

# LIBRARY CAMPAIGN

SUPPORTING FRIENDS AND USERS OF LIBRARIES

## Sieghart – will the report be kicked into the long grass?

**PLUS**  
Election questions  
SUFL 2014 report  
Telling new statistics  
Life-changing libraries



**AT LAST!**  
The facts about  
community libraries!

SPRING 2015  
No. 91



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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 public libraries through the activities of friends and user groups.



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The following organisations send representatives to attend steering group meetings:

Unison,

Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals (CILIP).

## JOIN US!

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

Our membership form is on  
page 32. 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](mailto: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. 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.

**2015 MEETINGS:**

For dates, check our website, or contact us to be notified ([thelibrarycampaign@gmail.com](mailto:thelibrarycampaign@gmail.com) or 020 8651 9552).

### 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.

# Damp squib Sieghart?

**Oh no! Not another report!** The Library Campaign – like everyone else – reacted with some irritation when William Sieghart’s review of English public libraries was announced a year ago.

There’s a huge pile of reports already. All pointing out the same basic problems. All followed by – no action at all.

Still, TLC – like everyone else – spent hours writing evidence for it. And – like everyone else – we were impressed by his grasp of the issues when we gave oral evidence, or heard him speak at the odd conference.

Above all, he stressed that everyone had told him they didn’t want just ‘another bloody report’. He was determined to get action. So...

The report was delivered to ministers early in October. Publication was now up to them. We held our breath... while weeks went by.

Finally, it limped out on December 18 – just a day before Parliament broke up for Christmas. A bit suspicious.

It was accompanied by NO offers of funding or support by government, except to set up a ‘task force’ to get people together to work on some basics.

The report itself is rather disappointing – lacklustre, polite and surprisingly short (we have published almost every word in this issue).

It is too tactful to use the word ‘crisis’. But that’s clearly the idea: make it as easy as possible to get some action, quick.

SO – write something so short that even the libraries minister will read it. Be nice about everyone so there’s no sulking. Recommend obvious things that won’t cost much. Stress the digital ‘offer’, because it’s such an obvious, no-brain necessity for a government keen to save cash by making everything as near to online-only as it can.



Since then... almost nothing. People flocked to an update meeting in the Commons (see our report: [www.librarycampaign.com/sieghart-report-the-latest](http://www.librarycampaign.com/sieghart-report-the-latest)). They took turns to pledge enthusiastic support for action.

The Society of Chief Librarians, in its usual mild way, has commented that it ‘would have welcomed a commitment to investment in public libraries to support the report’.

And, in its usual mild way, it is getting on anyway with Sieghart-compatible work (with modest Arts Council funds). Main project: developing a single digital platform to unite library resources.

But government funds – or even enthusiasm – for a coherent, urgent rescue job for England’s libraries? Nope.

As we go to press – five months after the report was finished – not a peep. Not even about the task force getting to work. Any day now???

The standard photo of the excellent, hard-working Mr Sieghart shows him standing in front of a lot of long grass. We fear it may be prophetic...

**As usual, we’ve sent you an extra copy of this magazine. Please take the time to pass it on, or place it somewhere people will see it...**

## National Libraries Day

This was always conceived as a celebration day – but carefully timed to grab councils’ attention before they set their budgets. Unavoidably, year after year, the focus has been more and more on fighting cuts. This year arch-rebel John Lydon (formerly Johnny Rotten) had to stand up for decent values, while our rulers (local and national) are determined to smash everything that makes us a civilised society... Here’s what he said:

**...yes, Saturday 7 February is National Libraries Day. Be there. Be there. Libraries are the most important essential part of our culture and civilisation. They record every single thought us as a species have ever endured and experienced. You are a fool to turn your nose up at this. I love libraries. I love the work done by librarians. Everything about me recovering when I was 8 years old is due to those librarians and I will forever love them as an entire tour de force of civilisation.**

God bless ya. Johnny Rotten loves ya. Please do not take our libraries away.

## THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGNER SPRING 2015, No.91

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### SPEAK UP FOR LIBRARIES 2014

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### SIEGHART SPECIAL

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# 2014 – the 10 key UK public library trends

**Ian Anstice (www.publiclibrariesnews.com) says:**

**It has been, as ever, a year showing wide variation – internationally and nationally. With 151 library services in England alone, it could hardly be otherwise. However, having read everything on UK public libraries over the last year, here are my key themes.**



**1** The fight for library buildings has (sort of) been won. But the fight for adequately funded library services has never looked so fragile.

Councils aren't closing many libraries: CIPFA estimated just 49 (1%) closed in 2013-14; 74 the year before.

That's a lot less than most people would believe. It shows that councils realise the tremendous detrimental political impact of closing a library.

However, this is not to say that we should all be celebrating. Faced with massive cuts from central government and strong pressure not to increase council tax, councils are cutting libraries in other ways.

The obvious one is to replace paid staff with volunteers. That trend has only been growing this year. Other ways include cutting bookfunds (down to their lowest level for decades). When you see a flagship mega-building like the Library of Birmingham having its opening hours cut almost in half, you know times are tough.



**2** Times are looking good for new English library trusts.

Although Wigan is taking library services back from a trust, overall there's never been so much pressure on councils to divest library services.

Suffolk and York are being touted, most recently in the Sieghart report, as the great new hope... and

the benefits they bring in terms of reduced costs are being scrutinised all around the country.

In Scotland, where slightly different rules apply, trusts now commonly run libraries. Expect a flood of these south of the border in the next couple of years.

**3** Amalgamations aren't happening. There's been a surprising lack of different councils merging library services for economies of scale. Perhaps there's a strong element of turkeys not voting for Christmas in this one.

It is notable that GLL is eyeing at least one more service to add to its portfolio, but no-one has yet publicly announced they're doing another Tri-Borough [the much-vaunted amalgamation of services in three London boroughs].

**4** Private companies are failing to make a dent. The US private library company, LSSI, has failed to pick up a single library service in the UK.

Carillion – who bought out Laing last year within weeks of the latter taking over Croydon – has failed to expand.

There are suspicions that challenging councils in, for example, Lincolnshire will open the door for private companies further down the line (the reasoning being that they can competitively tender against trusts etc). There's been no actual sign of this yet. One to watch, though.

**5** Usage falls as funding falls. Usage in England continues to fall roughly in line with reductions in funding. Usage in the USA, Wales, Australia and other countries is stable or is increasing, roughly in line with increases in funding.

The evidence is there – you get what you pay for. If you fail to fund libraries adequately, the public notice and cease coming. So you get fewer customers – and there's more reason to reduce funding. The vicious circle is there for all to see.

**6** Dark times continue to lie ahead. Both main political parties are committed to austerity, and thus to further cuts in council budgets, until 2020. Neither is willing to protect libraries from those cuts.

This means that you can expect, if anything, deeper cuts in the sector in the next Parliament, certainly if the Conservatives win.

If Labour wins, there is a chance their cuts will be less draconian – but it is unlikely to feel better at the time. We can hope, though.



■ Library of Birmingham

**7** **Protest works.** The success of the judicial review in Lincolnshire, and of protests in Liverpool and Wales, shows that, actually, the key thing to protect your library is to protest against cuts.

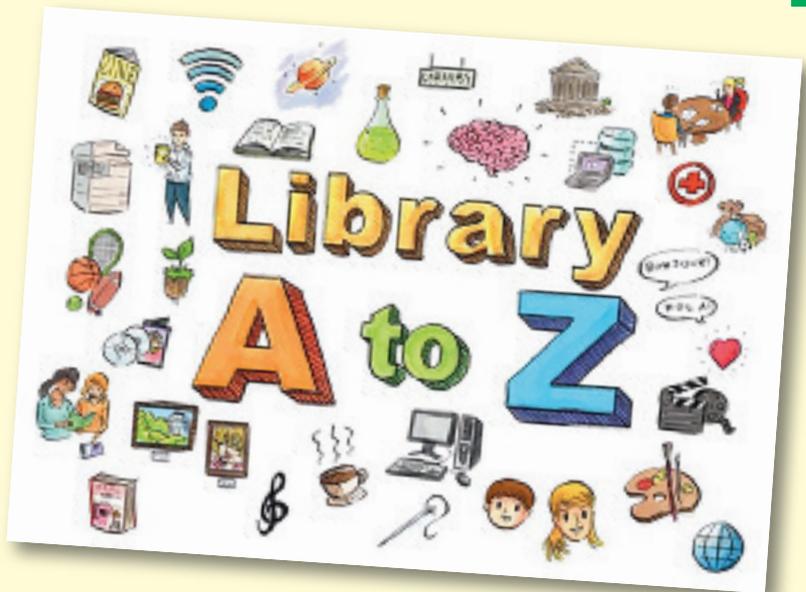
Simply using the library more has some impact, but there's been enough examples this year of well-used libraries under threat to show that it's not key.

Indeed, a well-used library may even be more at risk, as the council thinks volunteers would be more likely to save it.

No, the key thing to keeping a library open is the presence of loud, well-organised protest groups. This is going to be especially obvious until the general elections next year.

Afterwards, expect it to be lot less important, as politicians get down to the dirty work.

The loss (or not) of judicial review (still going through Parliament) will have a great bearing on whether local people are listened to (or not) in non-election years.



However, Mr Vaizey has continued annoying Sheffield council with queries about its consultation on deep cuts to its library service, and he has still not categorically said he will not intervene...



■ Ed Vaizey

Similarly, the launch of the Library A to Z, crowd-funded largely by campaigners, has also gained widespread support in many public libraries – probably because it is very carefully apolitical, and concentrates on the positive rather than the negative.

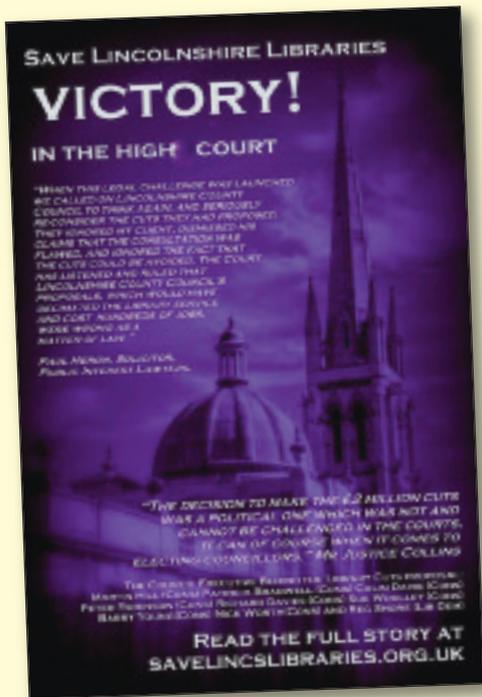
**10** **National organisations are upping their game.** The SCL (Society of Chief Librarians) has tried its best to make an impact on local councillors' views, and nationally.

The same can be said to some extent of CILIP, who have been active, with Big Debates and other stuff, this year. The professional association's obsession with navel gazing – sorry, modernisation – has also now apparently come to an end. It has, at least, left the organisation on a firm financial footing.

Praise must also go out to the Carnegie UK Trust, who have put their back into the LibraryLab innovation grants, leadership training and their advocacy work. Great to see.

**9** **National Libraries Day is gaining acceptance.** Most library services ran at least one event in 2014. I expect only the most reactionary and cautious councils to ignore it in 2015.

From its roots a few years ago as an instrument of protest, the Day is becoming used as an important advocacy tool, locally and nationally. A good thing to see.

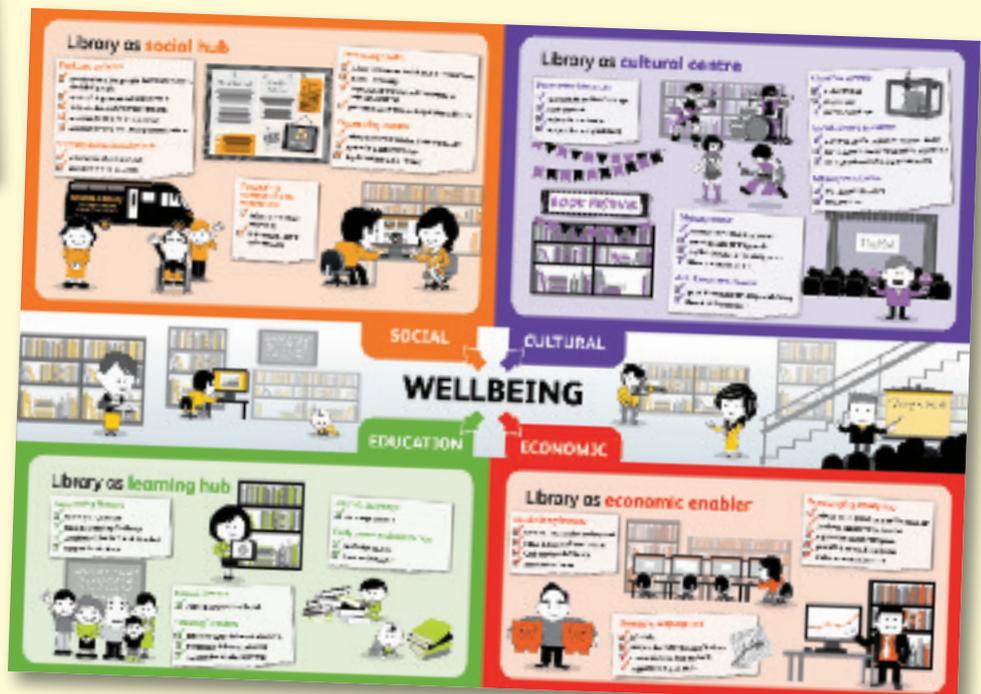


■ Above: the main points of Save Lincs Libraries' 2014 victory – to inspire others.

**8** **Lack of government intervention...?** The DCMS has continued its hands-off policy (otherwise known as malevolent neglect) on public libraries, with a stated belief that local authorities are the best to handle local services, regardless of any statutory responsibility it may have.

The Sieghart report was commissioned – but then only published on the last possible day before Christmas. The report itself was also deeply pragmatic and conservative (small c) in tone.

Even so, the libraries minister has only agreed to one recommendation so far – to set up a task force, which has no cost attached.



■ Right: brilliant campaign material from Carnegie UK Trust. Download it free from: <http://tinyurl.com/nk7p8qq>

# Who cares?

TLC was glad to see Chie Suga on another of her trips to London. She's a Tokyo academic who has been researching and publishing on English library campaigns for years, with TLC's help. In Japanese, of course.

She also met campaigners in Lincolnshire and Sheffield, plus the unstoppable Shirley Burnham in Swindon.

Meanwhile, we see **NO** useful research on public libraries by anyone English!

**NOTHING** on how volunteer libraries are working (or not) since 2013.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, they have been forced on to communities by the score, with councillors burling that they are a 'successful model' being used 'all over the country'. A new urban myth!

**NOTHING** from DCMS (Department for Culture, Media & Sport) about the effects of cuts and closures.<sup>2</sup>

**NOTHING** from DCMS even about the basic numbers. The only up-to-date totals of closures, mad volunteer plans (etc) are compiled in his spare time by librarian Ian Anstice ([www.publiclibrariesnews.com](http://www.publiclibrariesnews.com)).

He's the first to say his figures can't be fully authoritative. TLC is the first to say it's a scandal that the job isn't done by DCMS.

Finally, **NOTHING MUCH** from the official (and massively detailed) CIPFA<sup>3</sup> figures. These come out every December (already eight months out of date).

You can't see them unless you spend £400-odd (on what is, after all, public information). And there is no analysis even of national trends – let alone the differences between good and bad local authorities. These statistics should be gold dust. They are largely wasted.

**TO SUM UP:** we can all see that our local library services are falling off a cliff. But those responsible don't care. They don't even care to know.

## Notes

- 1 In 2013 the National Federation of Women's Institutes reported that many volunteer libraries were already creaking for lack of support, while Arts Council England's ludicrous 'report' said nothing sensible at all [see Campaigner no. 86].
- 2 A critical National Audit Office report points out that DCMS 'did not attempt to quantify potential impacts on libraries or explicitly address their sustainability'. Also that the Department for Education 'did not cover specifically the statutory duty for local authorities to secure young people's access to sufficient leisure-time recreational activities'. [Financial Sustainability of Local Authorities 2014, HC 783 Session 2014-15, 19 November 2014]
- 3 Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy

**STOP PRESS:** Scotland and Wales have only recently started to suffer damaging cuts. But they are on to it. Scotland is now researching volunteer libraries. Wales has already produced an excellent report [see page 10].



■ Chie Suga

## CIPFA SNAPSHOTS

Many thanks to  
Tim Coates

Campaigner Tim Coates has had a go at the latest CIPFA figures. Some illuminating results are shown on the opposite page. And here are some VERY interesting charts by Tim. Note: in the past 12 years, management and staff costs have hardly increased at all – from £401m to £417m. And expenditure on materials (books etc) decreased, from £102m to £82m.

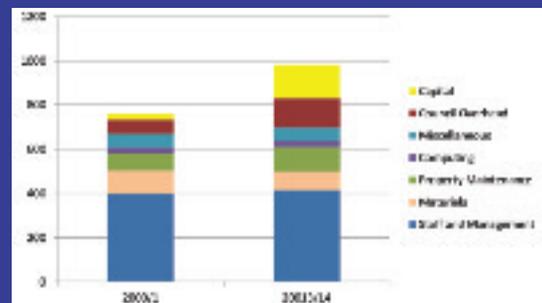
In the same 12 years, councils' overhead charges more than doubled – from £62m to £133m. Some councils record even more massive rises – eating up the funds that should be spent on staff and stock.

Our vote for the most outrageous example is Lincolnshire. This is the council that is insisting on dumping 30+ libraries on to volunteers, sacking over 160 staff and keeping just 15 libraries – despite outrage and opposition from the entire county. They declined to look properly at a bid from non-profit company GLL to make all the savings they wanted, while still running a full service. Now we can see why. They'd rather wreck the libraries than sort out their own inefficiency.

Annual Expenditure on libraries 2013/14  
£985m



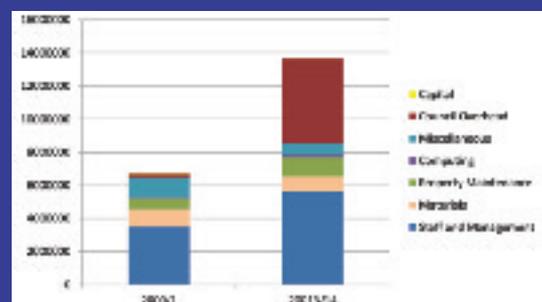
ENGLAND:  
graphs showing  
how the money  
was spent  
(above) and the  
change between  
2000-01 and  
2013-14 (right)



Annual Expenditure on libraries 2013/14  
£13.7m



LINCOLNSHIRE:  
graphs showing  
how the money  
was spent  
(above) and the  
change between  
2000-01 and  
2013-14 (right)



# COUNCIL OVERHEAD CHARGE AS % OF LIBRARY BUDGET

## OVER 25%

- Hull 50.3%
- Islington 44.5%
- Northants 43.9%
- Lincs 41.9%
- Sunderland 39.6%
- Surrey 39%
- Oxfordshire 35.9%
- Camden 33.8%
- Somerset 32.7%
- Gateshead 32.3%
- Wiltshire 32.1%
- Torbay 31.8%
- Leics 29%
- Rochdale 27.8%
- Westminster 27.5%
- Stoke on Trent 27.1%
- Merton 26.8%
- Harrow 25.5%
- Barnet 25.2%

## BELOW 6%

- Southampton 5.7%
- Greenwich 5.5%
- Stockport 5.1%
- Leicester 4.5%
- Norfolk 4%
- Wandsworth 3.6%
- Salford 3.6%
- Staffs 3.4%
- Slough 2.3%
- East Sussex 2.2%
- Kent 1%
- N Lincolnshire 1%
- Newcastle on Tyne 0.8%
- Tameside 0%
- Sheffield 0%
- South Tyneside 0%
- Cheshire 0%
- Swindon 0%
- Worcs 0%

## MOST IMPROVED?

- Lambeth 24% (45% in 2012-13)
- Croydon 2.3% (44.3% two years ago)

## NATIONAL TRENDS

### LOANS & VISITS

► Since 1997, the number of books available for lending has gone down by 20m.

England in 1997, 75m; in 2013, 57m; in 2014, 55m.

UK in 1997, 92m; in 2013, 63m; in 2014, 61m.

► Since 1997, the number of people borrowing books has halved.

England in 1997, 16m; 2013, 9m; 2014, 8m.

UK in 1997, 19m; 2013, 10.3m; 2014, 9.8m.

► Since 1997, library visits per person are down by 33%.

England: 1997, 6.4; 2012-13, 4.5; 2013-14, 4.3.

UK: 1997, 6.2; 2012-13, 4.5; 2013-14, 4.4.

► Copies of e-books held in libraries in 2014:

England 526,000; Wales 204,000; Scotland 60,000; N Ireland 21,000.

► E-books loaned in 2013-14 as a % of total book lending:

England 0.86%; Wales 1.54%; Scotland 1.70%; N Ireland 0.71%.

► Since 1997, overall book lending down by 49%:

England in 1997, 411m loans; in 2012-13, 222m; in 2013-14, 209m.

UK in 1997, 486m loans; in 2012-13, 263m; in 2013-14, 247m.

► 48% of libraries in the UK offer WiFi:

1,618 in England (50%); 213 in Wales (65%); 232 in Scotland (38%);

3 in Northern Ireland (2%)

### OPENING HOURS

► Since 1997, libraries open 10+ hours per week down by 9.8%.

England in 1997, 3,826; in 2013, 3,491; in March 2014, 3,450.

UK in 1997, 4,607; in 2013, 4,194; in March 2014, 4,145.

► Now 125 libraries open 60+ hours per week.

England, 114; Wales, 3; Scotland, 8; N Ireland, 0.

### LIBRARY MONEY

► Capital expenditure in 2013-14 was the highest ever (£163m).

In the past 5 years:

In England, capital spent was £688m (£386m in the previous 5 years).

In Wales, capital spent was £20m (£30m in the previous 5 years).

In Scotland, capital spent was £30m (£28m in the previous 5 years).

In N Ireland, capital spent was £16m (£14m in the previous 5 years).

► Annual spend on library operations fell in 2013-14 by 2.8% to £940m (£967m in 2012-13).

In England it fell from £783m to £757.3m (3.3%).

In Wales it fell from £49.7m to £49.2m (1%).

In Scotland it fell from £104.3m to £104.0m (0.3%).

In Northern Ireland it fell from £29.9m to £29.6m (1%).

► Expenditure on books (inc. e-books & digital content) fell 14% to £77.6m, its lowest for 20 years. It is now 7.6% of total spend.

UK spend on printed books was £66.7m (6.5% of library spend) plus £10.9m on e-books & databases.

In England, £62.5m spent on books (inc. £8.9m on e-books & databases).

In Wales, £4.9m spent on books (inc. £386,000 on e-books & databases).

In Scotland, £7.9m spent on books (inc. £1.2m on e-books & databases).

In Northern Ireland, £2.4m spent on books (inc. £350,000 on e-books & databases).

► There has been a sharp rise in property costs, from 11.9% of expenditure to 13.5% in two years. In 2014 there was no rise in service charges as a % of budget.

► In 2014 there were 19,307 paid staff (3,106 qualified professionals) and 35,813 volunteers. In 2007 there were 25,769 paid staff (5,298 qualified professionals) and 13,417 volunteers.

## LOCAL SNAPSHOTS

### LENDING DOWN

Since 1997, book loans down 55%.

The worst five councils:

Doncaster ↓ 75%

Redcar ↓ 75%

Barnet ↓ 73%

Bolton ↓ 72%

Croydon ↓ 71%

There are no councils where lending has increased in that time. However... in Southwark, the decline has been only 9%.

### STOP PRESS:

This year, Lambeth is achieving a 3% RISE.

### WHO SPENDS WHAT

(National average funding: £14.06 pa per person)

#### MOST?

- In London:
- Kensington £34
- Islington £31
- Tower Hamlets £26
- Harrow £25
- Hackney £24
- Southwark £24
- Out of London:
- North Tyneside £23
- Bournemouth £23
- NE Lincs £20
- Gateshead £20
- Walsall £19

#### ... and LEAST?

- In London:
- Wandsworth £13
- Greenwich £12
- Brent £11
- Havering £10
- Croydon £9
- Out of London:
- Cheshire £10
- Wigan £9
- Darlington £9
- Warrington £9
- Gloucestershire £9
- Suffolk £9
- West Sussex £9

### VISITS DOWN

The worst:

Redcar ↓ 75%

Warwickshire ↓ 57%

Buckinghamshire ↓ 67%

Waltham Forest ↓ 66%

Manchester ↓ 61%

### VISITS UP

The best:

Tower Hamlets ↑ 107%

Greenwich ↑ 85%

Sandwell ↑ 60%

Oldham ↑ 53%

Sheffield ↑ 45%

### LOANS PER RESIDENT PER YEAR

(National average is 3.9 book loans per annum)

#### FEWEST

- Lambeth 1.9
- Hammersmith 2.1
- Newham 2.2
- Manchester 2.3
- Wakefield 2.4
- Camden 2.5

#### MOST

- Norfolk 6.4
- Oxfordshire 5.7
- Worcestershire 5.6
- Cheshire 5.6
- Redbridge 5.5

# Phonics? Try fun!

**Barbara Band, CILIP Immediate Past President, says that what keeps kids reading is – a good library**

I recently spoke at a Westminster Education Forum Seminar on 'Encouraging Reading for Pleasure – the new National Curriculum, trends in reading habits and supporting reading at home'. Topics included school libraries, and improving literacy in primary and secondary schools.

These events are interesting, as you tend to get a range of people attending rather than the usual suspects – so they are an opportunity to garner further support for libraries.

Lord Tope, chair of the Parliamentary group for libraries, spoke about the value of school libraries. The group's report on this was published last year, and has sat gathering dust on a shelf somewhere ever since. (<http://tinyurl.com/mobelbf>)

Not one single recommendation has been followed up. Of course, we are likely to get a change of government of some sort in May, so that will be an excuse to totally forget it existed.

There followed an assortment of speakers. Some, I felt, were delivering a sales pitch for their latest product.

The local councillor on the panel obviously had no idea what life was like outside his area. He seemed to think that the collaboration that occurred between school and public libraries there (at the most a mile apart) would be perfectly achievable in the rest of the country...

I was also frustrated at how often teachers were mentioned and school librarians ignored – in both the talks and the question times.

The forum was meant to be about school libraries. Yet, at times, I felt it had been hijacked by phonics and reading programmes. These have their place, but they are only one tool in the arsenal. They are meaningless if you don't have that library (or librarian).

The highlight of the event, to me, was the keynote by John Dougherty, children's author and chair of the Children's Writers & Illustrators Group.

He likened reading to eating chocolate – if you wanted to make a child like eating chocolate, you wouldn't give him the bar and tell him to write descriptively about it...

For my session, I decided to focus on reading for pleasure and how this can be achieved with free voluntary reading. Basically you take a well-resourced library. This enables students to choose for



themselves what to read, be it magazine, fiction or non-fiction book, print or e-reader.

You give them time to be able to make that choice and to read their selection. You throw in guidance from a professional librarian who knows the stock and the students.

Problem is, this takes time. Schools don't seem to have that. Everything has to have **pace**, showing learning and progression.

So how do you measure the impact of what a student is reading? I'm not talking about the number of words or the level. They're easy to ascertain.

I'm talking about the influence on their imagination, their self-awareness, their connectivity with the characters to build up empathy and tolerance... the qualities we hope they will achieve to become well-rounded individuals. You can't measure that.

But a quote from Stephen Krashen (Free Voluntary Reading) says it all:

**'The evidence is overwhelming that reading for pleasure – that is, self-selected recreational reading – is the major source of our ability to read.'**

## ELECTION TOOLS

Make libraries an election issue! There's a handy selection of questions opposite.

And CILIP, the librarians' professional association, has a whole battery of excellent material – directly focused on libraries, of course.

It has four main themes: public libraries; digital inclusion; school libraries; making the UK smarter.

It will write to all the main parties, map manifestos and publish election commentary and debate.

There is a whole section on its website – <http://tinyurl.com/o7msbqx> – with key messages and loads of background material.

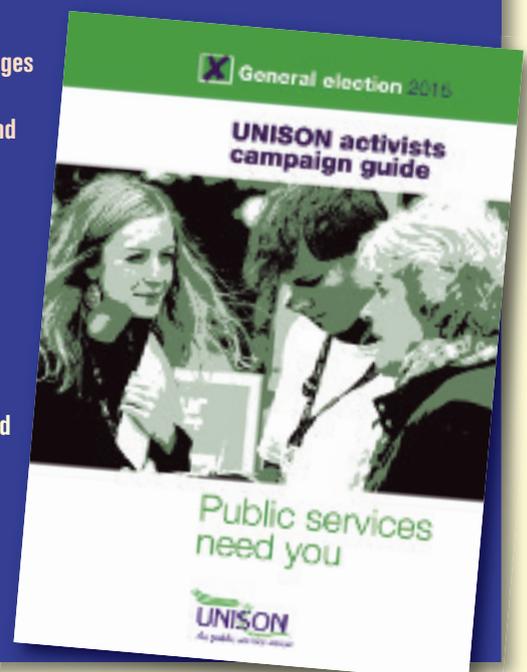
More content is promised between now and May, so keep looking.

For more, it's worth checking Unison's website – to see what turns up next ([www.unison.org.uk](http://www.unison.org.uk)).

Already there's an excellent campaigner handbook – <http://tinyurl.com/pmyarje>.

Obviously it's geared to Unison members, but there is good advice in it. It's also geared to supporting Labour.

But, with that party at least coming out with economic plans that seek to invest for growth, and tackle the deficit without a mad rush to slash public services and deepen austerity, we can see their point...



# Election questions

You might possibly know there's a general election this year – and quite a few local elections too. Here's a useful pick'n'mix selection of questions to ask candidates – devised by the workshops at the 2014 Speak Up For Libraries conference.

## BASICS

Do you use a public library? What for?

Which libraries are you a member of?

How old were you when you took out your first book?

How would you define a public library?

Would you like to see your local library close?

What do you think a public library does?

What do you think a public librarian does?

What is the main purpose of the public library?

## PARTY POLITICS

Will you be providing a clear statement/manifesto on public libraries for the election?

What would you do that [the other party] has not done?

What is your doorstep message/elevator pitch for libraries?

What is your action plan to safeguard the future of public libraries?

What is your vision for public libraries?

How much money should be invested in libraries?

What would convince you to invest in public libraries?

Have you considered the wider implications of public library closures?

How would society look in a post-public-libraries world?

What do you think personally, and how does this differ from your official party policy?

## FOR COALITION GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES

In light of how public libraries contribute to the delivery of numerous key government objectives, why isn't the Secretary of State intervening against cuts and closures?

Why are other government departments contributing so little to the work public libraries do to support their priorities?

Why is the government not co-ordinating and publishing information on local cuts and closures?

Why are there no government reviews of the effects of proposed closures?

Why is there no research into the sustainability of volunteer public libraries?

## FOR LOCAL ELECTIONS

How much of your council's budget is spent on public libraries?

Are you aware of the effect of current cuts on the service to residents?

What can you/we do to influence 'philistine councillors' who don't understand the role of public libraries?

What are you going to do about fictitious council consultations?

## CHECKLIST OF EXAMPLES

How do you see public libraries' role in supporting...

- ✓ digital inclusion?
- ✓ community cohesion/activities?
- ✓ literacy and reading?
- ✓ pre-school literacy?
- ✓ school-children?
- ✓ students?
- ✓ teenagers?
- ✓ adult learners (including adult literacy)?
- ✓ public health and mental health?
- ✓ business and the local/national economy?
- ✓ children and families?
- ✓ older people?
- ✓ unemployed people/benefits claimants?
- ✓ deprived areas?
- ✓ arts and culture?
- etc!

## PLUS...

Where else will these services be found if public libraries shut?

Why are public libraries seen as a luxury rather than a driver for local and national government priorities?

Do you assume everyone has online access? Even if they do, why should this mean closing public libraries?

## ADVANCED QUESTIONS!

Do you want to keep the statutory public library service? If so what do you mean by the phrase?

What alternative do you offer to volunteer libraries?

What would your party do nationally to ensure that localism does not result in a postcode lottery for library services?

What about having national standards for public libraries? (They are still in place in Ireland, Wales and Scotland. Why doesn't England still have them?)

What do you think of the idea of a national Library Development Agency?

Who has the teeth to ensure that library standards are upheld?

Are you aware of all the research evidence in support of public libraries?

How do you expect public libraries to deliver professionally-run services, with a growing range of services, when funds are being cut and many 'libraries' are becoming volunteer-run?

What should the public library service look like in 10, 20 years' time?

# At last! The facts about community libraries!

In Wales, the growth of non-council libraries has only just started. With enviable speed, the Welsh Government has set out to find out what's happening – and how well it's working... The report contains a mass of useful detail. Here are some highlights (lightly edited for clarity).

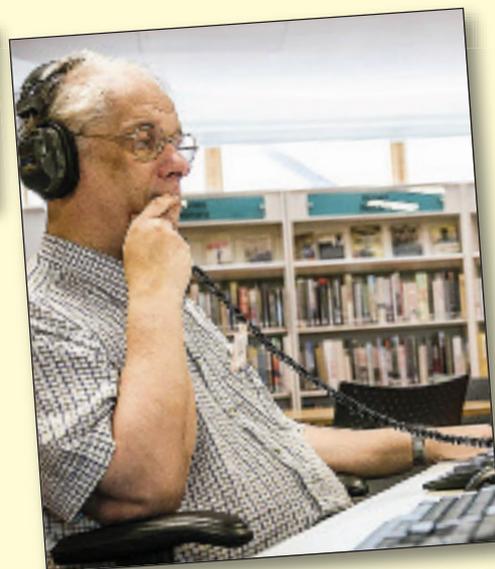
## WHAT IS IT?

This report follows directly – and quickly – the Welsh Government's two reports last year (see pages 14–16).

Both reports identified the need to support local authorities faced with savage budget cuts. (In contrast to England, the government takes an active interest in libraries, and local councils seem anxious to get expert advice.)

In late autumn 2014, this third report was commissioned to find out what has happened so far, as the very first councils try to fill the gap with trusts or various kinds of 'community library'.

By mid-February – it was done! A fuller report is due in nine months' time.



## Independent trusts in Wales

There are currently only two of these in Wales, both at a very early stage. Both group libraries with other services such as leisure, heritage etc. Both build in budget cuts year on year. Otherwise, there are several differences.

The report says: 'There would appear to be some inherent dangers and perhaps weaknesses in the business models of the trusts that require further scrutiny.'

### FUNDING

- The future predicted funding varies between the two trusts. Both are required to deliver annual savings, but the indicative savings for one trust are higher year on year (as much as 5% higher in one particular year).
- In one trust, no budgets are currently ring-fenced. The library service will have to compete for its budget on an annual basis against the other business units.

Some of these will have significant and recurring capital expenditure requirements (eg, leisure facilities will need to remain current and attractive; educational facilities will need to remain competitive). Others, such as heritage and the arts, would inevitably require significant subsidies.

- In one trust, the initial budget for the library business unit is based on the

budget provided by the local authority in 2013–14, with additional reductions on top during 2014–15.

Those levels of investment did not enable the service to improve or develop its performances. The Welsh Government's reports to the authority have highlighted inadequate investment over an extended period. The service may therefore already be inadequately funded at the time of its transfer into the trust.

### CAPITAL

In both trusts, investment in modernising library buildings (via [Wales-only] Community Learning Libraries capital grants) has been advantageous in reducing future capital requirements to maintain the buildings.

In the short term, therefore, major investment may not be necessary. But where the library is in an old building, possibly

listed, there will be a need for regular investment to maintain the facilities.

### INCOME

There are limited opportunities for income generation. Most public library services have experienced considerable difficulty in generating significant income.

Encroachment into the area of charging fees for more services, the only possible option, would be contrary to the Welsh Government's stated free and fundamental user entitlements.



## WHO WROTE IT?

It was commissioned by the Welsh Government via CyMAL (Museums Archives & Libraries Wales – the equivalent of Arts Council England).

It is written by Professor Hywel Roberts, Head of the Department of Information & Library Studies, University of Wales, Aberystwyth. He was co-author of the previous 'expert panel' review (see page 15).



## WHAT DOES IT COVER?

The report looks at (1) independent charitable trusts (2) community-run libraries.

It is NOT against either one in principle. But it does point out some concerns.

It sets out to describe what has happened so far – and to 'assess the impact of the changes... on the communities affected'.

It clearly states that it can only be 'a snapshot' in a rapidly changing situation.

Much space is given to judging whether any of the new models could meet statutory requirements. (This has barely been considered by responsible bodies in England.)

The data is anonymised, but it should be easy to identify the services examined, as there are so few in Wales – as yet.

## WILL IT LEAD TO ACTION?

That's the whole idea. A basic aim is to help 'inform future decisions by other local authorities'.

There's a welcome sense of urgency: 'suitable [government] guidelines cannot be

service to adopt new and different approaches to service provision and methods of working.

The timetable for such a transformation appears to be short. The role of the trust's finance officer and other managers in terms of developing such skills is crucial.

It is similarly crucial in terms of identifying and supporting new and additional approaches to generating income from a wider range of resources.

- Both trusts took longer than anticipated to become formally established.
- Participation in the various national and regional consortia seeking to improve and develop library services needs to be clarified and confirmed.

## THE FUTURE

Should a whole trust become unviable or fail financially, no indication was provided as to what would happen to the elements of statutory provision within the trust.

Some form of reassurance from the authority that the statutory library service would revert to being under its direct management (or some other mode of delivery accountable to the authority) is probably necessary.

Trust officers emphasised the importance of, and need for, funding consistency and continuity, both for the trust itself and also for the individual business units within it.

delayed for much longer – library authorities and their potential partners are now seeking an urgent and definitive decision.

'Reductions and substantial changes in the nature of public library provision in the near future, and in their management in Wales, are inevitable.'

## READ IT!

*Independent Trust and Community Libraries in Wales: research into the nature of current and planned provision, December 2014, commissioned by the Welsh Government: <http://tinyurl.com/k917k27>*



Residents of the authorities would be placed under a significant disadvantage should charges be introduced. They could migrate to facilities offered by neighbouring authorities, to the detriment of overall trust performance levels.

## STAFF REACTION

Initial staff response in one trust has been favourable, with morale higher than in recent years under the local authority (although integration of work practices and synergies are yet to be identified and applied in detail).

However, in the second trust not all staff could relate to the benefits of being employed by a trust rather than the local authority.

## OTHER FACTORS

- The nature and content of the service level agreements requires scrutiny. Trust officers indicated that more detailed guidance and definition of statutory provision is needed from the Welsh Government, to assist them in defining and delivering a suitable service within the new trust arrangements.
- The business model requires the library

## CONCLUSION

Independent trusts, based on formal service level management agreements, are suitable organisations to deliver statutory library services on behalf of the library authority – primarily because eventual responsibility and accountability for the service, and for the quality of provision, lies with the library authority.

There are, however, some inherent dangers – in terms of securing adequate annual budgets and in terms of providing safeguards for the library services should a trust fail for any reason.



# Community-run libraries

There are just five authorities in Wales where such libraries are up and running – though all are at a very early stage. Most were harder to set up than anticipated.

There are huge differences between them, and their effects on library usage. All, of course, are run by volunteers. They have good points. It is too early to make judgements, although some ‘challenges’ are already obvious.

## THE SAMPLE

Four authorities were examined. They are grouped into three types:

- **Model A** – community managed libraries run independently of the local authority library service (one example);
- **Model B** – community managed libraries benefiting from resource provision and high level staff support from the local authority (two examples);
- **Model C** – community managed libraries that benefit from resources, advice, training and paid staff in each library, direct from the local authority (one example).

Models A and B are stories of plans for closures, followed by bitter opposition, followed by... various solutions (including sticking to most of the closures).

Model C had planned for four years not to close small libraries, but to support them as a defined ‘stratum’ of ‘community libraries’. Each library gets resources, advice, training and paid staff, direct from the local authority.

Had many of these libraries been allowed to close, any prospect of re-opening them would have been remote.

Their continued existence may offer the distant prospect of being re-absorbed into the statutory service at some point in the future – should circumstances permit, and if such action would reflect community wishes.

## SO FAR, SO GOOD?

**A valued and valuable community resource has been kept. Many of the community libraries are operating in areas of considerable deprivation and social need, and across a wider range of activities.**

**The achievements of community leaders and organisations – managing a community crisis when confronted by very few options, and a very limited timetable – have to be admired.**

**Nevertheless, they already indicate the dangers to future sustainability of the community library model.**

**The main challenges are recurring costs, and maintaining community commitment and interest.**

## THE NEED FOR SUPPORT

There is continued very heavy dependence on the former local authority for core collections, essential facilities and services, and for advice and guidance.

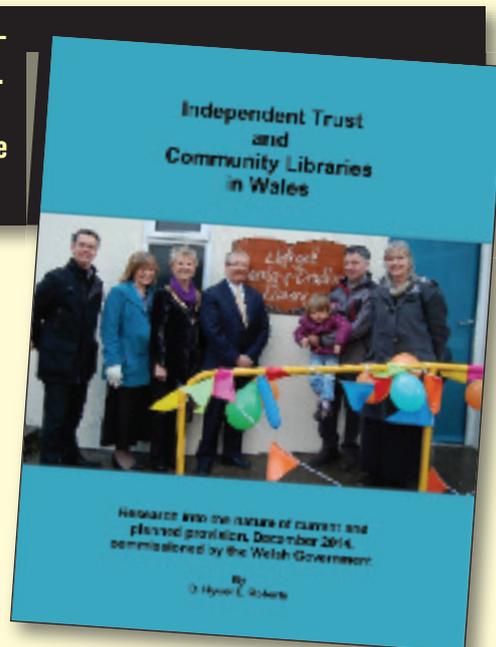
In many instances, users may not be able to identify the changes that have taken place, such is the seeming continued involvement or integration of the local authority.

The continuation of this relationship (and dependence) is invariably regarded as essential to the continued existence of most community libraries.

## LOCAL AUTHORITY ROLE

Local authorities in Wales have been remarkably generous in terms of their contribution to community library resources.

Under some of the models (but not all) there is a fear that the contributions of the local authority in key areas (such as maintaining and supporting ICT provision) are rather low in their list of priorities, and that advice and guidance will diminish over time.



The responsibilities of the community groups will multiply and become even more onerous.

There does, however, appear to be significant political interest and support for the continued relationship between the statutory library service and the community libraries within one authority's boundaries.

But not in all cases...

## THE COST

The financial implications are already proving to be onerous. They are particularly daunting in some instances (financial liabilities transferred to community groups). In such circumstances there is already a sense of frustration.

Generating funding is difficult, and much of the funding obtained has to be expended on meeting recurring revenue liabilities. Too little is available to spend on library developments and community aspirations.

In one instance, a community group has calculated that the cost of community library provision is already higher than it was under the local authority.

## THE VOLUNTEERS

The process of recruiting volunteers was remarkably successful initially. But issues have already arisen in terms of establishing regular and constructive links with customers, in the use of ICT, in the engagement of volunteers with training and with the creation of effective staffing rotas.

Indeed, there is already some evidence of dwindling commitment among early recruits – and of very many competing community demands for volunteers.



## THE BACKGROUND

The commitment and diligence of community leaders and organisations has ensured that a significant number of libraries have been saved from closure.

## LIBRARY SERVICES

Key performances have already declined. Opening hours, issues and visitor numbers have fallen in most cases, and very substantially in some instances.

It is too early to accept that this is a trend that is likely to continue, but the reduction in opening hours means that the offer to the customer has diminished.



## NON-LIBRARY SERVICES

There is increasing emphasis on developing a wider programme of community activity. In many instances the library component is now seen as only one aspect of a wider community initiative.

This is something all libraries should possibly aspire to achieve in a balanced fashion. But in the case of community libraries, it is seen as the only realistic means of ensuring the viability of the overall initiative.

In some instances the availability of opportunity funding tends to govern or drive the direction in which community libraries develop.

## THE FUTURE

Many of the current voluntary community libraries acquired their responsibilities due to difficulties in achieving suitable provision at their particular sites under the statutory library authority.

Many were deemed to be failing libraries – hence the original recommendation for closure.

It will be a very considerable (and perhaps unrealistic) challenge to expect all voluntary groups to make a success of failing situations that existed under well-resourced local authorities.

The problem could become particularly acute in relation to buildings.

Even though capital resources are sometimes easier to identify and locate, some of the buildings come with huge liabilities and challenges.

## ARE COMMUNITY-RUN LIBRARIES THE ANSWER?

Community libraries are certainly not a panacea for all the problems created by diminishing expenditure on public libraries.

They are merely one of several options that need careful evaluation.

The viability and sustainability of some of the community library models in Wales are largely unproven. But it would be unreasonable and very premature to make definitive judgments at this stage.

Nothing should be done to endanger or undermine community-led initiatives. They are providing valued, if limited, services.

Library authorities are unlikely to be able to draw firm inferences to support strategies based on some of the models now in existence.

They would certainly be acting in a precipitate (and possibly irresponsible) fashion should they consider a community-led or -managed model for their larger libraries.



## CONCLUSION

Library authorities should consider a whole range of options should they decide it is necessary to reconfigure library provision.

Community libraries are only likely to succeed in the case of smaller libraries.

The only model that appears to offer the best prospect of sustainability and viability, and a suitable emphasis on service quality, is the model that has a close and formal working relationship with the local authority library service, namely Model C.

It is the only model that could possibly be considered for inclusion within statutory provision.

## BETTER FOR COUNCILS

The value and contribution of community libraries to the overall provision of a satisfactory and sustainable quality can only be fully achieved through a continuing partnership with the library authority [ie, Model C].

There could be significant gains for the library authority if it enters into a formal agreement with partner organisations in communities.

It could achieve any stipulated expenditure reductions, yet at the same time it could continue to invest at very moderate levels in providing a library of a suitable quality that it can feel confident about, and accountable for.

Other authorities intending to follow this route would only be able to include such provision within statutory provision if it creates formal and sustainable partnerships.

## BETTER FOR COMMUNITIES

[Model C] appears to be a far more responsible model than simply handing over problematic service points and already declining services to community groups.

It appears to chime with the wishes of many elected local authority members.

There would also be some form of reassurance that core elements of service quality could be maintained.

In addition, communities would not lose their services suddenly and altogether (either in the immediate term, or if community initiatives should fail).

## A JOB FOR GOVERNMENT

Wales should strive to develop the local authority-led community library model, based on a formal and enduring agreement – but ONLY when circumstances dictate, and ONLY when the continued existence of a small library is threatened by local authority policies or imperatives.



Photos from the 2014 expert panel review, with thanks.

# When in Wales ...

Welsh public libraries, like England's, are covered by the 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act – with its duty for councils to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' service to all who want it. **But oh! what a difference!**

## In Wales...

Welsh library visits are consistently higher (per head of population) than in England – and are **RISING** (up by 11% since 2002-3). In England, many individual libraries perform brilliantly – but the national trend is **DOWNWARDS**.

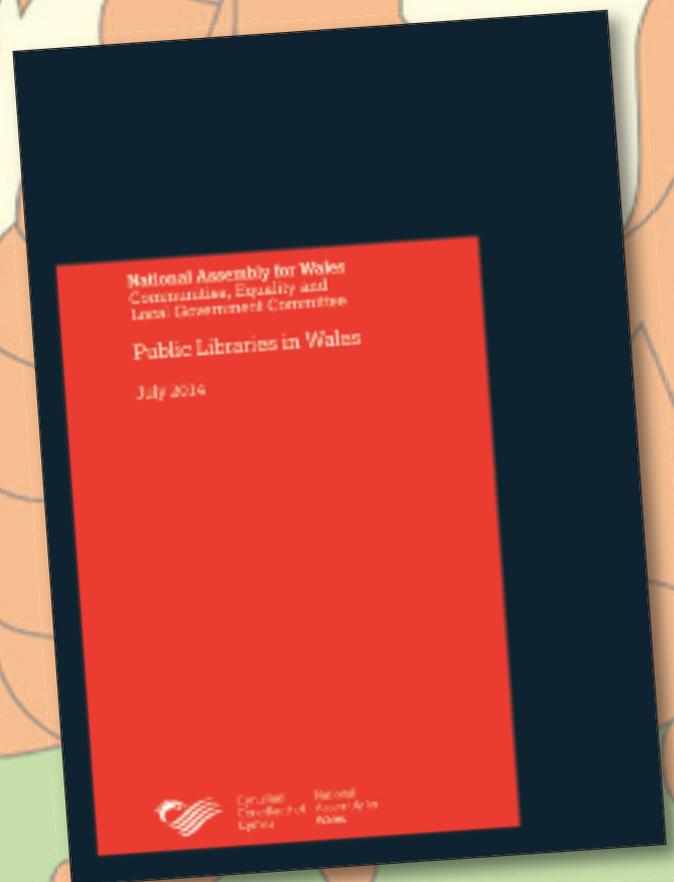
## What is Wales doing right?

- ✓ The government has an overall Programme for Government which commits it to improve access to public libraries, and to promote regional collaboration to achieve national standards. (Some say, though, that it is not clearly linked to other very relevant government priorities where libraries play a vital role.)
- ✗ In England there is no such over-arching commitment.
- ✓ There are national standards for public libraries – not compulsory in law but taken seriously. Councils report on their compliance, within a national assessment framework. The standards are regularly updated (the latest version was issued last year). Making them statutory is now being actively considered.
- ✗ England had such a system from 2001 – but it was abolished in 2008.
- ✓ The government actually has a strategic development framework for libraries. It's called **Libraries Inspire** (the latest version covers 2012-16).
- ✗ In England the government has nothing to say. Arts Council England (ACE) has some priorities, but you couldn't call it a national strategy for development.
- ✓ The government has invested money directly in library services, such as refurbishment and digital developments. This is seen as 'a crucial ingredient' in helping them modernise.
- ✗ In England, central government has not spent a bean. The Arts Council uses its tiny budget to support some useful development projects carried out by other bodies, plus (absurdly) arts projects that happen to be in libraries. Nothing directly on library improvement.
- ✓ There are national programmes to promote libraries.
- ✗ In England there are none.
- ✓ Drastic cuts to local authorities are starting to hit Wales – as they have done in England since 2011. Closures, and volunteer libraries, are starting to mount up fast. But at least in Wales, they admitted the danger – and started assessing it **BEFORE** it began, in 2013. 2014 saw **TWO** reports, one by the government itself, then an expert panel review.
- ✗ In England, the minister insisted year after year that 'libraries are thriving'. Huge damage had happened by the time the Sieghart report was commissioned – and continues to escalate. It's already beyond repair.

## THE WELSH ASSEMBLY REVIEW

The National Assembly for Wales committee set out to 'assess the work of the minister' in his duties under the 1964 Act and the Programme for Government. It also specifically looked at the likely effects of coming financial cuts.

Its recommendations are all made directly to the minister – and the expert panel agreed with most of them.



### 'We recommend that the minister...'

- 1... produces and publishes an annual report on the state of public libraries in Wales. [The expert panel agrees.]
- 2... makes arrangements for the central publication of disaggregated data showing the use of public libraries by demographic groups. [The expert panel agrees, and says some such data is already collected and should be used.]
- 3... works with partners to develop a contemporary definition of 'comprehensive and efficient' library services for local authorities to deliver under the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964. Such a definition should include the provision of internet access which, we believe, should remain free of charge. [The expert panel agrees.]
- 4... considers developing a voluntary accreditation scheme for individual libraries in Wales. [The expert panel thinks the existing Welsh Public Library Standards are a sufficient tool for this job. Extra work on individual libraries would be too costly.]

**5**... continues to work with local authorities and their partners to identify and promote further opportunities for collaboration and co-location arrangements in the delivery of library services. [The expert panel agrees.]

**6**... ensures that the necessary ongoing support and guidance is available in order to increase the long-term sustainability of community managed libraries. [The expert panel agrees.]

**7**... ensures adequate support and guidance continues to be available to local authorities to identify and pursue all available funding opportunities. [The expert panel agrees.]

**8**... whilst core library services should remain free of charge, the minister should explore with local authorities all other available options for libraries to raise revenue. [The expert panel says the scope is very limited - and might be counter-productive.]

**9**... works with local authorities and partners to promote better the wide range of services provided by public libraries. [The expert panel agrees.]

**10**... continues to pursue the case for additional funding from the UK government in recognition of the increasing responsibilities for library staff in Wales in supporting the delivery of digital-by-default welfare reforms. [The expert panel agrees.]

## THE EXPERT REVIEW

The expert panel supported the Welsh Assembly report. This is the experts' action plan. (We have lightly edited the wording to make it clearer.) The 11 recommendations are divided into three main areas: managing change, strategies for improvement and action at national level.

### 4 ways to manage change

#### I. CONSULTATION:

The Welsh Government, WLGA (Welsh Local Government Association) and local authorities should work with stakeholders to continue to **develop good practice guidance** which will assist local authorities (and their public library services) to **consult on services**.

This should include **training**, and **promoting the wealth of online resources available** (Wales has National Principles of Public Engagement, a Practitioners' Manual for Public Engagement and an Evaluation Toolkit).

#### II. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

The Welsh Government, WLGA and local authorities should work with stakeholders to continue to develop good practice by **local authorities undertaking Equality Impact Assessments**.

This will include training and promoting the use of the forthcoming **Equality Impact Assessments Practice Hub** being developed by the WLGA and NHS Centre for Equality & Human Rights.

#### III. BETTER PLANS FOR CHANGE:

**Proposed changes to public library services should be progressed only after the production of costed options.** These should be appraised according to: (a) identification of appropriate timescales; (b) completion of required impact assessments; (c) opportunities for collaborative working (with neighbouring authorities or other delivery partners). **This recommendation should be applied with immediate effect.**

### WHO WERE THE EXPERTS?

#### CLAIRE GREASER

Director, Lisu (library research, Loughborough University) – Chair

#### STEVE DAVIES

Lecturer, School of Social Sciences, University of Cardiff

#### PETER GOMER

Assistant Director, Community & Leisure, Caerphilly County Borough Council, Policy Officer, Welsh Local Government Association

#### PROFESSOR HYWEL ROBERTS

Head of the Department of Information & Library Studies, University of Wales, Aberystwyth



#### IV. PROPER RESEARCH:

CyMAL should take **immediate steps to collect evidence and assess the impact of proposed changes to library services** on communities (within the context of statutory requirements) in Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC, Neath Port Talbot CBC and Blaenau Gwent CBC. **This should inform future decisions by other local authorities.** CyMAL should publish an initial report after three months, with a full report after 12 months.

### 5 strategies for improvement

#### V. JOINED-UP THINKING:

**Every public library service should develop an evidence and outcomes based strategy to begin in 2015-16**, outlining how the library service contributes to local, regional and national priorities. This should be published on the library service's website.

This document should be used as a strategic planning tool, and regularly revised and updated.

The strategy should be **supported by a delivery plan** outlining how it will be implemented, including a Results Based Accountability scorecard assessment. (An **example of best practice** is Caerphilly CBC's five year development plan, which is based on their 10 year strategy.)





■ @Laurencereed presenter/producer of @BBCCornwall Lunch

■ Siobhan Dowd Trust:  
<https://twitter.com/sdowdtrust/status/551743971463274496>

# Let's not lose sight ...

**Elizabeth Ash highlights the well-meaning craze for book swaps ... and the real danger posed by calling them 'libraries'.**

Are we at risk of losing sight of what a comprehensive library service is? The sheer diversity of models, often with bizarre or misleading titles, has seriously blurred the lines and may have dimmed the memories of some.

### So many models...

We now have everything from well-meaning volunteers press-ganged into stepping up to offer a service as best they can and to preserve a space in the hope that the full library service will be reinstated some time in the future... through to trusts, mutuals and private companies, running libraries for reasons it is sometimes difficult to align with community interest and benefit. It is hard to swallow that the latter do this for love, not profit.

There has also been a worrying proliferation of models that fall well short, often referred to as libraries but nothing more than 'bring a book, take a book' book swaps at best. They appear to grab people's attention for their novelty value.

I'm referring to the book swaps in public spaces such as coffee shops or pubs, the 'little libraries' movement and disused phone-boxes packed with makeshift shelves of books. It seems the idea is gaining traction and support.

### Remember the libraries offer...

Public libraries are a lifeline to communities and to individuals – providing access to resources and information necessary to learn, improve, engage, connect, educate, entertain, inform and empower.

They, and the skilled library staff who run them and deliver the service, make a library what it is.

- A public library offers, amongst other things:
- a safe, inclusive and non-judgmental space
  - access to a wide range of free books, newspapers, journals, talking books and more
  - a range of resources, both online and in hard copy
  - internet access
  - expert support, advice and guidance on tap
  - information on a wide range of services and events locally
  - activities for all ages
  - an ordered space, with clear systems in place to safeguard the interest and safety of all who use it.
- Yet some think a box of books – and a random selection of books at that – is a serious competitor for properly funded and staffed public libraries, and worthy of the title of libraries.

This is a very worrying trend. Whilst book swaps are certainly quirky, they fall well short and do a disservice to those most vulnerable and in need of access to a proper library service.

Book swaps are generally unmonitored, allowing different agendas to be pushed if anyone wished to use them to do so. They offer little, if any, order or quality control, nor access to advice and guidance for those who need it.

Calling them libraries gives an air of acceptance and compounds the notion that libraries are just about access to books, and any books at that.

A library offers so much more than access to a limited number of books. That's surely why so many defend their value and protest their demise.

Nothing less than a properly staffed, stocked and funded library is our aim. Let's not lose sight of that.



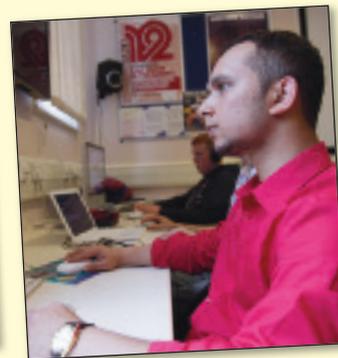
■ <https://twitter.com/elizelford/status/505807046164611072>

The latest example is in Eastwood, Notts. The local paper's photo shows a conventional phone-box with nine rather battered books precariously stacked on the telephone.

A local councillor is quoted: 'We can all afford mobiles these days so the boxes go unused.' (Yes, and we can all afford computers and Kindles too, no doubt).

A library manager says: 'This new approach complements the council's long term modernisation strategy.'

We'd love a quote from former local resident DH Lawrence, but he's spinning in his grave too fast...



# Libraries Change Lives

Every year, the CILIP **Libraries Change Lives Award** shows the amazing things public libraries can do. This year, the winners are all clever partnership projects. And, this year, the awards were presented by an admiring **William Sieghart** ...

These projects not only transformed lives at a personal level – they had a visible impact on the wellbeing of local communities and helped fuel the local and national economy.

Philip Wark, Chair of the CILIP Libraries Change Lives Award judging panel says: 'Library staff and libraries up and down the UK carry out

life-changing work in their communities every day. These three services are excellent examples of the partnerships that library staff design and deliver to address people's needs. They are a powerful reminder of what a professionally run and delivered library service can do.'

Previous winners include Bookstart, first

piloted by Birmingham Libraries and now funded by the government. It now gives books to three million babies and their parents, and is proved to make a real difference to literacy and numeracy levels in primary schools. Another winner was Edinburgh's prison library partnership, which has transformed the library into a popular resource that tackles social inclusion and provides support, opportunities for education and employment and a better transition back to community life.

The award is judged by CILIP's Community, Diversity & Equality Group.

## THE WINNER

### Enterprise hubs in Northamptonshire

Northamptonshire Library & Information Service works with the Northampton Enterprise Partnership (NEP) to provide a new business information and marketing service for people who have skills or ideas they want to turn into self-employment or business start-ups. This includes many job-seekers who cannot find opportunities in the local job market (the region has above-average unemployment).

The support includes free or low-cost business expertise via drop-in sessions, one-on-one consultations, workshops and, of course, access to the library's information resources on business and on local markets and opportunities. Also on offer is access to low-cost office and meeting space.

Since launching in April 2012, the service has helped over 750 people, 75 of whom are now known to be trading – in areas ranging from cleaning to boat-building, creative arts to veterinary lab services.

This accounts for about 10% of all the county's start-ups in this period! At least 12 of these new businesses have become employers of staff or apprentices.

#### SEE THE VIDEO

<http://tinyurl.com/nl77c4s>



## FINALIST

**KidsHub Library Sessions in Hertfordshire**

Hertfordshire Library Service in partnership with the charity KidsHub runs closed library sessions and special tailored activity sessions for children aged 0-19 and their families, who have additional needs such as autism, cerebral palsy or profound and multiple learning difficulties.

These families rarely, if ever, used their library. Many parents of children with special needs worry that their children would be disruptive in the library space, and the children themselves are often unsettled by new environments and experiences. Tailored closed sessions allow them to use the library without feeling anxious or uncomfortable.

This has opened the library up as a welcome place for the projects' families to visit during regular opening hours. Many of the children and their families now have enriched lives with access to books and the library's electronic resources. The library has become a welcome place to visit, socialise and integrate into the community.

## SEE THE VIDEO

<http://tinyurl.com/p59wmy8>

## FINALIST

**Studio 12: Writing Leeds**

Leeds Library & Information Service works with specialist local film production company Left Eye Blind in the library's own audio visual studio.

Library staff encourage young people to express verbally their thoughts about their place in their environment, then work with them to turn these into pieces of creative writing. Left Eye Blind then works with selected participants to turn these pieces of writing into short films, giving the writers the experience of co-producing a piece of cinema to industry standard.

Most of the users come from Leeds BME communities. Many were excluded from school or experienced poor formal education. Many have been long-term unemployed. The project has had a direct impact on their self-confidence and feeling of social inclusion, giving them visible personal development.

Users have achieved an accredited qualification for the project and have gone on to pursue further training or study, or secured employment in the creative industries.

## SEE THE VIDEO

<http://tinyurl.com/k59epfe>



## Speak Up For Libraries Conference – 22 November 2014

It was packed, it was lively and a lot of information was exchanged.  
**Ian Anstice and Laura Swaffield report.**

### Barbara begins ...

**Barbara Band, CILIP President, opened the conference.**

This SUFL, said Barbara, was a chance for those who are passionate about libraries to advocate for them – and get feedback.

Libraries provide ‘a service above and beyond what is expected. And a professional librarian has knowledge, skills and experience that you cannot replicate by using a volunteer – no matter how much they love libraries.

‘The decimation of our libraries is inexcusable. The people who are allowing it to happen should be ashamed of themselves.

‘Six years since Alan Gibbons started his Campaign for the Book, Ofsted can give a school an “outstanding” rating even if it has no library or librarian at all.

‘School libraries are closing, or the librarians are being replaced by administrators using child labour!’

As for libraries minister Ed Vaizey, Barbara referred to a Westminster debate the previous week\*, in which he claimed to have a ‘team of library experts’ – despite the abolition of the MLA (Museums, Libraries



& Archives Council) and the statutory Advisory Council on Libraries [against the stated wish of just about everyone, including The Library Campaign].

‘Really? Who are they?’ asked Barbara. ‘I’d like to know. He’s not looking at each library service which is closing libraries, despite what he claims.’

Barbara also referred to a recent National Audit Office report that condemned Ed Vaizey’s department for not even trying to ‘quantify potential impacts on libraries or explicitly address their sustainability’.\*\*

Other things, like rubbish collection, are easy to measure, she said.

‘If the impact [of current library cuts] was measured,’ she said, ‘the people responsible would be horrified by the results.’

Libraries are about literacy, wellbeing, economy, up-skilling, safety and more.

The argument that libraries aren’t used doesn’t stand up. Last year, there were 3m visits, 92m children’s books were issued, 160m adult fiction... and many people visit libraries who don’t even borrow a book.

‘Each generation,’ Barbara concluded, ‘tends to hope things will be better for the next generation – not moving backwards... We need to find a way to convince the people who don’t think libraries matter.’

\* [www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm141119/halltext/141119h0001.htm#141119h0001.htm\\_spnew60](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm141119/halltext/141119h0001.htm#141119h0001.htm_spnew60)

\*\* [www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Financial-sustainability-of-local-authorities-20141.pdf](http://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Financial-sustainability-of-local-authorities-20141.pdf) (page 31)

## Politicians’ panel

**Alan Gibbons (in dark top) introduced (L to R) Helen Goodman MP (Labour) shadow minister for libraries; Justin Tomlinson MP, Conservative and Parliamentary Private Secretary to libraries minister Ed Vaizey; and Martin Francis of the Brent Greens. (SUFL had tried hard to get hold of a Lib Dem speaker, without success. And then, just four days later, Helen lost her post in a Labour reshuffle. So it goes ...) Each speaker began with a statement. Then the session was thrown open to questions – with plenty of input from the audience.**



Martin Francis said that libraries link to the Greens’ wider social agenda – voluntary co-operation between empowered individuals, a society’s success measured not just by economic indicators but by equity and happiness.

Libraries are not just for borrowing books – they change lives. They are for children, the elderly, people who can’t afford much – a social, neutral space. They should have paid staff, and be adequately resourced and available to all.

Brent’s closure of six of its 12 libraries (‘not needed because books are cheap’) led to ‘an uprising of previously respectable people’.

Libraries can be transformed not by closures but by using new technology.

Helen Goodman outlined the wide role of libraries and added: ‘We can all say libraries are lovely, but we’ve got to have a proper plan. The cuts people are facing are really terrible. They are a product of the local government settlement.’

Ed Vaizey, she said, had told the recent Westminster debate that only 100 libraries have

closed. But the true figure is nearer 936 under threat of being lost to the public service between 2010 and 2015 [see THE DAMAGE panel for the calculation].

The four Universal Offers developed by the Society of Chief Librarians [see Campaigner no 86, Spring 2013, page 10] should be the core offer – reading, information, digital inclusion and health/wellbeing.

The government's fund of £150m for 'super-connected cities' has spent only £20m. She is trying to get the rest spent on libraries.

Labour is not happy with putting the responsibility on to the voluntary sector. We must retain the legal framework making local authorities responsible. It was a mistake to abolish the MLA (Museums, Libraries & Archives Council) and the Advisory Council on Libraries.



The government needs independent professional advice. We should take the £6m being spent by Arts Council England on arts projects in libraries, and use it to establish a body that can give professional leadership. Every library authority must employ 'some' professional librarians.

Justin Tomlinson made it clear that he cares about libraries, going back to his four years as the Swindon lead councillor for libraries and his stint as chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for libraries.

But it emerged that he was speaking only for himself and was not describing Conservative policy. This was disappointing...

However, he strongly supported the basic Vaizey stance that libraries are purely a matter for local authorities.

Libraries face challenges, he said, such as declining usage, e-books and changing customer expectations. But the biggest problem is the lack of engagement of senior ministers. At the Westminster debate, only one MP was present who was not connected to the culture department. We should, he said, empower local library managers to run libraries.

Professional librarians should be the core of the service. Each library should publish its figures on usage and issues. And local authorities are 'rubbish' at using Section 106 money [funds from developers] for their libraries.

Wifi should be a given, plus more information on the bookstock (as in Waterstone's) and uniforms for staff. Opening hours should follow footfall. It's 'a crying shame' that only 7.5% of the average budget is spent on stock.

There should be opportunities for sponsorship. Volunteers should provide additional hours and

activities, including support for marketing, recruitment and outreach. He is enthusiastic about libraries but they must embrace the challenges.

## SHOULD MINISTERS INTERVENE IN LIBRARY CLOSURES?

**Justin** ► How would the minister be in the best position to dictate to councils? It should be for us as local communities to drag elected officials into libraries and show them how important they are. If they persist in closures 'I wouldn't want to fight an election on that basis'. Councils have got to justify their plans.

Labour has only ever intervened once. I don't think the minister should intervene unless circumstances are exceptional. You will get it right through elections. We don't want to centralise the service.

At a general principle, the secretary of state should not run local libraries. We're meant to be devolving powers, not dictating them.

**Helen** ► We need to have some sense of how we define 'comprehensive and efficient', but it will be different in different places.

Unless we address the funding question, the damage will carry on. Labour would restore the needs element in the local authority funding formula, which would tackle some of the problems (eg, rural councils relatively unscathed, larger cuts made to deprived urban authorities such as Liverpool). Sharing back office facilities also still has some way to go.

It's 'extraordinary' that Vaizey has not intervened in, for instance, Lincolnshire. The reason is that he is incapable of saying what he thinks a library service is. You need to have some sense of this.



Councils are having to make intolerable choices. What would Labour do? Ease the financial pressures.

**Martin Francis** ► Ministers are never going to intervene, so we have to take them on. I don't think there's any substitute for the movement of people in defence of their libraries.

We need to make the connections with health, education etc. Get it on the agenda at elections. The underlying assumption is always that people have to pay for everything, and all services should be monetised and make a profit for somebody.

Michael Gove intervened all the time, so this government does intervene when it feels like it...

**The audience** ► All were clear in saying that the ultimate responsibility is with the minister. Ed Vaizey has simply hidden behind the local authorities. They brought the speakers back to this point every time they wandered off it.

## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEERS?

**Martin Francis** ► There should be a professional librarian in every branch. As an interim measure volunteers could be used to ensure libraries' survival until we can get them back. Libraries should be fully staffed, fully funded.

**Justin** ► Volunteers should be additional, for instance to provide extra hours. Professional librarians give extra, and people rely on that. Volunteers have got to be a last resort.

**Helen** ► DCMS is pushing people into volunteering and running libraries. Justin is saying things quite different from the minister. There should be a policy that every local authority should employ some professional staff. I'm very aware that paid staff are feeling undermined. We need a formalised code about the appropriate roles of volunteers and professional staff. But to have a professional in every library is 'not possible'.

**The audience** ► did not support any role for volunteers except as a supplement to paid staff, although there was sympathy for groups who had no other way to support or save their library. One audience member said that volunteers cost far more than they ever could save. They can't run libraries themselves, and rely on paid staff from other branches doing extra work, on low wages.

## HOW WOULD YOUR PARTY SUPPORT THE DIGITAL ROLE OF LIBRARIES?

**Justin** ► The People's Network transformed libraries. Local and national government business is increasingly done online. The library is a very good vehicle.

But on the other hand, he doesn't want library staff to be IT staff, 'tied down' helping people to use IT for their basic needs. He wants them to be 'about books'. Other departments should finance library staff when asking them to support their clients.

**Helen** ► 10m people have never sent an email. The digital divide is growing all the time. It's unkind to push everything online when some don't have access. Lewisham was a pilot for Universal Credit but nobody told the libraries – people flooded in. There should be a plan.

**Martin** ► Libraries obviously have a role here but because of cuts and job losses, people are being passed wholesale on to library staff for IT needs. I don't want them to lose their role of encouraging children, taking an interest in what they are reading etc.

**The audience** ► made it loud and clear that they already function as IT support. It was seen as a positive thing – 'We are not glorified book swaps, we are about information, with a high digital presence and digital skills. We've got to move with the times, adopt a wider agenda.'

It was also seen as brutal reality – the workload can be overwhelming, but nobody else has enough facilities or staff either: 'Everyone seems to be dumping everything on us.' It would help if libraries' digital skills and services were properly measured – and funded.

Local managers who understand their communities should make the decisions.

**Martin** ► 'Comprehensive and efficient' and standards mean sweet Fanny Adams without funding. Decisions on how to deliver standards should be made locally.

But I'd be concerned if standards were only about what is easily measured. We need qualitative as well as quantitative measures, or we'll be feeding the monetarisation agenda. There could be a minimum, and a maximum to aim for.

The elephant in the room is that the Local Government Association doesn't want library standards because there's no money to deliver them.

**The audience** ► was very firmly in favour of national standards. Wales and Scotland use them successfully. They are not the answer to everything, but the current chaos is far worse. Numerous examples were given where a 'library' is 'one volunteer and a hand-cart', or a few bookshelves in a pub or community centre. (This is to the apparent satisfaction of the minister – who needs standards more than anyone else, just to do his job).

Certainly standards should focus not on narrow metrics but on impact – especially if libraries are to get funding from other departments whose priorities they serve. Local authorities would have flexibility to decide the best way to deliver the required outcomes. The new Welsh standards emphasise impact, so it can be done...

## WHAT SHOULD THE PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE LOOK LIKE IN 10 YEARS' TIME?

**Helen** ► Every library should have a core offer of four Universal Offers. Every local authority should have professional staff, leadership, shared good practice, agreed common standards. Libraries are not the past, libraries are the future.

**Justin** ► Better use of section 106 money to invest in libraries. More stock. Priority given to the frontline.

**Martin** ► Every library a social space that improves the quality of life of the people who use it. Diverse communities no longer communicate with each other because there are so few public spaces...



## WHAT ABOUT RESTORING NATIONAL STANDARDS?

**Helen** ► It's would be a good idea to have a professional body to lead on this. It's not a job for civil servants. But 24 indicators is too many. We need to get some balance. The other extreme is total laissez-faire. We need to home in on some sense of what works, for when the minister has to make a judgement.

We need to think about resourcing and standards together. You can't set incredibly high standards and not provide the money. It's perfectly possible to build in flexibility, as with the national standards and the Care Quality Commission for adult care.

**Justin** ► Every service is different, delivered differently, so it's difficult to see how precise standards could be set. But e-books need to be sorted. And the government could lead on best practice and new technology. Things are fast evolving, so we've got to make sure money isn't wasted. Too many councils are wasting money on what will turn out to be the next Betamax.

The political climate is all about devolving powers, so it's not unreasonable to want local people to be responsible, and agree their own local standards. It's wrong to centralise. We don't want one size fits all.



## THE DAMAGE

This is where Helen Goodman got her estimate of 936 libraries in danger of being closed or passed to volunteers.



In the debate, Helen referred to CIPFA's estimate of actual closures of service points in 2012-13, at that time the latest CIPFA data available.

The Public Libraries News website ([www.publiclibrariesnews.com](http://www.publiclibrariesnews.com)) is the only organisation to attempt to monitor what is currently happening in all 151 library authorities in England, and to include transfers to volunteer groups.

This information is collected by Ian Anstice in his spare time from local media reports and press releases issued by councils. There is a link on the PLN website to what is happening in every authority, so his estimates can be easily validated by officials or chief librarians.

Based on these reports, PLN estimates of closures and transfers to volunteer groups are:

- (i) Since 1 April 2014, 170 libraries have come under threat of closure or passing to volunteer groups.
- (ii) 491 libraries (411 buildings and 80 mobiles) were reported as being under threat of closure or passing to volunteer groups in the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014. (Ian points out that this can only be an indicative figure based on media reports).
- (iii) CIPFA reported 74 service points actually closed in 2012-13.
- (iv) CIPFA reported 201 service points closed in 2011-12.

Ian Anstice welcomes any information about closures and transfers or corrections to reports published in the media or reports by councils, to ensure that an accurate and up to date picture is published. He also welcomes any questions relating to the data or the media and council reports.

Desmond Clarke

# Libraries work!

**So why do politicians ignore all the evidence – and the example of so many other nations – and preside over their destruction? asked author and campaigner Alan Gibbons.**

Libraries work. They make people literate. Please note that few government ministers or local councillors use genuine evidence to support their decisions. Here is some evidence:

**‘Enjoyment of reading has a greater impact on a child’s educational achievement than their parents’ socio-economic status.’**

Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development, Reading for Change, 2002, 2009.

**‘Children who read for pleasure made more progress in maths, vocabulary and spelling between the ages of ten and 16 than those who rarely read.’**

Institute of Education, 2013.

**‘Overall, young people who enjoy reading very much are nearly five times as likely to read at the expected level for their age compared with young people who do not enjoy reading at all.’**

Children’s and Young People’s Reading Today, 2012.

**‘All pupils must be encouraged to read widely across both fiction and non-fiction to develop their knowledge of themselves and the world in which they live, to establish an appreciation and love of reading, and to gain knowledge across the curriculum.’**

(Department for Education, 2013)

**‘Reading at Key Stage 3 should be wide, varied and challenging. Pupils should be expected to read whole books, to read in depth and to read for pleasure and information.’**

(Department for Education 2013)

Libraries work because reading is not about orthography alone. It is about immersion, experience, communication. Reading is like other human experiences – do it a lot and you get good at it.

Libraries are cheap. In total, they cost less than a billion pounds, when trillions are wasted on Trident, the banks and a failed austerity project that has given

us almost permanent economic crisis since the 2008 crash.

Shutting them costs a fortune, not just in redundancies but in the damage to society:

- UK Gross Domestic Product in 2025 could be £32bn higher if action was taken to ensure all children were reading well by the age of 11. (The Read On, Get On campaign supported by Save the Children, the Confederation of British Industry and the Teach First charity).

Libraries fill a gap:

- One in six children don’t read a book in a month.
- Four million children do not have a book at home.
- The National Literacy Trust did a survey with 17,000 people in the sample. This is rather bigger than Michael Gove’s Premier Inn ‘evidence’. It found that a child who visits a library is twice as likely to be a fluent reader as one who does not.

Libraries provide a lot more than books: story telling sessions, research, help with the internet, access to work, local history, a community meeting place...

Libraries are popular. They get high user satisfaction results in surveys.

They are heavily used by the young, the poor, the elderly and the vulnerable. If we abandon them, our notion of community crumbles.

Libraries keep up with technological change. They used to have cuneiform, papyrus scrolls and the codex. Now they have the codex, e-books and the internet.

Libraries are ill-served by those given the job of superintending them.

Ed Vaizey [libraries minister] has, on the many occasions local authorities have proposed to shut over half their libraries, been ‘minded not to intervene’. If Ed read more widely, he would understand that ‘minded’ is a most inelegant word.

Libraries are a statutory service, but councils often say they are not, ignoring legal advice.

Libraries have lots of good friends among the public. Hundreds of thousands of people have petitioned, rallied and protested. If closures are slowing, it’s only because of massive public pressure.

Libraries have few genuine friends among politicians.

- Local authority spending has declined by up to half in real terms.
- Vaizey does not exercise his duty to superintend.
- Hundreds of libraries have closed or been handed over to an uncertain future with volunteers.
- Opening hours have been slashed.
- Book funds have been slashed.



- The Local Government Association occasionally fails to say that libraries are statutory.
- Libraries are always top of the hit list for cuts.

Labour cuts as badly as the Tories, meekly implementing Osborne’s idiotic economic programme. The Lib Dems prop up the Tories, then hypocritically try to distance themselves from them.

Politicians claim credit for things they haven’t done. Vaizey preens about the big Birmingham and Liverpool central libraries – started before his government came to power.

The law is not enough. The 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act’s requirement of a ‘comprehensive and efficient’ service has never been comprehensively and efficiently explained.

A library needs a librarian. A library without a librarian is a room.

Volunteers can supplement a professionally run library service. They should not substitute for them.

Not all countries are doing what we are doing.

- There are 180 new libraries in South Korea.
- There are many more libraries in China.
- There are more libraries and librarians in Japan.
- There are no wholesale closures in Ireland, New Zealand, France, Spain or Finland, to give just a few examples.

Across the world many people ask me in genuine bewilderment: ‘How can the UK do this?’

Libraries attract a lot of expensive inquiries. How many have there been in recent decades, with no action to show for them? For the next report, we want leadership.

The word is that Sieghart admits volunteers are not the solution. That’s great. We want paid and trained and respected librarians in every library. Joni Mitchell said: ‘You don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone.’

The only real friends libraries have got are Friends groups, users, staff, communities, unions, authors and illustrators.

We want politicians who are committed. We have to build the strongest coalition – here in the real Big Society. Localism should mean – fight in your locality for universal library provision!

# Sieghart says ...

Here it is at last – the long-awaited report on England’s public libraries, chaired by publisher **William Sieghart**. Is it just another report? Or will the fairly modest actions it urges actually happen? Time will tell – except time is fast running out ...

## The public library service in England is at a crossroads.

For 150 years, library services have been run by local government, with oversight from central government. Libraries already deliver a wide range of facilities and services within local communities, and, given sharply reducing budgets, and changing needs, there are keen concerns about continuing to provide these vital functions.

Many local authorities are delivering impressive and comprehensive library services. Their delivery and management is innovative as well as excellent.

The need now is to build on and extend those practices to benefit every library in the country.

Central government therefore commissioned me, with the help of my advisory panel – Sue Charteris, Janene Cox, Luke Johnson, Roly Keating, Caroline Michel, Stephen Page and Joanna Trollope – to investigate how the public library system could best work, in the future.

It has taken us seven months. We have visited large numbers of libraries, both urban and rural, discussed the issues and challenges facing libraries at length with local government, considered over 200 submissions of written evidence, and heard invited oral evidence from many of the above, including distinguished bodies such as Arts Council England.

All our evidence has been gathered with an acute awareness of the sustained and severe

financial situation affecting everyone, the rapid pace of current change, and the imperative that no-one is left behind.

Two themes have emerged, consistently and dramatically.

The first was that there have already been far too many library reviews in recent years which have come to nothing.

The second was that not enough decision makers at national or local level appear sufficiently aware of the remarkable and vital value that a good library service can offer modern communities of every size and character.

## Libraries are, let us not forget, a golden thread throughout our lives.

Despite the growth in digital technologies, there is still a clear need and demand within communities for modern, safe, non-judgemental, flexible spaces, where citizens of all ages can mine the knowledge of the world for free, supported by the help and knowledge of the library workforce.

This is particularly true for the most vulnerable in society, who need support and guidance, and to children and young people who benefit from engagement with libraries outside of the formal classroom environment.

The library does more than simply loan books. It underpins every community.

It is not just a place for self-improvement, but the supplier of an infrastructure for life and learning, from babies to old age, offering support, help, education, and encouraging a love of reading.

Whether you wish to apply for a job, or seek housing benefit, or understand your pension rights or the health solutions available to you, or learn to read, the library can assist.

In England, over a third of the population visits their local library. In the poorest areas, that figure rises to nearly a half. It is no wonder that communities feel so passionately about their libraries.

They are not only safe places for literacy and learning, they have also been the starting point of empowerment for many citizens who lack opportunities at home. And, in many cases, across the country, there are outstanding examples of libraries who benefit, and engage with, their local lives and communities.

This best practice needs to be shared further. A library’s great strength – its localism – must not be allowed to become its weakness.

More focussed effort is needed to help local government implement its desire to benefit its

## THE REPORT IN FULL

The Independent Library Report for England (Department for Culture, Media & Sport):  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-library-report-for-england>

## The Panel:



■ William Sieghart



■ Janene Cox



■ Caroline Michel



■ Luke Johnson

communities through the public library system.

What we would like to see is a re-invigoration of the library network. It starts with a **marked increase and improvement in digital technology**, rolling WiFi out to every library in the country. That WiFi connection should be delivered in a **comfortable, retail-standard environment**, with the usual amenities of coffee, sofas and toilets, and offer, in addition, such new services as would make the library a vibrant and attractive community hub.

A series of hubs would support individuals and communities to become more enterprising, more literate, and in consequence, more prosperous.

### Libraries could and should play a major role in rectifying literacy standards.

A re-energised library network would be a natural and established partner for every school, as well as being the provider of courses in both literacy and adult education.

**Local cultural organisations** would find an equally natural ally in their library, every partnership increasing the sharing of knowledge and the growing of audiences.

The research for this report has resulted in a fervent belief among the panel members that **the future of libraries as community hubs is essential for the well-being of the nation.**

At the moment, at least 20% of the population have no digital technology at home, and far more fail to understand how to make the most of what they do have.

The need to create **digital literacy** – and in an ideal world, digital fluency – is particularly helped by the **professionalism and experience of the library workforce, who should be recognised for the significant role they play in modern society** at present, and also be augmented by the recruitment and training of equally high calibre personnel for the future.

These two central ambitions need economic coherence for their fulfilment. In fact, **coherence at a national level is needed throughout.**

**As things currently stand, the present governance of the library network does not allow for either economies of scale or for genuine national strategic leadership.**

In such a fragile financial environment as we have now, economies of scale across the country could have a huge and beneficial effect. And a national strategy could articulate what libraries are, and why they are a force for good for us all.

### Libraries belong, after all, to every one of us.

We have come across extraordinary cases of the **transformative effect that a community has had on shaping a library to suit their particular needs.**

Their involvement has not affected the statutory authority of local authorities, but has rather, by suggesting new models of resources and expertise, helped to create a new dynamism in the way a library relates to its community.

We are not just intent upon refreshing the public library network. We want, also, to make better use of taxpayers' money.

Many government departments have budgets already allocated to related services, so libraries become a natural fit for them.

**Central government, by investing in digital resources across the library network, could show that it understands how crucial the service is to both the welfare and the advancement of the nation.**

We would like to see some greater consistencies in libraries, such as branding and signage, as well as the all-important provision of services.

We would like to see sharing of digital networks.

We would like to see future generations able to take the excellence and efficiency of the library service for granted, including, perhaps, the issuing of national library cards.

The whole point of the work of this panel has been to ensure that this vital service to our nation can adapt to changing environments and technologies and thrive on the progress that they bring.

It will take time and dedication to bring the adjustments about, but we are optimistic that there is the commitment and energy there to keep the service developing and flourishing well into the future.

We are extremely grateful to all those involved for their useful insights and contributions.

This report is for the government who commissioned it, but there is a great deal here for all those involved in, or appreciative of, the library sector, to think about and pursue.

By working together we can have considerable influence in sustaining, and shaping the public library service of England.

William Sieghart & Panel

### CONCLUSIONS

**Our conclusions are clear, concise and practical. We make three major recommendations:**

- 1 A national digital resource for libraries, to be delivered in partnership with local authorities.**
- 2 A task and finish force, led by local government, in partnership with other bodies involved in the library sector, to provide a strategic framework for England, and to help in implementing the following:**
- 3 The task force, to work with local authorities, to help them improve, revitalise and if necessary, change their local library service, while encouraging, appropriate to each library, increased community involvement.**



■ Joanna Trollope



■ Roly Keating



■ Sue Charteris



■ Stephen Page

# Sieghart in brief

This is a slightly shorter, clearer version of the full report.

## WHO'S WHO

- ACE:** Arts Council England  
**CILIP:** Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals  
**DCLG:** Department for Communities & Local Government  
**DCMS:** Department for Culture, Media & Sport  
**LGA:** Local Government Association  
**SCL:** Society of Chief Librarians

## DIGITAL SERVICES

**It is essential that all public libraries in England should offer free WiFi, computer facilities and workforce training to support users.**

Without this, libraries often present a negative image as old-fashioned places that have little relevance in today's society.

It will allow them freedom and flexibility to respond to the needs of communities, in line with wider technological advances. It will also help libraries to innovate, share or jointly adopt services more efficiently, and give them the opportunity to generate income from non-core services.

It will allow libraries to develop new services, new audiences and local innovation. As a result people will get access to more resources, information and support.

WiFi on its own will only go part of the way to solve these issues. Current fixed terminals do not offer enough flexibility to cope with changing demand. By providing computer facilities – tablets, mobiles, laptops or other devices – libraries will be able to meet user needs and free up space for a wider range of services. It will also encourage a wider demographic into the library.

This can be viewed as the next phase of The People's Network, which changed how libraries have been used since 2000.

There is a need to develop high quality content to help inspire and encourage creativity, leisure and engagement across the digital world.

This can build on the work from Library 211,<sup>1</sup> which has begun to explore how the public library can be the most exciting place for readers, and give access to an unprecedented range of digital content.

Equipment should be available to everyone, with assistive reading technologies and accessible keyboards.

Libraries offer more than just books, CDs and DVDs. They have become the portal to a whole range of

material for education, entertainment and self-improvement.

Libraries already facilitate access to a wide range of government services including education, welfare, business and economic growth and health care. This will dramatically grow as more services go online.

**It is important that central government provides funding to demonstrate its continuing support and commitment.**

## A NATIONAL DIGITAL NETWORK

A national digital network for libraries could have a single platform and a national library card and catalogue.

Public libraries are already moving beyond the confines of their buildings. A digital network can help support this, especially in rural areas with no library service. It can help rural library services build their social capital to revitalise communal facilities.

The network will also allow libraries to communicate with each other more effectively, and to promote their services in a more unified way.

**It could bring about a socially inclusive 21st century library model that is fit for purpose. It can help reinvigorate the offer, reach new customers and increase the visibility of libraries in the community.**

This emphasis on the digital should not take away the importance of physical stock. Libraries encourage literacy and learning in various forms, including written and oral. A national digital network could allow existing stock to be better sourced, shared and curated on a wider basis.

The network could help with e-lending. It would also give users access to reference, specialist collections and local archives as these become available online.

It would allow libraries to build stronger links with The National Archives, the British Library, universities and other specialist libraries. It could also help to join up libraries across the globe to share information and new practices.

This will give the public library service access to a greater wealth of material, and allow it to connect with the wider world. It will enable the user to move seamlessly from national and international content through to relevant local content.

**It is important that this national library network should link up with other digital projects to help with compatibility and cohesion. The support of the Government Digital Service and its partners will be essential.**

## ACTION LIST

### CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

- Fund local authorities to extend WiFi, computer facilities and workforce training for all public libraries in England.
- With local government, establish a taskforce, led by councils with others interested in the sector to: provide leadership; implement the recommendations; help reinvigorate the public library service.
- Obtain greater cross-government recognition and support for libraries.
- Secure changes in copyright law to enable Public Lending Right to include remote e-loans.

### TASKFORCE

- Support the creation of a national digital library network.
- Respond to the outcomes of the current e-lending pilots. Work with publishers, libraries and others to adopt the models supported by the pilots.
- Encourage and develop the library workforce, especially new recruits and graduates.
- Develop sector-led best practice guidelines to help local authorities working with volunteers and community-led libraries.

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- With central government, jointly establish a library taskforce, as above. Through the taskforce:
- Develop a vigorous culture of mutual support among local authorities through sharing good practice/resources, and seize opportunities for even greater collaboration.
- Consider all available options for the delivery of their library service.
- Encourage more community involvement in the management of libraries, through a variety of models.

## LIBRARY TASKFORCE

**There should be a library taskforce to provide the necessary leadership and help ensure that the actions detailed in this report are delivered.** It would not be practical or desirable to create a new body for this.

**It should be a 'task and finish' group, which will report regularly to Ministers and the LGA. This will foster a new and dynamic way of working for libraries.**

The taskforce, which we provisionally call 'Leadership for Libraries', will be led by local government, with technical expertise provided by, amongst others: ACE\*, BBC†, British Library, central government (including the Government Digital Service), CILIP, LGA, SCL and The Reading Agency.

It will be the advocate for public libraries in England, including branding, promotion and an overarching vision and narrative which can be delivered at local level.

It is important that the public library service achieves greater and more coherent visibility, and that its potential benefits are understood at national and local level to inform policy development.

Membership of the group will vary, depending on the tasks involved.

**For certain actions it could help to have representatives from library users and volunteers, third sector foundations, trade unions, publishers, authors and the library workforce.**

Roles and responsibilities will be assigned to each programme, with organisations/ individuals assigned to tasks that match their skills and interests. Others can be invited in to give wider experience and perspectives.

The taskforce will clearly set out its key deliverables, and measure its success against these. The aim is for it to run for three to four years.

Some actions might need to continue after this time, under a particular organisation or alternative governance model.

The taskforce should be open and transparent, for instance by publishing both its action plan and regular reports of progress.

## WIDER GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

The government facilitates more than 650 transactional services for citizens and businesses, with more services becoming 'digital by default' in the future.

Digital by default means creating services which are so straightforward and convenient that all those who can use digital services will choose to do so, while those who can't are not excluded.

The Cabinet Office's Digital Inclusion Strategy<sup>2</sup> sets out how it will help to reduce the number of people without basic digital skills, to enable total digital inclusion by 2020.

\* We recognise the positive contribution of ACE in supporting libraries since it took on that role in October 2011. Its strategic development role will continue as part of the taskforce, and it is hoped that libraries will continue to be able to maximise opportunities for ACE funding streams.

† The BBC endorses the ambition to ensure libraries remain a vital part of public life. In particular, it recognises the role digital technology can play, and is resolved to help realise this potential. It has committed to joining the taskforce, charged with looking in detail at what digital capability would most benefit libraries (be it training or technology) and, in particular, whether there is an opportunity to support libraries through a national digital infrastructure.

**One key action for government is to identify where increasing digital capacity will improve wider policy outcomes. Other departments acknowledge that libraries already help to deliver their services.**

**However, more needs to be done to ensure that libraries get appropriate recognition, support and publicity. A greater joining up of government initiatives at a strategic level would help libraries deliver them in a cohesive way.**

Libraries already facilitate access to government services such as education, welfare, business and economic growth, health and wellbeing. Many support a range of digital inclusion activities.

As part of the Get Online campaign, libraries have already enabled over 3 million people go online. With appropriate investment and partnership there is huge potential for libraries to do more.

Libraries provide access to books, online resources, workforce training, support and space.

Some rural services in particular have close relationships with social services and adult education, amongst others.

Further joint working across departments, alongside communities and other providers, is required to maximise efficiencies and opportunities.

The library workforce spend a large proportion of their time helping people with poor computer and internet literacy. An increase in online transactions will only make the library more relevant to the digitally excluded, as the one place where they can access a whole range of facilities and support free of charge.

**The future of libraries should be seen as all of government's responsibility – not just DCMS and DCLG.**

There should be greater awareness of any funding or other support for local authorities. (Funding streams may be tied to certainty of provision across all of England / the UK. This may require one bid to be made collectively on behalf of all authorities.)

## E-LENDING

**Digital technology is developing rapidly, and will continue to have a major impact on the way information, culture and the written word are consumed.**

There has been rapid growth in the loan of e-books, although it is still small in comparison to the loan of traditional books. The most recent figures show that issues of e-books for public libraries in England in 2012-13 were 803,085. This was an increase of 80.6% on the previous year.

The review of e-lending in 2012-13<sup>3</sup> provided advice on how to achieve an e-lending model to provide a strong modern offer to the public, with fair remuneration to publishers and authors and protection against copyright infringement.

In March 2014 SCL and the Publisher's Association (funded by the British Library Trust) began a 12-month pilot into e-lending, working with four local

authorities to identify a suitable, sustainable model. The findings are due in early 2015.

There is a role for the library taskforce to help develop an e-lending solution, in close liaison with publishers and authors.

Future action may be needed to include e-loans in the Public Lending Right. (In July 2014, the government amended legislation to extend PLR to audio and e-books for on-site lending. However, more work is needed.)

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

One of the most successful programmes to encourage talented young graduates into a profession is TeachFirst, whose mission is 'to end inequality in education by building a community of exceptional leaders who create change within classrooms, schools and across society'. Many graduates have now gone through this programme. This has helped raise the profile of the teaching profession.

**Currently librarians and the wider public library workforce do not get universal recognition for the wide range of services that they provide.**

The sector needs an equivalent programme to attract the next generation, as well as developing further skills for the existing workforce.

**The 21st century librarian will need to be more of a community impresario, with digital and commercial expertise, who can champion the community's needs and generate new business and audiences for the library.**

The creation of programmes to recruit, encourage and develop the library workforce at all levels should be led by the taskforce, with the active involvement of SCL, CILIP and other interested partners.

Volunteers have always contributed to libraries. They should be included in any workforce training, to help them to take their skills to the next level.

## VOLUNTEERS & COMMUNITY-LED LIBRARIES

**A core set of guidelines is needed for working with volunteers and communities.**

This could share information, lessons learnt, best practice and legal, regulatory and operational issues. It can then be disseminated nationally through the digital network and other channels.

This work should be led by the library taskforce with key partners including **user groups**, local authorities, the LGA and SCL – all of whom have considerable experience and dedication in this area. It should complement and enhance existing guidelines.<sup>4, 5, 6, 7</sup>

The involvement of volunteers and communities is not new, though their role and numbers have changed over time.

Some of the more innovative places that we visited were run by volunteers, in partnership with their local authorities and with strong support from their communities and the library workforce.

Community-managed or community-supported libraries can present a creative way to manage resources and help support the professional library workforce. In so doing, they better reflect the needs of their local area and can have a positive influence on what services are delivered, opening hours and having a sense of ownership and engagement.

**We would like to see communities consulted in greater depth and brought more into the management of their library service, through a variety of models.**

**There are examples of volunteer-only libraries, though there is a tendency for these to be established in reasonably affluent areas. There are still questions over their long term viability.**

More disadvantaged localities often have greater need, but they don't tend to have the resources, experience or confidence to take over the running of their library.

There are also new models of delivery such as community co-operatives, mutuals and social enterprises. There have been encouraging signs that these can help improve the quality of the library service.

There is plainly not one library model that fits all situations. It is right that there is a range of options to fit in best with different community needs.

**However, it is important that there is greater cohesion between these different types of libraries and that there is more support for both local authorities and their communities in understanding the different models and choices/support open to them.**

## ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Libraries are a local service, managed and funded locally, with councillors accountable to local taxpayers – users and non-users alike.

Whilst it might be more efficient to have fewer library authorities, we are not recommending changes to the existing structures. This is a matter for central government to lead and agree on.

**Local authorities should continue to have the statutory duty 'to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof',<sup>8</sup> taking into account local needs and available resources.**

It is for each authority to decide what is 'comprehensive and efficient' for their own area, to determine how much they spend on libraries and how to manage and deliver their service.

The Local Government & Public Involvement & Health Act 2007 places a duty on principal authorities to have regard to the need to secure that any community governance for the area under review reflects the identities and interests of the local community, and that it is 'effective and convenient'.

**Libraries are among the most valued of civic spaces. They have a cross-generational appeal that other local authority services can only dream of.**



■ Library manager (centre) and volunteers, Suffolk Libraries.

They are a gateway to information, ranging from public health to adult learning, jobs, volunteering, the police and other cultural services.

**Against a background of austerity, the future of libraries has to be considered as part of the overall council service offer. Libraries are most likely to be viable when they can demonstrate their value to the widest possible group of users.**

Many libraries are already exciting, relevant and vibrant community hubs that drive footfall to town centres and help to create a climate of aspiration.

There are inspiring examples of local authorities collaborating with each other, and with other partners, bringing together services in a single location, to improve the efficiency of the library service.

The LGA already supports and promotes sector-led improvement. It should continue to lead on this area, in conjunction with other key partners in the library sector.

**The need to share what works will continue to be of the utmost importance. A local government led taskforce could play a positive, powerful role seeking out and sharing the most exciting practice for other places to learn from, and adapt to suit their own circumstances.**

There are a range of different models that authorities can adopt to deliver their statutory duty and provide a library service that meets their

community's needs: staff led public service mutuals; community mutuals; trusts; shared services; in-house; contracting out etc. There are encouraging signs that community co-operatives, mutuals and social enterprises can improve quality.

**One size does not fit all. What works in one area may not be applicable in another. It is up to councillors to consult their communities, carry out a rigorous options appraisal and put in place a model that reflects local circumstances – looking at the strategic approach and levels of provision across the network as a whole, including the other services that the local authority provides. Many authorities are already doing this.**

Greater collaboration and sharing of resources between authorities can create efficiencies by reducing the number of buildings, managers and backroom staff while benefiting from other economies of scale. It also allows users greater access to wider services.

Efficiencies can be achieved by co-location of services; sharing/ outsourcing back office functions; and greater use of purchasing consortia or frameworks for equipment.

**Political support, leadership and commitment to change will be needed at all levels. It is right that local government leads this.**

Significant transformation takes time. Longer-term benefits, financial or otherwise, may not be realised immediately. Sometimes it is necessary to invest in the short term to save in the longer term.

As well as the LGA's sector-led improvement offer, central government has provided assistance and funding to help councils:

- The Mutuals Support Programme<sup>9</sup> is a £10m fund to support services spin out as employee controlled businesses by providing access to professional expertise and technical support that staff would not have access to or fund themselves. The programme has worked for libraries that are moving towards developing community led models
- DCLG established the Transformational Challenge Awards for 2014–15 and 2015–16 to help local authorities (including libraries) to improve efficiency, reduce bureaucracy and integrate services where possible.

## REFERENCES

- 1 [www.theliteraryplatform.com/collective/library-21-research-and-feasibility-study](http://www.theliteraryplatform.com/collective/library-21-research-and-feasibility-study)
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- 3 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-independent-review-of-e-lending-in-public-libraries-in-england>
- 4 The Community Knowledge Hub for Libraries: <http://libraries.communityknowledgehub.org.uk>
- 5 Learning from experience: guiding principles for local authorities: [www.artscouncil.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/browse-advice-and-guidance/community-libraries-learning-experience-guiding-principles-local-authorities](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/browse-advice-and-guidance/community-libraries-learning-experience-guiding-principles-local-authorities)
- 6 Learning from experience: summary briefing for local authorities: [www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/Community\\_libraries\\_research\\_2013\\_summary\\_report.pdf](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/Community_libraries_research_2013_summary_report.pdf)
- 7 [www.opm.co.uk/publications/rural-library-services-in-england-exploring-recent-changes-and-possible-futures](http://www.opm.co.uk/publications/rural-library-services-in-england-exploring-recent-changes-and-possible-futures)
- 8 [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/75/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/75/contents)
- 9 <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/mutuals-information-service>

# For example ...

The report highlights a mixed bag of case studies to show some ideas it likes. Everything from entire library services to a one-off arts project ...

## YORK LIBRARY & ARCHIVES SERVICE (EXPLORE)

One of the first public service mutuals, independent of the council, it obtained £100,000 in advice and support from the Cabinet Office Mutuals Support Programme.

One third is owned by staff; two thirds by its community members.

'Able to generate greater involvement by local people in all aspects of the service.'

All libraries have been kept open, becoming community hubs, eg a health and wellbeing centre in partnership with local GPs.

Explore is also working with Be Independent, York's adult social care public service mutual, to help 3,500 elderly housebound residents with tablets and face-to-face training, enabling them to use portable WiFi devices for Skype, online banking, food shopping, choosing library books etc.

## NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

Core library network now works as community hubs, spaced across the city as key council buildings, with a range of services.

To be integrated with Customer Services and Leisure Centres – with frontline workforce trained in customer service, leisure, sport and library/information skills.

Future partnerships planned with the arm's-length housing organisation, further education college, a university, the police and other services.

Libraries seen as a 'catalyst' for improved digital and traditional literacy skills, with free superfast broadband and WiFi.

They continue as a safe, neutral community space, with the library ethos of 'help, neutrality, excellent customer service and expert advice/mediation'.

## CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU

The Society of Chief Librarians is working with the CAB on a national protocol for local partnership working. This will cover co-location, shared training materials for staff and volunteers and, with support from the Government Digital Service, increased collaboration on digital inclusion, assisted digital support, access to government services online etc.

## ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND (ACE)

Its £6m grants programme enables libraries to explore new ways to deliver library priorities, working with artists and arts organisations.

**EXAMPLE:** in 2014 Rutland County Council led a consortium of four East Midlands councils in a digital creativity project, with a digital arts organisation found via ACE.

About 90 young people aged 10–14 led a project to design mythical creatures (linked to the 2014 Summer Reading Challenge) using an Arduino Robot, working with a programmer, a sculptor/artist and a narrator. The creatures then toured libraries.

Librarians extended the scheme's impact in reading and literacy by linking with the 'STEAM' (integrated arts and science) curriculum.

## LEARN MY WAY\*

A free online learning platform. Learners can study at home, or get help at a local library or UK Online centre. It links a national resource to local library staff committed to helping people gain online skills.

Courses are combined into packages to provide a logical path through the site. Online Basics is for complete beginners: keyboard, mouse/touchscreen skills, simple searches, getting an email address.

Online Plus adds job hunting, shopping, socialising and managing money.

Since 2010, over 1.2 million people have gained basic online skills, with many progressing further.

\* [www.learnmyway.com](http://www.learnmyway.com)

**EXAMPLE:** Cambridgeshire Learning & Skills uses Learn My Way in seven libraries and runs outreach activities in areas of rural deprivation, including in a pub and a Tesco community room. Staff and volunteers provide one to one support.

**EXAMPLE:** Taunton and Yeovil libraries run Learn My Way classes. The national platform helps them reach more people, eg working with the Somerset Village Agents Network to give individual support. They work with parish councils on marketing and promotion.

The activity is mainly staffed by paid library staff, with some volunteers from Jobcentre Plus.

## SUFFOLK INDUSTRIAL & PROVIDENT SOCIETY

See pages 30–31.

## DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL

The council is maximising libraries' potential to support rural communities.

**EXAMPLES:** hack-maker spaces (part of the national Enterprising Libraries initiative); galvanising community support; adding meeting spaces and cafés; encouraging co-location with other services to increase footfall and sustainability.

Libraries as community hubs provide new activities and services to tackle digital exclusion and employability and (with public health funding) health and wellbeing initiatives.

Following public consultation in 2014, Devon is now looking to establish a new organisation, which could be contracted to deliver its statutory functions and involve local communities.

## THE UNIVERSAL OFFERS

Since 2013, the Society of Chief Librarians has developed a set of four offers for library services – reading, health, information, digital.

A core package of partnerships, resources and advocacy messages is developed at national level, then delivered locally to meet differing needs. This enables library services to share costs and resources, saving money and time.

The work is backed by customer research, tested with partners and customers and developed with The Reading Agency and ACE (which provides funding).

**EXAMPLE:** The Books on Prescription scheme was adopted by over 90% of library services. In its first year, it reached over 275,000 adults. A fifth offer on learning is in development.

## ENTERPRISING LIBRARIES

A partnership between ACE, the British Library and the Department for Communities & Local Government which turns libraries into 'incubators for business ideas'. It provides coaching, advice, meeting spaces and IT support.

This builds on the British Library's successful Business & Intellectual Property Centres. These provide small businesses and entrepreneurs with free information and expertise.

## ACCESS TO RESEARCH

Free, walk-in access\* in public libraries to over 10 million academic articles. Students, independent researchers and small businesses benefit from a unique collaboration between librarians and publishers, who have made their journal content available for free.

\* [www.accesstoresearch.org.uk](http://www.accesstoresearch.org.uk)

## NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

See page 18.

# Suffolk's Industrial & Provident Society

**Sieghart liked the service model he saw in Suffolk. We asked them some questions ...**

## How did the idea of setting up an Industrial & Provident Society come up?

Looking back to 2011, there was a serious threat of closure to a large number of the county's 44 libraries, as part of widespread consultation. These proposals were met with such resistance across Suffolk that there was a re-think.

This led to the proposal to set up an Industrial & Provident Society – an organisation which could run the service. It was quite a radical idea, and it would still mean the service would operate on a much reduced budget. But there was so much support for keeping the libraries open that everyone was determined to make it work.

Suffolk's IPS (Suffolk Libraries) officially started life in February 2012. It took over the running of libraries in August 2012.

For a full explanation of what an IPS is, see: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial\\_and\\_provident\\_society](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_and_provident_society)

## What help was given in setting it up?

Once the decision was taken to form an IPS, an interim board was formed. This, with the newly-appointed General Manager, worked with Suffolk County Council to set up the new IPS. Suffolk Libraries has a contract with Suffolk County Council to deliver the service. (The full details are available on Suffolk Libraries and Suffolk County Council's websites).

## What other support, advice or funding did you get to set up?

A huge amount of credit has to go to the local community groups – the people who passionately

opposed the closure of libraries. Their support continues through each library's community (or 'Friends') group.

As of July 2014, all 44 libraries have their own community groups, which are official members of Suffolk's Libraries IPS.



As this model was so new, eight pilot groups were given support at an early stage to get off the ground. These were focused on libraries which had already developed strong groups of supportive library users – including Debenham, Stradbroke, Bungay, Thurston and Aldeburgh libraries.

These groups are now well established, and have led some significant developments at their libraries. For instance:

- The Aldeburgh Library Foundation has helped to develop an adult learning programme which won an award at this year's Suffolk Adult Learners Awards
- Thurston Library Friends group has supported a pilot scheme to lend e-reader devices
- Bungay Community Library group has funded a

small increase in opening hours and library refurbishment

- Stradbroke opened the first library Post Office in October 2014.

In September 2013 and in 2014 Suffolk Libraries held Annual General Meetings, where a succession of new directors (board members) were elected. Potential board members are representatives from the community groups. Each group votes to elect the members at the AGM. The General Manager is also a board member.

## How does your model differ from other experiments, such as York's mutual, or the charitable trusts for Wigan, Luton etc?

Our Society (also known as a mutual) is not a trust but a co-operative. Our membership is by community groups. York is an employee-owned mutual.

## What are the advantages of the model?

We have much greater freedom as an independent body. Our grassroots model gives library users more input into the running of the service. The organisation is more accountable to the community.

Of course, at the beginning this was not proven. Many people were fearful of this new approach. However, two years into the journey we can confidently show what a difference these freedoms have made.

Although there is naturally a drive towards raising additional income to support the service, much of the activity generated by community groups is helping to provide a much more diverse range of activities and events. This money does not pay for core running costs.

## Alison says...

**Alison Wheeler, a library manager for Suffolk CC since 2008, became General Manager of the new IPS in February 2012. This was a completely new job within the profession...**



It's true that when I began this job, I really didn't appreciate just how much I needed to learn. Nor did I realise that in the first six months, being a librarian would not actually be as useful as being able to develop good governance, create a pension scheme, understand VAT, TUPE and industrial relations, and negotiate a contract with my former employer.

It was two parts exhilaration, one part brinkmanship and one part blind terror! Today I think it's the best job I have ever had. It's what

my many years in the profession have trained me to do.

Now we have got past the start-up and the settling down, my library experience is much more important than ever. The principles and philosophy enable me to see into the future and understand profoundly why we want to do some things and not others.

I am very proud of my 35 years in public libraries. I passionately want them to be as valued and precious in the future as they have been in the past.

Our 2020 vision articulates that better than I could, with a direction for the future which is based on staff, customer, non-user and stakeholder views of where we need to go.

I know that some people had fundamental concerns about the proposed model and how it would work. I'd never say it has been easy, or has not been a challenge for all of us.

But, over two years later, all 44 libraries are still open and the organisation has led a series of innovative developments.

So I feel the proof is in the pudding.

Independence also means we can do new things. For instance, we have installed new computers with fewer restrictions, so, for example, customers can use their own USB devices to upload their CVs. We can flex our resources quickly, and there are far fewer barriers to decision making.

Our staff have also gained. We have recently adopted the Living Wage, ahead of the county council, and have a rewards scheme in place.

#### **What are the disadvantages, or the lessons learned from experience that other library IPSs could benefit from?**

Experimentation is always high risk, but also high in opportunity. At times, it would have helped if someone else had already been through the process so we could benefit from their learning.

We tackled and solved issues as we went along, and at times worked out case law on the hoof! We plan in 2015 to showcase and share everything we have learned on community working and on externalisation.

It's frustrating sometimes, as there are still some misconceptions about the way we work. Some believe that libraries in Suffolk are now run by volunteers. They are not. But in general the new set-up seems to have been positively received.

#### **What are the trends in usage?**

Like all library services, we have seen a trend of fewer physical books being loaned – although children's book lending appears to be on the increase and we have broken our Summer Reading Challenge figures two years running.

Visitor figures have remained at roughly the same level, supported by all the additional events we're now running. For us, what is important is making the library experience meaningful and relevant to everyone who uses our online services or walks through a door.

We are one of the leading library services in terms of e-book lending. Our current focus is on the future and how we deliver a modern and relevant library service.

We've just published a summary of our strategy and vision – [http://suffolklibraries.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/16975-Suffolk-Libraries-Vision-2013-14-v02\\_Report-A4-LR.pdf](http://suffolklibraries.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/16975-Suffolk-Libraries-Vision-2013-14-v02_Report-A4-LR.pdf)

We've undertaken a market research project to help us understand what we can do to attract people who do not currently visit the library regularly, or may benefit from the other services we provide. It's also important for us to reassure the more traditional user that the service is in safe hands.

A customer survey carried out last year asked people if they'd noticed a difference in the service since we took over: 53.8% said it was about the same, 39.4% said it had got better and only 6.8% felt it had got worse.

We also won the Digital Award at this year's EDGE Conference for our Get Connected Project.

#### **How does it work financially?**

We have managed to deliver all the expected savings (about 28% of the original budget). We are now working on new business developments to bring in more income, to help the core library service and to extend the brand. Precise figures can be found on our website in our accounts to the last two AGMs.

#### **How do staff numbers compare with pre-transfer?**

They are more or less the same. We have a strong commitment to skilled and paid library staff. We still have professional library managers, and we have many new skills essential for a stand-alone body that runs library services – web, IT, finance, marketing, human resources and, of course, qualified librarians. Thirty-nine people are now doing an accredited leadership programme.

#### **How much do you rely on funding from Friends or users? Does the model look sustainable for the future?**

The fundraising work of the community/Friends groups is an important aspect of our model. However, this is not for core library costs, but for local priorities and profile raising.

We were quick to realise that groups would want to see that the money they raise is spent locally. So they do pay for extras at times – redecoration or furniture, extra IT equipment and (in some cases) extra opening hours. Whatever they spend the money on, it's their decision.

There are a wide range of ideas, including loyalty cards, events, branded items and taking a share of profits from crafts or artists whose work is on sale in the library.

## Unison says...

It is very early days for ANYONE to make a proper judgement of the new model. The organisation has been running only since 1 August 2012.

It has been presented to staff and the general public as an exciting new opportunity. In theory, the idea of a charitable organisation running libraries could and should work on several levels. It can cut bureaucracy, focus solely on libraries and give staff increased autonomy and a say in how the organisation runs.

Charity status should mean transparency in all policies and decisions taken by the IPS. Management have so far seemed keen to engage and consult with staff and have held working groups around pay and rewards and the role of library staff in the future.

However, further cuts in public spending are forecast. These will inevitably result in a reduction to the grant given to the IPS by the County Council, so savings and cutbacks will need to be made year on year. The original contract will need to be re-negotiated.

This does not give staff a sense of permanence. The feeling is that privatisation is inevitable, if the organisation fails through lack of funding.

Staff are the most expensive resource for the organisation, and the area where we are concerned most savings will be made. There is a staffing strategy programme being undertaken at the moment, which will attempt to standardise roles and re-distribute staff, if necessary.

This is causing stress to staff, who are afraid their pay, hours and working conditions will be affected. There does not appear to be much confidence in the protection that TUPE [Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations] will give us in this respect.

We are currently running at a deficit. This has resulted in cuts to relief staffing, which, in turn, puts enormous pressure on permanent staff.

Staff are increasingly being asked for complex advice on mental health and wellbeing issues, on how to fill in job application forms and compile CVs. More and more people are sent from job centres and the Citizens Advice Bureau to fill the void caused by cutbacks to other services.

This expectation has caused problems for staff, who lack the training to assist properly. Many staff feel they are expected to work in their own time as a matter of course, especially in setting up community groups.

We have already seen one attempt to change the terms and conditions for staff on old (pre-2002) contracts, and this is still pending. Luckily it was headed off by Unison.

There is a worry that staff cutbacks will be filled by unqualified volunteers. Some of our volunteers are excellent and they fill a need, but their involvement makes staff anxious about their own jobs being replaced.

We have been told that volunteers will not replace paid staff. But how long will this remain the case, when we are expected to deliver more for less?

There is a worry that the community groups, formed as a necessity by each library, have undue influence over their operation. They often seem to know more about what is going on in a library than the staff do. One library had its opening hours changed to suit the activities of the community group, for a specialist activity which limits library use for the general public.

In conclusion, we feel that the future of the library service in Suffolk is very uncertain. There is no sense that the new organisation has any permanence. It could work if funding is adequate.

A great deal is required of staff, who had no say in their transfer to the IPS and who are expected to share the vision of senior management regardless of the potential threat to their future security.

