 206 UK library authorities (93%).

DOING (MOSTLY) MORE

In the past decade, more and more demands have been placed on libraries to expand their range of services. Reported changes (either expansion or cuts) are so far relatively small – mostly from fewer than 10% of respondents. But there are exceptions.

- Most striking is the 24% who report an increase in Baby Bounce and Rhyme Time, and the 25% who report increased IT training/assistance for the public.
- Other areas where more than 10% reported increases included: reading groups, Summer Reading Challenge, help with CV writing and job searching, author talks, school holiday activities, outreach with local schools and home library services.
- A quarter (25%) reported more activities for young people.
- A fifth reported more for older people.
- On the negative side, almost one-fifth of respondents reported cuts to both school holiday activities and outreach to local schools (19% and 20% respectively).
- Less than 10% reported more activities for specific equality groups.

ONE-STOP SHOP?

Variations in provision probably reflect the different emphasis placed by different authorities on the role of libraries. They may be used to compensate for cuts elsewhere, and/or become a one-stop shop for council services.

- Just under a quarter of respondents reported that other council services have moved into the library. Just over a fifth said their library is now a council one-stop shop (65% said it is not).
- Of those in one-stop shop libraries, 43% said they have received training on their new role. A slightly larger proportion – almost half (49%) – have not.

FANCY THAT!

A third (32%) of respondents reported that they now charge for services that were previously provided free.

FEWER STAFF

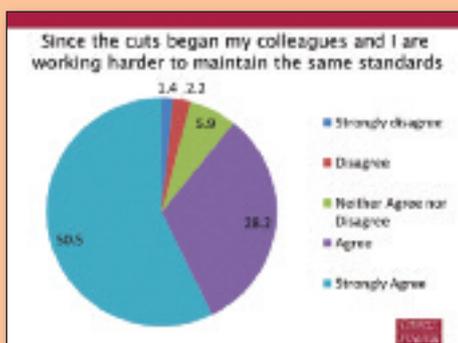


Staff numbers have been in decline for several years, with sharper drops more recently – and probably in future. Since 2009–10, there has been an overall reduction of more than 12%.

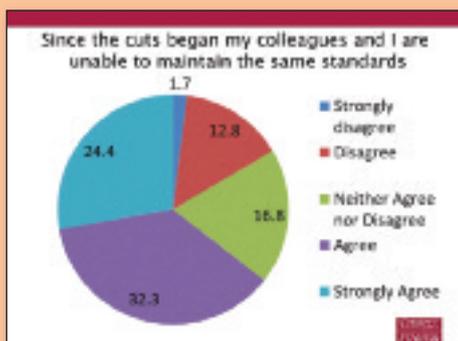
- 61% report a decrease in full-time posts in their library; 55% report a decrease in part-time posts.
- While 16% report an increase in casual or agency staff, over a quarter report a decrease in these as well.

WORKING HARDER

- 78.7% of the overall sample felt they are having to work harder to maintain the same standards as before the cuts.



- 56.7% agreed/strongly agreed that they are unable to maintain the same standards.



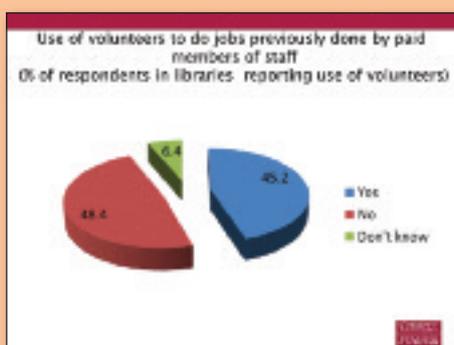
- Just under 40% agreed/strongly agreed that they are trying to find new ways to provide better services.

- Just under a quarter of the entire sample reported that they feel stressed at work 'most of the time', 56% occasionally.
- Just 12% rarely feel stressed at work and only 2% 'never' feel stressed at work.
- Large numbers of staff are required to work alone, or alone on a particular floor, during opening hours: 41% of the sample are (44% of those who answered this question); 51% (55% of those that answered) are not. Many respondents expressed concern about this.
- 8% regularly work alone to cover staff sickness or leave; 13% regularly do so to cover lunches or breaks; 9% regularly do so in the evening; 18% regularly do so during usual opening hours.
- 56% of all those required to work alone (and 22% of the entire sample) said this has increased since May 2010.

VOLUNTEERS

Although there has clearly been an increase in the number of volunteers, the figures are a little opaque. CIPFA collates only the numbers, not the hours contributed or the range of tasks carried out. This survey helps to supplement the CIPFA data.

- Over half (55%) of all respondents reported that their libraries use volunteers, and only 35% reported that they do not. Of those that work in libraries with volunteers, 73% reported that their use has increased since 2010.
- The vast majority (88%) reported that volunteers are not used to cover for staff absence. However, 45% said that volunteers do jobs that were previously done by paid staff. Slightly more (48%) said that this is not the case in their library.



- 20% of those working in libraries with volunteers are themselves responsible for managing them. A further 41% reported that this is done by their manager, 32% said by another colleague.
- Respondents were fairly evenly split over whether volunteers can be a useful supplement to paid staff. 36% of all respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed, while 34% agreed or strongly agreed and 18% were undecided.
- Views were much more strongly held on volunteers replacing paid staff. 82% of the entire sample agreed or strongly agreed that they should not do so. A small proportion agreed or

strongly agreed (6%) that they should. Only 1% had no view.

WHO SHOULD RUN LIBRARIES?

Many respondents no doubt fear job loss or a deterioration in conditions of service if libraries are no longer directly provided by the local authority. However, there are attacks on jobs and conditions in many local authorities, and the government's austerity programme is likely to continue. So there may be other explanations for continuing commitment to public provision (long term membership of a union may be one).

There is little support for any of the alternatives to direct provision that are being proposed by central government, and by some local authorities.

- 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that libraries are best as a publicly funded service, directly provided by the local authority. Just 2.7% disagreed with this, and 6.2% were undecided.
- Less than 10% saw the merits of a service provided under a shared services contract with another local authority. One-third were undecided, but over half (53.7%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with it.
- 68% disagreed or strongly disagreed with using a charitable trust or mutual. Just 3% agreed or strongly agreed, and 16% were undecided.
- In almost a mirror image of the support for direct provision, just under 80% (78.7%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that libraries should be provided by a private sector company under contract to the local authority. Only 1.5% agreed or strongly agreed, and 7.4% were undecided.

WORKING WITH FRIENDS & USERS

Importantly, a commitment to public service may lay the basis for collaboration with service users. Many branches are already engaged in joint activity with library users' groups or Friends of Libraries.

- Just under 80% (79.8%) agreed or strongly agreed that library users are potential allies of the staff in defending a high quality service. Just 3% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Only 5.4% were undecided, suggesting that this is a very strongly held view.
- Almost as many (67.6%) agreed or strongly agreed that library users are also potential allies of the staff on direct workplace issues (defending jobs and conditions). Only 6.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 14.4% were undecided.
- A majority clearly want to see these attitudes put into action. 65.6% agree or strongly agree that union members should work more closely with local library campaigners. This was opposed by just 4% of the sample, with 19% undecided.

What they said ...

Quotes on things the participants cared about most.

HIDDEN DANGER

"One thing that is missed in the whole debate about library provision is that working practices are being constantly altered to provide fewer and worse services. This diminishes users' expectations of what a public library should be."



WORSE CUTS TO COME

"Cuts are hitting us hard from the next financial year until 2016, so that is when the majority of staff cuts will be happening."

"Budget cuts are just starting to have drastic effects. We could do with another survey in a year's time when the full impact takes hold."

"Our BIG cuts will begin in April 2013."

"Changes are imminent rather than implemented already."



WORKING HARDER

"A third of the staff have left but we are still expected to do the same amount of work. Staff are working really hard, and cutting corners, to try to offer the same or improved services so that the axe doesn't fall."

"We are working harder simply to keep a basic service going. We do not have the resources to develop our services and thus maintain our stake in the community."

"The quality of the service is poor (even though staff are doing their very best) due to huge cuts. We are struggling to cope, but if we say anything senior managers criticise us for 'being negative' or 'not accepting change'."

"We are taking the burden of a lot of other cuts, particularly in benefits advice, job searches and most recently legal aid."

"Library users should be more aware how hard it is to work in a library due to cuts, staff shortages – and start complaining higher up in the service. It is not our fault."

SLIPPING STANDARDS

"We will be unable to maintain this level of service in the long term. Staff are stressed and overworked. Standards have started to suffer."

"Library customers are often too focused on keeping buildings open rather than protecting the number of staff needed to run an effective service."

"Frontline/enquiry work, previously the role of permanent/professional staff, is now expected of casual/part-time staff (including Saturday assistants, who are often school students)."

"Continual erosion of professional grades – fewer librarian posts, elimination of professional enquiry service."



VOLUNTEERS

"Volunteers should not take paid workers' jobs, but we are unable to complete all the work required."

"Volunteers should only be for add-on services which would not otherwise be offered."

"Although I respect individual volunteers, I disagree in principle with the use of unpaid labour."

"We are losing the volunteer argument. A stronger case needs to be made for the expertise of paid, trained and experienced staff."



"It's such an insult to suggest that our jobs are so simple that anyone with no qualifications at all can do them."

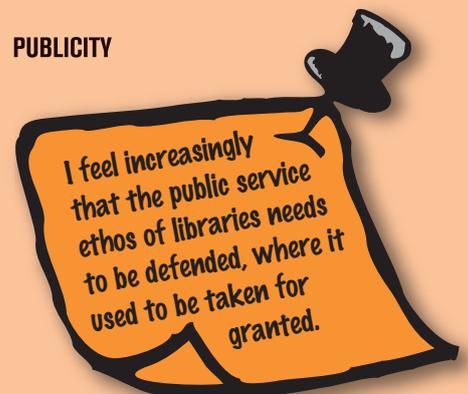
"For all their merits, volunteers do not provide the quality and knowledge which are guaranteed by contracted librarians and other paid staff."

"There tends to be a high turnover of volunteers, which requires repeating training on a regular basis."

"Volunteers need paid co-ordinators, otherwise they are more burden than boon."

"Volunteers may help, may hinder, either way can't be 100% reliable."

PUBLICITY



"Libraries desperately need higher profile and more aggressive campaigns ... not just library managers talking at library conferences about how important libraries are ... We need to GET OUT THERE to the public and blow our trumpet, not just go preaching to the choir."

"There should be far more promotion and events to publicise that the library is FREE! Young people tend not to realise this."

"It is hard to defend keeping some libraries open, when few people use them. Campaigners and staff need to work together to encourage the public to use libraries more."

"Elected members are usually ignorant of the services provided by their libraries."

A senior manager within my local authority actually said: 'Why do we need libraries? You can just look on Google.'

CAMPAIGNERS

"Even when the library was closing a service, we were not allowed to inform customers until it was too late to do anything."

We would like to speak out more to defend the library service but we are not allowed to by our management.

"Union members should work more closely with campaigners to defend libraries, but members are very vulnerable. If they take part in any activity criticising their employer, they could face disciplinary action."

"In my experience it doesn't matter what users do in support of us. The council will make cuts based on its budget, semi-regardless."

"Specific campaigning in an area may have an effect. However, when the cuts are hidden – less staff, less professional staff – it is hard to motivate users. If a whole building or service goes it's much easier to organise a public campaign."

"It was as a result of Friends of Xxxxxx Libraries' campaign that court action was brought, and branch libraries and mobile services saved. The council intended to cut these until told it could not."

"Some library campaigners are unrealistic in their aims, wanting everything to stay the same."

Library users can be very vocal but prevent potentially beneficial changes from taking place.

"Library campaigners don't care about professional experience. All they want is local buildings to be kept open."

CHANGE

"It's difficult to counter propaganda put out by council management and the government about 'changing and modernising' and 'Big Society', which is cover for cuts. Ordinary users think the only options are those put forward by the council."

Most people don't understand what libraries do. Books are important but libraries provide a much much bigger range of services.

"If much of the work is outsourced on set budgets, services left entirely under the local authority will be subject to greater stresses on their budgets. It therefore isn't clear which is the best model for libraries."

"If we aren't prepared to look at other avenues we run the risk of having an operating system developed in the 1960s trying to deliver a service in the 21st century, and becoming outdated and irrelevant. We need always to look at new ways to fund, evolve, innovate and develop."

"Library services should be apolitical, impartial, and maintain the trust of the most disadvantaged sectors of the community. They need to sit within a council, but be a little outside it. This is the best way to maintain a free and comprehensive service to all."

"We can learn a great deal from retail and business about how to evaluate services, and market and display our wares. And we can learn from them how to make better economies and streamline practice to make the best use of funding."

"The library service is a valuable community asset but needs to maintain a vision and purpose and adapt to changes. The reduction of some libraries may not always be a negative and needs to be balanced against quality and diverse provision that does not always need to be from the same static building."

"The service has lost its way over the last 20 years. It is floundering in search of a new identity and image. Goodwill is being lost because of thoughtless introduction of technology to replace the personal service that people have valued for so long. Chronic underfunding and undervaluing of both professional

and non-professional staff continue to damage long-term prospects."

"The team and myself are always thinking of new ideas to improve our current services and create new ones. We think of ourselves as a business and would like to do more to get people 'through our doors'."

A COMMON COMPLAINT

"Fewer decisions made by management and more made by the people who actually know how the service works in practice. Alternatively, better communication between the two levels."

Cut back on managers and pour more money into the libraries!

"I have lots of ideas, as do my colleagues, but we are not listened to, and it is understood that we may 'fall foul' of management if we voice them."

"Managers are now separate from service delivery. This didn't used to be the case and is a backward step."

ANOTHER COMMON COMPLAINT

"Government should enforce the 1964 Act."

"We need a national framework, national sharing of resources, national intervention and guidance from DCMS, national library standards implemented countrywide."

"We need to define what 'comprehensive and efficient' is and a level agreed nationally, so that libraries are not seen as an easy target and the statutory element is strongly upheld."

"Central government should get behind libraries more instead of always looking to cut because libraries aren't seen as 'essential'."

Ensure that the contribution libraries make to society – to equality, cohesion and learning for all – is recognised.

Domesday scenario



We're now living in very harsh times. Libraries can no longer expect to get public funding 'just' because they are worthwhile and very much valued by users, says **Sally Prentice**, councillor and libraries portfolio holder in Lambeth, London

People rightly feel very passionately about the importance of libraries. However, they have not been a leading public service for many decades.



To justify continued public funding, libraries need to be much clearer about their core purpose – and the outcomes that the library service will deliver.

Their service model has hardly changed. Librarians see their role as serving people who come through the front door of their library, rather than asking who comes into the library and who does not.

Librarians do not seem to have asked themselves why some residents never use their local library, and what they can do as public service professionals to encourage them to step through the front door.

Librarians must accept some responsibility for the dreadful statistic that one in seven adults in Britain cannot read the instructions on a medicine bottle.

Councils across the country are looking at new ways of delivering library services. Often they are using volunteers, sometimes to take over library buildings, or to play a greater role in running other activities such as book clubs and evening classes, alongside professional librarians.

More libraries are becoming a focal point in their communities. They are offering a wider range of activities and services, including access points to other council services. Sure Start encouraged library staff to expand and develop specific activities for parents with very young children.

The broader 'community hub' role has value, particularly in isolated rural areas and neighbourhoods with few (or any) community facilities.

However, there is unrelenting pressure on public expenditure, likely to continue for many years to come. The 'Domesday scenario' is that local authorities will be unable to fund any services other than social care and refuse collection.

At an ACE (Arts Council England) seminar I recently attended, participants discussed why libraries should continue to be publicly funded – and what public funds should be used for, in a library service.

Advocates for libraries need to be able to answer the question that every Treasury official will ask: what is the public value or outcome that taxpayers' money is being used for?

Although hosting meetings of the local history society and offering a local recycling facility is of value to the people who take part and use these services, by themselves they will not be sufficiently robust to justify continuing public subsidy.

Libraries are incredibly important in providing study space for children and young people to do their homework, and for adults who are studying and lack sufficient space and or technology to do so at home.

However, a bright young Treasury official is bound to ask: why do we need libraries, when schools and colleges could simply open for longer hours?

Seminar participants agreed that libraries needed to be much sharper in articulating their core purpose. That core purpose is, and should continue to remain, enabling people to access, explore and enjoy reading and knowledge in the digital age.

Libraries could play a critically important role in enabling people to learn about, and feel confident in, using digital technology, as well as enjoying reading for pleasure. Such a role could not be more important. The digital divide is continuing to grow. One in four adults still do not or cannot use the internet.

For libraries to undertake this role, they need to completely rethink how they deliver their services.

Librarians will need to be much more proactive in reaching out and engaging with local residents, community organisations and public services such as the NHS and Job Centre Plus.

Library staff in many parts of the country lack some of the most important skills for the future, such as community engagement, using digital technology, communications and marketing, advocacy and audience development.

Workforce planning is very difficult at a time when library services are reducing staff. But all services need to think about the skills, values and life experiences that librarians will need in the future.

Librarians who have joined the service later in life, and who understand what it is like to not be able to read, speak English or to have not enjoyed school, may well be better placed to develop relationships with isolated local residents than recent graduates from library schools.

If the library service is to have a future in 2022, investment in the people running it will be as important – if not more so – than investment in library buildings.

Boo hoo

Government cuts are barbaric. But that's the new reality, says **Ian Anstice**

It is becoming more and more obvious that public library workers are being asked to prove, in cold and harsh terms, that they provide sufficient return for their councils.

If they cannot prove this simple fact, they will lose their jobs. Their buildings are already being closed, and will continue to be closed in large numbers.

Merely being librarians, serving what is widely seen as shrinking numbers of users and providing services that libraries think they should (such nice things as local history meetings or homework clubs) is not, it appears, going to be enough.

Ruthlessly cut

In this terrifying new world, it is envisaged that education and social welfare will soon take up all of local councils' ruthlessly cut budgets.

'Mission creep' of libraries into other areas – where libraries become jacks of all trades but, sadly, masters of none – was recently attacked by a Labour Lambeth councillor, Sally Prentice.

Rather than going in all directions, she says, libraries need to re-focus on their core purpose of: 'enabling people to access, explore and enjoy reading and knowledge in the digital age'. And they'd better be able to prove it on statistical grounds to the accountants.

After all, doing what seems like a good idea at the time is not normally a viable business strategy at the best of times.

Reality

It is even less so now, when councils face a shortfall in their budgets of two-fifths (so far), and the government is insistent on no increase in tax.

This all reminds me of the adage that 'if you can't count it, it's a hobby'.

In some ways, Prentice's mission statement is a case of 'back to the future'. Victorians would have had little problem with libraries concentrating on reading and learning. In others ways, though, it's very barbaric, philistine and harsh.

Boo hoo. Well, libraries appear to be living in a barbaric, philistine and harsh world.

So, it is clear, they can either bemoan their lot and die or become a bit more bottom-line themselves.

It's a bitter pill to swallow. But critics (and many supporters) of libraries would point out that it's no use arguing against reality. Don't mistake the messenger for the bad news.

Using self-service? Watch out!

UK public libraries have been damaged by their inability to work together on today's tech innovations. This is about to get much worse, predicts Mick Fortune. And volunteers could be in the firing line.

Our 21st century creative, innovative and tech-savvy (to quote myself) libraries are going to be, it seems, more and more often run by volunteers. But they are going to face a number of challenges that could end the experiment before it begins.

One example is my favourite topic – RFID and its vulnerabilities and legal aspects. Self-service has been present in libraries for more than 10 years now. Most often a technology called RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) is used to provide it.

It was originally used to enable libraries to combine self-service operation of lending and returning items (called 'circulation' by librarians) with security, on a single device.

National standards

The attraction of RFID was that it combined two things: triggering an alarm if an item had not been properly issued, plus reading the item number used to identify it in the library database.

Previously two technologies had been needed to perform this task – barcodes (for the items) and magnetic strips (to set off the alarms). But RFID 'tags' – as the labels now placed inside the books are called – use chips to store data. These can, unlike the magnetic strips (which are either 'on' or 'off'), be programmed in a variety of ways.

In Denmark, Holland and other European countries, where RFID technology was first promoted – and where national library agencies existed – the need to agree a common approach to using this technology was recognised at the outset.

National – and eventually international – standards were defined for all libraries (public, academic or private) to use.

Global markets

In the UK there was no such national agency. So, for more than 10 years, our libraries have been busily investing in a technology that has been implemented in dozens, if not hundreds, of different and incompatible ways.

Suppliers originally devised their own unique ways to program tags (to protect their markets). But even they were eventually persuaded of the benefits of adopting a common standard, as RFID began to be used to provide new and innovative services. Danish borrowers can, for example, borrow and return items at any library in the country.

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In the UK the SCL (Society of Chief Librarians) announced that it could provide a similar service by its 'universal membership' initiative. But it couldn't.

The way in which UK libraries have implemented RFID doesn't allow it.

UK libraries do not just suffer from this inability to share resources across authority boundaries. They are now being left behind as new standards-based services are developed in global markets.

Destroyed

Many libraries are unable to switch suppliers because no-one else can read their tags. Workarounds have been devised by some suppliers to allow limited co-operation and even more limited services. But these generally only make matters worse in the long run.

And things are about to get even more difficult. All the tags in use in UK libraries at least conform to one standard. They all operate at the same radio frequency – 13.56MHz. The problem is that so do many smartphones.

And a particular kind of RFID technology called NFC (Near Field Communication) is beginning to appear in smartphones around the world. It

is capable of accessing the data stored on tags – and to alter or delete it.

The internet shows many examples of librarians seeming to welcome this development as offering them ways to deliver new services. But they seem mostly oblivious to the fact that it also allows the possibility of existing ones being destroyed.

The RFID industry is aware of the problem and is working to find a solution. But it will almost certainly be available only to those that have adopted the international data standard. That – for the most part – will not include many in the UK.

Accountable

Additionally, in 2014, the EU will publish recommendations on its mandate M436. This 'requests' (for the moment) libraries to carry out an audit of the data they store on their RFID tags. A Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) template for completion by library services is already in preparation.

For most European countries this will be a relatively straightforward process, since all their libraries will share a common data standard. But in the UK there will be two challenges to meet.

The first is that to establish what data is being stored, a technical audit must be undertaken. This, though a relatively simple task, could cost many thousands of pounds.

The second is that in order to simplify the execution of its mandate, the EU has determined that it is the operator of the RFID equipment who will be held responsible for data stored. In some cases, these will be volunteers.



Mick Fortune is an independent library consultant with over 40 years experience of library and book trade technology, as both user (at the British Library) and provider (as a former MD at Nielsen Book and Amertech). He is deputy chair of BIC's Library Committee, and project leader on their Privacy and Library Communications Framework groups. He is also an expert member of committees of BSI and ISO. He founded the librarians' campaigning website Voices for the Library (www.voicesfortheibrary.org.uk).

A version of this article appears on the website of **Locality**. This organisation is funded by government to help communities run their own local services.

Obviously, few if any want to run libraries. However, we know that many have no choice. We support their efforts. That said, **Locality** is a useful source of ideas. Check it out.

www.locality.org.uk

This is an issue that is confusing even those public libraries that AREN'T being handed over to volunteers. Most librarians to whom I have spoken seem to think it will be their supplier or their legal department that will be held accountable.

But in fact the draft makes it clear that it is the person responsible for the library service that will be placed in the tumbrel and taken away to Brussels. (Be prepared for a spate of power transfers in 2014).

ACE (Arts Council England) makes no mention of this, or, for that matter, any of the other technological challenges that will need to be overcome – not only to deliver a 21st century library service, but simply to maintain what we have at the moment.

ACE's predecessor, the MLA (Museum, Libraries & Archives Council), made considerable efforts to advise librarians of such issues, often by working with organisations like Book Industry Communication (BIC)*.

Deaf ears

The MLA communicated this kind of information directly to librarians (if they were listening). Since its demise ACE has shifted its position to communicating solely with the SCL and the LGA (where librarians are thin on the ground). It has also removed from its archives the guidance commissioned on the subject by MLA.

Repeated attempts have been made to communicate the value of BIC and others' work in the field of standards and best practice to both ACE and the SCL. They have so far fallen on deaf ears at ACE, although SCL is to meet us soon.

It's not just the advice to volunteers that is lacking. It's all libraries that are suffering.

* **BIC (Book Industry Communication)** is a charity funded by the Booksellers and Publishers Associations, the British Library, CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals) and various commercial and public sector members. It exists to promote supply chain efficiency, in both the book trade and in libraries, through e-commerce and the application of standard processes and procedures.
www.bic.org.uk



Missing link

Most library services ignore a very simple, very obvious element that could vastly increase their usage figures – telling people they exist. **Alan Templeton** demonstrates.

If you listen to Camden's policy makers, you will hear nothing but bad news about public libraries.

They will say that there is no longer a need for these institutions, because people are not using them. As evidence for this, they can point to the Camden libraries statistics*, where a downward performance trend in most libraries is well established. In addition, they can point to a nationwide decline.

However, there has always been a steady trickle of stories about library services that have bucked this trend. The latest of these comes from Edmonton (Canada, not London), where there has been a spectacular increase in library use.

The policy difference that has given the Edmonton service this enviable performance is a concentration on marketing. This is often the magic ingredient in other library success stories. It is one that most library services neglect.

The library profession does recognise that marketing has a place in its skills set. However, there is an attitude barrier to properly using this particular one.

The profession is uncomfortable with anything that suggests that library services are actually retail operations – and, of course, marketing is a key component of retailing.

The current widespread assault on library services has created two groups of casualties – library users and library staff. Both of these groups have reacted angrily to what they believe are unnecessary cutbacks. Only one of them is in a position to radically improve the situation – the professionals.

They do need to put to one side their fastidiousness, and take marketing seriously in practice as well as theory. If politicians are deprived of the 'poor performance' excuse, they will find it much more difficult to dump libraries – however much they dislike them.

For an example of poor marketing practice, it is not necessary to look beyond Camden's borders.

To its credit, Camden has refurbished virtually all its public libraries. It is a basic marketing assumption that a pleasant environment helps to bring in the punters, so this should have improved the performance of Camden's libraries. It did not.

The expenditure of very large amounts of tax payers' money failed to have any noticeable effect on Camden library performance. The reason? Little thought went into the marketing aspect of the refurbishment programme.

The outcome of the programme pleased existing borrowers and library staff, but had no impact on non-users (the people who should have been the prime target group).

The inside of the libraries became brighter and generally more comfortable. But this was invisible to those on the outside. Usually, nothing was done to the outside of the building. The opportunity was missed to make the changes that would draw people inside.

* <http://cplug.btck.co.uk/PerformanceofCamdenLibraries>



- Edmonton's statistics show:**
- Circulation up 13%
 - 200% growth in membership card orders
 - Membership renewals up 18%
 - Programme attendance up 25%

www.donovancreative.com/case-study/edmonton-public-library



Set up to fail?

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Jim Brooks is well known as a pioneer of community-run libraries. But, he argues, it is dangerous folly to assume that people really want them – or that they will work everywhere. Often, they won't.

Little Chalfont Community Library is a success story. It was established in 2007 and – entirely managed and run by unpaid volunteers – it has gone from strength to strength.

According to the recent research report commissioned by ACE (Arts Council England), success stories like ours are evidence that community libraries, run by volunteers with huge enthusiasm to spend their free time managing and staffing a library, are an innovative way to replace council-run libraries and save money.

The reality is that in many communities, this will not work. There are many problems that can arise. I would like to highlight two.

First, not all communities are the same. Little Chalfont is an affluent area with a population of around 6,000, many of whom are retired professionals.

This provides access to a pool of literate people with time to spend on being a volunteer. It also provides access to people with the skills and knowledge to run a library 'business'.

In addition we have the ability to obtain funding from local people, businesses and grant sources, and we have supportive local authorities.

These factors are key to offering a library service on a par with a council-run library. They will not exist in many communities, especially those in greatest need, such as socially deprived areas.

Second is lack of council support. Over the last

few years we have been contacted by over 100 communities from all over the country, asking for help and advice on how to set up a community library.



I have detected none that had any enthusiasm to set up a community library. They were all motivated by the fact that their local library was under threat of closure.

Anger sparks them into action – followed by even more anger when, in many cases, they realise the lack of support and even hostility they will experience from their local council.

The support they need will vary, depending on the circumstances. It could include support from professional librarians, cash grants, training, access to stock, general equipment, IT hardware and software and the library building (on terms that can be afforded by a start-up community group).

Without affordable support many community libraries are doomed to failure, or to providing a second class service.

One key area is access to the Library Management System (LMS). If a community library is denied access it has no option but to operate on a stand-alone basis not connected to the wider network.

This means offering an inferior service. As community libraries proliferate this will mean a partial break-up of the library network.

A significant number of fledgling community libraries are being denied full access to the LMS. The reason often given by the council is that data protection issues will result.

Our library has had full access to the Bucks County Council LMS for six years with no data protection issues. This leads me to the conclusion that this is an excuse rather than a reason.

My view is that in the next few years we will see growth in the number of community libraries.

But beyond that we will see a significant number closing. This will be because of their inability to source volunteers with the necessary skills, or because many councils will fail to provide the ongoing support that community libraries need.

There seems to be a groundswell of feeling amongst people in a position of power and influence, that the transfer to community libraries is a really good thing, is going very well and should be encouraged.

That may appear to be the case. But they should not lose sight of the fact that some communities do not have the resources to go down the community library route.

They also need to realise that even where the communities do have the right demographics some councils are refusing, either by accident or design, to provide necessary support. They are setting up community libraries to fail.

NEED HELP? Trying to establish, run, or help run, a library in the community – because you've been given no alternative? Searching for practical advice – because none is provided by the agencies that are supposed to look after libraries (DCMS and ACE)?

Little Chalfont Community Library gives a lot of help, out of sheer goodwill. So far it has advised about 100 local groups.

You can learn a great deal from their website*. So go there first, and explore it thoroughly. It includes a document on establishing a community library.

Jim Brooks, the Library Chairman, says: 'We have received so many enquiries from other communities that this document was developed to give basic advice on the key areas to address, to avoid having to constantly repeat the advice!'

Then, if you need more, they can give individual advice. And they have many more documents, including a Volunteers Induction Pack and a 'comprehensive' Operations Manual.

Jim says: 'We are happy to share any or all of our documentation and to give advice on a wide range of subjects on a no-charge basis, to any individual community.'

'We always ask them not to share the information with others. We believe it has value, so if a commercial organisation or local authority wish to share it, we will charge them.'

'We also know that no two community libraries are the same. It is important we understand their needs before sending them a significant amount of documentation.'

'To give you an example of the detail we need to address – our health and safety policy runs to 40 pages, including 20 risk assessments. It is reviewed annually by a health and safety expert.'

'No cost to the council'

Friends of Little Chalfont Library (FOLCL) is a charity established in 2006 to save the Little Chalfont County Branch Library from closure by converting it to an independent community-run library.

In 2006 Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) decided to close a number of branch libraries. An action group was formed to fight closure in Little Chalfont.

The action group, Friends of Little Chalfont Library (FOLCL), organised petitions, lobbying and local and national media cover. In the face of this fierce opposition, BCC agreed that if a business plan could be produced demonstrating that the community could take over the library 'at no cost to BCC' it would be considered.

Anything provided or supplied by BCC would need to be paid for. This included rent for the building, charges for IT equipment and software, supplies such as bar codes and a management fee of £1,000 per annum.

The only discretionary item was stock, for which BCC required rent of around £7,000 per annum. To avoid this cost, most of the stock was returned to BCC. Replacement stock was obtained by a public appeal that netted 12,000 books.

The business plan covered budgeted costs, funding, the volunteer base and organisation and management. It also covered FOLCL's aspirations to improve and expand services to make the library a real centre for the community. It was accepted, and Little Chalfont Community Library began in February 2007, completely managed and staffed by unpaid volunteers.

Services provided

The library offers all the services available through a county library. It is linked to BCC's computerised Library Management System (LMS). Customers use a standard county library card to borrow, reserve, renew or return stock, either at Little Chalfont or any county library.

Little Chalfont offers photocopying, laminating, reference material, information on local events, magazines, newspapers and access to a wide range of books (including large print and audio).

It also offers internet access, wireless broadband, a reading group and computer classes for adults. All are free of charge.

The library is available to community groups as a low-cost meeting venue. Facilities include a computer data projector, large screen and a linked surround sound audio system.

Running Little Chalfont Community Library is very similar to running a business. The main difference is that there is no payroll.

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The management team, all of whom are Trustees of FOLCL, take on the various responsibilities. These include health and safety, data protection, financial management, Charity Commission requirements, volunteer and rota management, fund raising, event management, policy and procedures, stock selection and procurement, website management,



SUCCESS!

- The library is highly valued by all sections of the community.
- Footfall has increased each year.
- Stock issues have significantly increased.
- The library has a high customer satisfaction rating.
- Opening hours have been increased.
- A paved and planted public amenity area on the library frontage has been completed.
- The thermally inefficient windows and entrance door have been replaced.
- The library interior and exterior have been refurbished.
- Library equipment has been upgraded.
- Film nights are held regularly, showing popular films when they are released on DVD. They have proved to be a huge success.
- The local community responds very positively to financial appeals.
- Local businesses, organisations and authorities have provided financial and other support, including BCC.
- Fund raising events are held on a regular basis and are well attended.
- Local schools use the library for projects and the display of artwork.
- The library gives a large number of local people the opportunity to be involved in voluntary work. They enjoy the work and value the interaction with other volunteers and the public. They feel they are making a real contribution to the community whilst working in a friendly, stimulating environment.
- The library management team provides information and advice to other communities faced with library closure.

building maintenance, liaison with local authorities and organisations.

A host of other specific activities arise from time to time, such as managing projects.

The library is staffed by over 50 unpaid volunteers, working a flexible shift system. They also help with other work such as bookings and leaflet delivery to the 2,400 local households (6,000 residents).

FOLCL has received the Best Volunteering Group Award from Chiltern District Council, a Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, the MBE for volunteering groups, the High Sheriff's Award for services to the community. Its Chairman has been awarded an MBE for services to libraries.

Following a complete change of heart in 2010 BCC are now promoting the library as a model for other communities.

Grants have been obtained from a wide range of organisations. Over £20,000 has been spent on new stock in the last 3 years.

Death of the public library system?

Mike Chaney, an experienced library volunteer in Dorset, questions the official line that community management is the future. It could even be the kiss of death ...

JUST THREE months ago I was raising a glass of bubbly to the future of the new community library in my Dorset village. The library was packed – and not just for the free bubbly. There was genuine enthusiasm for the idea that the 1,400 people of Puddletown could run their own library.

Among most of those volunteers, that rosy view of the way Dorset County Council has shuffled off its responsibilities (to this and to six other small and mainly rural communities) still persists. One of the most active volunteers told me recently: 'This is so much better than the old system.'

But for me – more world weary, even cynical – it is becoming apparent that through this willing co-operation with our library authority, we are contributing to what could conceivably be the death of the public library system as I have known it these past 70 years and more.

If our councillors hear much more about how much better off we are for not having professional help in our libraries, it won't take them long to see the financial advantages of conferring such privileges on all their communities, save perhaps the biggest towns. And Dorset doesn't have many of them, being a county of villages and small market towns.

Carnage

Indeed, stalwarts of the group which led the fight to save Dorset's libraries are hearing more and more hints from highly placed sources at County Hall that the library service hopes to reduce its number of branches to as few as 14.

What carnage the financial crisis has wrought. Until this year Dorset had one of the most comprehensive services in the country in terms of population: 34 libraries for 410,000 people.

In January and February it 'lost' nine of those: one totally, the other eight to 'community' status. This, the county insists, means they are outside its statutory provision.

But it now appears that, at least under the country's present political leadership, the 1964 statute is a busted flush.

No cash-strapped council leader is going to lose sleep over the fear that Whitehall or its clawless catspaw ACE (Arts Council England) will now call to account any authority that fails to provide a 'comprehensive' library service.

Indeed, reading ACE's assessment* of the advantages of volunteer-run libraries, any council

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that deprived its people of the benefits of self-help could be accused of profligacy.

ACE has no time for the concerns of groups like mine: that it is becoming increasingly difficult to ensure a constant supply of suitable volunteers.

We have to turn away or try to find other roles for those who have never learned to use a computer with confidence. Furthermore, the fact that we open principally during working hours means that only the retired can help us.

Paying our way

Apart from the difficulty of finding enough people to make themselves available for a minimum of ten three hour shifts every week, we have the very real bread-and-butter problem of paying our way.

Although we've only been at it for three months, we calculate that we're going to have to drum up at least £3,000 every year. That's just to pay the rent, power the equipment and keep the place warm, insure our workers – and bring a bit of welcoming style to the workaday furnishings we were left by the council.

The fiver we get by way of annual subscription from our 80 members doesn't cover a tithe of that.

We are endlessly shaking our collecting boxes under the noses of our small community.

If it weren't for the support we've had from local charities (going on for two grand in the past 12 months) and the willingness of local high profile 'personalities' to come and do a turn for us, we'd be on our uppers already.

But, as the picture of our opening shows, local celebrities like Kate Adie, the BBC's former intrepid war correspondent, turn out for us.

Benefits

She and Julian Fellowes, the Oscar-winning script writer and creator of the Downton Abbey ITV blockbuster, have also filled halls for us.

Both gave us their time and their support entirely freely – and gave us the chance to make enough to ensure our immediate future.

The trouble is that there are so many other 'good causes' these days, not only after our supporters' time but their money too. It is far from certain that we can keep the show on the road in the long term future. But we are giving it our best shot.

I readily concede that there are solid community benefits from community management.

For example, we now no longer open after 5.30pm.

We worked for four years before we took over completely, filling in for paid staff when the council cut their hours. This gave us the chance to see for ourselves that we got very few customers in the evening.



■ Kate Adie (left) toasted the opening of Puddletown Library as it transferred from Dorset County Council's library service to community management. She and Mike Chaney, the author of this assessment of the impact of community management, are surrounded by some of the volunteers who now run the library.

PHOTO: Tim Lee, Friends of Stalbridge Library (Stalbridge is a village in north Dorset).

We knew better than administrators away in their ivory tower at County Hall. Once we got our hands on the levers of power, we chose to use our labour when it is most needed. In such ways, volunteers are in closer touch with their community than professionals.

We are also developing 'non-library' uses for the building the county council has passed on to us. We can now offer our visitors a cuppa and a more comfortable place to loiter for a chat.

For old codgers like me, however, no matter how warm the welcome I get from my neighbours when I borrow a book, it's difficult to forget the comfort of the help of someone who'd devoted a lifetime to learning how to run a library – and who knew, without a lot of head-scratching, how to extract information from the county's computerised library management system.

I should make it clear that Dorset has worked valiantly to prepare our volunteers to make a decent job of doing what it can no longer afford to do.

Self help

It has given comprehensive training to the couple of dozen volunteers, who still open the library for the same number of hours that the county's professionals provided.

It circulates books to us in the same way that it did (save that it no longer offers talking books or any recorded music on our shelves: such non-standard things have to be ordered from library headquarters in Dorchester). And it has left us the self-service console and the public access computers.

Our library service has done all it could to make the hand-over to community management a success. But, as it appears that local government is going to have to go on tightening its belt, it is difficult not to suspect that our enthusiastic volunteers are not only helping to bring about the virtual extinction of a paid-for library service.

They may also be opening the door to a transfer to self-help of an ever-widening range of 'public' services.

Mark my words: you ain't seen nothin' yet.

Mike Chaney was chairman of the Friends of Puddletown Library (2007–2013) and a volunteer librarian (2008–11) until old age and arthritis (he says) got the better of him.

* see Campaigner no 86, spring 2013

Mike Chaney first wrote about Puddletown's volunteers in our summer 2009 issue (no 78). He was already quite clear about the difficulties and dangers. You can get all our back issues on our website: www.librarycampaigner.com

E-loans, by gum!

Laura Swaffield welcomes (limited) progress on e-lending in libraries.

Hello to An Independent Review of E-Lending in Public Libraries in England*. This came out in March. It was late – to nobody's surprise. E-lending by libraries is a very thorny issue.

It is popular where it's been tried. E-loans are currently available in limited form – when individual library services sign up with publishers who have an e-loan scheme, or agencies that get the rights to a number of books. But that's very far from wide availability of all the latest books.

We should be grateful for the hard work of this distinguished panel (see box) under publisher supreme William Sieghart (pictured). But maybe not ecstatic.

The report amounts, in essence, to saying: 'OK, we've really got to think this out properly.' This was true years ago. So the real work is only just beginning.

But it does show progress. It makes a bold decision that e-books should be lent free (just like p-books). The thought of losing the free offer of books (a statutory duty) had worried librarians a lot.

On the other hand, do we know if every publisher (and writer, and bookshop) will eagerly assent? It's worried them a lot, too. Would free and super-easy loans make their sales plummet?

The report recommends (obviously) that Public Lending Right should get more money, and be extended to e-books – and to audio-books too (too long neglected). This will take legislation – and money. I've seen no offers of either, yet, from government.

Another bold decision is that e-books must be lent 'remotely' – that is, without people having to trudge to a library building to download. This, of course, would negate the whole point of e-lending.

But a few years ago panel member Stephen Page heroically tried to get all publishers to agree a baseline offer for e-lending. Some would only accept lending on this daft basis. Will they all come on board now?

E-books, says the report, should be lent like paper books – to one person at a time, for a limited number of loans until a paper book would have worn out. This seems surreal, but protects publishers' income.

* www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-independent-review-of-e-lending-in-public-libraries-in-england



■ William Sieghart

But who will protect library managers' budgets? Can they afford to buy in a whole new format, on top of current ones? It will be years (if ever) before people stop wanting paper versions. Libraries might even have to buy and lend out e-readers or tablets.

And will 151 library authorities be able to work together, adopt common standards and methods and technology? Let alone all those poor new DIY libraries that are out on the fringe.

Pilot projects start soon, run by SCL (Society of Chief Librarians), with 'design' support from Arts Council England and really informed help from The Reading Agency, which has long experience with publishers – and digital technology for libraries.

The results of these pilots will show us just how far we've really got.

THE PANEL

Chair: **William Sieghart**, founder of Forward Publishing and the Forward Prize for Poetry; **Janene Cox**, President, SCL; Commissioner for Tourism & Culture, Staffordshire; **Roly Keating**, CE, British Library; former Director of Archive & Content, BBC; **Caroline Michel**, CEO of (literary agents) **Peters Fraser & Dunlop**; **Stephen Page**, CE, Faber & Faber; **Joanna Trollope**, author; **Jane Streeter**, bookseller; past President, Booksellers Association.

