

# *The* LIBRARY *Campaigner*

*Supporting friends and users of libraries*



## **Public libraries 2010?**

- **Future-proof your library – action checklist**
- **The government's ideas – have your say**
- **Public library system is a muddle, say MPs**
- **Unison to hold its own inquiry – with the spotlight on staff and users' views!**



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# THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN – AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

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



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## Thanks to ...

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

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## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

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

### 2010 MEETINGS

16 January, 13 March, 22 May (AGM), 10 July, 11 September, 13 November

# MEMBERSHIP FORM

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

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

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Please make cheques payable to: **The Library Campaign**. It saves a lot of time and money if you pay by Bankers Order.

If you are able to do this please fill in the form and return it to us.

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(BLOCK CAPITALS PLEASE)

Please return to: **The Library Campaign, 22 Upper Woburn Place, London WC1H 0TB**. Registered Charity (England & Wales) No. 1102634

# Prepare for action ...

I am writing this on the eve of the announcement of the two government-sponsored documents, which you can read about on pages 8–10. One is the report of the Wirral inquiry, the other is the DCMS consultation document which seems to be the first fruit of the government's long-running review of public libraries.

Editorial deadlines prevail, so I don't know what's in them. So I will do a little crystal ball gazing, bearing in mind what has been happening recently in the 'real world', as well as the impending election.

The Wirral report has been delayed by the Wirral Borough Council's decision to reverse their decision to close 11 libraries. There is a clear presumption that this is because, having seen the draft of the report, they could see the writing on the wall.

However, this is the tail end of the Wirral saga. The crucial elements have been the pressure put on by local users, unions, politicians (usually, if not entirely, of those parties in opposition on the council) – not forgetting Alan Gibbons and his Campaign for the Book.

Together they created such a ruckus that the Minister was forced to reverse his original decision not to intervene. When the inquiry did get under way, I gather,

## Secretary's Slot

Andrew Coburn  
Campaign Secretary



submissions by local people as well as by professionals such as Bob McKee of CILIP kept up the drumbeat on the issues that the campaigners had been pushing.

Meantime another fight has been going on in Swindon, with at least limited success, in trying to keep open the four branches that the council wanted to staff with volunteers only – or else close. I had a very pleasant afternoon with Shirley Burnham (pictured), who has been spearheading the campaign – it was interesting to see the Old Town library.

Once again pressure from local people, as well as campaigners such as Tim Coates and the local MP, Anne Snelgrove, have helped to achieve some results.

We should take heart from these successes – however temporary they may be – because it seems that the next few years will be even more challenging. Whoever wins the general election, we know that there will be cuts in public

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spending and these are going to fall as much on library services as any other. Maybe more.

The Local Government Chronicle recently published a survey of senior local government officials which reported that culture, including libraries, is top of the list for cuts if the time comes. There was no mention of the statutory nature of the library service as opposed to others such as museums, etc.

If Labour wins the election, we will no doubt get more of the same. Even then, there is likely to be an attempt to push more work out of direct delivery and into the private or voluntary sector.

It seems likely that attempts will be made to devolve more power to local communities. How this will work we cannot be sure but if you are in Birmingham you will be aware of the power now granted to committees of councillors covering each parliamentary constituency. If they want to close a library or increase the book expenditure they can, as I understand it, do so with very little reference to the centre.



Shirley and Andrew outside Swindon's Old Town library – small and thus unimposing, perfectly placed among the shops, with big windows to encourage people to come in. But alas, it has lost half its expert staff and is soon to be moved elsewhere...

If the Conservatives win, the consequences may be very similar. We know that they, too, want to clamp down on public spending and also have visions of local control of services. And of course they are historically the party which has tried to outsource local government.

Being the party of opposition, but with a lot of local authorities already in its camp, has given the Tories the chance to experiment in other ways. If you take them at their word, they have come up with a library strategy.

Cited as the way to go are the exploits of (Conservative) Hillingdon in refreshing their libraries, extending opening hours and adding new stock at little cost (much increasing usage).

Bearing in mind what I said about opposition politicians leading the way in opposing retrograde steps, we should be mindful that it is a Conservative council that has been threatening Swindon's libraries (and, of course, Wirral is Labour.)

Barnet's 'Easyjet' council service model (basics for all, extra charges for extra services) would still have to provide a statutory library service. But it is possible to envisage differential charging and other steps to enable those who can pay to enjoy more of the library service than those who cannot.

I can't speak for the Liberal Democrats' library practices or national policies. There is little evidence to hand

for the former (although they do run Newcastle, with its much-vaunted new central library). And I know that people quite close to the Library Campaign are advising on their potential manifesto policy, which may be good. But I suspect that the message of squeezing public spending will be carried through there, too.

Library campaigners will have their hands full with what is likely to happen locally before the national election campaign. The budget round for 2010-11 is almost upon us.

But take heart from what has happened in Swindon and Wirral, as well as from the good things that are going on in other places (including Newcastle).

**Let us know both if there is a threat to or in your locality but also if things go better – new libraries opening, money being put in, exciting events programmes etc. The Library Campaign needs to know what users see and feel about their local services, so that we can play our part nationally.**

## Maintaining a voice for library users

We plan a formal re-launch for the Campaign in the Spring. Our name is becoming better known as public libraries come into the limelight more – but there's also more need than ever to make sure we are known as a (rare) voice for library users.

The publication of various reports on libraries (see pages 6 and 8-10!) show how much we still have to do.

So keep up the good work, nag your local councillors, write to all your local papers and we will keep our libraries and demonstrate that the UK is still one of the most civilised countries in the world.

Meanwhile, as some of you will already know, I was recently elected (unopposed) as Vice-President for 2010, and thus President in 2011 of CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals – the librarians' professional body).

I am not sure yet whether this is going to cause any major problems for me, other than finding the time to fit everything into a busy schedule.

I do not see any conflict of interest in holding both my posts with CILIP and being Chair of the Library Campaign – after all, we all want the same thing – a better range of library services!

I accept that I shall have to be careful about what I say wearing which hat! Clearly, I can be much more critical of local authorities, etc. wearing a Campaign hat than I could with a CILIP hat on, where I should need to, perhaps, be a little more diplomatic. Your views would be appreciated.

Lastly, may I take this opportunity to wish you all a very successful campaigning New Year!

### Chairman's Chat

Brian M Hall  
Campaign Chair



## ACT NOW!

**If you do nothing else all year, tell the government what you want from the public library service.**

**26 JANUARY is the deadline for comments on a new policy document**

**BUT THEY DIDN'T CONSULT LIBRARY USERS!**

**The Library Campaign will do all we can to raise awareness**

**WE NEED EVERY MEMBER AND GROUP TO JOIN IN – turn to page 10 for more details**

**Read it online at <http://tinyurl.com/yedk5nm>**

**BETTER STILL, SEND FOR A PAPER COPY to:**

libraryreview@culture.gsi.gov.uk  
or DCMS Libraries & Archives Team, 2-4 Cockspur St, London SW1Y 5DH



## Who runs public libraries?

### LOCAL LEVEL:

Public libraries are run by local authorities. They have a statutory (legal) duty to provide and promote a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service [under the 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act]. They have no such legal duty to provide museums, galleries, theatres, sports centres etc.

*The funds come from council tax and the general allocation from central government to local authorities.*

There is no specific funding ring-fenced for libraries – libraries have to compete with all the other services in the council's budget.

Libraries are a comparatively small service (compared, say, to education or social services). They will probably be grouped with other services in a bigger department – e.g. archives, arts, community education, culture, customer services, heritage, environment, leisure ...

The boss may therefore be called anything from Chief Librarian to Head of Arts, Culture & Heritage. There will also be a 'lead' councillor and a committee that include libraries in their brief – again, the name will vary. All local councillors are also sure to take an interest in the library on their patch. So will the MPs.

### NATIONAL LEVEL:

#### The DCLG

The Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG) is the central government department responsible for local government. It lays down general policy for local authorities, but does not give detailed directions on how to run services such as libraries.

Ultimately it holds the purse-strings for public libraries. Every year, it determines how much each local council will get in funds from central government – which provides the vast majority of their funding.

*It does not determine how much of that funding is spent on libraries.*

That is entirely for local councils to decide – after consulting with local people.

[www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)

#### The DCMS

Central government's policy on libraries is set by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS).

*But it does not fund libraries.*

The DCMS covers a wide range of topics – the ones in its name, plus broadcasting, gambling, tourism, the arts, etc.

It is headed by the Secretary of State, whose brief covers all these areas. In theory, the 1964 Act gives him/her power to obtain information from councils, and even to intervene if a local authority is not providing a 'comprehensive and efficient' service. These powers have been used to some extent, but there has never been a full-blown take-over of a service.

Below the Secretary of State, one minister is more directly responsible for libraries (among other things).

A small number of DCMS civil servants cover libraries.

[www.culture.gov.uk](http://www.culture.gov.uk)

#### The MLA

MLA (Museums, Libraries & Archives Council) is a government-funded independent body. It advises the government on libraries (etc), works on policy research and encouraging service development – and increasingly sees itself as an adviser to library services at local level.

*It does not run libraries, or fund them.*

Its work covers a vast range of subjects – e.g. access for disabled people, advice on working with small children/ reading groups/teens, better value in buying books, collection management, design, marketing, staff training – and much more ...

Last but not least, MLA masterminds the People's Network scheme, which put computers/internet access into every library and continues to develop web-based resources.

MLA has produced a vast quantity of useful reports and resources, which can be found on its website.

[www.mla.gov.uk](http://www.mla.gov.uk)

## And could they

**IT had 60 written submissions – from library users to library chiefs and local council bosses – and five lively oral sessions.**

And it homed in on the problem that comes up again and again, any time public libraries are discussed. That is 'leadership and governance'. And that means the muddle – and the multiplicity of agencies – that greet anyone trying to make sense of public libraries (see left).

Step forward the APPG (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Libraries, Literacy & Information Management). Our favourite MP, Lyn Brown, has been its chair for years.

This year APPG set up a committee (five MPs, one lord) to look at this muddle.

The various problems it causes are constantly mentioned in reports. But it has never itself been the pure focus of an investigation. Lyn came to one of our meetings this year to tell us about progress.

Interestingly, two of the MPs on the inquiry panel had direct experience of the big public library battles – both fighting closures of small branches. Anne Snelgrove's constituency covers Swindon. Lynda Waltho covers Dudley.

Both expressed concern about consultation and the use of volunteers. In both cases, regional officers from MLA (Museums, Libraries & Archives Council) had been involved. But both MPs saw the process as 'ticking boxes' and as not including what local people wanted. Meanwhile, DCMS (Department for Culture, Media & Sport) had not got involved at all. So the scene was perfectly set ...

After months of work, the APPG report came out in October. As predicted at our May meeting by Lyn Brown MP, almost all who gave evidence agreed that three big things are 'non-negotiable' for public libraries: they need a 'statutory framework', services should be free at the point of delivery, and local authorities should run them.

They also agreed on eight strengths, but identified 25 weaknesses! Most of the latter are all too familiar: including

# be run better?

**A new report from Parliament suggests that changes are needed to rescue public libraries from the current muddle.**

fragmentation, confusion, no advocacy, little guidance from above and a huge gap between good and bad services.

Most consistently criticised was the split between the two government departments that deal with libraries – but unfortunately there was no clear consensus about the solution. APPG, however, sees it as the priority problem. Some of the rudest words were reserved for a ‘weak’ DCMS that ‘doesn’t have a clue’ about the vital community role of libraries.

Also much criticised was MLA. But recently MLA has reorganised its structure. Some said this will transform it. Others that its new focus on integrating all culture services is bad for libraries. Again, APPG sees the problem as crucial, because a ‘lead national voice’ is urgently needed – and has much to do.

Another common theme was the importance of library staff. Quality varies hugely, at all levels, says APPG. Many need to acquire new skills – especially management/leadership ones, as many senior librarians are soon to retire.

So – what next? The ultimate problem is summed up by our own Secretary, Andrew Coburn: ‘APPG identifies many of the issues that have long been known to cause problems. Some of the solutions suggested may not be the right ones.

‘Our chief concern, however, is – who will have the inclination and the clout to grasp the nettle and get something done? The lack of a clear answer is precisely the problem for public libraries.’

## Recommendations, in order of priority

- 1 Government funding and functional responsibility to be brought together, within a single government department
- 2 Powers of intervention to be retained by the Secretary of State, underpinned by clear guidance on the definition of ‘a comprehensive and efficient service’
- 3 The Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964 to be clarified by a clear definition of the minimum/core service to be expected by customers
- 4 Local authorities to remain responsible/accountable for services
- 5 The core service to remain free at the point of delivery
- 6 The purpose, role and composition of the Advisory Council for Libraries to be reviewed, clearly articulated and promoted [this body is self-explanatory, but currently has a vanishingly low profile]
- 7 A new Library Development Agency for England (LDAE) to: advocate for public libraries; articulate a national vision; establish marketing, awareness and promotional programmes; disseminate good practice; establish a comprehensive evidence base; facilitate quality improvement
- 8 In the light of the above, the role, function and funding of MLA to be adjusted
- 9 Local authorities to publish a code of ‘customer engagement’, with clear methodology for informing/consulting/ involving users and non-users in planning services
- 10 Use of volunteers to be positively encouraged, but not to substitute for core service provision
- 11 Local authorities to publish a code of practice on volunteers, covering practical support, hours, training, expenses, meals, police checks etc.
- 12 Local authorities to be encouraged to further develop collaborative arrangements, especially for back-office services
- 13 MLA (or the new LDAE) to commission and implement a mid-term communications strategy for public libraries
- 14 MLA (or LDAE) to develop and actively promote staff training to improve management, leadership and corporate governance.

## The six on the enquiry panel

Lyn Brown MP (Labour, West Ham, Chair to July 2009); Lynda Waltho MP (Labour, Stourbridge, Chair from July 2009); Nia Griffith MP (Labour, Llanelli); Mark Pritchard MP (Conservative, The Wrekin); Anne Snelgrove MP (Labour, South Swindon); Lord Tope (LibDem).

The report itself is only 32 pages long. Also published is all the written evidence presented to the inquiry, and transcripts of all the oral sessions. A good read!

[www.cilip.org.uk/get-involved/advocacy/public-libraries/Pages/appg.aspx](http://www.cilip.org.uk/get-involved/advocacy/public-libraries/Pages/appg.aspx)

# WIRRAL! ... RESULT!

The people of the Wirral fought, argued, campaigned, demonstrated – and simply refused to be fobbed off. It was a magnificent effort. The library experts looked, and agreed with local people. Both MLA (the government's advisory body) and CILIP (the librarians' professional body) made strong criticisms.

Finally – after quite some time – there was action by the government department responsible for libraries, DCMS (Department for Culture, Media & Sport). It has long had powers to hold a public inquiry into council plans, if they seem likely to produce a service inferior to what is required by law.

(That's the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964, which makes it a legal duty for councils to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service for all who want it ... and various other things. The exact meaning of the Act is much disputed!)

A public inquiry like this has never been held. So all eyes were on Wirral this summer, when it was held in New Brighton. Our day-by-day account of what happened is still on

**All this year, the row has rumbled on in Wirral. The council (Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council) wanted to close 11 libraries out of 24. Local people said no. And then...**

the Library Campaign's website ([www.librarycampaign.com/WirralReport](http://www.librarycampaign.com/WirralReport)).

Now at last the result is out. Wirral has been clever. It reversed its closure decision at the last minute – so that means it can't technically be in breach of the 1964 Act! But there's no doubt that its decision was wrong – and yes, it was illegal!

The inquiry was run (by Sue Charteris, a consultant) with impressive fairness. Her report is just as fair and sensible. And – at last – it makes it very clear how a council should run its library service!

Renewed arguments are already breaking out! But this report is really important. Read it. Use it...

## Extract from the Report

### Main findings

**The Inquiry has found the Council to be in breach of its statutory duties under the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964, because it failed to make an assessment of local needs in respect of its Library Services.**

It therefore cannot have acted reasonably in meeting such needs in the context of its statutory duties and available resources, as, in the absence of such assessment or demonstrable knowledge of local needs, it was incapable of identifying a reasonable option for meeting such needs both comprehensively and efficiently.

In particular, there are some specific needs for adults that have not been addressed. These include the specific requirements for older people, disabled people, unemployed people, and those living in deprived areas.

I am also concerned that although the Act does not specifically cover the role of schools in library provision, the Council has not been able to demonstrate that it has had due regard to the general requirements of children, which I consider to be a breach of its statutory duties.

The Council took the decision to close 11 of its libraries in the absence of a

**You may not know the Wirral local libraries referred to. But any library user will get the picture ...**

strategic plan for or review of the Library Service. As such, I believe that the Council's approach to re-visioning the service was fundamentally flawed, because their approach focused specifically on the issue of asset management and cost savings.

I also believe that the decision was made without a clear understanding of the extent and range of services currently being provided in the libraries, including those which are 'core' to the service and those which are ancillary. This makes it difficult to see how the Council could plan for ceasing or re-locating any aspects of the current service.

The Council's decision, which is better described as an indication of intent rather than a fully worked up plan, risks being a partial response to need that would disadvantage relatively isolated and deprived communities.

I therefore believe there to be a further breach in relation to the needs of

deprived communities. On the basis of the evidence provided to the Inquiry, I do not consider that the needs of the community in either Beechwood or Woodchurch estates, who form part of the wider library community as a whole, will be adequately met.

A key concern of mine, therefore, has been the absence of an adequate plan for and commitment to a comprehensive outreach service. Without this, the Library Service as a whole will not be compliant.

Without an assessment of needs and a strategic Library Service review, the Council has displayed a lack of logic around why some facilities were recommended for closure and not others.

Having considered the evidence submitted to the Inquiry, I believe there is a strong case for reviewing the decision and/or retaining a physical service (not necessarily as it is now) at some sites earmarked for closure. This is for the following reasons:

- where libraries are located in an area of significant deprivation ...
- where the Council's decision on which libraries to close changed ...
- where the Council identified an area of need but subsequently chose to ignore this information ...

# Librarians' view

**This is what Bob McKee,  
Chief Executive of CILIP,  
says about the report**

The report is compelling reading. Fair and balanced, it summarises the views of Wirral Council, the views put forward by those who presented evidence to the Inquiry, and the views of Sue Charteris (who was commissioned to lead the Inquiry).

The Inquiry finds Wirral in breach of statute because the Council failed to make an assessment of local needs, failed to meet some specific needs of adults and the general requirements of children, failed to address the needs of deprived communities, failed to carry out a strategic review of the library service.

The Inquiry recommends that Wirral Council builds on the considerable evidence of local needs and demands generated by the Inquiry, produces a clear strategic development plan for the library service, evidences how it will meet the needs of all groups and communities in the Wirral, works with a wide range of local groups and library users, and draws on support and advice from elsewhere (including CILIP) to strengthen the service.

This is a positive set of recommendations, designed to help Wirral move on from the confrontational context of the Inquiry to, as the report says, turn a difficult situation around.

This is just a quick summary of the headlines. The report is rich with detail and insight, and the value of the report is not just in the conclusions drawn about the Wirral.

Sue Charteris has produced the best in-depth case study I have ever read of the issues faced by Public Library Authorities in the present climate, trying to meet the needs of local communities and comply with legislation in hugely challenging circumstances.

Everything in the report rings true, everything in the report is transferable, in some degree, to every Public Library Authority in the country. This is a 'must read' report, to be added to the Christmas stocking of anyone with an involvement or interest in the future for our local library services.

After this, inquiring into any public library proposals (whether the inquiry is formal or informal) will now be a much more comprehensive and efficient – a much more meaningful and forceful and authoritative – exercise. Thanks, Sue.

**Read it yourself: [www.culture.gov.uk/reference\\_library/publications/6485.aspx](http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/publications/6485.aspx)**

- where the Council has failed to meet its own standards in terms of a reasonable distance to travel ...
- where libraries have inter-dependent links with schools and/or children's centres. There has been a lack of involvement of governing bodies in discussions.

Given the breach of duties outlined above, it is not possible for the Inquiry to endorse Wirral MBC's current plans for restructuring its Library Service.

However, the Inquiry has generated considerable evidence of local needs and demands for the service, on which the Council can now draw.

I recommend that the Secretary of State requires Wirral MBC to produce a clear strategic development plan for the Library Service in Wirral to his satisfaction, and within six months of publication of this report.

Subject to his endorsement of the plan, I also recommend that the Secretary of State requires updates of this plan to be submitted to him annually for the next five years, with ongoing support and advice provided by the MLA [see p.6].

If, after due consideration, the Council still wishes to proceed with its model of fewer but better buildings (involving closures), I recommend that the Secretary

of State require the Council to evidence how it will meet the needs of all groups and communities in the Wirral.

**Importantly, I would recommend that the Secretary of State requires evidence from Wirral that they are working with a wide range of representative groups and library users from all the libraries, including those in libraries that are planned to close, on the design and accessibility of the new centres, and the transition of services highly valued by current users of the libraries that are planned to close.**

**I also recommend that the Secretary of State requests Wirral to undertake to strengthen the new service.**

**I do believe that this is an opportunity to turn this difficult situation around. Given the debate this Inquiry has provoked, there is an opportunity to draw on support available locally from the library user and campaign groups, potential partner organisations and others; and regionally and nationally from other library authorities, CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals) and the MLA.**

The law requires WMBC to provide a comprehensive and efficient service for

all those persons desirous of the use thereof. I recognise that Wirral MBC, like other authorities across the country, has considerable pressure on service budgets and needs to ensure it is making the best use of its resources both now and in the future; but there were risks in relying on a Strategic Asset Review without a concurrent Library Service Review to specifically address the design and delivery of the Library Service.

I recognise too that the Council decided to be pro-active and develop a new approach of providing a network of fewer but better Neighbourhood Centres 'with libraries at their heart', together with an enhanced outreach service, which it believes is a more sustainable way forward.

However, I do not believe the Council adequately assessed how well this model would meet the needs of its constituent communities before taking a decision to close 11 of its 24 libraries. At best the decision was premature and does not demonstrate how specific needs within communities will be adequately met.

As such, it is impossible for me to agree that the plans are reasonable or adequate. I recommend to the Secretary of State a series of steps that I consider to be necessary to turn this situation round.

# Tell her what you think – and soon!

MARGARET Hodge is newly re-installed as libraries minister, after a while away on compassionate leave. She's back just in time to take charge of the 'public libraries modernisation review' first promised in October 2008. It has been delayed and delayed. Finally, on December 1, it was out.

What does it say? Well, the good news is that it is not a policy document. It's a consultation paper. Views are now being actively sought by DCMS (Department for Culture, Media & Sport).

That's just as well. The paper shows little sign of all the development work done with Margaret's department by working parties on digitisation, staff skills and other solid topics. No sign of the seven (at least) draft reports painstakingly compiled from this work. No sign of the 'round table' discussions with a wide range of interest groups such as authors and publishers.

**The public library service in England needs 'radical transformation and modernisation', according to the libraries minister. Does it? You MUST take this chance to tell her what YOU think!**

**And no sign at all of what library users think. Because we were not asked!**

What we get instead is a rapidly-compiled anthology of 'think-pieces' that Margaret suddenly requested from a varied group of people. It's a real mixed bag, representing librarians, MLA, CILIP, publishers, booksellers, local councils, even the man who runs Starbucks ...

But nothing from Unison! They weren't asked. And nothing from library users!



**Margaret Hodge**

Ditto. (There's just one exception – Shirley Burnham (see p.3) wasn't asked, but she wrote in anyway. Good for her.)

Margaret was questioned about this at the official launch of the consultation paper. She said it was aimed purely at 'professionals'! Told that Unison is holding a people's inquiry in February 11 (see p.5), she said this was too late – her final policy document will not take account of it!

The Library Campaign is now working to make sure that everyone knows about this. It will represent users' voices to Margaret, and also at the Unison inquiry.

**But we also need as many comments as possible, from individuals and groups alike. Tell Margaret what you think! Don't miss this chance!**

As for what the consultation paper actually says, the different think-pieces make all kinds of different points. It might be best to concentrate on the Foreword by Margaret herself. She says she wants to put her own personal stamp on the eventual policy document.

To be honest, it's hard to believe that much will come of this – a whole new library policy, just before a general election? But you never know. It might just happen – Margaret clearly wants it to!

Either way, it's absolutely vital that we take this chance to be heard!

## Margaret says...

**THERE'S** a covering statement from Margaret in the press release that came out with the consultation paper. It begins: 'The public library service in England needs radical transformation and modernisation if it is to remain as relevant and popular in the 21st century as it was in the 19th and 20th centuries ...'

This makes alarming reading for those who have previously encountered local politicians keen to be radical and make their mark on libraries.

However, the paper has an Introduction (presumably written by civil servants) and a further personal piece from Margaret.

Both set out some pretty familiar points about the need for good bookstock, buildings and opening hours. And how to make the lousy services as good as the good ones – a real chestnut, that, but key!

Both show some grasp of libraries' role. The Introduction says: 'The public library service has a vital role in a democratic society. Libraries help to promote equality of opportunity and intellectual freedom and ... embody a commitment to open access to information and education for all.'

'Libraries contribute to a wide range of national and local government targets – improving literacy and early years education, community cohesion, learning and skills development, health and well being, digital inclusion, citizenship, business support and entrepreneurship.' Very true!

Margaret says: 'Libraries are a much-loved part of public life in England, with more branches than either McDonalds or Boots ... we must be united in our efforts to build on the strong tradition of the past to provide a relevant and valued service for the future.'

The paper highlights five specific themes, and asks 23 specific questions. For instance, Margaret says she wants to take on board both the Wirral report (p.8) and the CILIP guidelines (p.14). One point she highlights is 'the right balance of national and local roles ... could a new balance help ensure national minimum standards whilst enabling local areas to determine their own services based on local priorities?'

The paper is an easy read – or skim. There are all sorts of bits in it. The important thing is that as many library users as possible simply tell Margaret what **THEY** want. It's high time!

**Tuesday 26 January is the closing date for responses**

The paper is called **Empower, Inform, Enrich – the modernisation review of public libraries: a consultation**

**Download it – or request a print copy. THEN SEND COMMENTS.**

**libraryreview@culture.gsi.gov.uk or DCMS Libraries & Archives Team, 2-4 Cockspur St, London SW1Y 5DH**

# FUTURE-PROOF YOUR LIBRARY!

**YOU** may see no immediate threat in your area. Even so, you'd be wise to do some future-proofing. Almost certainly, budget cuts are already being planned. A much bigger wave of cuts will begin next year, once local and national elections are safely over. **And things will get worse in 2011.**

It is not The Library Campaign's job to tell people what they should want their own service to be like. But we suspect a major issue will be attempts to close small local libraries. Probably, also, book funds will be raided, opening hours reduced ... the usual things. Are these acceptable? Are there alternatives?

Whatever is said at national level, people need to be prepared to act at local level. The sooner they start, the better. The Library Campaign can provide tools to help.

Many Friends/users, we think, need to get moving SOON on a campaign to get library staff/managers, councillors and library users working together at local level.

Why? Some services and staff are brilliant. They use library buildings to the full, make sure they are well publicised and that everyone feels welcome. They make sure they help other local services – working with pre-schoolers, homework clubs, reading groups, clubs for special people and special interests ... etc etc!

AND they are good at making sure everyone knows about all this. Especially those who hold the purse-strings.

But other library services are not like this. They could do more, often with ingenuity needed more than expense. Worse, they have failed to get their message across to the other departments within the council. Nobody knows what they do. This is a very dangerous position to be in when cuts are being decided. Library Friends/users know all this.

Again, many library managers are aware how useful library Friends/users can be. They can help them tailor their services to local needs, even help expand services with some judicious volunteer help, or improve the use of the buildings by organising events. Above all, they can speak out for libraries when staff cannot do so.

On the other hand, many councillors and many librarians still don't 'get' the point of real engagement with users. In some cases it seems they will do anything, spend anything, to avoid a simple discussion with their own residents!

**We all need to recognise that budget cuts are coming next year – and even more so the year after. It's almost certain to affect YOU. Are you ready?**

The Swindon and Wirral stories this year (see p.3) give a flavour ... These are cautionary tales to tell them. People in local government circles already talk about 'doing a Swindon' as something to avoid – so we can build on a certain budding awareness.

But, even the well-meaning ones often don't have a clue how to really work with Friends or the community. Nor do they have any idea what we can actually do to help them. Or, indeed, what their libraries actually do.

Time and again we have seen some well-meaning planner come up with a 'clever' idea – often, to close small branches, to save a tiny amount of money. Most of them have never been inside a library, or realised how much they are valued.

Time and again we have seen them utterly astonished by the hostile public reaction. Maybe, this time, we can stop this damaging process before it starts.

It's no good being aggressive about it (yet). It will be counter-productive – at this stage, anyway. If need be, you can criticise stubborn cases later on.

But, we suggest, for now they need wooing and educating. We ought to be able to show that working WITH library users will help, not hinder, councils. And the sooner it starts, the better.

## A LETTER:

*Dear Sir,*

*A campaigner recently said "you can't put a price on some things" with regard to retaining post offices.*

*We all must have noticed the damage done to our communities by the loss of so many post offices, even in urban and suburban areas. In fact, most of us predicted the outcome, but it was government policy.*

*Libraries are facing the same meltdown across the country, most of it occurring before the real opposition to another government policy was organised.*

*The London Borough of Lewisham has managed to maintain a public service but cannot hide how slimmed down the service has become.*

*Both central government policy and lack of funding have badly affected the possibility of provision.*

*So, where are we heading with this? Well, we have two elections in the offing. We know the London Borough elections are due to take place in May next year. The Prime Minister has to announce a General Election before his term runs out in June 2010.*

*We have written to each of the parliamentary candidates for Lewisham East (Labour, Conservative and Liberal-Democrat) and also emailed the Greens and Socialist Workers.*

*We are asking what policies will be in their manifestos for both elections with reference to libraries.*

*Let's see what they come up with.*

*Patricia Richardson  
(Joint Chair of the Grove Park User  
Group Committee)*

[NB: the editor has changed the words 'adult education' in the original letter to 'libraries', to show how well it still works ...]

## Patricia Richardson writes...

There are about 650 parliamentary constituencies across the UK. All you need in each constituency is a small number of public library service supporters to get out there, ask the questions and let 'THEM' know that public libraries are a serious issue.

Voters will not have a better opportunity for quite a while to get the message across and to hold elected representatives to account. Politicians have no money. They only have public money. They MUST be held to account for spending sensibly, thriftily and wisely for the benefit of whole communities. Public services are an issue for us all. The least 'THEY' can do is to keep these services ticking over until the public finances are back in order.

Above is a copy of my letter to the local paper, printed 30th September, about adult education. Our group sent letters to the new candidates for each party sitting on the council. The Green candidate promised us a reply when their policies were in place. We had a meeting with the LibDem parliamentary candidate, accompanied by the LibDem candidate for the electoral Mayor position in Lewisham. We await further replies ...

# IDEAS BANK ...

## Will there be local elections next year? If so ...

- 1 Contact each political party at its headquarters. Ask what they plan for libraries. Get it in writing!
- 2 Find out who you know is a party member, and get them involved in the manifesto-writing work.
- 3 Go to meetings and ask questions about libraries.

## Meet those in charge

That means your head of libraries, the head of whatever department libraries are in, and the councillor responsible for libraries. Make sure they know you are there to defend the library service. You should be a very useful ally. If they don't see it this way, the sooner you find out, the better!

- 1 Find out what plans they have.
- 2 Find out how the current budget is shaping up.
- 3 **ASK HOW YOU CAN HELP.** Brainstorm some ideas with them. Alternatively, if they don't want to know, make it clear that you exist, you will be watching, you want to be consulted and you will take action if necessary.
- 4 Make sure you keep regularly in touch as the situation develops.
- 5 If need be, contact other friendly councillors to see if they can find out the library service's plans/ projected budget.

## Meet the staff at all library branches

As above.

## Find out what your current council cares about most

Every council is committed to about 35 'priorities'. Each will be judged by the government according to a 'National Indicator' (NI). So each council will be especially keen to do well at these things. Can libraries help?

Find out what priorities/NIs your local council has chosen. Enquire locally, or go to [www.localpriorities.communities.gov.uk](http://www.localpriorities.communities.gov.uk). Then ...

- 1 Get to know the departments/

**Here is a menu of ideas – a blend of informed, reasoned argument, and a display of muscle. Seasoned campaigners know that reason alone seldom works! Many readers will find nothing new here. They've done it all before. But it's worth using as a checklist for 2009-10. You will know which ideas are easiest and most useful for your own group. Where do you have good contacts, good working relationships, good ideas? Where are your gaps and weak points?**



**The Durning Library, Lambeth, London, was saved ten years ago from a Wirral-style mass closure plan. Time for the Friends to celebrate with an exhibition and party. They invited councillors who had helped before, to thank them, and the current portfolio holder (in black), to bear witness to Lambeth's current promise not to close local libraries. The photo was emailed (with caption) to the local paper – and in it went.**

councillors involved in these priority areas, and become known to them.

- 2 Think where libraries can help them, discuss ideas with the library service.

## Invite all relevant councillors to visit you/the library

This includes your local ward councillors, and councillors that have a portfolio where libraries can provide useful facilities.

That could include culture, education, early years, adult social services, children/youth, crime, employment ... Almost anything can be relevant, IF

you/the library service can show how useful the library already is, and have clear ideas about what more could be done.

Choose a time when something is going on that is relevant to their portfolio – storytime, homework club, old people's club, reading group etc etc.

NOTE 1: Even if they don't come, a message will be getting through to them ...

NOTE 2: If they do come, get a photo! If the local paper won't send a photographer, send them one of your own. Local politicians appreciate some

publicity – and it ties them in with the library for the future.

NOTE 3: It's not just other council departments that can work with libraries. For instance, local primary care trusts often work with libraries on healthy promotions, information, books on prescription etc. What contacts do you have?

### Invite your MP

As above.

### Prepare a list of everything your friends group does – or has done in the past

It is astonishing, but true, that most people in the library service – let alone elsewhere within the council – will have no idea what you do now, or have contributed in the past – even if it has been on a spectacular scale.

They are also, surprisingly, unlikely to know about past times when you were forced to fight against council plans – even if this fight was damaging to the council/ the political party, and they lost.

You will be treated with much more respect if people know the basic facts about you, what you can do for good, and the power you can wield.

### Prepare a list of ideas for the future

This is where Friends/users can be especially valuable.

You know your library and your locality – often far better than the local staff, let alone managers at HQ. You know local people and organisations that have something to offer – or could make good use of the library's facilities.

You are also likely to have bright ideas that won't obviously occur to people less in touch with the neighbourhood.

Many libraries could be much better used as a community 'hub', often at little extra expense.

Councils need to learn that they have a valuable resource that they could exploit.

### Prepare a list of cost-saving ideas

As above – and especially relevant at the moment! Cuts are on the way. A common knee-jerk reaction is to look for obvious 'easy' cuts in cultural services. With your intimate local knowledge and contacts, you may well be able to think of ways to cut waste.

### Prepare a list of useful contacts

You may soon need people to speak out for you. Some will be able to talk about the value of the library to the local community. Others might add a bit of spice, and ensure some publicity. Ask everyone in your group whom they know. Face-to-face contact is always easiest and best, so start your list with existing contacts. It can be so simple – who do you know that has a child at school? And so on.

- 1 local organisations of all kinds. That might be anything from schools and nurseries to residents/tenants' groups, local history or other amenity groups, clubs of all kinds, churches.
- 2 individuals.
- 3 local celebrities.
- 4 conduits for local publicity. Local papers, local radio, local TV, community websites, blogs, community newsletters and bulletin boards – physical or electronic, your own e-list and/or telephone 'tree', your own website, the Library Campaign's website (always hungry for news). There are far more means to communicate than there were even a few years ago. Don't miss out.

### Find more friends! Get them ready!

- 1 Recruit members (individuals & organisations) to your Friends group, explaining the danger to come.
- 2 Discuss with them what more the library could do for them, rather than what they could do for the library.

- 3 Make a list, obviously – and remember to get email addresses for everyone who has one. A real time-saver! If you have a meeting, post plenty of people at the doors to take down details.

Note down what useful contacts your members have, and/or any skills they are willing to contribute.

### Early actions

- 1 Circulate some kind of support pledge for signing by individuals, organisations, councillors, MPs, local celebs etc etc.
- 2 Make sure someone attends all council meetings (etc). Generally do all you can to make your faces known, and to make it known that libraries have friends and they are likely to make a fuss.
- 3 If you can, start extra activities going in the library right away. Some services are pretty apathetic, but ought to be able to twig that their jobs could be at risk. You can help them make their branch look good. Use it or lose it.
- 4 Make friends with the local media. Invite them to attractive events, or send them a (digital) photo and caption.

### Your own ideas

- 1 ...
- 2 ...
- 3 ...
- 4 ...



Tipton library, Sandwell, is a great example of a service demonstrating its value to the whole community. Children from three primary schools met five WWII veterans and asked them lots of questions. The event was co-run with the local history group, who donned 1940s costume. There was a 'rationing' display with weighed-out portions of foods, and the local RAF base and the Territorials came with exhibits such as a model glider and military gear to dress up in. A local school decorated the library with artwork, which stayed on display for a month. Real community engagement!



# The West Midlands scene

THE former West Midlands County contains seven Metropolitan District Councils – Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Coventry, Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall and Solihull – all of which are, of course, public library authorities.

The current situation is very mixed. While some authorities are developing and expanding, others are contracting and, in this writer's view, are failing to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service within the terms of the 1964 Act.

► This is certainly the case in Dudley, which once boasted one of the finest public library services in the country. Dudley Council (Tory-controlled) has recently succeeded in closing no fewer than five branch libraries (including my own!). These were at Wall Heath, Dudley Wood, Quarry Bank, Amblecote and Woodside. Several of these had particular personal relevance to me. I worked briefly at Dudley Wood when it first opened nearly 50 years ago. I spent much of my youth at Woodside Library. I currently live in Wall Heath.

The 'solution' to some of these closures was the development of so-called 'link-libraries'. These, to dispassionate observers, have proved to be largely ineffective. One suspects that their relative lack of use will be used as

**It's political will, not money, that makes the difference between good and bad public library services. So says Brian Hall, new Chair of The Library Campaign, in his survey of the seven West Midlands library services.**

## What's the 1964 Act?

Councils classed as 'library authorities' (151 of them in England) must provide a library service – by law. The current law is the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964. It sets out a number of requirements that all services should deliver. The main requirement is to be 'comprehensive and efficient'. But the concept is not clearly defined. The public inquiry into Wirral (see page 8) has set out some up-to-date ground rules. But this has proved to be just the start of some very bitter debates about the 1964 Act.

an excuse to close them in the not-too-distant future.

In the case of Wall Heath, we were offered nothing – except journeys to such places as Gornal, Wordsley (which appears to have virtually no books on its shelves despite a recent refurbishment) or Kingswinford (which was almost immediately closed for the building of an extension).

Kingswinford has now been completed and the newly refurbished library has been re-opened. Although there is now more space, the practice of putting reserved books into tatty brown paper bags for collection by the readers, together with the introduction of self-service machines, bode ill for the future.

When will local authorities and librarians realise that one of the reasons people visit libraries is for the personal, friendly service they receive from the caring staff?

How anyone can argue that providing nothing constitutes a comprehensive and efficient library service is beyond me! It has to be said, however, that Dudley is being held up as the ideal model for public library provision in other authorities, most notably, Wirral and Wolverhampton. Heaven help us all!

► In Wolverhampton, progress is being made on the new library at Wednesfield complete with a new aluminium roof. Here, too, five libraries have been closed (four small service points and one larger branch). I suspect that this was done by the local authority rather than by the chief librarian, who would not have been particularly sympathetic to closing a larger branch.

► Walsall is a strange set-up. It has gone through several manifestations in recent years. Although it is working well at present there are worries about next year and the 2011.

► The same is true at Sandwell, now one of my favourite library authorities. Sandwell has been a revelation in recent years. The current Chief Librarian, Linda Saunders, and her predecessor, Keith Hayes, though very different in their management styles, have worked miracles in what was for many years a fairly moribund authority. It must by now be one of the best library authorities in the country. Many thanks are due to



Councillor Linda Horton, who has responsibility for libraries (amongst other things).

► Coventry has just announced that it is looking for £10m of cuts in local services. One cannot help but worry about the future of its library service – particularly since the cabinet member responsible for libraries told its then Chief Librarian that ‘if we didn’t have to provide libraries, we wouldn’t bother’!

► Solihull, like all other library authorities, is facing a bleak future – especially as the government has recently announced an across the board 10% reduction in public spending.

► Birmingham is an interesting case. It is in some ways fairly typical of what is going on in other parts of the country – ie, closing or restricting services in branch libraries (and making the staff swear to secrecy!) in order to develop rather grandiose central libraries.

In Birmingham’s case, we have seen many manifestations of ideas, plans, etc. from innumerable consultancy firms, at enormous cost. A less-than-enthusiastic article I wrote in CILIP’s journal Update (August 2008), produced an outraged response from Birmingham in which it was claimed that the new library would be the biggest and best in Europe and that I should have been more enthusiastic!

Perhaps my view was tempered a little by my observations over the last ten years (!) and the experiences of many members of staff, past and present. From these I have deduced that any concept of



**What’s a library link?**  
**Several councils have adopted these as an alternative to completely cutting off a library service. They are small, generally housed in facilities such as community halls, have restricted opening hours and small collections (say 1,500 books) but are connected to the library service’s catalogue and online services.**

service to the community has been abandoned to produce a building which would be the envy of everyone else, and to the greater glory of Birmingham’s councillors and officers.

Or by the ‘fact’ that, having put the plans out for public consultation, just over 70 people (out of a population of over 1,100,000) seem to have objected to the height of the proposed new library, so it will be reduced by one floor! I

suspect, however, that the word has gone out that city will not now, during the credit crunch, be able to afford the £39m it had previously pledged.

I am also appalled that the local media have been taken in so completely by the ‘spin’ put out by the hierarchy in Birmingham’s libraries.

The big problem in Birmingham as a whole has been the creation of a de-centralised system (constituencies) so that staff in individual libraries have no mechanisms for espousing their views. In some cases professional managers, who have no qualifications, experience or understanding of the culture and ethos of public libraries, been brought in simply to save money. Not only are they not qualified librarians but they seem to have little recognition for those that are. As long as there is a minimum number of staff in the building in at least one of the larger branches, then the building remains open despite the complete lack of qualified staff!

**The main lesson that can be learned from the West Midlands is that it is not just a question of money, but of political will as well. Public library services are developing and expanding in several parts of the country, but in others they are being seen as a soft option for cuts! Watch out for worse to come!**



**Wall Heath Library**  
 will close on Saturday June 21  
 You can continue to use all borough libraries. Your nearest libraries are Kingswinford Library and Gornal Library  
 From June 23 both Kingswinford and Gornal libraries will open 10 days a week  
 For details call Kingswinford Library on 01384 612740 or Gornal Library on 01384 612753  
[www.dudley.gov.uk/libraries](http://www.dudley.gov.uk/libraries)  
 Dudley