

The LIBRARY *Campaigner*

Supporting friends and users of libraries



We know what
he wants ...
... now it's time to
say what **WE** want!



SEE INSIDE



AUTUMN 2011
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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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– if interested, please contact the Secretary

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

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**.

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.

2011/2012 MEETINGS

2011: 19 November

2012: 28 January, 24 March, 12 May (AGM), 14 July, 15 September, 17 November – all Saturdays

MEMBERSHIP FORM

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

Name.....Tel:..... Email

Address.....Post code.....

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.

Signed..... Date.....

MEMBERSHIP RATES

Individual £15.00 • Concessionary Rate £10.00 • Local Organisation £20.00 • Trade Union Branches £30.00

Local Authorities £200.00 • Company/National Trade Unions £100.00 • Others please write for details

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.

BANKERS ORDER FORM

To The Manager.....(Name and address of your bank)

Please pay The Library Campaign

(HSBC, Salford University Branch, The Crescent, Salford M5 4PB. 40-40-39, a/c 61277405) the sum of £..... every

year starting on (date) until further notice

Signed..... Account No

Name..... Address

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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

Rising from our slumbers

HERE ARE a couple of really big pieces of news in Campaign terms. We have been dormant for a while from most points of view. So we are looking at workshops on key topics such as campaign tactics, law, volunteering and 'alternative forms of governance'. Some practical, some controversial.

Legal cases

Many Campaigners will know that there are a number of judicial review cases being taken in various parts of the country. Unfortunately, for the Isle of Wight and Lewisham it has not been possible to take cases forward.

However, Brent are awaiting the result of the hearing of their case, on or about 2 October. Gloucestershire are also some way down the road.

Most recently, the Camden Public Libraries Users Group (CPLUG) have decided to investigate the legal route to stop the closure of three branches. More accurately, the council wants the local community to run the libraries. But if that doesn't happen – and CPLUG would rather it didn't – the closures will presumably follow.

In all three of these cases, the Library Campaign executive has made contributions to the legal costs.

You might wonder why we did not concentrate on one.

A decision in one judicial review creates a legal precedent. But the three cases are all different, exploring different arguments using the Public Libraries & Museums Act. We believe that we need to encourage as much scrutiny of closure (etc) proposals as possible and are happy to support these cases.

I should note that we have agreed that this is not an open cheque book. Any other appeals will be dealt with on their merits, and we do need as much notice as possible to consider the cases.

Although there have arguably been fewer closures than we had feared in this local authority year, the game is not

Conference

In the flier enclosed, you will see details of a conference we are holding on **22 October** for friends and users of libraries to meet and decide how to take things forward.

Secretary's Slot

Andrew Coburn
Campaign Secretary



over. A number of councils have put things on hold while they consider the options and the pressure they faced – for instance, in Suffolk and perhaps Oxford. Other places such as Bolton are still facing closures. And the next financial year will not be much better than this.

The conference is intended to offer people the chance to talk to each other about how they can deal with what is happening. So we are looking at workshops on things like 'alternative forms of governance' which sometimes means outsourcing but can also include setting up charitable trusts to run libraries and other services.

We will have an address from Philip Pullman, who has been forthright in supporting public libraries generally, notably in Oxfordshire and Brent. We will also have a video message from author-campaigner Alan Gibbons, who will be in Kenya on the day.

We hope that as many local groups as possible will attend. Although we are charging a registration fee it includes lunch, and we will help with travel costs for representatives of local friends/user groups.

We are also delighted to be working with Voices for the Library (<http://voicesforthelibrary.org.uk/wordpress/>) in running the conference. They are a group of people who (mostly) work in libraries and associated roles.

They have been instrumental in raising the temperature as well as providing

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informed insight on proposals across the country – as they may well do at the conference.

Website

We have also had trouble with our website since new year. It should be back by the time you read this (www.librarycampaign.org.uk). But in the last few months we had a version which was eventually forced 'off air' by robot spam. The Campaign could have carried a huge amount of ads for Viagra etc... but we didn't think this was terribly appropriate. So we are moving to a more stable site. We would like to thank John Kershaw who resurrected the site a few years ago and hosted it until now. If there is anything you would like to see (or don't like) let us know.

Eric Hiron Smith

Eric passed away on 21 March. He was an Executive Committee member of the Library Campaign from when we became a charity until his death.

Eric originally came into contact with the Campaign as a result of the work done by Geoff Smith in 1999 to identify Friends groups. Eric was Vice-Chair of Friends of Rotherham Central Library.

At the time he was the only retired person on our Executive Committee, so he volunteered to visit Rotherham's surrounding library authorities and report back – whether they had Friends or support groups in place already or if there was the need to form such a group.

What he found shocked him. This was what motivated him to get involved on the national scene. He felt that his threat of reporting back to the national Library Campaign carried some weight. He frequently used it when hearing of threatened library cuts, and of library staff's bewilderment at his suggestion that organising a protest group might help them.

Soon after he joined he volunteered to be our Materials Officer – storing the merchandise, posters, pop-up exhibition stands etc. He was very proud of this role.

When the Library & Information Show was on, we relied on him to staff the stand. One of my lasting memories is seeing him trailing back to the train at the end of the show with a trolley-load of displays and unused paraphernalia. He also continued the work of checking on other Yorkshire library services and reporting back.

Eric himself was a keen library user, an active member of several libraries throughout the county. He visited the Rotherham, Barnsley and Doncaster Central Libraries regularly as a reader and a user of their computer suites. He was unusual in that respect, had no wish to own his own computer, preferred to get out and use the ones in the public library and have a chat to the staff.

His taste in books was quite surprising, too. He owned a large book collection as well as borrowing from the library: among his favourites were travel, adventure, politics and (especially) books on and by the climbing fraternity. His son Andy talked at his funeral about his love of the outdoors including walking, youth hostelling and cycling.

Judith Morris, who worked with Eric for the Friends of Rotherham Central Library, wrote: 'I frequently wonder what he would make of the situation libraries find themselves in now, especially in Rotherham where, over the years, several branch libraries supported by strong, active Friends have been closed down.'



'In the present climate they would certainly have remained open, run by the Friends as enthusiastic volunteers.'

The other thing that all those who met him will remember was his involvement with the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA). Indeed his family asked for donations in his memory to be sent to CAMRA and the Library Campaign.

For CAMRA he was involved with promoting cider, and held a prominent position in the organisation. He worked extremely hard, overseeing cider provision in the Rotherham Beer Festival (which is huge) and travelling widely to judge the cider in Yorkshire pubs and hotels.

He was very upset last year when CAMRA replaced him with a younger man, a car driver (this was really because they realised they were expecting too much of Eric as his mobility decreased – rather than lack of appreciation of what he had achieved).

When we met we almost always – including on the last occasion I saw him – ended the day in the pub.

Eric was born in 1934 and brought up in Coventry. He worked as a sound engineer for the BBC at Bush House and elsewhere, before moving back to the Midlands to work for GEC.

He was unusual in not owning a television. Judith wrote: 'I once tried to persuade him to consider getting one but he was adamant, did not want a flashing talking box to dominate his home, preferring instead the company of the radio and his recorded music.' He was a jazz aficionado. When he was not heading for a pub after meetings in London, he would often go to the famous Ray's Records (now part of Foyle's).

Manfred Pagel (Richmond Friends), who attended the funeral, wrote: 'I am sure you will be pleased to hear that Eric's funeral was very well attended and that the service was quite moving and very appropriate. The minister was an old family friend who had known Eric all though his adult life, so was able to pull the diverse parts together very well.'

By Andrew Coburn, with contributions from Judith Morris and other Campaigners.

Campaign activists who wrote on hearing of his death said:

He was a good friend, kept me posted on Yorkshire issues. Rotherham Libraries owe him a lot ... I'll raise a glass to his memory.

He impressed me as a 'character' in the most positive sense.

He was a memorably kind and helpful colleague for the short time I was a Campaign committee member.

He was a real stalwart of the old school. One could tell he was weakening but he always made the effort. He was a familiar face at so many library gatherings and was very welcoming, although I was infrequently present. What a loss to public library supporters!

He was a lovely man

Behind his deadpan exterior, he was quite a one for random acts of kindness. He made full use of opportunities for education, from public libraries to a post-retirement diploma in community development. The Campaign badly needs people with his kind of energy and determination.

He was quite a modest man, never boasted and rarely reminisced unless persuaded to do so. I got the impression of someone who was quite a gentle man, trying hard to conceal this behind a gruff exterior, someone who took life's knocks, brushed himself down and carried on. When we look back he was a bit of an enigma.

Campaigning tools

DON'T FORGET that The Library Campaign's very useful handbook is now accessible on our website. A few bits have become out of date – it explains, for instance, the role of the now-dead MLA. But it is full of advice, from the basics (how to start and run a group, plus sample constitution) to the kind of information you find you need as soon as you try to get really to grips with your local issues (how libraries/local government work, who is responsible for libraries, tactics, how

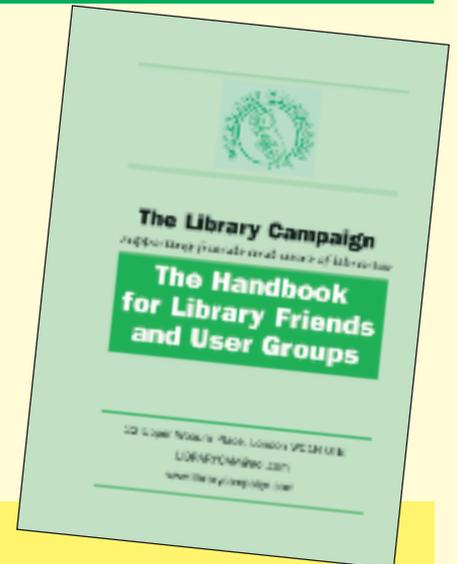
to get media cover and lots of contacts for information).

Now Unison has issued a new campaign pack. This complements TLC's beautifully, with a clear run-down of today's most topical (and confusing) issues: volunteers, outsourcing and privatisation, shared services and co-location. Campaigning advice includes a sample speech, and updated contacts list.

It is written very much for workers, keen on decent pay and conditions as much as on running a good service. (And why not?) But there's vital information for all.

Few will disagree with Unison that: 'All trained library staff are an essential part of the service libraries provide to the community ... while there is a place for volunteering in libraries, we argue that this should not be at the expense of paid staff.'

Unison also makes a point worth considering when 'back office cuts' are glibly advanced as the answer to everything: 'It would be a mistake to



Download free at:

http://librarycampaign.org.uk/mw/index.php/Start_A_Group

view anything that isn't "frontline" as somehow expendable.

'After all, the end result of a local resident being able to go into their local library and borrow the latest bestseller is a small part of the overall story – well-stocked and well-planned library services are no mere accident.'



Download free at:

www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/19990.pdf



Philip Pullman, author

'Those who think that every expert can be replaced by a cheerful volunteer who can step in and do a complex task for nothing but a cup of tea are those who fundamentally want to see every single public service sold off, closed down, abolished'.

Now it's **Love Libraries Day!** After the huge success of Save Our Libraries Day on 5 February this year (see spring 2011 *Campaigner*) it's to be an annual day, with an emphasis on the positive. Hence the new name.

The next date is Saturday 4 February 2012. And the week leading up to it will be devoted to activities in schools and colleges.

Alan Gibbons (left), who first pushed the idea (suggested by Lewisham campaigner Anthony Scully), said: '[It] will be a celebration of libraries and librarians ... a day when families and communities flock to their local library, to use it, join it, love it.'

'There will be story-telling, author events and celebrity visits. There will be a library membership drive. Finally, some areas will stage "libraries out late" with extended opening hours.'

This time it will be a bit more organised – though nobody wants to lose the energy and spontaneity that made this year such a wow. A steering group has been set up. There is a huge list of enthusiastic supporters (see box). And a website is planned.



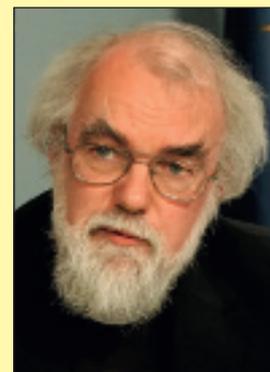
SUPPORTERS

Ascel (Association of Senior Children's & Education Librarians), Book Marketing Society, The Bookseller, Booktrust, Campaign for the Book, CILIP, Crime Writers Association, Cyprus Well, Federation of Children's Book Groups, The Library Campaign, National Federation of Women's Institutes, National Literacy Trust, National Union of Teachers, People's Book Prize, Poetry Book Society, Public Library Online.com (Bloomsbury Publishing), Publishers Association, The Reading Agency, Royal National Institute of Blind People, Scholastic, School Library Association, Society of Authors, Society of Chief Librarians, Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators, Unison, Voices for the Library.

Archbishop Rowan Williams, on visiting a library on a Manchester council estate:

“Space, opportunity, the time to discover a larger world to live in – where are the clearly articulated priorities in public discussion that would... make us think twice before dismantling what’s already there, and disappointing more hopes for the future?”

“Talk about the happiness of the nation isn’t going to mean much unless we listen to some of these simple aspirations – aspirations, essentially, for places, provisions or situations which help you lay aside anxiety, and discover dimensions of yourself otherwise hidden or buried.”



Hillingdon shows how

Hillingdon (see *Campaigner*, spring 2011) has won the first-ever Library Innovation of the Year award in the *Bookseller* Industry Awards (the ‘Nibbies’).

The new award marks growing commitment from the *Bookseller* – indispensable magazine of the book trade – to public libraries. It’s noteworthy that most on the shortlist are actual library services, not publishers or booksellers working with libraries. And most of them are doing things that every library does to some extent.

Hillingdon (led by consultant Tim Coates and councillor Henry Higgins)

is praised for its commonsense focus on refurbishment, stock, events and a ‘careful investment strategy, including back-office efficiency drives and private-sector partnerships’.

It was chosen as winner simply because ‘while public libraries across the UK are under the threat of cuts, [it] has shown how branches can stay relevant to the public’.

Also praised is the devolution of responsibility to branch level – and the close involvement of councillors.

The judges did not go for glamorous or radical innovation. One said: ‘Hillingdon has taken a lot of small steps that together have led to a big improvement.’

Shortlist

- Essex County Council Libraries: Space Station 2010, a summer reading challenge for 10-16s with free DVD loans as incentives.
- Opening the Book Furniture: refit of Yate Library, South Gloucestershire, using retail ideas.
- Nielsen Book, LibScan: tracks library borrowing to improve stock buying decisions.
- New Writing North, Read Regional: the annual promotion of local authors by north-east libraries.
- Bloomsbury Publishing, Public Library Online: digital ‘library’ now used by 20 authorities.
- The Answer Ltd for the London Libraries Consortium: cost-effective reference scheme increased usage 300%, saved £40,000 in pilot area.

Murder in the Library ...

The Crime Writers Association (CWA) is the latest to start a campaign to support public libraries. There is already year-round criminal activity in libraries*. Now CWA wants to do even more. It says: ‘With 321.5m visits in 2009-10 alone, it is crucial that authors help libraries to survive and flourish. Crime is the most borrowed genre.’

CWA is contacting publishers, asking all its members to stage at least three events a year in their local library and setting up co-ordinators to get contacts going.

CWA Director Claire McGowan is compiling the regional co-ordinators list: clairejmcgowan@yahoo.co.uk

* www.thecwa.co.uk

SIGN UP – NOW! The Women’s Institute has adopted public libraries as its major campaign for the year. Look out for action locally. Meanwhile, it has acted nationally – by lodging an official petition in support of public libraries. Get everyone you know to sign it! Closing date is February 5 next year – just in time for Love Libraries Day.

The wording is: ‘I, the undersigned, believe that libraries are an essential local educational and information resource yet with many libraries under threat, the future of the library service is at risk.

‘I want to see the value of libraries recognised at both local and national levels and I am calling on the government to honour both its commitment to act as a champion of the library service, and its duty of oversight to ensure that a comprehensive and efficient library service is provided.’ It is ‘live’ at:

<http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/1269>

What difference will this make?

So, farewell then MLA (Museums, Libraries & Archives Council). Over the years the Library Campaign has had many meetings to represent users to this English advisory body (under its various names) – with mixed results.

MLA has produced a huge flurry of research and reports – many of them very useful. But it has never really filled a leadership role to the satisfaction of either library staff or users.

Most recently, a slimmed-down version of MLA has concentrated much of its library work on advising local authorities. But this has been done in confidence (ie, in secret), causing frustration and resentment in local library users. Sometimes users are strongly opposed to what appears to have been suggested or endorsed by MLA – as often as not, closures.

Well, MLA is now itself to be closed in the government's 'bonfire of the quangos' – or rather, much reduced and folded into Arts Council England (ACE) on 1 October.

Now (published September 2011) ACE has come out with a 'framework'¹ and a research review² to sketch out the future. These are out for consultation.

Both are evidence of an honest attempt to get to grips with a world which, frankly, fits a bit oddly into the purely cultural mind-set that ACE has had up to now.

It can't let go of that word 'excellence' (very 80s, very arts elite). More worryingly, it hasn't fully grasped the vital role libraries play in getting information to people – from benefits claimants to businessmen. The digital/information role of public libraries – more vital than ever in a recession – is covered but not highlighted. Academic and school libraries are hardly mentioned at all – a dereliction of responsibility that the old MLA drifted

into. The arts-based ACE can hardly be criticised for not filling that gap – but just who will?

It doesn't help that it wants to mix libraries into the same framework as museums and the arts. This is another mistake that MLA often made – often, it wasn't really interested in anything that didn't apply equally to museums and archives.

Librarian commentator Ian Anstice – who will be leading a workshop at the conference on 22 October – says: 'A warning bell here may be chiming with some. Libraries are as much to do with education and literacy, with council services and even social services, as they are with the arts, and they may not fit in as snugly with the local museum as some of the text suggests.

'For instance [the research review says]: "In the long term, we expect that ACE will not have separate strategies for museums, libraries and the arts. We will use the same framework to drive all of our programmes and inform all of our funding decisions."

'ACE may find out that One Size Does Not Fit All. It may also be a breath of fresh air to the public library service. Or, perhaps most likely, it will fall somewhere between the two.'

However, Ian also highlights a passage that shows ACE is at least not falling for the old line that libraries are irrelevant, on the way out, or an indulgence of the posh middle classes. In fact, they can already give some tips to the arts world.

ACE says: 'Although public libraries have seen a decrease in the numbers of people borrowing books, evidence shows that where there has been strategic investment – such as in promoting children's reading – visits rise.

'And patterns of use are changing, with a significant increase in users accessing services digitally. Libraries have innovated in response, offering enhanced digital provision and actively promoting libraries as local social spaces which can draw in and support new users.

'Unlike museums or the arts, differences in people's socio-economic status do not affect their likelihood of using a library; neither does illness or having a disability.'

So what is ACE going to do? Here the heart sinks a bit. First, it eagerly promises to continue the insultingly useless Future Libraries Programme (see pages 14-15) as a central plank of its improvement service.

Second, that shows you that it really doesn't 'get' the tsunami of closures and all-round damage that is going to hit public libraries within months. It is clear that ACE has little money, and it is most interested in 'improvements' that cost little or nothing. Fair enough. But there is no sense of the real disaster at hand.

Several commentators have expressed disappointment – or worse. The papers convey no sense of how it feels at the frontline for local campaigners. There has certainly been little or no consultation with library users so far. The Library Campaign will be doing something about that.

The two papers pretty much set out the status quo on public library thinking – including an understanding of some of the 'tensions' and arguments. That's a reasonable starting point.

But it must not be left at that. Users can – and must – feed their views into the consultation.

1 Culture, Knowledge and Understanding: great museums and libraries for everyone: <http://tinyurl.com/3zy842n>

2 A Review of Research and Literature of Museums and Libraries: <http://tinyurl.com/638lv6g>

THIS will make a difference!

THIS IS the phony war. After the massive outcry earlier this year, as local council after council revealed crazy plans to close libraries, the fuss has died down a bit.

But – as most of us know – subsequent promises to 'save' libraries don't amount to much. Final decisions have just been deferred. Ideas to keep libraries going will, often, make them hardly worth visiting (short hours, few books, poor maintenance, all-volunteer staff...)

The bodies that should have stood up for libraries didn't. The MLA (see this page) was often worse than useless. The government (see pp.10–11) is the most supine it has ever been. Its two (and only) bright ideas are frankly absurd (see pp.14–16).

Far, far more effective were library campaigners on the ground. If any progress has been made it's down to them – and to the hard work of internet informants like Desmond Clarke and Shirley Burnham, one-

man Campaign for the Book – author Alan Gibbons, and switched-on librarians like Ian Anstice and the Voices for the Library group.

We are working closely with all these to make our conference on 22 October (see leaflet enclosed) a real step forward. Philip Pullman is coming too.

It's time for library users to come together, learn from each other – and move forward together. If we don't protect libraries, who will?

LIBRARY CAMPAIGN CONFERENCE – SATURDAY 22 OCTOBER

10:00: Registration (Tea/coffee); Video from author/campaigner Alan Gibbons. 10:30: Introduction. 10:35: First plenary: presentations from the Brent, Doncaster and Gloucester campaigns. 11:20: Second plenary: Pete Challis, Unison: Budgets – national and local. 12:00: Workshops. 13:00: Lunch (included in registration fee). 14:00: Workshops. 15:00: Tea/ coffee. 15:15: Plenary report back. 16:00: Philip Pullman. 16:30: Close.

To register e-mail: librarycam@aol.com

Libraries Change Lives

EVERY YEAR, the Libraries Change Lives award highlights the immense flexibility of public libraries – and the amazing work they do. It's run by CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals).

This year's winner was announced by author and libraries campaigner Alan Gibbons.

Linda Constable, Senior Manager, Customer Services for Dorset Libraries, and chair of the judges, comments: 'In their very different ways, all three shortlisted projects have had a huge impact on the lives of disadvantaged people in their communities.'

'In these difficult times, when the value of libraries is being called constantly into question, these projects leave one in no doubt that libraries definitely change lives.'

Video footage of each project is online at www.cilip.org.uk/lcla

THE WINNER

Making the Difference: Opportunities for Adults With Learning Disabilities (Kent Libraries and Archives)

'I have never felt so alive in my entire life.'

Kent Libraries wanted to make sure that its services for adults with learning



Glitz and glamour at 'Putting on the Ritz', a community event hosted by Sevenoaks Library in partnership with the Sevenoaks District Partnership Group. (Photo: Kent Libraries & Archives)

disabilities were helping to integrate them in everyday life. This project sought to understand their needs, those of their carers and support workers, then to provide new experiences and skills for 'independence and fun'.

Since April 2010, 721 people have taken part. Activities have included creating an information library, staffed by adults with learning disabilities as paid librarians; placing Easy Access collections of books and DVDs chosen by adults with learning disabilities in

12 town centre libraries; volunteering and work experience, and regular Biblio Hour and Coffee & Chat sessions. A highlight of the project was a 'Putting On the Ritz' 1920s fashion evening.

RUNNER-UP

Our Tyneside & The History Club (Newcastle City Libraries)

'The History Club has been very interesting. It has allowed me to meet new people and visit different places. Finding out about local history I've learnt things I never realised.'

In November 2009, Newcastle Libraries began a 12-week project with Better Days, a charity for adults with learning difficulties and the Sage in Gateshead. It aimed to educate and engage participants with their local heritage in a safe and friendly environment. The group enjoyed research, photography, creative writing, music, crafts, guided tours, and grew in confidence and self-esteem. It was clear that there is huge interest in local and family history, and that this weekly activity should continue. Newcastle Libraries launched The History Club in April 2010, open to any adult with learning difficulties. Topics have included The Great Fire of Newcastle, Newcastle United and The Ghosts of Newcastle. The club is now a



Doug Walker tries out one of the Pen readers at Newcastle City library with the help of Service Manager Sharon Reeve. (Photo: Martin Salter)



A member of the Newcastle City Library History group shows off his work book. (Photo: Martin Salter)

vital part of participants' and staff's lives; 100 per cent of participants say it is 'fun'.

RUNNER-UP

The Nealis Project (North East Accessible Library & Information Services)

'I stopped using the library because I couldn't see the titles; [this scheme] changes how I feel about coming back into the library. It's an excellent idea.'

This partnership has been working since November 2007 to improve library, information and reading services to blind and partially sighted people (VIPs) in North East England. It includes 12 public library authorities, six voluntary sector organisations, the Society of Chief Librarians, CILIP and MLA, as well as new partners outside the library community. Its focus has been on developing low cost, practical solutions. Leaflets with details of the services on offer have been widely distributed; training days for staff have been held, and a VIP area with a specially adapted PC and screen has been created at Newcastle City Library. Young people on a local Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme have been paired with VIPs to act as reading buddies.

Library closures – just what are we losing?

A VERY sensible letter in *The Lewisham Mercury* (15 June 2011) described the damage likely to be done by the latest round of politicians' games with our library services. It ended by asking 'And who will catalogue what has been lost?'.

This had us reaching for our 'Blackheath Village Library Domesday Table', which we had produced to set out what our local library (now closed) provided for us, and to help us keep in mind what we were fighting for.

Of course, we knew that no table of simple facts could fully illustrate why we thought the library such a valuable asset to the area.

It is not enough to tick a box to show that newspapers are provided. We all know how much it matters that there is a comfortable place in which to read them, and that does not easily fit tick boxes.

Nor could our table measure the incidental benefit a good local library brings by encouraging people to visit the area and use its facilities, whether they be a nearby park or a local hairdresser. But, a simple list of things we could measure or say if they are there or not, seemed to help.

All this has left us wondering if the time is right for a much broader Domesday Book of library services across the country, to be produced before the political oligarchy can sweep them all away and set about persuading us that what it has given

Lest we forget
Blackheath Village Library Domesday Table
 A summary of the facilities provided by Blackheath Village Library in early 2011

Number of books	Adult: 11,000	Children: 11,000
Books in other than books	Teaching books, graphic novels and DVDs	Yes
Floor space	Above 1,000sq ft (up to 10,000sq ft) in the ground floor	Yes
Open	Trials: 12 hours per week Current opening: 9.30hrs	Open per week: 4 Through facilities: Yes
Notes and notes	Local and national services and the closest branch of Public Health (PH) is within walking distance of the library in some. They include the following: In 2009, the library had 14, 100+ and 100+ of 14, 100+ items.	
Staff	Provided by the Library Service. Usually the same people work.	
Staff able to help users	Yes. Staff offer basic help with PCs, online facilities etc.	
Online catalogue	Yes	
PCs for use by the public	Adults: 4 Children: 100. They are used, but if you have a need as it is replaced by a newly needed book.	
WiFi	Yes	
Photocopy	Yes. Black and white and colour. They also serve as a printer for the PCs.	
Suggestion book	Yes. The suggestions and the library service response are open and transparent.	
Notice board for public use	Yes	
Non-reading and non-reading	Yes for books	
Reading group meetings	Yes. There is a group meeting per month.	
Library in a village	Yes	
Work tables and seats	1 table and 10 seats (1000sq ft) in the main area and other seats in the side area.	
Drinking water	Yes. Drinking water including the Greenhouse Centre, other works.	
Over 100 books from other libraries	Over 100 books from other libraries: 10000 books. A library in 1000sq ft. There are 100 books in the library.	
Other Council services	Waste recycling: Supplies (including) children with green public water and other services. (1000sq ft) in the main area. A change of the book is provided.	
Access for blind	Yes. The floor has a ramp system. There is a group of volunteers who are disabled but in the main area for the library and a 'Tap and Display' use path for the library.	

Anne Bennet and Alan Dove are soon to receive a pioneering 'new' (much smaller) library service run by volunteers. Will Blackheath receive anything like the professionally-run service it has had up to now?

instead is much better for us and what we were asking for all along.

Perhaps it would be good for the politicians' souls if they know we have a solid record of what they have set about destroying.

A comprehensive survey of the country's public libraries would be a much more daunting task than our little table. Friends and Users Groups might collect information, but it would have to be chosen to fit a wide variety of types of service, and coverage would inevitably be patchy. Then someone would need to collate and publish it.

But first, does anyone else think an effort would be worthwhile? And if it is, are there any organisations that could and would take on the job masterminding it?

What is he thinking?

I am here to talk about some of the fantastic work that is going on in libraries all across the country.

I was happy to endorse Westminster, Hammersmith & Fulham and Kensington & Chelsea councils' proposals to combine library services, saving taxpayers more than £1m a year and ensuring all their 21 public libraries remain safe from closure.

This has to be good news all round. We really do need to see much more of this type of merger, saving back-office costs to protect the front-line.

Last month Hillingdon won the Booksellers' Library Innovation of the Year Award. I know not everyone's been a fan of Hillingdon but there's no arguing with the facts. At a time when many library authorities are considering closures their service is so successful – it received a record number of visitors last year – that it's undertaking a programme of library refurbishment instead.

Windsor & Maidenhead announced in February that a new library will be built to serve residents in the North West of the Royal Borough who they felt were having to travel too far to access library services. This responsiveness to the needs of residents is exactly what must underpin all local authority library authorities.

Last week, Lancashire celebrated Carers' Week by providing lots of information at a number of libraries for carers, with emphasis on issues of health, employment, education and leisure.

As well as integrated social service provision, Lancashire also has an exemplary partnership with the University of Central Lancashire which sponsors the Lancashire Children's Book Award – 10 books on the shortlist this year: 'As a university dedicated to lifelong learning, we are pleased to be associated with an Award that encourages enthusiasm for reading and critical judgement in equal measure.'

In Newcastle, Jesmond Library has reopened following a two-month refurbishment to make the 1960s Grade II building more accessible. Improvements include self-service

A lot of people are asking this question about Ed Vaizey. As libraries minister during the worst-ever period of mass library destruction, he encourages local campaigners. But he has persistently declined to use his legal powers to intervene. And his own ideas for helping libraries are causing alarm... This is a speech he gave at a conference in June (slightly trimmed).



terminals, automatic entrance doors, a larger community room with kitchen facilities, an accessible public toilet, new flooring, layout and lighting – and £5,000 of new stock.

Manchester library services are widely recognised as an exemplar of diverse service provision. Like many authorities, it has run a consultation on future provision, having in the past year upgraded many existing libraries. I have looked at its Facebook page, I was heartened to see that over 2,000 visitors had taken the video tour of the Central Library. 'Into the Stacks' is possibly the speediest tour of library shelves I have seen, but exactly illustrates not only different ways of accessing the library, but also the potential to reach non-library visitors.

These are exciting developments, and there are many more. By the way, a lot of this success is not about money. It is about passion and imagination, about realising the public library service in an area is a huge asset to be exploited, not a burden to be got rid of.

I have been Minister for over a year, and it has been important to engage with the sector at every level. I have had numerous meetings with various stakeholders, engaged closely with the MLA, and brought the Local Government Group much closer to government through the Future Libraries Programme (see pages 14–15). I have

discussed libraries with publishers, booksellers, the British Library and digital champion Martha Lane Fox. I've visited numerous library authorities, carrying on the work I was doing in Opposition, and even opened new libraries!

Of course, the only media story at the moment is proposed closures of libraries. Quite rightly in my view, local campaigners are letting their voices be heard. There are calls for me to intervene by 'calling in' these cases with the powers Ministers have under the Public Libraries Act.

I have said again and again that I will not shy away from doing so if there is a case for it. I have not done so yet for two reasons.

First, this is a fluid situation. Authorities that have announced widespread closures have since reversed their proposals – precisely as a result of those local campaigns. Campaigning does work.

Second, I think it is far better to have a dialogue with authorities before we press the nuclear button that is 'call-in'. So my officials have met five authorities to discuss their plans – and also met the campaigners from those local areas as well.

These are useful, constructive meetings – one campaigner was kind enough to e-mail me following a meeting in the department with my officials to say: 'I am very grateful, and found them to be very pleasant, helpful, and they listened.'

So why don't I meet campaigners or individual authorities personally? Simple – I might be involved in any final decision on call-in, and my decision could be seen to be prejudiced if I had met an authority or a group of campaigners prior to making that decision.

I am here as a backstop. My powers allow me to prevent a local authority breaching its statutory duty. But let me be clear. I do not run library services. Local authorities do. And as democratically elected representatives, they have the right to configure library services in the way they believe best meets local needs.

So what is the future?

For a number of authorities, the review of service provision has enabled them to do a root and branch assessment of the service, and introduce provision and ways of working which they'd previously had ambitions for but not impetus. I understand the arguments. If half your libraries account for just over 10% of your visits, rationalisation is an option you might consider.

But you have to take library users with you. Intelligent people will understand

your reasoning if you are open and honest with them. Carry out some meaningful consultation and you might find they come up with some ideas you hadn't thought of.

There are creative means to manage resources. One option may be to consider if a community supported library would be not just a viable alternative, but actually a better one. A small library which is open just a couple of days a week under local authority control could easily become a vibrant community hub open for far longer, if the local community is invited in to help run it.

The key for me is that councils continue to support community libraries with a core service – they don't simply hand over library services and turn their back. That means access to book stock, equipment, training, and the services of a professional librarian for a specific amount of time.

MLA has now produced a document, Community Managed Libraries [see page 16], which offers advice on some key issues which may be helpful to those of you who are considering this option.

What I think we need to realise from the merger of the MLA and Arts Council England [see page 7] is that for the first time cultural and library services will be joined up.

ACE will be able to work with local authorities across the piece, and use its extensive regional network to raise the profile of libraries and link them with the kind of community services that cultural organisations are able to offer on a local level.

There will be other opportunities as well. There's no reason why a library service couldn't apply for an award from Grants for the Arts, to run a specific cultural programme in libraries. When cultural organisations applied in the past, I bet they never thought of including libraries. Now, hopefully, they will.

ACE has also launched its digital innovation fund. Again, there is no reason a library service couldn't apply to that in future, to pioneer some digital innovation project in their libraries – perhaps a telecast of opera, dance or theatre in libraries in the evenings.

Talking of which, I really think we might be able to do more to help get all our libraries wi-fi enabled. The public library has always been the hub for access to knowledge, but today vast amounts of information are also available on the internet. Using their own devices, library users could log in to a wireless network in their local library, combining the richness of the internet with the physical books and collections.

And we do need to make progress on e-lending, to see if we can make that an offer that is available easily nationwide.

Quite rightly, a lot of the debate over the last year has been about threats to libraries. The campaigns have raised the profile of libraries, and led to many being saved. But it is important to talk about the opportunities for libraries.

About the library services that are not just surviving but thriving. About the opportunities presented by a joined up offer from museums, cultural organisations and libraries under ACE. About the opportunities of using technology to attract new users, and give existing users a different experience.

I will continue to work with library authorities, charities and stakeholders, to listen and engage, to protect library services where I need to, but to push them forward as well.



Lewisham protestors held an 'Ed, get out of bed' vigil outside Ed's workplace, the Department for Culture, Media & Sport. They had been waiting over a month for a message, after they had met Ed's helpful civil servants. Their dossier was accepted by a friendly press officer – no library official was available. Then they went on waiting another few weeks, with no word received. Then their libraries closed. As we go to press, they have still heard nothing.

The man who wrote the Act

I WAS delighted to be asked to draft the parliamentary Bill that became the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964.

I saw that the task gave me a valued opportunity to draw up the blueprint for an enhanced library service in England and Wales, fully supported by the government and local authorities.

We all have happy memories of public libraries, dating from our youth. Many a child has found refuge, help, enlightenment and companionship in their public library. Wise and skilled librarians put us on the right track and led us to the most helpful, instructive and entertaining books. I saw an opportunity to further this great work, and eagerly grasped it.

I had a vision of expanding library services, making them readily available to all who needed them (including youngsters not yet aware of the treats in store). Libraries should be handy for dwellings or bus routes. Wherever necessary, books should be taken to readers in the form of mobile libraries. There should be a sufficient supply of books of all types, suitable for all ages.

My new drafting assignment filled me with enthusiasm as I set to work. I was determined to write the Act in plain English, making every word count.

I ought to set out my qualifications, so here goes. I have spent more than 60 years in the field of legislation as draftsman, practising barrister, Oxford University law teacher and researcher, CEO of a leading professional body (the RICS) and author. I have written three books* on legislation and many articles which are on my website www.francisbennion.com.

I now analyse some key provisions of the 1964 Act (actual words of the Act are in italics).

A comprehensive and efficient library service:

- Compulsory components: *Books and other printed matter, and pictures, gramophone records, films and other materials, sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children.*
- Readership: *All persons whose residence or place of work is within the library area of the authority or who are undergoing full-time education within*

The government has so far failed to use its power to intervene under the 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act. Francis Bennion (left) is uniquely qualified to criticise. John Dolan (right) adds some points for 2012, as campaigners in Brent, London, pursue the government through the courts.

that area. [Together the library areas cover the whole of England and Wales.]

- Duties of government: (1) *To superintend and promote the improvement of the public library service provided by local authorities in England and Wales.* (2) *To secure the proper discharge by local authorities of the functions in relation to libraries conferred on them as library authorities.*

That is the bare bones of it. I haven't space to include more detail about the Act's contents. But I need to stress three points about understanding the legal meaning of Acts of Parliament.

- 1 **Every person to whom an Act of Parliament applies is under a legal duty to comply with it.**
- 2 **A mere literal compliance without the substance will not suffice.**
- 3 **Implications may need to be drawn on.**

An Act of Parliament consists of express words *and implications*. Thus for

example it is *implied* by the 1964 Act that library authorities will fulfil their duties properly, will provide suitable buildings that can accurately be called libraries and will employ sufficient trained, experienced, paid staff, not relying unduly on volunteers.

The official 2011 publication titled *Future libraries – Change, options and how to get there* [see page 15] does not appear to meet the requirements of the 1964 Act. It is primarily a charter, stuffed with jargon, for reducing costs.

Yet any library authority which in 2012 and subsequently spends substantially less on its library service than it did in 2009 would be acting unlawfully. This is because all the 2009 expenditure would be assumed to have been necessary to comply with the 1964 Act.

On page 5 the publication makes the mistake of calling the work of library authorities 'one of the most highly valued local authority elective services', which literally means that the service is optional for the authorities, when of course it is compulsory.

Page 9 talks about the need to 'break down the boundaries of tradition', which rubbishes the great traditions of library service in this country. It also uses euphemism in describing reducing opening hours as 'rationalisation'. Page 10 suggests locating libraries in shops, which does not satisfy the Act. And so on.

Many library authorities are proposing drastic reductions in expenditure, though the government has only conducted two public inquiries (Derbyshire 1991 and Wirral 2009). This is an inadequate compliance with its statutory duty.

Footnotes: Francis Bennion

© Francis Alan Roscoe Bennion 2011. Originally posted on the Voices for the Library blog: <http://www.voicesfortheibrary.org.uk/wordpress/?p=2025>. Voices for the Library is a librarians' group promoting the value of public libraries and supporting library campaigns across the UK.

* *Bennion on Statute Law* (Longman, 3rd edition 1990, 373 pp); *Bennion on Statutory Interpretation* (LexisNexis, 5th edition 2008, 1,579 pp); *Understanding Common Law Legislation* (Oxford University Press, 2001 & 2009, 221 pp).

Footnotes: John Dolan (p.13)

1. Bookseller 1 August 2011 <http://bit.ly/qIIIm1d>
2. Under the 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act <http://bit.ly/mQBGNq>
3. Public Libraries & Museums Act Section 7(1)
4. Like hospitals, I may not want to use it one but I will pay tax to have it for others and in case I need it one day...
5. 24/7 librarian on call <http://bit.ly/ockEpc> and check your local library website for a link
6. The riots and looting have kicked off. This may result in directing reduced funds to law and order, meaning more cuts for everything else. Libraries would be part of the solution if Britain invests in solutions as well as punishment.
7. <http://bit.ly/bo45Gw>
8. Voices for the Library <http://bit.ly/cvXry3>
9. *Public Libraries News* <http://bit.ly/qxLt16>
10. See ACE announcement on their commitment to public libraries development <http://bit.ly/rnwItA>

A Brent minefield

AT LEAST two questions emerge from the High Court hearing into Brent's proposal to close six of its 12 libraries.

The Bookseller reported¹ "*Helen Mountfield QC argued that the council failed its legal obligations² ... because it did not properly identify the range of needs it had to meet...*".

The requirement of the '64 Act is that the service, being "*comprehensive and efficient*", provides a service for "*all persons desiring to make use thereof*".³

This desire has three roots: *Needs* (Conscious or Unconscious: learning, education, information); *Wants* (Expressed: e.g. literature, stories, music, cultural and social experiences); *Expectations* (Assumed: resources, support and community facilities for the community at large⁴ and as a contingency for future use).

The current urge to close libraries and reduce the scope of services assumes that they are not *desired!* The campaigns would indicate otherwise.

The Bookseller article highlighted a question, "*Does there need to be an actual library building ... or can a council still fulfil its obligations after closing the physical libraries?*" A library (building) might be a "*centre of cultural life*" (Mountfield quotes the Bourdillon Report, 1962). The Council's defence cited the '64 Act. "*There are references to library services and library facilities but those are not library premises,*" she said, to prove that the service could be both physically absent yet still comprehensive.

In fact a modern library service can only be both – in the right place at the right time for the right reason.

"No closures here!" is a frequent claim of councillors – but in most "no closure" authorities less visible cuts are eating into provision. Concerns about closures should be matched by alarm about dismantling from within. It's disingenuous and anti-democratic; it sends otherwise good services into a downward spiral towards irrelevance and, you've guessed it, closure.

What is the council actually doing?

... when all authorities are making cuts and library cuts are disproportionate. If consulted, genuinely, ask what the authority is **doing**, as well as **cutting**:

- Resources: there are no more national standards, so is the council funding a diverse collection of current resources – physical and electronic?
- Buildings: it's even more important in hard times to maintain a viable network of libraries; is there a programme for short term maintenance and long term refurbishment, replacement or relocation of Victorian, 1930s and 1960s (library expansion periods) premises?
- ICT: Books, journals and the web are the commonest means to get information; publishing is increasingly electronic. Consortia buying is economical. Is the service using *Enquire*⁵ (24/7 access to skilled information searching) and social media (to develop new services and reach new users). Is the council upgrading essential IT infrastructure?
- Activities: Partnership and outreach make libraries effective. Is the library in local partnerships? Engaging users? Is the council committed to national programmes? *Bookstart*, *Race Online 2012* and suchlike can't work without local library delivery. Trained, well-managed volunteers can be invaluable here.
- Staff learning: It's essential. In-house staff learning and development alongside targeted courses, shared learning and online programmes.

- Promotion (aka "marketing"): The most frequently cited cause of low awareness is failure to promote; does the authority promote services imaginatively?

Sustainable libraries

... will take a lot of energy in the present climate. Already library services are pitted and prioritised against so called "essential" services; some elected and appointed leaders are actually against libraries (money, preference for other services), perpetrating myths like "it's all on t'Internet", "books are cheaper and accessible".⁶

This is made worse by the absence of Ministerial leadership:

- to respond to users and taxpayers who plead to be heard;
- to listen to skilled and experienced librarians;
- to provide guidance to local authorities on what constitutes a good library service;
- to facilitate modernisation and innovation;
- to advocate the role of libraries across government departments and other sector partners.

Without a different approach, and with such pressure to cut, only a few solutions remain: a precedent-setting legal resolution that persuades local authorities to consult and respond more positively; a government resolution – from the PM, without whose agreement little would change; a campaign of such size and conviction that the DCMS finally intervenes.

The Library Campaign

... has been around for a while. To be effective I propose it works closely with these organisations:

CILIP is the only national body advocating for libraries in all sectors. *What makes a good library service?*⁷ comprises guidelines on public library provision for portfolio holders in England. CILIP also has useful resources for advocacy <http://bit.ly/iZXSg7> including a *Campaigning Toolkit*

Voices for the Library⁸ has captured the imagination and commitment of library users, workers and citizens. See also Ian Anstice's excellent **Public Libraries News** and a really good checklist on consultation.⁹

Society of Chief Librarians have been disrespected in the past by campaigners. In fact they are largely prohibited from countering their employing councils' views and plans. However, between them they have enormous experience of service provision and development. Work with them not against them.

Arts Council England will take on a strategic lead for libraries following the abolition of MLA. Work with ACE to develop its own story and strategy. Early statements look promising¹⁰; there is even a focus on information services and learning as well as the obvious, reading.

Too much energy is wasted attacking "bureaucrats"; they are also the professionals – and they too are taxpayers! It's now seriously political and time to move on to informed and energetic advocacy.

I am former Head of Library Policy at MLA and former Head of Birmingham Libraries. I am an elected trustee of CILIP. The views expressed here are my own.



John Dolan

FLP – fillip or flop?

MAGIC BULLET? ER, NO. The Future Libraries programme (FLP) is Ed Vaizey's pet project, exploring in practice the kind of ideas he wants to spread nationwide. There are plans to spread the knowledge gained so far, and for a further phase.

What is it? In brief, it is pilot funding which has enabled 10 projects (involving 38 library authorities) to work on the kind of ideas the minister advocates.

This can be boiled down to four basic themes (see box below). These will look pretty familiar to anyone involved in libraries' current struggles.

A 'final report'¹ was issued in the spring by MLA (see page 7). It is a tale of solid work and achievement. It draws out useful lessons. It concludes: 'Innovative approaches to developing long term solutions... can deliver savings.' And: 'Options appraisal should begin from an assessment of community and user need and aspiration.' That's sound enough.

On the other hand, the hard work done so far shows clearly that: sharing services involves 'complexity and risks', needs time and trust – and won't work as a quick fix to stop closures. So much for the easy 'back office' savings that communities secretary Eric Pickles claims are there for the taking.

The report's appendix,² with brief details of each project, contains many useful lessons, but no huge surprises. It will probably confirm whatever prejudice readers already hold.

Overall, the report shows that much can be done, but it takes a lot of work, a lot of time, a lot of relationship-building – and a fair bit of support. It is not known whether future efforts will get the £10,000 that each FLP pilot got.

Minister Ed Vaizey flags up his Future Libraries programme (FLP) whenever any public library problem is mentioned. What is it? Is it the answer to everything? Laura Swaffield calls for caution.

Several pilots used resources beyond that sum. Some say they need more funds to progress. One used almost all its

Their FLP work was also allied to a bigger (£50,000) regional project with outside funding.

However, the sudden drastic 'frontloading' of local cuts in December 2010 wrecked all their preliminary data on possible savings.

Other pilots were also undermined by sudden cuts that had nothing to do with the FLP work, and threw every council into turmoil. These are unlikely to have helped with 'community engagement'.

Meanwhile, sensible savings might demand extra money upfront. 'Core systems are expensive to alter', says Project 10.

One of the most productive projects was Selpig's (9). But Selpig has existed for years, and has already made savings. 'FLP money just helped us do, quicker, things we wanted to do anyway,' said one Selpig library chief. And, as it was purely 'back office', there was no need for time-consuming 'community engagement'.

Similarly, the south-west consortium (10) used FLP to 'add capacity' to existing joint work on user needs and back office savings. Savings of up to 15 per cent were identified – but they will be long-term.

Projects found they needed a lot of technical expertise, especially financial and legal. In at least one, politicians insist on preserving the distinctive character of each service.

Community management

'Community management' does not emerge as The Answer either – although it seems the libraries minister has decided to go for it in a big way (see page 16).

There has been little 'community engagement' so far (although it was a central requirement when the bids were chosen). Sometimes it was not needed. Often it is due to be the next step.

However, it is hardly good practice to 'consult the community' after the main thinking is finalised. Project 2 found that community ideas were 'diverse and not



Baby day in Cannock. Will FLP really protect local services like this from cuts? It's hard to see how ...

£10,000 just to facilitate meetings. Another used all its money and more to buy in basic data about users.

Shared services

Savings were often not the main aim. Greater Manchester (Project 1), for instance, was clear that the aim was just to identify options for the future. Many efficiency cuts had already been made.

FLP has identified 'four options for helping to ensure the survival of libraries in the 21st century':

- Running libraries in partnership with the private sector, charities and other councils.
- Extending their 'reach and range' by integrating them with other community facilities (eg churches, shops, village halls) & providing public services (eg, health centres, police surgeries) in existing libraries.
- Sharing services like back offices and mobile libraries with neighbouring local authorities.
- Giving library users the ability to play a more active role in running library services themselves.

limited to traditional library models of service delivery’.

Project 3 says: ‘The consultation and engagement has had a significant impact on [our] recommendations.’ Project 4 is waiting to see results from other consultations before doing its own.

Suffolk’s council (5) wanted to ‘divert’ all its public services. To outside providers. Here, the idea was driven by the council’s politics, not libraries’ needs (‘We did not look at user needs in any detail within the strict confines of the project.’). The whole idea has since been abandoned after a public outcry (however, plans for ‘community management’ are very much alive – and regarded with suspicion).

Before all that happened, FLP work in Suffolk discovered that any kind of devolution is ‘a huge task’ requiring many partnerships, and capacity building in the community.

Individual libraries can’t just be hived off ad hoc: ‘It has become clear that maintaining the connections between libraries, whoever runs them, is vital to their continuing value to communities. This will be in any legal agreements we make.’

In Northumberland and Durham (2), extensive work was done with communities, who proved very willing to help out. The project is already trying out prototypes as ‘action research’. But it’s still not possible to give ‘a final view’ of potential savings.

Even Bradford, using a fairly well-trying ‘library links’ concept, cannot quantify the savings (but knows it will cost money short-term).

Perhaps the most positive vision was the south-west’s (10): ‘One part of the vision is that the new model would enable communities with libraries – but increasingly those without – to develop community provision to fit local needs in a way that the current set-up does not.’ But that, it says, will need lots of consultation – and time.

Consultation with staff was rare – and usually meant just informing them. Suffolk found this ‘challenging and interesting’....

What next?

Most FLP projects have yet to produce much action. Most argue for more time – plus clarity of vision and detailed financial information.

Immediate benefits from FLP, most agree, include its online community of practice, improved mutual understanding with partners, better-informed elected members, shared learning (if time permitted) and better information about their communities.

Some projects show that little had previously been done to align libraries with councils’ overall priorities.

All these points are familiar from many existing reports. All could surely have been worked on already – preferably at national level.

Project 4 points out that even now, none of the FLP work has ‘provided any further clarity on the 1964 Act ... for example, what “comprehensive and efficient” is or should be. The Wirral review and judicial reviews have not provided a national

picture. It is unclear how FLP will be delivered [in future] without MLA input.’

More questions than answers, then.

References

- 1 tinyurl.com/3qzdvz
- 2 tinyurl.com/3bj3hnm

WHO TOOK PART?

(numbers as in the appendix²)

- 1 Greater Manchester: Bolton, with Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, Wigan**
[feasibility study for sharing services]
- 2 Northumberland with Durham**
[2 projects: going local, going digital]
- 3 Herefordshire with Shropshire**
[serving sparse rural areas]
- 4 Lincolnshire, with Rutland, Cambridgeshire, North East Lincolnshire, Peterborough**
[creative ways to ‘cut across traditional administrative boundaries’]
- 5 Suffolk** [options for community governance of libraries]
- 6 Bradford**
[‘Library Links’ in retail premises]
- 7 Oxfordshire with Kent** [develop an analytical tool to inform modernisation]
- 8 Kensington & Chelsea with Hammersmith & Fulham (later joined by Westminster)**
[shared services ‘across the board’, including libraries]
- 9 Selpig (South East London Performance Improvement Group): Lewisham with Bexley, Bromley, Croydon, Greenwich, Lambeth, Southwark**
[savings and improvements via increased collaboration]
- 10 Cornwall with Devon, Plymouth, Torbay** [better services, crossing traditional boundaries]

STOP PRESS: It’s worse than we thought

NOW THERE’S a new report* on FLP. It adds little to the first one – except a new opportunity for almost everyone to express withering scorn.

The report is by MLA, in one of its very last actions, and the Local Government Group (a new joint name for the Local Government Association and its improvement agency).

The previous report made it very clear that FLP has little to offer that’s immediately useful. Drastic changes, Ed Vaizey style, cost time and money.

They also raise scary questions of law, finance and organisation. The new report does nothing to clarify what these are – let alone how to solve them. The wise reader will conclude it’s best to stand back and let these pioneer projects go through all the trauma and make all the mistakes.

One extraordinary section reads: ‘It must be recognised that the pilot projects now have to be implemented. Many of the councils are only just embarking on consultation ahead of taking final decisions on the future shape of services. It may be that as a result of consultation, proposals change.

‘It will also be important to track implementation in these projects if we are to confirm that the proposals work and actually

improve efficiency and effectiveness, and it could be a number of years before a final judgement can be made on this.’

In other words: ‘We haven’t a clue if any of this will work. And few councils have even told the public what they’re planning.’

Annie Mauger, Chief Executive of librarians’ association CILIP, says: ‘A Tory government made libraries statutory. Now here we are with a Tory government supporting a programme that is not giving anything that meets people’s needs. It is such a limited document in scope and doesn’t change the underlying issue that libraries are being hit more than any other service.’

As for volunteer-run libraries, Annie says: ‘We recognise the need to save money, but we don’t have any evidence that this will.’

Librarians’ website Voices for the Library raises a huge pile of questions about how volunteering, and ‘partnerships with the private sector’ would work in practice. It adds: ‘A room that is merely full of books is not a library, no matter how the councils dress it up ...

‘At a time when real leadership and vision is required to outline a truly 21st century service, the government is found lacking in imagination, short-sighted... and blinkered by ideology.’

* Learning from the Future Libraries Programme phase one: <http://tinyurl.com/3hqbnap>

Over to the community?

Here it is – the minister’s latest gift to public libraries. It is the new report on Community Managed Libraries* – part of his favourite Future Libraries Programme.

* <http://tinyurl.com/67xc9al>

THIS REPORT’S findings are apt to be swept aside in the panic created by savage, hasty cuts to local authority services. As author Jo Woolley delicately puts it: ‘The current pace of change means that this is a dynamic context in which to write a paper, aspects of which may quickly be outdated.’

She means the gathering pace of ‘multiple transfers’, as council after council gives in to local pressure to stop closures – by handing libraries over to ‘the community’.

There is no precedent of hand-overs on this scale to learn from. Moreover, the various examples of existing community-run libraries are – as might be expected – very unlike each other. Not so easy to draw lessons here either. And there are just 29 of them (one per cent of England’s libraries). Not much of an evidence base.

A file of case histories is to come soon. Meanwhile, it does emerge that ‘community-managed libraries’ are neither free nor easy. Councils certainly can’t just dump them, even on affluent areas.

Are there any problems? Well... ‘the majority of local authorities intend to retain their community libraries within their statutory service, although very few intend to continue funding these libraries’. How is that going to work?

Will local people rush to take over? Well... ‘several’ councils say people will need ‘specialist legal advice, or support around Tupe (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment Regulations), indemnifications, re-structuring pre-transfer and business management... [and they] would be responsible for sourcing advice and experience themselves’. A scary prospect, surely.

Extracts from the report:

Community involvement and engagement with the statutory library service has been in place for many years; it is different from handing a service over to the community to run and manage.

Community libraries [current, established, models] are not free and represent a cost to the public purse. A large proportion are maintained through parish/town council support.

A library designed by its core users might not look the same as one provided by the council. Local authorities must be mindful of their duties under the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964.

The successful transfer of libraries to community support relies at present on the continued existence of a free, quality statutory service. The greatest opportunity for the future relationship... is to work in symbiotic partnership.



Puddletown, Dorset: all kinds of help from local people kept this library open – though Friends chairman Mike Chaney pointed out in *The Campaigner* that they could guarantee to work in it for only four hours a week, and needed professional support. This year, all funding has been withdrawn, so, after all their efforts, the library is doomed.

The report lists the very real advantages of having a truly local, responsive, flexible, community engaged library service.

It’s undeniable that some local authority services need a big culture change to embrace such ideas.

But, that said, it’s surely arguable that all these benefits could arise from a conventional statutory service – if it had enough money and proper council support.

THE PROS

- Local authorities (both rural and urban) can maintain/increase library provision; save money; meet local goals around employment, deprivation, community engagement with the political process, social benefits.
- Consumers can become ‘participants & influencers’; respond to place-based needs via co-location, asset transfer and income generation.
- Users can get continued/improved access when buildings would otherwise have closed (i.e. ‘access to information, books and other media, including the internet, civic space for study, learning, reading or simply meeting others’.)

THE CONS

- Libraries that are not part of statutory provision are not governed by it – so they could charge for books/services: ‘This might be seen to undermine the fundamental principles and purpose of the library service.’
- Too much distance from local authority support could reduce a library’s ‘capacity to be used to achieve social change’ – so a council loses a ‘greater strategic opportunity’.
- Loss of trained and paid staff may mean no consistent access to advice and support to public library standard.
- A clear split may be damaging: ‘Community libraries face difficulties if set outside the statutory service, and the statutory service can see benefits to the population as whole if it has a relationship with community-managed libraries. The greatest opportunity for both is to work in symbiotic partnership.’