

The LIBRARY *Campaigner*

Supporting friends and users of libraries



LIBRARIES ARE IN DANGER!

In this issue, we round up all the latest information on what library users really want and we launch a new 'coalition' that will make sure your views are heard!



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THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN – AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

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



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The following organisations send representatives to attend steering group meetings: Unison, Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals (CILIP), Association of University Teachers, University of the Third Age.

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

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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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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Now the local debates begin ...

Lost in Lewisham?

Lewisham is just one of the boroughs already planning multiple library closures. If it succeeds, others will doubtless follow. But have councils planned wisely? Can service users even find out? Peter Richardson unpicks some of the issues.

How did it come to this? In March 2008 the elected Mayor of Lewisham set up a Commission on Libraries and Learning. Not long after the first meeting, he did warn us he had 'seen the books'. Last autumn he warned the Pensioners' Forum AGM that money was to be short, and changes could be expected.

This had not prevented large sums of money recently being invested in buildings for the library service. Our own Manor House Library received £1.75m capital funding (dating from 2001). Another £1.8m was borrowed on the open market, to be repaid at a cost of £122,000 a year until 2049. The officers advised in favour of this decision, although Heritage Lottery Fund had earlier been keen to give the money as a grant, on condition they would be in control of the project. Manor House reopened in 2009.

Forest Hill had a major refurbishment costing about £1m. Downham Health & Leisure Complex contains Downham Library. We cannot find out what are the costs involved.

Wavelengths leisure centre is being redone again, the second time in 20 years, and those costs also need investigation.

Investment has been made in self-issue, enrolling school children through their schools, longer opening hours and new stock.

So, do some residents now have to pay for a fine new service they cannot reach?

Looking at the list of proposed closures, there is the spectacular achievement of creating the 'donut' effect in the middle of the borough – closure of Sydenham, Crofton Park and New Cross will leave many schools and estates outside walking distance of their nearest library facility. Do not mention the elderly, infirm, young mothers ... you can add to this list!

Although Blackheath Village Library and Grove Park Library are on the

periphery of the borough those residents will be just as badly affected, as well as residents of the adjacent boroughs.

We are told the saving will be £830,000 over three years. But how, we do not know.

For instance, Blackheath Village Library is on a lease, which lasts until 2013, at £72,000 a year. Unfortunately, the fact that the library ended up here was also due to a bad council decision, many moons ago.

Just as a matter of interest, none of those receiving new investment are named, yet. Nobody is suggesting closing any swimming pool or leisure centre (yet!) – perhaps because most are run by the private sector, so business contracts are involved.

No doubt the proposal will reduce to one or two libraries closing, and we will all be supposed to be grateful it is not going to be worse.

There must be another way!

Dudley's doing fine!

In our winter 2009 issue, Brian Hall criticised his local service for closing five branch libraries and replacing some with small 'link libraries'. Kate Millin, Dudley's Assistant Director of Libraries, Archives & Adult Learning, sees things differently ...

The five libraries that were closed had had staffing and stock increases in the two years prior to their closure, to try and make them more viable, but their usage had continued to decline. All but one were in poor condition.

The closures were not part of a cost-cutting exercise, but were part of an improvement plan. The end result will be:

- ▶ a net increase in opening hours across the borough by 75 hours a week, making library services more available.
- ▶ Dudley now has five libraries open seven days a week – 61.5 hours – including Sundays for the first time.

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For our cover cartoon, many thanks to Chris Riddell, illustrator (and occasional writer) of children's literature and political cartoonist for The Observer. Check out his clever, stylish work – he has won the CILIP Kate Greenaway Medal twice and the Nestlé Smarties Book Prize seven times.

What library users – and non-users – want!

Alan Templeton says...

Ipsos MORI interviewed a representative sample of 5,000 people aged 15+ – and found that 81% of library users visit a library to borrow a book. This figure is very similar to the finding of a recent survey in the inner London borough of Camden. In Camden, it was found that borrowing books was the prime aim of 82% of library users.

These very high percentage figures have been achieved in spite of a massive reduction in book stock in virtually all of England's public libraries. They indicate that the number of books within a library has little bearing on the behaviour of library users – they still keep trying to find something suitable.

However, a high percentage of a decreasing overall usage would actually suggest that users who are dissatisfied with a library's book stock simply stop going to the library. Therefore, they also cease using its other facilities. This is confirmed by the official (CIPFA) 'active borrower' figures.

The situation may well be far worse in London than in the rest of the country, as Londoners are the least likely to borrow a book from a library according to the survey.

The overwhelming importance of the book lending activity in the nation's public libraries is a constant theme of all library user group statements. It is, equally constantly, ignored by library authorities. There are many new, exciting activities which can be carried out in public libraries, and the boring, old-fashioned one is pushed down the library service priority list.

The Ipsos MORI report clearly shows that there is a great mismatch between the priorities of library users and library authorities. Most likely, it is just one additional piece of evidence to be ignored.

Of course there is more to the research findings than a confirmation of the

In December 2009, the government (DCMS) commissioned Ipsos MORI to carry out research into public library usage in England. The findings have been published. There are very detailed tables for those who want to research the findings in depth. Meanwhile, two Library Campaign members pick out some interesting bits...

importance of book lending. Some of these are already well documented, such as the fall in library usage in the 20-30 year age group.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the report is the analysis of the employment status of library users. The investigation found that the unemployed were apparently the least likely people to use libraries.

This is a group that could obviously benefit greatly from the help available in public libraries, but which seemed slightly unwilling to do so. The detailed analysis showed that only 28% of the unemployed group borrowed books (the lowest figure of all occupation groups). More encouragingly, 54% carried out research on jobs/health/training/local events (the highest figure of all occupation groups).

In fact, although the headline figures for the unemployed appear poor, this group became very focused in the way that it used public libraries. It concentrated on what mattered most. The overwhelming priority was to find employment. This is confirmed by the high interest that the group showed in learning about and using computers.

Laura Swaffield says...

Many libraries I know are hopeless at simply telling local people what they offer. It should be so simple – a big sign outside, a few ads, contacting local schools and community groups. And almost nothing is done to publicise libraries at national level.

So, for me, a major finding by Ipsos MORI is about what they call 'latent

demand – that is, how many people are doing activities elsewhere that could potentially be done in a library'.

Well, 41% of the sample had actually been to a public library in the past year. Not bad. This is higher than the most recent official government figure (37.5%). Better still, of the remaining 48.5%, 31.2% had either borrowed or wanted to borrow a book – that's 15% of the total sample. 'If half of these could be persuaded to borrow from a library,' says Ipsos MORI, 'that would increase the total library engagement to closer to 50% [of the population].'

The researchers also think there's 'potential for a modest rise in the number of people using public libraries for internet access. Computer usage reduces as income rises, suggesting that [it] is serving the lower income members of the community. Usage was highest amongst those still in education... primarily for the activities one would expect – for doing their own research and a quiet place to study.'

'Secondary activities vary across the groups although doing own research remains important.

All in all, 'there is a high degree of possible latent demand – people who have not been to a public library, but who have done an activity which could be done there, such as borrowing a book.

'Therefore there is the potential that many of these people could become library users if the offer better meets their needs.'

Or, I would submit, if they ever found out what's available in their library...

**Report: www.culture.gov.uk/images/research/Libraries_omnibus.pdf
Data: www.culture.gov.uk/images/research/Libraries_Omnibus_Research.pdf**

What people want!

Unison continues its campaign to save public libraries...

PUBLIC libraries belong in 'the framework of an accountable publicly owned and provided service, rooted in the local community, responsive to it and worthy of the trust extended to it by local people'. Outsourcing (to a commercial or charitable body) is untried and unnecessary.

This is the core message as Unison steps up its campaign with a new report.¹

It combines a survey of public library staff and a report of Unison's 'people's inquiry' day, held in February – with library users and frontline staff to the fore.

Both were compiled by Steve Davies, the Cardiff academic who wrote Taking Stock², Unison's first anti-cuts report in December 2008 (The Campaigner, summer 2009).

The inquiry day aimed to 'hear from those whose voices had previously remained unheard – users of the service, supporters of the service and library staff'.

One key problem identified was: 'There is an awareness, and increasingly an expectation, that libraries contribute to a council's broader social aims' – but no change to the old 'silo' budgeting process. So funds are not moved into libraries.

But one library manager said that many councillors still don't understand that 'libraries contribute to the well-being of society and the aims of councils in general, rather than just the people who come in and borrow books'.

Librarians' association CILIP backed up this argument – even more true during a recession – but also urged smarter use of existing resources through shared services/locations, better procurement, national deals on e-services, etc.

Worryingly, one delegate said that staff not only felt undervalued by their council, but that 'the workforce's contribution to the success of the [new] library was not recognised by senior management'.

The Unison survey showed staff felt far more valued by the public than by their

There is a balance to be struck between providing what current library users want and providing what is attractive to those that do not currently use the library service. Some argue that in reaching out to the latter group, some authorities have drifted away from the most important part of the library service – books. However, it does not follow that reaching out to the wider community requires abandoning the central focus on books. It may be as simple as ensuring that the premises are welcoming and pleasant to visit, that opening hours are convenient, and that bookstock is varied and of good quality.



own managers, and felt least valued of all by their local authority (see box). This is very scary news, when local authorities are being forced to make drastic cuts in the services they run.

Among many points raised in the report are training, updating and career development – important at all levels.

Most needed are 'stock management, search strategies (including traditional sources), display and promotion and – above all – customer service'.

'Despite relatively low pay and many other problems,' Unison asserts, 'library staff are committed to their work.'

'Almost 60 per cent of survey respondents agreed that there was a public service ethos among library staff.'

During this campaign, UNISON is focusing on five themes:

- **adequate resources and funding for library services, staff and premises**
- **empowerment of staff and communities to shape services together**
- **partnership working between libraries and councils across the UK to share information and good practice**
- **responsiveness to library users from all backgrounds**
- **provision of staff training and professional development**

A reader development librarian told the inquiry that there were two reasons she joined the library service. The first was a recognition that 'the main aim is to extol the benefits of reading' and the second was that she was 'very conscious of the information-rich and information-poor divide and I realised that this was linked with literacy and money' and that libraries could do something about this. Evidence to the inquiry highlighted the many roles played by libraries in local communities and, although books remain central to libraries, they also offer much more. Arguably, they always have done.

Unison's staff survey, January 2010

CUTS

- Library has cut/delayed services in past two years: 42.7%;
- Staffing inadequate in my library: 62%;
- Cuts in training budget in past two years: 35.3%;
- Feel insecure in my post: 61%

VOLUNTEERS

- My authority encourages use of volunteers: 53.6%;
- Volunteers are mostly supervised by staff: 76.8%

CHANGE

- Seen changes in the service in past two years: 93.1%;
- Consulted before change: 48.5%;
- Change included staff cuts: 77%;
- Positive developments in my library: 47.7%;
- Investment in my library service: 51.5%

CAREER

- My training was adequate: 61.2%;
- Cuts to training budget in past two years: 35%;
- There are career development opportunities in my service: 33.8%;
- No career development opportunities in my service: 51.1%;
- I would recommend the library service as a career: 35%;
- I would not recommend the library service as a career: 42.5%

MORALE

- I feel stressed at work: 65.7%;
- Morale is very low or low: 66%;
- Morale is high or very high: 6.6%;
- I feel valued by management: 38%;
- I feel valued by the public: 88%;
- My local authority does not value the library service: 60%

¹ The people's inquiry into the public library service: www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/19151.pdf

² Taking Stock: www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/17301.pdf

Local libraries matter!

UNISON continues to fight to maintain the terms and conditions of those working in the public sector. You would not expect anything less. All of us depend on public services or state support for anything approaching a civilised existence.

The future does not look rosy from where we are standing. If you are curious about what the future might look like, look no further than a Conservative council near you. Tory-led local government boasts of having made 50% more cuts – aka ‘efficiencies’ – than required by central government in the last spending review period.

23,000 jobs disappeared in the past year, through redundancies or deleting ‘frozen’ posts. Core services – especially in adult social care – are already being axed by the minute. Over 1.4 million workers – two-thirds earning less than £18,000 – have had their pay frozen. Both major parties were guilty of choosing to freeze – or cut – council tax and reduce the local public funding base, long before the elections.

Alongside losing day centres, residential homes and jobs in home care (yes, home care) and social work (yes, social work), comes an assault on the public library service, with closures and restrictions mushrooming.

UNISON believes that local libraries represent a higher point in our common culture than many bankers, businessmen or council leaders seem able to comprehend. They are worth fighting for. We have been talking to library users, campaigners, writers and library workers to find out how we can protect and improve them in an era of austerity.

We find ourselves interestingly at one with Rolling Stone Keith Richard. Keith, while having trouble organising his own substantial book collection, recently professed a secret longing to be a librarian. He described the importance of the public library to him: ‘When you are growing up, there are two institutional places that affect you most powerfully: the church, which belongs to God, and the public library, which belongs to you. The public library is a great equaliser.’

UNISON’s campaign to preserve this

The autumn spending review will slash national department budgets. But for public libraries, the fight will be at local level. Heather Wakefield, Head of the Local Government Service Group of Unison, sets the scene.



treasured ‘equaliser’ comes at a time when library statistics are posing difficult questions. In 2006-7, 337m visits were made to 4,500 of them. That’s more than to football matches and the cinema. Yet 40 libraries closed that year.

More closures have followed. There are now just 3,500 libraries, with a 2.1% decline in library users to just (!) 12m last year, with young people least likely to use them. Nonetheless, loans to children have increased to 85m since 2003-4, despite being fewer than a decade ago.

The fall in library usage coincides with some other interesting facts. The official (CIPFA) survey in 1995-6 showed a UK total of 124m books. 2008-9 will show a reduction to 95m. This is probably an overestimate, since few libraries now hold an annual stock audit – Birmingham, for instance, has cut its book fund every year for ten years. The national figure could be as low as 57m.

Long opening hours have suffered: 160 libraries were open for more than 60 hours weekly in 1975-6. Twenty years later, that had shrunk to just nine. Small wonder that ‘footfall’ has dropped.

Ground-breaking

In 2008 we published ‘Taking Stock: The Future of our Public Library Service’ (Spring 2009 *Campaigner*). UNISON’s recent Peoples’ Inquiry (see page 5) generated much debate about how to extend opening hours, use volunteers, fund new buildings, the future for e-books, public access to IT and the role of libraries within local communities. Some fascinating observations were made....

Libraries host many ground-breaking initiatives such as book clubs for the visually impaired, children and the mentally ill. A ‘Book Express’ service in Newport supports postal lending. Outreach work in schools and day centres is commonplace. Access to computers

and the internet is widespread, although it could be better in areas of poor reception (eg, Herefordshire).

New super-libraries can be high on design, but low on books (eg, Tower Hamlets’ Idea Stores). Small, old buildings can house wonderful book collections (Amersham). Libraries ‘co-located’ with other council services can get ‘lost’ and lose their appeal. Establishing a library trust doesn’t guarantee high quality service or good treatment of staff.

Alongside UNISON’s Inquiry came our survey of over 2,500 frontline library staff (see page 5). Two-thirds feel stressed and have low morale. Despite this, over 60% believe libraries still have a strong public service ethos.

In these testing times, many will derive their sense of belonging and access to the world from public services. Genuine community cohesion will be generated by public service workers, helping poor and vulnerable people to ‘a piece of the earth’.

This sense of wellbeing and belonging will be nowhere more acutely felt than in our public libraries – already used by many millions. It takes little imagination or wit to recognise that they hold the secret to improved literacy, support for learning, access to the world of IT and community wellbeing. Let’s just hope local councils are cute enough to recognise it.

CHANGE IS OVERDUE

– a public charter for libraries

We are currently in a situation where two thirds of people in the UK read in their free time yet only one third of the population visit libraries. Why is this the case when libraries offer 24 hr web services, are open to all and provide access, free of charge, to books and an array of other interesting reading materials? Either it is because a public library service is not relevant today or, the more likely, libraries are not meeting the needs and wants of their local communities.

For too long the public library service and its management have been unresponsive to and disconnected from users and potential users. The essential value of public libraries needs to be reinforced at both local and national level and a focused effort must be made to see libraries fulfil their role and maintain their relevance for generations to come.

1. MAKE THE LIBRARIES LOCAL

Individual libraries, large and small, need to be empowered and resourced to meet the specific needs of their local communities. The individuality of each library cannot be overstated and libraries need the freedom to operate independently.

2. INCREASE OPENING HOURS

In today's society it is unforgivable that some libraries close for lunch or on certain weekdays. Providing access to library services means opening libraries at times when the community wants them open – late closing and weekend opening should be the norm.

3. IMPROVE LIBRARY COLLECTIONS

Library collections, book stocks and other resources have been neglected almost everywhere and they need to be restored, maintained and made accessible. This means increased funding for new stock, replacement stock and giving the public access to special collections.

4. IMPROVE THE LIBRARY ENVIRONMENT

All public libraries should be attractive and dignified places to visit and in which to read and study. They need to be kept clean, safe and smart. Standards of interior design need to be raised and building architecture used to best effect. Appropriate local events and activities are important.

5. EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY

While books should remain the focus for libraries, computers and technology can enhance users' experience. With this in mind, computers and all associated equipment need to be in good working order and kept up to date. Internet-based services, available round the clock, add value for many users and should be extended and promoted.

6. LIBERATE THE LIBRARY STAFF

Service to the public should be of a high professional standard. All staff, long or short term, full time or temporary, should be trained for the roles they undertake. Volunteers are welcome for many aspects of the service, but they cannot take the place of skilled librarians in provision of the day to day service to readers.

7. COLLABORATE AND SHARE BEST PRACTICE

Collaboration between neighbouring authorities will make limited resources go further and sharing best practice will mean all libraries are better able to meet users' expectations. A range of funding sources is available and councils need to explore the options and consult people about proposed change.

8. DON'T WASTE MONEY

Accurate, meaningful and consistent reporting of library budgets and expenditure will encourage accountability and openness and mean all budget discussions are grounded in facts.

9. PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK

Performance reporting should be timely, accurate and clear. Every month councils should report publicly the key usage figures for each library within their responsibility.

10. ENGAGE INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES

There needs to be a substantial, genuine effort to build trust between councils, government bodies, library professionals and library users. Local councillors must all be fully and properly informed about library matters and libraries should actively work with their users in managing their libraries.

11. DON'T CLOSE LIBRARIES

Of course sometimes building development means that libraries have to move; library services can be provided more efficiently in newer facilities; sometimes closures can be justified. However residents are distrustful of assurances of improvement and the onus is on councils to demonstrate the benefits of proposed changes before they are made. Savings from library closures will be tiny compared to the animosity generated among library users. Many library users belong to groups sometimes marginalized by society – the elderly, the unemployed, single-parent families – and the negative impact on these people's lives following library closures can outweigh any cost savings.

12. MAKE AND KEEP A PROMISE

Public library users call upon councils to commit themselves to achieving the aims of this charter.

DO YOU AGREE?

Add your own local details and sign up to The Library Alliance

Why have a Charter?

THE Charter has been launched. What does it mean for the Library Campaign? Our Executive Committee has supported the charter from the beginning.

It may be helpful to explain why: including the process that led up to that support, and what we – and you – can do with it now that it has been published.

The Campaign is, by a distance, the longest standing organisation representing library users/friends, but in recent years a number of others have made a public name for themselves in support of broadly the same things.

They include Tim Coates (ex-Waterstone's), Desmond Clarke (ex-Faber), Alan Gibbons (children's author and one-man Campaign for the Book) and Shirley Burnham (Swindon Old Town library). Tim was recently voted chair of Libraries for Life for Londoners – LLL – the London federation of user groups.

Largely prompted by Tim, we all felt we should try to come up with a single national focus for activity to support libraries.

This would build on work done over the last few years to maintain a general public profile for library users and, in more depth, in places under threat like Wirral and Swindon.

Now the recession and public spending cuts are likely to hit libraries just as much

as any other service (more, if you believe some people.)

So the Charter was drafted. Over several weeks, there was a lot of mostly electronic discussion. I don't think anyone can deny that, as finally agreed, it is a lowest common denominator exercise.

Amongst the points of debate were the following:

- Many of us wanted a more positive introduction.
- A number of people thought the section on technology was too weak and treats IT as an afterthought rather than a central pillar of the modern public library service.
- The section on staff was particularly controversial. Most users of a library speak of any member of staff they meet as a 'librarian'. Staff who have a library and information science qualification sometimes feel undermined by that. Equally, if you call the staff 'professional', that should surely refer to all of them, whatever qualifications they have, in that all should be striving to supply a professional service.
- There was some discussion of the sections on collaboration and on funding. Does partnership mean getting away from what libraries should be doing, or is it another way of getting

money and putting the library in front of its actual or potential users?

- Most crucially, what about the clause in section 11 'sometimes closure can be justified'? For the original Library Campaign that would have been a deal breaker. We opposed all closures. Now that we are a charity we cannot take such a blanket view. But others may feel uneasy – seeing that clause as a loophole for councils to point at when they say 'We agree with the Charter and of course it does say that sometimes...'

So the final product will not please everyone. But it is something that can be built on locally.

We encourage users and local groups to give it to their local library services. Not just the senior managers, but – probably more importantly – to councillors.

Nationally the Campaign will be considering how we can use the Charter. It was on our website within a couple of days of being published, and we had a useful discussion at our well-attended AGM on 10 July.

No doubt at our next meeting – and in between, by email etc – we will come up with other ways to use it. Give us your ideas. Tell us what happens when you use it locally.

Andrew Coburn

WHAT LIBRARIES CAN DO...

Prison library (Edinburgh) – Winner of the 2010 CILIP Libraries Change Lives Award

It costs £31,106 a year to house one prisoner. If just one does not re-offend for a year, it pays for the library at HMP Edinburgh (Saughton).

The old library was (dauntingly) in the education department, staffed by a (trained) prison officer with little time. The prison funded a new one – professionally planned, partly designed, built, decorated, stock-selected and staffed by prisoners. Edinburgh public libraries (ECLIS) funds the stock and joint-funds a full-time professional librarian.

The change is stunning: visits up from 30 to 200 weekly (plus waiting list), staff membership from 19 to 56, stock damage down from 80 per cent to zero. Partners include Salvation Army Family Support, Scottish Arts Council, Scottish Premier League, Scottish Book Trust, Families Outside, Storybook Dads and the prison's art department.

Projects from 'outside' include Reading Stars, Six Book Challenge and the city-wide One Book – One Edinburgh. Activities have included a sports quiz and training with rugby professionals, a Burns session, author visits, 10 prisoners trained in library skills (one may get a job with ECLIS) – and 63 referrals to courses (including parenting). Unique to this prison are family days (sometimes with ECLIS's book bus).



Users say:

'When I first came... I would have to read the same paragraph over and over, but after practising all the time I find reading just as easy as breathing. Reading fills me with wonder and lets me use my imagination.'

'I have felt so good after [family events], my children and partner have left feeling very happy at being able to spend some quality time with [me] ... Families can feel a bit more normal.'

Things to come ...

Don't expect libraries to be spared from the cuts of 25% – or more – that will be demanded of all public services. More will be known after the autumn's formal spending review decides how much local authorities will get. But this will only be the start. The amount to be spent on libraries is decided by each local council. Library supporters will have to find out what their own council is planning ... The Charter sets out the priorities that most library users agree on. What alternative savings are possible?

CUTS and closures in library services are starting to be announced. Nottingham is planning to close two branches, Lewisham is eyeing up five.

Cambridgeshire is looking at its whole service, with talk of more volunteer-run branches as well as the closure of four in the suburbs of Cambridge because a newly refurbished central library has just opened. And there will be more, I'm sure.

In some places it may not be closure but cuts in the bookfund – in one service 15% has gone this month.

At a conference I attended recently the numbers 25-40% were being gaily used as a measure of the scale of cuts (I'm sorry, savings) required.

In that climate it will be difficult, if not impossible, for any authority to argue that the 'savings' will improve their service, as has been done in some places in recent years.

For library supporters the question is – what should be our response?

It is easy enough to say that we are

opposed to these measures and demonstrate against them. Councils will ask: 'What is your alternative?'

At the macro level we may want to say: 'Get out of Afghanistan, impose the Tobin tax, get the money back from the bankers' etc. Even if this had much chance of success, it would be a longer-term solution than we have time for. Council plans are being put into practice by the week.

Part of the answer may well be to increase efficiency. From my day job I know that many library services have not yet found all the uses of technology they could employ, to reduce costs/time in backroom processes, rather than the front of house or the bookfund.

There is also a case for examining the central costs that are recharged by councils to individual services for things they are obliged to have (IT or financial

Yes, minister?

The new minister for libraries, Ed Vaizey, made his first policy speech on 1 July. This was his message to local councils – and library users.

"I will champion libraries – I will do my best to link them to national priorities and... big agendas like digital inclusion, the Big Society, health, education. I want you to do the same at local level. I want to continue to hear about innovative partnerships... [and] delivering on key policies... we must show more flexibility, more innovation and more teamwork than ever. Library users will be right to challenge where frontline services are closed if services haven't thought about some radical efficiency options – shared services, merging functions or staffing across authorities or public services, use of volunteers or other community buildings."

WHAT LIBRARIES CAN DO...

Miss (Manchester)

– Runner-up in the 2010 CILIP Libraries Change Lives Award

Manchester Libraries plus Macmillan Cancer Support equals Miss (Macmillan Information & Support Service). It has three branded Macmillan points in larger libraries (refurbished by Macmillan), with Macmillan advisers (paid by libraries).

Advice covers benefits, childcare, hospital problems etc, as well as cancer information. Miss also offers confidential personal sessions. In all libraries, staff feel empowered to handle/refer cancer queries.

Miss is for all – patients, family, survivors, the worried well. The informal local setting relaxes people and complements NHS services.

Partners include adult social care, the NHS, the libraries' Health Matters team, Regional Cancer Information Managers and community volunteers.

In 2009, 1,100 people attended events; 1,000 leaflets etc were given out (most about prevention); 154 people had private sessions. Miss fits local council priorities and is a blueprint for further collaborations.



Users say:

'I can never find anything on the internet. It's really helpful to phone someone who can tell me where to look for what I want.'

'I already feel better. This is the first time I've ever spoken to anyone about my treatment and what happened to me.'

'After the bad news at the hospital, it was a real comfort to know I was coming to see you today.'

services, for example.) This, too, will be a longer-term solution unless the authority is looking at these issues already.

One argument against cuts is to point out the small savings made by closing a small branch – particularly if the building has to be maintained afterwards anyway.

The danger of this, of course, is that the response is: ‘OK, we will keep that open but the £x thousand pounds will come from the bookfund.’

One response used by library managers is to say: ‘Can we get money from elsewhere?’

Many library services are now part of bigger departments such as Adult Social Services or Children & Families. In such cases there is money for projects on literacy, healthy living, independent living for old people, etc.

The trend is to tap in to those agendas and get money for specific projects.

Alongside that, ‘joined up’ thinking, much-hyped by the last government, is getting some practical application through ideas such as ‘Total Place’ – streamlining together all public spending on a client group, including all tiers of councils, the NHS, police, central government etc.

The current government is not throwing out the basic idea, although it is

Customise the Charter

The Charter is a starting point. Ask your council to sign up. But first, see if you want to add your own items, to suit the special needs of your area. For instance...

- What steps are they taking to ensure that money is not being spent on inappropriate things?
- What are appropriate opening hours in different parts of your area?
- Is there a special local collection that you want to refer to specifically?
- Are there specific activities that are crying out for development?
- Can you mention library services that fit especially well with the council’s own stated priorities?
- What help are you willing to give? Get your own ideas in first!

of course being rebranded (‘place-based budgeting’, I heard this week).

Libraries are again seeing space where they can bid for money to run activities with some of those other agencies.

There are those who feel that this attempt to get involved in non-traditional, arguably non-core, library activities is misguided. They say in effect that libraries should ‘stick to the knitting’. I don’t see that.

Like it or not, public libraries are a local authority service. They are never going to be unique, not having to respond to the wider council agendas. There may well be times when they have to say ‘no’ – if only because they don’t

have the capacity to do everything.

But to convince politicians and council officers that they are serious, I see no reason why they should not explore some of these other avenues – so long as they safeguard the core service. It’s no use asking for extra money to run an event for older people if there is nothing that visually impaired people can borrow, or a children’s activity if there are no books for them to take home.

Whatever your view of the proper role of a public library service, nobody said it would be easy in the recession. As supporters of libraries, we should not let that stop us arguing the case.

Andrew Coburn

TELL US WHAT YOU ARE DOING LOCALLY. GIVE US YOUR IDEAS.

And follow the Charter – and the news – on our website www.librarycampaign.com

WHAT LIBRARIES CAN DO...

Home from Home (Barking & Dagenham) – Runner-up in the 2010 CILIP Libraries Change Lives Award

It’s a simple idea – bring people to books, not books to people. The housebound service visits 400 individuals (aged 30 to 100) and over 30 sheltered communities, community centres, etc. Now all are invited to the libraries’ events.

More than 70 have been to one or more events. The council’s accessible transport service is used (during downtime, so it is good value). The drivers are seen as friends, and are ‘very enthusiastic and helpful’.

So are the local Primary Care Trust, police and Heritage Department. It’s an easy way to contact hard-to-reach people. Activities have included talks (e.g. on health, crime prevention, local history, Ethiopia), reminiscence, a carol concert and library events such as Black History Month and Living Libraries (‘borrowing’ people for conversation – including elected members). Plans (after consulting users) include visits to parks and heritage sites, education activities.

The scheme fits local council priorities, and helped it gain Level 5 of the Equality Standard for Local Government.

Users say:

‘It’s unusual for me to have one conversation during the day, let alone over a dozen.’

‘It was very very interesting and really different. We were really treated like individuals, and that doesn’t often happen these days.’

‘For a small investment of time and money, it’s making a big difference to the lives of an important group of our residents’ – Council leader.



What Friends/User Groups want!

THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN

THE Library Campaign believes public libraries should remain under the control of local authorities, to ensure responsiveness to local demand and circumstances.

However, it is right that a central government department should have some oversight of libraries in all forms.

On more than one occasion councillors (including cabinet members responsible for libraries) have told Library Campaign supporters that if libraries were not statutory they would be content to close some – or even all – of them.

It is also a common experience to find that decision-making councillors have no idea what their library service does, let alone what more it could do (Wirral comes to mind).

Public libraries can and do contribute to other public services. In some cases they take the lead, whether it be school class visits, summer holiday reading for children, providing 'books' (in a variety of formats) to the housebound elderly, or loaning energy monitors as part of a broader environmental initiative. This must continue, and there is enormous potential for expansion.

Much is likely to depend on leadership and management, especially (though not only) at local level. Other public services should know what they can offer. Funders should be aware of the library's involvement – and that it does not necessarily come cheap or free.

However strong the contract between a local authority and an outside provider (trust, company etc), the bottom line is that a citizen cannot remove the people who control the service if it is being run in ways they do not like. That is why the Campaign has always supported direct provision.

Role of friends/user groups

We strongly support library authorities engaging with their communities over library services – both users and non-users.

Where there are Friends/ user groups we know that some have had very fruitful dialogue. At the very least we support stronger links of this sort, specifically for libraries (rather than generic citizens' panels etc.) Where this can be worked into mainstream activity, it need not be a burden.

Ideally we would like to see strong and active user groups in every library

In March this year, a government plan for public libraries was published. Then the government changed. There's little point in reading it now. What's worth reading is the evidence sent in by various Friends/user groups. Here it is, somewhat cut down. They don't agree with each other completely, but there are some common themes...

authority, and associated with every branch. Some authorities have initiated these and supported their continued existence (Sutton and Northamptonshire spring to mind). Others have grown from users getting together independently, but now have a good relationship with the council (Sandwell, for instance.)

Many run extensive programmes of events, clubs, ICT training, childrens' workshops, art exhibitions, garden projects etc. These expand the usage and relevance

practices. These need to be encouraged if, for instance, they can save money or draw on funding from outside bodies which cover more than one library authority area.

Many digital services are provided by libraries. Because many would at one time have been provided from reference books, we strongly believe they should be free.

As more online services develop we hope that as many as possible will also be free, especially e-books and e-audio. We do not see, nor do we want to, the end of the printed book but we recognise that e-services are becoming more accessible.

Libraries should be getting involved in them (albeit with an eye to future trends so that they don't over commit to something that may die as a format).

The ICT revolution gives new potential for people in small libraries (and at home) to access a fuller range of services, from the catalogue to education materials to all the major reference titles.

We are still very far from having an internet connection (let alone broadband) in every home. Even if this were the case, many

people need advice and support in finding what is available, getting the best from ICT – and avoiding the worst.

We do not support self-service machines simply to save money and reduce staffing. If the library is to be part of the community and a welcoming place, it should not feel like a bank foyer out of hours.

The provision of branch libraries needs to have account of local circumstances, not just theoretical provision. The fact that the next library is 'only' a mile way as the crow flies is no help to a young mother who has to take her children on two buses to get there.

Local community views need to be paramount. This should include user/friends groups, other active community groups and schools (these might use the branch for class visits, and also for pupils to study quietly out of school).



Coffee ... attracting readers in Alton, Hants.

of the service, with no extra input by staff. They also raise funds for non-core expenses, use local networks to give extra publicity and serve as an initial 'bridge' to the local community through their local knowledge and contacts with community groups (Lambeth groups do all of these.)

All these examples indicate that growing user involvement can be valuable. Where there have been less friendly or structured links, we still believe it is vital to have articulate groups supporting the library service and able to advocate as outsiders.

Many library services already work well with other public services such as the NHS, youth service or education/children's department, and often receive funding from them.

There are also growing numbers of purchasing consortia and joint working

Read all the evidence at:

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/consultations/6752.aspx

The Wirral report [*The Campaigner*, winter 2009] serves as a thorough case study to illustrate this. If there is difficulty in justifying a stand-alone building, combining with another public service should be recommended.

Libraries are arguably the local service most well distributed across communities.

We are particularly concerned that the number of elderly and vulnerable people living at home is increasing. In some authorities the service to these people is under strain. It often relies on volunteers. This cannot be assumed to continue indefinitely.

Such people often represent the traditional library user at a later stage of life. Libraries should continue to try to attract new audiences – especially those who do not know about libraries but would find them really helpful (as opposed to those who are aware but have other interests.)

New and traditional

But services must be careful to balance provision so that it can serve both new and traditional audiences. If current users like something as it is, this may be precisely why non-users are not coming to the library – so their views need to be sought too.

As the only national body that represents library users/friends we would welcome the opportunity for library users to get more involved in decision-making.

There have been successful exercises in involving users in stock selection. Opening hours are another area where users should be consulted directly. Different experiences should be compared and best practice drawn up (and on).

A minimum standard for consultation is needed. The seemingly endless problems in, for example, Swindon and Wirral show why. Standards might usefully include provision for the views submitted to be given a public response. We often hear about letters, petitions etc disappearing into the Town Hall and never being referred to again.

Publicity is a serious problem – and the solution would be very simple. We constantly find that people are not aware of what their local service offers. When they accidentally find out, they are amazed.

The remedies include better signage, conventional advertising and consciously forging links with schools/nurseries/community groups etc.

Nationally the spectacular success of the straightforward ‘join your library’ campaign by the National Year of Reading in 2008 (2.3m new members) shows how worthwhile this would be.

We have no strong view on libraries selling coffee or food if it does not compromise the space available and the primary library functions. Facilities like this may attract people to libraries, where they may then use the core services. We support partnerships such as those between the Reading Agency and Orange (Chatterbooks clubs for children) and Costa (the Six Book Challenge for adult learners).

We start from the position that no public library should be closed. That said, there are circumstances in which an alternative may be offered. But poor use should never be taken on face value. Has any work been done to find out why use is poor and/ or try and increase it? Has it been properly publicised/ marketed? Are the opening hours/stock/staff suitable? Has consideration been given to an alternative venue, or a partner in using the building?

In rural communities the desire to provide a consistent level of service should not mean that because community X has no library and community Y (similarly sized) has, the latter should lose its library. The aim should be levelling up.

Some provision, even unstaffed, is better than none at all, though it should not preclude a staffed mobile library.

We cannot say that all libraries should be provided in dedicated buildings. It is more important that the building is fit for purpose and accessible.

Some traditional library skills, such as cataloguing, stock selection and specialist knowledge of children’s reading, appear to be dropping off the library education agenda. This is regrettable. Not all these skills can be learnt on the job or bought in – there is a place for qualified librarians in every service.

However there is also need for good customer care and other attributes such as presentational and coaching skills. These may not all be traditional to library staff.

Volunteers

What also needs to be inculcated, if it is not there already, is the ethos of public service and a vision of what the library service is for.

Volunteers have long worked with employed staff eg, in local history, services to the housebound. We would not want this to cease. There may be other roles they could fill. Volunteering is a way of involving young people and extending capacity to enable a wider/ richer provision of a service.

But replacing employed staff with volunteers is not appropriate. If authorities want to extend the use of volunteers they should get full staff agreement and look at areas for which there is a proven interest.

We would like to see more monitoring, not least of how many libraries have opened/ closed in a year. This is a fundamental piece of data, but ministers are almost always unable to provide it.

Visits and borrowing are important and should still be used as a gauge. However they leave out issues such as the quantity and quality of stock. More should be done in this regard. If the number of visits/ issues is down could this have something to do with the fact that people are not interested in what is on the shelves?

Much more thorough analysis of existing data is urgently needed, to give guidance on the reasons for the success of the many services that are achieving dramatic increases in library usage.

FRIENDS OF LAMBETH LIBRARIES

IN this London borough several library closures have taken place. Only 10 years ago, we had to fight hard to save three out of five under threat. We start from the premise that libraries are absolutely essential to local communities. We urge that this premise should never be undermined.

It follows that an efficient and comprehensive library service should be a statutory obligation. Only in this way

can there be a proper response to the needs of communities which, in a multi-racial, multi-cultural Britain, may vary enormously in their composition and requirements.

We see, too often, how in times of financial stringency local authorities can be swift to maintain other services at the expense of libraries. It must be the job of central government to ensure they fulfil their statutory obligations. It should do so more actively than it did in Wirral.

IT has undoubtedly changed people’s expectations of what a library should offer. It has also put people in touch

with sources of information for which they do not have to go to a library. It is not, we suppose, likely that such technology will eventually become as much a part of every home’s equipment as a telephone. Libraries will remain useful for people seeking IT access, but they may find that the need gradually lessens rather than increasing.

There is thus a continuing need for hard copy, of which books are the universal form. Libraries should be full of books. The essentials are good bookstock, an accessible location and real quality of premises.

Maintaining and improving

FRIENDS OF STONY STRATFORD LIBRARY

THE strength of libraries is their local provision and their availability to all age and social groups. In Stony Stratford it is the only building freely available to all. That is why the friends have concentrated on a free programme of events which in 2009 attracted 700 people.

Libraries offer a great opportunity to provide a healthy mixture of learning and leisure; in Leighton Buzzard the library is attached to a small theatre; until Buckinghamshire County Council closed it, Milton Keynes Central Library had a gallery which was better used than the present one.

Libraries should be exploited for lectures, workshops, concerts and drama. We initiated four reading groups, which now operate independently, and occasional groups to read poetry and plays.

Workshops for children in holidays are grant aided by the Town Council. The relationship of schools and libraries needs more exploration and development.

All libraries should be considered suitable accommodation for services both statutory and voluntary, and in particular the supply of information.

Libraries are places where the goal of 'partnership' can be exploited. The Stony Stratford Futures Group is purchasing exhibition cabinets for the library, for permanent displays on the town's history.

The library is the natural focus for visitors to the town, as happens nationally in many similar places.

The quality of the bookstock is vital. Unfortunately many councils have found it an easy option to cut the budget for new books. The existence of a comprehensive reference section in local libraries is essential.

We question the assumption of a decline in library use. There are changes of use and there are libraries which are not attractive to users through bad management and/or dull presentation. It is important to be aware of the way libraries may be used over a lifetime, with concentrated use in childhood and retirement.



Computers and expert staff... Scottish TV used Dundee Central Library's family history centre to research a programme on Captain Kidd. Specialist staff traced several vital documents about this local pirate.

The library computers are always busy. Users are not only those who come through the door but also those who use online services, or receive books at home delivered by volunteers.

Attendance figures should be used to

establish the times when libraries need to open. The use of volunteers is possibly controversial; certainly no use of volunteers should threaten professional and full/part time staffing.

However, volunteers might be of use under professional management for some functions, for which they could be trained.

As long as it is possible for a quieter space to be set aside, libraries should now be places of meeting and discussion. Commercial services such as coffee machines should be considered.

The library service needs a large enough training budget to ensure that staff are equipped to use and advise on all appropriate IT.

There need to be sufficient computers to allow access to book texts online. The availability online in university libraries of journals should be copied by public libraries.

Any move to change responsibility for the library service to an independent/quasi-commercial enterprise, or away from local government, needs to be resisted.

Libraries are a service people can experience directly, by holding a book or sitting at a computer. Many people are prepared to pay higher taxes for such services.

Libraries are an essential part of our learning and leisure, and a key component of the local network of organisations and facilities. They should never be considered as an easy option for financial cuts.

bookstock should be tackled through partnerships, which can secure valuable discounts through bulk buying. Where co-operation with a local bookshop is possible, this should always be undertaken. It is important that libraries should not become rivals to booksellers. The book trade is also a vital national asset.

Most of our libraries in Lambeth were provided by generous benefactors. They were usually built in community centres where accessibility still remains high. Although many are old buildings, this is not a disadvantage if there is good maintenance and

repair. They make a significant contribution to the local architectural environment; their familiarity makes them objects of affection and reassurance. New buildings can be very fine, but they may also be intimidating. Adaptations in the old ones can prove both more economical and more attractive.

The assertion that 56% of adults have literacy skills below the level of a good GCSE is horrifying. We strongly support schemes to encourage reading among the young. This is when an ability can be turned into a habit.

Libraries which have windows easily

seen by the public should arrange eye-catching displays. Interiors should be made welcoming with the odd vase of flowers or potted plant, perhaps a coffee machine, and chairs that are comfortable to sit on (or in!).

Last (but by no means least) the development of friends groups in every library should be encouraged and supported. Friends are excellent publicists for their libraries; they arrange talks and events, co-operate closely with staff, know their neighbourhoods and can form an effective nucleus of any local consultation.

FRIENDS OF WEYMOUTH LIBRARY

LIBRARIES should have a common purpose, with each having flexibility within the system (ie, taking account of the populace within the locality). Central government and local authorities should make better use of the public library service to communicate local matters.

Libraries should be able to control their own budgets for bookstock and day-to-day activities. Local companies could be encouraged to donate/contribute, in return for an opportunity to promote themselves within the library.

Society is making more use of IT, and this must be a part of the future of the library service.

Self-service should be available in all libraries. However, consideration should be given to those who, for whatever reason, do not wish to use it. It is important that there is still interaction between library staff and the public.

There should be a national online catalogue covering all public libraries. Library membership should be

national. It should be possible to request books online.

There should be more publicity, with particular emphasis on attracting younger people into libraries. More could be done by advertising in the local press, radio and shops. Encourage the formation of friends' groups.

Libraries should not be privatised. They could take note of how the commercial sector advertise and promote their products, and adapt some methods to promote libraries.

The only justification for closing a library is very low usage, but first an

investigation should be held to find the reasons. Libraries are a public amenity and should be closed only as a last resort.

Co-location could be successful when a new complex is being built. It is not important that a library should be in a dedicated building. It is difficult to see how unstaffed mini-libraries could work.

Library courses should have relevant content and teach the right skills, but this does not always seem to be the case. Who determines what the right skills are?

Staff should have good communication skills and enjoy working with the public. Those who show good leadership skills and initiative should be encouraged.

It is important that at least one member of staff is a qualified librarian. Volunteers should be used only for additional activities, not to replace existing library staff.

The service should carry out surveys in all libraries to find out whether they are benefiting the local population. Local press and radio should be used to initiate discussions on the service.



Attracting younger people... highly successful children's Summer Reading Challenge in Cornwall – and nationwide.

FRIENDS OF COLEHILL LIBRARY

DORSET Libraries is one of the best services we have. Our local library is open when we can access it, has a good book stock, and it is very easy to request books and obtain them.

It is a bright and cheerful place, where we have a very knowledgeable and helpful librarian; we meet friends and can read the local newspapers daily. Book issues are not declining here.

We want to keep our library open. This is our main concern. Library users place much value on convenience and accessibility. Library users are, in the main, voters.

The nature of information access is rapidly changing. It would be difficult to predict how this will change in the future.

For the short term, however, we have a significant proportion/ many older users for whom digital information access is too difficult. They still need their library.

Similarly, for young children learning to read, there is no better stimulus than having a large collection of interesting books readily accessible.

All people need the ability to read, and the more this is stimulated the better. One cannot exist in the digital world without this capability.

Books are terrific. They are easily carried, can be used anywhere, and are not difficult on the eyes. Will one be able to say the same of technological replacements? This remains to be seen.

One book suits all readers; we don't want to have a different electronic book for different titles. The dust has to settle here.

Libraries need to have modern technology, and introductory training in its use. They can easily demonstrate that they have relevance in today's world.

A library cannot contain everything people want, but has cross-library access.

Thus my small village library has available so much more than just what is on its shelves. Perhaps a solution is for the county library service to print books as required.

But the library cannot be just a club for those that know about it. It must go out to the community and tell them what it can do for them. And it must start young. Let people know what is available.

Publish lists of new materials and facilities. Work with local schools (not just primary but also middle and upper schools) to assist and expand the research materials of students.

Can they bring their laptops and have wireless access to augment what they can find in the library? Could there be dedicated electronic newspaper readers available in the library?

Smaller computers, on the line of netbooks with wireless access, could be borrowed within the library. If somebody wants immediate access to a particular book, a digital copy can be obtained from the publisher at very short notice.

There are three types of people: IT-shy, IT users and children. We need to cater for all, and assist people in moving from the first or last to the middle.

Libraries are doing well. No changes should be made without serious and considered consultation.

FRIENDS OF STREATHAM VALE LIBRARY

FRIENDS groups are in many respects the real experts on public libraries. They have detailed knowledge of local catchment areas and good contacts with community groups that could both use and help develop the facilities. We are an obvious resource, but are too often ignored at both national and local authority level.

The small local library will be the focus of much attention as public service cuts are sought. At the very least, there should be clear guidance that closures should be treated as an absolute last resort, not a first option.

The government should back a programme of education for local councillors (and national departments such as education and health) to show that, properly exploited, local libraries are a flexible resource that provides unique value for money.

Any closure must be preceded by a thorough assessment of the needs of ALL local people, especially the more vulnerable, AND replacement services put in place and working. All this was recommended in the Wirral report.

Streatham Vale has almost no public facilities. The need here is

obvious for a building that is easily found, useful to all, safe, unthreatening to enter and extremely versatile in the support it can provide. A library!

Almost none of these needs can be met by the kind of 'mega-library' that excites local and national politicians so much. These have their place, but it is a limited one. By definition they are expensive and set very far apart.

To many ordinary people, such buildings are daunting, impersonal and – above all – take too much time and money to reach.

They are almost no use to the people who need a library most. Reaching them is

an ordeal for people with limited mobility, children, young mothers with prams, and a whole list of people that anyone with common sense can add to.

Daily access is essential for many – such as schoolchildren who need a quiet place to do their homework, pre-schoolers who need repeated early experience with books and language, and older people trying to stay independent. Only local buildings – in quantity – can provide this.

IT provides new opportunities. For the first time ever, there is truly local access to ALL the resources of a full library service, including all major works of reference, every newspaper, education material at all levels etc etc.

For many people, broadband at home is not a real prospect. Even if it were, there is a crying need for advice and support to find what is available and avoid the huge amounts of dangerous or incorrect content on the web.

Properly used, local libraries repay their cost many, many times over.

Their running costs are minimal. Their potential to profit from community involvement is almost limitless. Closing them leads to enormous public hostility, as has been proved again and again. Attempting to replace them is, in practice, ruinously costly in both time and money.



Schoolchildren who need a quiet place ... teen corner in Leeds.

SHIRLEY BURNHAM (SWINDON)

IN late 2007 I inadvertently become a 'library campaigner', in the face of the proposed closure of my own branch library in Old Town, Swindon.

Ignorant of the generalised threat when our campaign began, residents are now dismayed at the scope of cuts likely throughout the nation. In the current environment residents do not perceive that they can rely on their councillors' promises.

Those in positions of influence tend to patronise 'ordinary people', which only infuriates us. Those who call for good branch libraries are not 'dinosaurs'.

We elect and pay for our leaders. All our views should be given weight and be the focus of policy-making.

Branch libraries that are easily accessible are very important. National problems with literacy and disparity in educational opportunity have been recognised – so the loss of the 'university of the street corner' will be a disaster.

How can we reverse the decline in library usage (if it really exists – demand is increasing as a result of the recession)? Invest modest amounts in infrastructure, improve opening hours and bookstock, value and retain trained frontline staff.

Much new funding has been wasted on uncontrolled central overheads and inefficiencies.

Buildings can be improved with modest expenditure, but current policy seems to blame taxpayers for a shameful lack of investment, and punish communities with closures.

Local councils are using the current financial situation to sell off buildings that house libraries.

It is too easy for the strategic agencies and the profession to blame new technologies and lifestyle changes for any decline.

They must admit that the service has been badly led and managed in many authorities, and has failed to stimulate or respond to the needs of the public.

There has been a lack of proper focus on frontline services and a failure to provide the most attractive offering. Ridding the service of frontline staff is

a certain way to disaffect a very large number of library users (check the statistics, and see).

The government should monitor developments in digitisation, which are evolving but unclear. It must not, however, disregard the real needs, today and tomorrow, of library users and potential users.

Many false dawns for e-books are anticipated. Most people will need real books for a very long time.

Currently, I do not believe that the advice libraries receive is generally helpful. It is gimmicky, negative and does not focus on community needs.

Is there any doubt that the library service lacks proper leadership and direction? No wonder councillors and officers are confused.

There have been more than 30 reports and studies published in recent years, including those by the Audit Commission, the Parliamentary Select Committee and the All Party Parliamentary Committee on Libraries.

Many, in different ways, have complained about the 'woeful lack of leadership'. There is an urgent need to tackle the leadership void.

FRIENDS OF STALBRIDGE LIBRARY

PUBLICISING the activities of other public services would not seem to us to be a proper purpose of a library service. Central government should certainly not have authority to tell local authorities to use their library service in this way – it needs to devote ALL its resources to publicising itself and making sure better use is made of it.

Much could be learnt from the private sector. Perhaps a small one-off team should investigate this. We are not convinced that any of those models would benefit libraries any more than they have education or health.

The digital revolution will make it possible for access to books and other material such as DVDs and e-books to be quicker and cheaper – but not forgetting there is still a significant proportion (21%) of the population that does not have (and perhaps never wants to have) internet access.

Over-reaction to developments such as e-books could take valuable resources away from the need to provide good reading material and basic internet, to improve quality of life for all and as an essential supplement to education in schools and colleges.

It is also a fact that there are eight different e-book systems on the market. Until one becomes predominant it would seem to us remarkably unwise to go too far down this route.

Self-service is being fitted throughout Dorset libraries, regardless of their size.

The claim that it frees up staff to deal with more complex enquiries is tenuous. In small rural libraries one librarian can easily deal with enquiries without holding up other customers – the cost is vast and is virtually wasted.

A national online catalogue would appear to be beneficial, but with libraries using a large variety of library management systems will this be possible without great cost?

The provision of books, including a good proportion of large print and children's books, both hardback and paperback, should be prescribed, along with PC access. The ability to hire talking books, DVDs, CDs at all sizes of library should also be prescribed. Other services appropriate for larger

libraries could be determined at local level, as long as they are not funded by reductions in the service provided by small and mobile libraries.

In reviewing library provision, local authorities must take into account (amongst others) the size of each community, its location, the availability of public transport to get to nearby town centres, the average age and the existence of schools.

The only possible [justification for closure] would be a significant reduction in the population of the area served, or the introduction of a new library nearby.

Saving money should NEVER be an acceptable reason for closure. Where a local authority is proposing to close a library for any reason, there should be a statutory requirement to seek approval from the Secretary of State.



Small community libraries... toddler session in one of four extra mini-libraries set up in village halls in Lancashire.

Small community libraries should be provided where the population exceeds about 3,000 and there is a natural centre of activity such as shops, surgery, and a school.

These days it is very unlikely that such communities will have a good enough public transport system to allow them to visit libraries in adjacent towns. A weekly mobile service should be provided for lesser communities.

Do you do enough to market library services? NO NO NO, you do not! Here in Stalbridge the friends group is trying its best, but this really does need a national and local campaign.

Properly targeted marketing is virtually non-existent. There is a simple need for market research. We hope that friends organisations will be asked to have a hand in this.

What you encourage MUST take into account the views of those who use a particular library. Taking one example – a Starbucks in a village library would be

impossible, and in county towns could cause big problems if it competes with an established coffee house down the road. In small communities the benefit is likely to be negligible, and it might even make people avoid the library altogether.

Basically we think that libraries should still be seen to be libraries and not social centres. We don't see any advantage in small libraries having any connection with commercial activities.

As a means of saving funds, Dorset County Council asked communities to consider using trained volunteers [partly] in place of qualified librarians.

In the event only two now do so. The remainder have accepted reduced opening hours or pay for a librarian from town or parish precepts.

Indications are that those two libraries are running successfully, but there is always a concern about the future availability of volunteers.

Stalbridge did not take up this option – [much] of the population is already highly involved in volunteer activities, and it would be difficult to ensure the library's continued existence.

One type of volunteering that could save significant funding, however, was not agreed by the County Council. Contracting out the maintenance of the buildings, grounds and equipment is extremely expensive, and most of this work could be easily undertaken by local volunteers who have the necessary expertise.

In Stalbridge we calculated that we could save the council £1,000 a year by cutting the costs by £2,000 and then being remitted £1,000 towards librarian hours. Our offer was refused.

It is absolutely essential that the proper provision of libraries remains a statutory obligation. Had it not been, Dorset would have been able to close down 15 libraries, and their local communities would have had no recourse in law to prevent it.

We do not understand why any further research is needed. If the DCMS [Department for Culture, Media & Sport] does not already have the necessary information and statistics, the library service is doomed!

For instance, we have to assume that the DCMS appreciates the essential link between libraries and young people's ability to read. The library service as a whole costs a fraction of the education budget. It should be given more! We should never contemplate reducing national or local budgets for our libraries.