

THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN

SUPPORTING FRIENDS AND USERS OF LIBRARIES



'...ongoing changes by library authorities...'

UK libraries in 2017

Volunteers

- no easy answers

Money troubles

Librarians -
frustration and fear

IT update

News, views, reports
- events!

Children's laureate

Most-borrowed books

Section 106 mystery

AUTUMN 2017
No. 95



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THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN – AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

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



The Library Campaign

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Registered charity (England & Wales) No. 1102634

THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN maintains a FREE LIST of local FRIENDS AND USER GROUPS

with their contact details, on our website.

If you know of a new (or old!) group that is not on our list, please notify: thelibrarycampaign@gmail.com

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Officers and the Executive Committee meet regularly every two months, 1–4pm usually on a Saturday, usually in central London. Campaign members are always very welcome to attend. We would like to hold more of these meetings in the regions, both to encourage members to come and to help those committee members who have a long journey to London. We have 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.

2017–18 MEETINGS:

For details and future dates, check our website, or contact us to be notified (thelibrarycampaign@gmail.com)

ELECTED OFFICERS

Laura Swaffield London

Andrew Coburn Essex

MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Geoffrey Dron Bolton

Bob Goodrick London

Mathew Hulbert Leicestershire

The following organisations send representatives to attend steering group meetings:

Unison,

Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals (CILIP).

WHO'S WHO?

Quick guide to some of the many things relevant to libraries ...

1964 Act (Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964) says all local authorities have a statutory duty to provide a public library service, which must be 'comprehensive and efficient' and available to all who wish to use it. Libraries are NOT optional. It gives the Secretary of State power to enquire – and intervene – if standards fall short. These powers have barely been used.

ACE (Arts Council England) now has 'responsibility for supporting and developing libraries'. As yet unclear what that means in practice.

CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals): the professional body for librarians in all types of library.

CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy) collects figures on library performance and on user satisfaction.

DCLG (Department for Communities & Local Government): the central government department responsible for local government. It provides most of local councils' funding. It does not determine how much of it is spent on libraries.

DDCMS (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport): sets central government's policy on libraries (among other things), but does not fund them. It is headed by the Secretary of State, with one minister more directly responsible for libraries (among other things).

LGA (Local Government Association) lobbies on behalf of local government. Does some useful work on public libraries, but ultimately sides with councils, not library users.

MLA (Museums, Libraries & Archives Council): ACE's predecessor.

NLT (National Literacy Trust): charity 'dedicated to building a literate nation' – which includes promoting reading for pleasure. Huge source of information, campaigns and projects.

SCL (Society of Chief Librarians): advises LGA on library matters. Does useful work on public libraries, but sticks to 'quiet diplomacy'.

UNISON: the trade union for most public library staff. Good research and promotional materials.

TRA (The Reading Agency): charity to develop reading, especially via libraries. Dozens of projects to promote books, especially to key groups like children, reluctant readers, ethnic minorities etc.

Taskforce (the Leadership for Libraries Taskforce): set up and funded by the DCMS to lead development following the Sieghart report 2014.

The right kind of change?

In June, 2017 looked like the year when everything changed. The general election overturned some big national assumptions. Whatever your political affinity (and TLC has none) we learned that voters do read manifestos, and are not paralysed by cynicism and apathy (even the young ones).

The wisdom of austerity was strongly and consistently challenged. This pressure has continued. Cuts to public services are finally on the national agenda. People are starting to realise that damaging them damages all of us.

The services themselves are increasingly emboldened to spell out just how bad that damage has become – to police, firefighters, the NHS, schools, prisons, libraries...

Within days came the horror of Grenfell Tower. Nothing can ever mitigate that.

But the focus has widened to highlight issues such as the strain on emergency services, disastrous deregulation, dissipation of responsibility, outsourcing, a council's choice of spending priorities, its refusal to listen to residents

Plus general indifference towards citizens who aren't rich – not just locally, but nationally and throughout the media

We are impressed at the dignity, articulacy and courage of local residents, who are determined to maintain that wide focus beyond their own suffering.

So.

For quite a while, it really seemed that the world had been turned upside down. Things are settling a bit now, but perceptions may have shifted permanently.

We can all see that public libraries are perfect exemplars of all the themes outlined above. But has anything changed? Not really.

This issue brings the picture together. As usual, there's a deluge of reports about how incredibly useful libraries are, in all kinds of ways. Plus other reports that show the decision-makers are still not on board with library users and campaigners.



■ Sign of the times in Norfolk.

The menu is change all costs – and precious little evaluation of what those changes are doing. Neither the DDCMS nor the Taskforce are asking the right questions.

A constant theme is money. The features on volunteers, and reading groups, both show what really gets lost when a bit of money is 'saved'. Those on section 106, and the hard cash value of libraries, show there should be other considerations.

All the talk of innovation, partnerships (etc) often comes down to staff using all their creativity just to find new ways of getting basic funding. 'Income generation' distorts the public service ethos.

The basic public library model is flexible enough to meet changing needs – if it is properly funded. Every good local library is a 'community hub'. We acknowledge that not all of them are good. But nobody ever said they should just be 'hubs' and drop their library role. Yet that is a growing trend.

Campaigners are still accused of being too 'negative' when they confront head-on the wreckage being inflicted at local level. But they understand very well the value of public libraries. They mount brilliantly creative campaigns, and compile impressive (and practical) arguments for wiser spending of brutally limited resources.

They should be listened to by councils – and the government agencies responsible for libraries. That's the change we want.

THE COVER PHOTO is of the Old Library, Digbeth, Birmingham, taken from a gallery of 'ghost libraries' on <http://www.playingbythebook.net> – mostly a site that covers children's books. The library is now, it says, 'an events space for hire and is often used for weddings!'

The cover caption is from the minutes of the latest Taskforce meeting, as duly reported in **PRIVATE EYE**. See page 6.

THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGNER AUTUMN 2017, No.95

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Thriller writer G X Todd is also a librarian, Gemma Todd. She had the rare courage to speak the truth about the wretched situation of many in the profession...

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Masses of facts in easy chart form – plus plenty to think about. From Carnegie Trust UK.

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Laura Swaffield reviews the new report from the Taskforce. Lots of facts, few clear findings and nothing about their value as... er, libraries.

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There are good volunteers, says author and librarian Dawn Finch. But the truth is that it is just not workable to rely on them too much.

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A new study reveals the full value of what these groups deliver – and the threat posed not just by budget cuts but by the 'partnership' model libraries are now supposed to pursue to get funding.

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Ben Rymer highlights an obvious source of funding for libraries that is constantly overlooked by councils that plead poverty.

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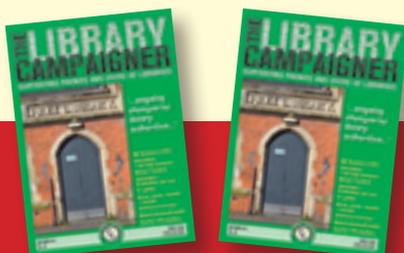
Nick Poole, chief executive of CILIP, takes an optimistic view of libraries' case for better funding. Plus two reports that try to spell out their value in strict financial terms.

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Public Lending Right pays a small fee to writers every time their book is borrowed. This means it can give some fascinating insights into the nation's reading tastes.

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The more TLC grows, the stronger we all get!



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

Another year, another minister ...

Last year's new libraries minister, Rob Wilson, lost his Parliamentary seat in June. So it goes.

The new new one is John Glen, MP for Salisbury and South Wiltshire since 2010.

He hasn't crossed our radar before, and we haven't seen much of him so far. He lists his political interests as 'policy development, youth issues, armed forces, foreign affairs, education, health'.

His proper title is 'Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Arts, Heritage and Tourism', which hardly emphasises his libraries role. He has popped up at the odd library in his finding-out tour and expressed suitable enthusiasm.

We'll have to see.



■ John Glen meets Anne Sarrag of The Reading Agency, at the launch of this year's brilliant-as-always Summer Reading Challenge.

£4m? Thanks, but ...

Departed minister Rob Wilson did achieve one thing – a £4m one-off fund for libraries to bid for 'innovative' projects that 'deliver new opportunities for disadvantaged communities'. Which is what any library does.

The Department for Culture, Media & Sport and Arts Council England chose 30 projects to get anything from £50,000 to £250,00. You can look up the list online.*

They are all good, of course, ranging from a soft play area to business advice, laptop loans to activities for various groups.

But they are all, really, the kind of thing that most services would do if they had the money. And doubtless the projects that didn't win would've been just as good.

The truth is that £4m is peanuts to cover the whole of England. And it's dwarfed by the sums ACE doles out regularly for arts, performance and the other things that come more naturally into its brief.

Darren Henley, ACE chief executive, said: 'This programme has provided us with a fantastic opportunity to fund new activities in libraries and reach people who might not usually use their local library service.'

'We had a phenomenal response to the fund when it opened. There is a huge appetite for funding like this.'

Quite so.

http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Libraries_Opportunities_for_Everyone_Innovation_Fund_successful_applicants.pdf

Taskforce gets real?

The Taskforce has done some good work. But for many its whole programme, so far, has been compromised by its too-ready acceptance that austerity is not to be questioned.

Plus a rather starry-eyed view of 'alternatives' such as co-location, partnerships with outside bodies, income generation and using volunteers.

The core assumption is that it's up to hard-pressed library staff to come up with 'innovations' that just boil down to finding ways to replace the core funding they have lost.

So it's intriguing to note a passage in its latest minutes about forming a sub-group (though in no great hurry) to concentrate just on funding.

We quote the exact words, for fear of spreading misconceptions. But alongside the usual ideas, we do note references to 'core funding', getting more from developers and having (yet another) crack at central government...

The minutes say:

'In light of the continued messages about austerity for this Parliament, the Taskforce agreed to review work undertaken to date and look in more depth at how long-term and sustainable funding... could be secured.'

'There were a range of routes that they wanted to explore further, ranging from:

- securing existing core funding, and pursuing efficiencies within existing budgets
- seeking new funding (for example by pitching for money from the proposed DCMS Cultural Infrastructure Fund or other specialist foundations; or seeking funding linked to specific outcomes, such as health or business support bids)
- pursuing other forms of revenue (ranging from infrastructure funding derived from developers, income generation, endowment funding or social enterprise revenue streams).'

Any day – TLC keeps you in touch

The ingenious Elizabeth Ash is compiling a daily update of library news that comes direct to your inbox. Go to <https://uklibrarynews.wordpress.com> and click the blue box on the right that says: 'Follow UK Library News'.

October 9–14: National Libraries Week

Libraries Week

9-14
OCTOBER
2017

discovery.

National Libraries Day has been moved from its traditional slot in February – timed to alert local authorities as they put the final touches to their budgets.

Now it's in October and it's National Libraries Week – the week of October 9 to 14 (clued-up schools, councils and library users have long made more of a week of it).

The change of date was agreed by librarians' association CILIP with its current partners Society of Chief Librarians, The Reading Agency, Arts Council England, the Taskforce and the School Library Association. (TLC has long fallen off the invitation list, although library Friends have always been an essential resource for libraries taking part.)

The tone is to be 100% positive. CILIP says: 'Libraries will showcase the best they have to offer, encouraging people to discover what libraries can do for them.'

'It's not just public libraries – libraries of all kinds in schools, workplaces and universities have amazing services that will be on show during Libraries Week.'

Libraries are arranging their own activities, so find out what yours is doing and support it! And/or do your bit online via Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. For instance, CILIP is collecting 'interesting or unusual facts and figures about libraries' – serious or fun – to use in publicity. Email or send via Twitter: <https://twitter.com/CILIPinfo/status/903220090874855425>

If you go to the website and scroll across the top you can find a whole lot of stuff including library facts, posters, templates, a toolkit for marketing and another for PR. These are seriously good. So download them in case they disappear after the Week! And sign up for regular email updates.

GET THE LATEST NEWS VIA:

<http://www.librariesweek.org.uk>
www.twitter.com/librariesweek
www.facebook.com/librariesweek
 #librariesweek
 Email: librariesweek@cilip.org.uk

October 19: SOS libraries

UNISON holds an annual all-out 'SOS day' for a chosen public service. This year it is doing public libraries proud – on 19 October.

UNISON says: 'Libraries are a hub and a haven in our communities. They offer a place for people to work, relax, discover and think.'

But the campaign will not dodge what is actually happening to these havens right now. UNISON says: 'The incredible work that libraries do every day to support their local communities is under threat because of Westminster's unfair cuts to spending on local services. Libraries have been hit particularly hard by cuts: more than 478 have closed in just six years.'

'The effects of these cuts – closures, redundancies, library privatisation and loss of expertise – are devastating for libraries and for the people who depend on them.'

'We need to make sure that library services are protected and invested in so that communities can enjoy and benefit from them now and in the future.'

All UNISON members will be urged to join and visit their local library (it's a big union!).

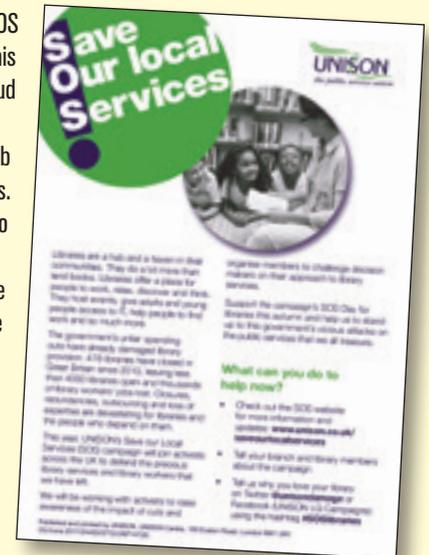
Local branches are getting information, ideas and resources to start organising. So get in touch with your local UNISON staff to see how you can get involved.

There will be full-on campaigning to 'call on local and national decision-makers to take action on shameful spending cuts and ask councils to commit to providing comprehensive library services'.

There are campaign materials to download. There's a basic leaflet at: <https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2017/06/24453.pdf> and a full guide at: <https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2017/09/SOS-DAY-2017-briefing-PDF.pdf>

There's a blogpost with regular updates. It has a slot for you to contribute – UNISON wants to feature lots of stories about individual library services – what's special about yours, how has it shown what libraries can do for people? You can also send material via Twitter or Facebook. Photos and videos welcome. See box for details.

UNISON says: 'Help us make our SOS campaign on libraries a rallying call to protect these vital community services.' Glad to!



GET THE LATEST NEWS VIA:

<https://www.unison.org.uk/blogs/2017/08/sos-day-17>
<https://twitter.com/unisondamage>
www.facebook.com/unisonLGcampaigns
 #SOSlibraries
 Email: sos@unison.co.uk

The debate rumbles on: should the official library agencies be quite so accepting of endless cuts? It reached flashpoint recently with reports of a conference appearance by Taskforce CEO Kathy Settle.

The most pithy was in *PRIVATE EYE* (issue no 1448):

'LIBRARIES Taskforce chief executive Kathy Settle made the mind-boggling claim at a recent local government conference that public libraries are currently flourishing: "While people focus on libraries that have closed, there aren't that many of those – and there are hundreds that have been opened or renovated," she insisted. "That message doesn't always get out."

'Minutes of the last Taskforce meeting, just 16 days earlier, record that Settle was present while the Taskforce discussed complaints about the lost libraries in Lancashire, Swindon, Southampton, Barnet, Bedfordshire and Darlington. Maybe she was confused by the fact that in the minutes of a three-hour meeting, covered by more than 4,500 words, "closures" were not mentioned once, instead referred to obliquely as "ongoing changes by library authorities".'

I didn't say that!

We asked **Kathy Settle** for the facts. Here's her reply.

Recent articles in *Private Eye* and the *Bookseller* referred to a report by UKAuthority on a conference that I spoke at in late June 2017. As quotes were used without the full context I provided and, in a few cases, quotes were attributed to me when the remarks were actually made by others, I wanted to provide more details here.

The conference was Connected Local Government Live – one of many where we seek opportunities to share the important messages from our strategy document, *Libraries Deliver: Ambition*, with key decision makers in local councils and with partners.

The benefits of speaking at events like this was recognised by library commentator Leon in his recent blog post where he recognised that attending such events was 'effective advocacy to those with considerable influence over the running of libraries'.

My presentation started with context about library usage, moved on to an overview of the ideas set out in our strategy, and concluded with good practice examples of what library services are doing across the country.

The question and answer session afterwards was wide ranging, including some discussion on income generation ideas. This led to a member of the audience (not me, as described in the article) mentioning that their library service was receiving funds from their local council as it recognised that the library provided public toilets which were open to all. I commented that this wasn't something I'd heard of before, but it was certainly an interesting idea!

The article reported that I'd said 'such [income generating] initiatives "can sound unpalatable"'. This

was an acknowledgement of some people's views that they don't think libraries should have to undertake income generation activities and are concerned this might detract from the library service's ability to deliver its 'core purposes'.

I can fully appreciate these concerns. It is right that all such opportunities need to be carefully considered, ensuring they are relevant and appropriate to the particular library, their local circumstances and community needs, and will generate sufficient profit to make them worthwhile.

However, these opportunities can lead to benefits to users (for example, widening the range of activities and facilities available) and to library services (for example, bringing in new members, broadening the range of local community organisations they work with, as well as providing a source of income) so are worth exploring.

The role of the Taskforce is to raise awareness of opportunities, in particular those ideas which have been proven to work for some – whilst recognising that they may not work for all. This was why we focused on this topic in some of our recent Masterclasses.

The discussion also led on to the pros and cons of co-location and, ideally – to maximise benefits for users and efficiencies – integration with other services.

This included JobCentres and police services, where apparently it was said that 'police services are already paying £30,000–40,000 a year for library front desks...' This may well be true, but it wasn't something I said.

I did mention the new 'hot desking' Commuter Hubs established in some libraries with the Ministry of



■ Kathy Settle

Justice, where I 'also warned that those seeking to use space in this way should prepare for... "pushback" from the local community'.

Initiatives like this can be subject to criticism, often due to very reasonable concerns about how the reuse of space might impact on users and the library services they can access. The MoJ Commuter Hubs have, however, been located in back office areas that were previously under-utilised. They have not taken space from the public areas in the library, showing that changes like this can be made without such detriment if planned carefully.

The UK Authority article concluded: 'The overall message was that libraries are flourishing' and quoted me as saying: 'While people focus on libraries that have closed, there aren't that many of those – and there are hundreds that have been opened or renovated. That message doesn't always get out.'

Commentators leapt on the phrase about libraries flourishing and commented that I was living in some alternative reality.

TASKFORCE CONTACTS

<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/libraries-taskforce> <https://libriestaskforce.blog.gov.uk>

Twitter: @LibTaskforce Email: libriestaskforce@culture.gov.uk

What the article failed to mention was that one of the first slides in my presentation, based on the CIPFA figures, showed the decrease in library visits and book issues (and increase in website visits) over the last 10 years.

I did build on this to reflect that, even with this decline in numbers, library services were still some of the most used services in our communities, with 211 million physical visits and 86 million digital visits in England in 2015-16, making them a hugely valuable asset in terms of their reach into, and support for, communities – an asset that we believe could be better utilised by government and other partners.

The reality I see is that the picture is hugely varied across the country. For example, some library services are achieving increases in users, whilst many others are seeing a decline. And some library services are proposing to close some libraries or move them to community management, whilst others are proposing building new libraries or undertaking significant refurbishments.

My point was that, despite this variation, the mainstream press tends to focus exclusively on reductions and cuts and closures to services.

Again, Leon's blogpost (referred to earlier) summarised some of my previous comments on this topic well: 'Kathy Settle... said: "I think we need to break that negative narrative. I recognise that's difficult because there really are cuts and closures happening. We certainly don't want to make it look as if everything is sweetness and light because we know that it's not.

"But equally, if we don't turn that narrative round and collectively start talking more positively about libraries, no one else is going to. And why would anyone want to invest in a service that sounds as if it's failing?"

We have a large strand of work articulated in our strategy around making the case for libraries – including getting the 'Libraries First' message over to government and partners. Approaches include one-to-one meetings, speaking at events like this, sharing good practice and encouraging library workers to tell and share stories of their successes.

I appreciate that the impacts of this may not always be easy to see, especially as some of the discussions we have with external partners are confidential in the first instance and projects can take time to get off the ground. But we do look to showcase these as soon as we can on our blog.

We publish regular updates about the work of the Taskforce on our webpages, our blog, and via twitter. If anyone has questions or comments about our work, they are welcome to email us.

REFERENCES

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fifteenth-meeting-of-the-libraries-taskforce/minutes-of-the-fifteenth-meeting-of-the-libraries-taskforce>
- <https://leonslibraryblog.com/>



CILIP shapes up

CILIP has a new logo. Not too sure why, but anyway it's a better move than the ill-fated initiative a couple of years ago to change its name to ILPUK (don't ask).

CILIP ran a well-timed FACTS MATTER campaign this year around the general election – a perfect time to point out just how important it is to have trained professionals around when you need to sort out fact from fake.

With Brexit and Trump making up so much of the daily news – and the growing tendency for councils to forget what proper librarians actually do – we reckon it's a campaign that should run and run.



DCMS meets reality

The DCMS has a new logo too – with 'Digital' added to its name. It hadn't had time to change the outside of its Whitehall building when it was visited by a gaggle of real, non-virtual children from Barnet.

Barnet is just one service ramming through destructive cuts despite overwhelming public opposition. The children object in particular to the policy of leaving libraries without staff for hours. At these times under-15s are banned completely, for obvious safeguarding reasons. The children object, for equally obvious reasons.

Coincidentally – or not, the ... er ... DDCMS announced the next day that at long last it is adding Barnet to the list of services it is formally investigating. What effect this will have remains to be seen.



■ Hats off to the librarians of Chester, who got right into the spirit of the city's summer Pride parade.

Literature needs libraries

How many people read literature? What does it mean to them? Who do they see as writers of literature anyway? The Royal Society of Literature has commissioned the first-ever public survey* to ask. It's fascinating.

Respondents defined for themselves what 'literature' is. Their most-named authors list starts with Shakespeare and Dickens and includes many classics, but also popular modern writers ranging from J K Rowling to... er, Dan Brown.

'Far from being elitist or off-putting,' says the RSL, 'literature turns out to be something people love, long for or aspire to.

'There is a tremendous opportunity here for all of us in the literary field to tap into the public's appetite for literature.'

Well over a third (38%) would like to read more literature, rising to 56% of those who don't read literature now.

So what would help them read more? The top three responses were:

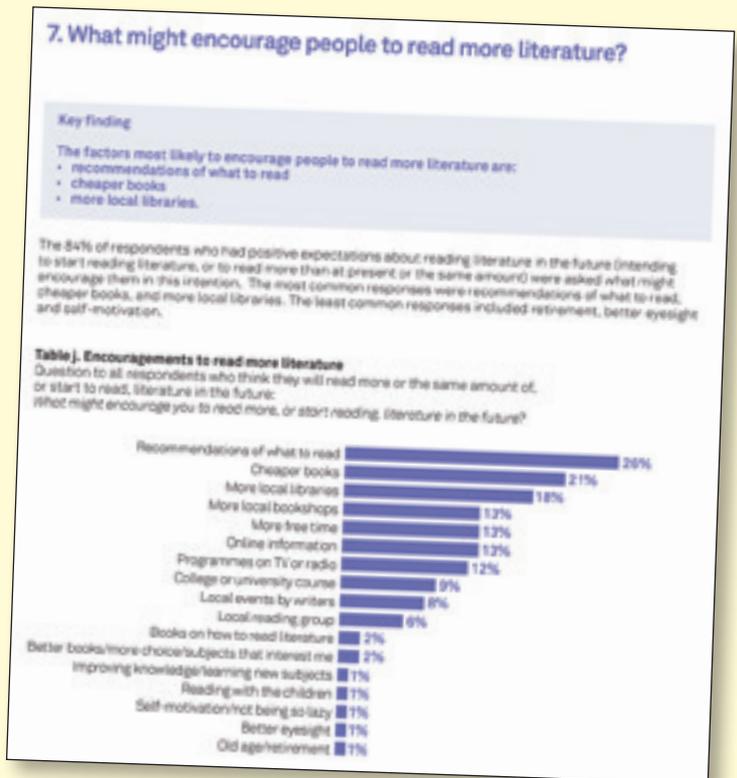
recommendations of what to read (26%), cheaper books (21%) and more local libraries (18%).

The RSL comments: 'Local libraries may come third, but they are equally relevant to meeting the needs expressed in the first two points – with librarians and library activities helping people choose their reading, and with free accessibility removing any financial barrier.

'A properly resourced public library service is vital to sustaining and increasing the engagement in literature that this survey makes clear is such a valuable component of British society.

'Like many others, we at the RSL have been appalled to witness the proliferation of library cuts and closures in recent years. We are currently considering how we may be able to use the RSL's influence to help address this concern.'

In fact, the full list of factors also includes reading groups, events with writers



and other things you might find via the library – if people did but know it. More publicity needed, as usual.

<http://rsliterature.org/literature-in-britain-today>

Literature needs librarians

The perfect complement to the RSL's survey comes from the Society of Chief Librarians.

'Reading doesn't just happen,' says SCL. 'It is nurtured and encouraged by the right kinds of activities, groups and support'.

Reader development is a high priority for the services surveyed. Most likely to be targeted were adults and children aged 0–12. Least likely were BME communities, adults with learning disabilities, ESOL readers and adults aged 18–25.

Many services offer reading activities outside of the library building. Over two-thirds support reading for non-readers.

But less than half the respondents had had any form of training.

Most wanted were training in outreach work and work with non-readers, followed by making the case for reading in libraries and support to develop new delivery models.

Basic 'soft skills' – engaging people in conversations about reading – were also needed.

Most services still have specialist librarians for reader development. But volunteers are the second most commonly used resource, though only 44% saw training them as a priority.

Maybe this is partly because non-librarians, says SCL, need a completely different type of training that has yet to be developed... another unexpected headache for those who think volunteers are the answer to everything.

... and literacy

Reading for pleasure is known to be the essential key to improved literacy. Local libraries have a key role here, countering the rather grim, didactic approach encouraged in schools by the national curriculum.

But there's a problem... 86% of English MPs' constituencies (458 out of 533) contain at least one ward with 'serious literacy issues', says NLT (National Literacy Trust).

Its researchers created a 'literacy vulnerability score', using the social factors most linked with low literacy such as unemployment, qualifications, income, social mix and area characteristics. Children's education attainment was not included.

Middlesbrough came top of the danger list, followed by Barking, Hackney South & Shoreditch, Liverpool (Walton) and Sheffield (Brightside & Hillsborough).

But most problem areas are in the West Midlands, Yorkshire and Humber and the North West. Inner cities have the greatest needs. Rural areas are less affected.

NLT says: 'Children's futures will be put in jeopardy if action isn't taken at a local level to tackle England's deep-rooted literacy crisis.'

<http://goscl.com/reader-development-a-high-priority-for-library-services>

Internet access – the reality

For the next time you encounter that hoary old assertion that ‘We don’t need libraries – everything’s online and everyone has internet access’... here’s a reminder of the obvious.

Good Things Foundation and BT have issued a new analysis* which shows there are 15.2 million people in the UK that aren’t making full use of the internet. They don’t just need IT access. They need help to make the most of it.

Either they are complete non-users (7.8m), or they are using only one site or a couple of apps, or going online less than once a week (7.4m).

Both groups are likely to be socially excluded, with 90% of non-users classed as disadvantaged (people with poor health or a disability, people in social class DE, people who left school before the age of 16).

Non-users are likely to be older (39% are over 75). Limited use is seen at all ages, with 63% aged under 65.

This shows that groups most excluded from society are also those most likely to be missing out on the significant benefits the internet can provide, including financial savings, work opportunities, information and the chance to stay in touch with friends and family.

Good Things Foundation says: ‘We know basic digital skills is a big issue (18% of people say they aren’t online as they don’t have the skills). But it’s not the only measure. Digital exclusion is a much more complex issue. The way people are using the internet – how much and how often – is vital to understand whether they’re really getting the benefit they could.’

The local library would seem a good place to address all this.

The research is based on new analysis of the 2015 Ofcom Media Literacy Survey, by Liverpool University.

* <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/news-and-blogs/news/152-million-people-uk-not-fully-using-internet-says-new-report>

Internet access – go to the library!

The government has published its Digital Strategy.*

Despite the inevitable burbling about ‘incredible content and services... exciting start-ups... technology clusters’ and so on, it gives a fairly coherent list of objectives, including proper broadband everywhere [plenty to do here] and digital skills for all [plenty here, too].

Which department has issued this? The assumed guardian of public libraries – the DCMS (Department for Culture, Media & Sport).

And – glory be! – the section on skills training actually includes in its ‘first steps’: ‘develop the role of libraries in improving digital inclusion to make them the “go-to” provider of digital access, training and support for local communities.’

It notes that libraries are ‘trusted’, and provide hundreds of thousands of skill sessions, as well as more sophisticated stuff such as coding and makerspaces.

The dispiriting thing is that progress is seen as all about ‘partnerships’ with charities or with businesses like Google, BT, banks etc to provide what the government clearly thinks will be a free lunch.

Will that ‘trusted’ status really survive all this? Why can’t public services just be properly funded, instead of all this fooling about with ‘partners’?

* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-digital-strategy>

... and the story day to day

Free to download* is a report on how the People’s Network (i.e. PCs in libraries!) is working out. Installed nationwide in 2000 for a modest £100m, it’s now a core service.

An early worker on the project was one Nick Poole, now Chief Executive of CILIP, which has compiled the report with ICT specialists Lorensbergs.

His foreword sums it all up. Some quotes:

‘The People’s Network was then and still is today a brilliant piece of visionary thinking – a pioneering initiative that set the template for the provision of free, supported internet access in libraries around the world.

‘Its creators saw the transformative power of the internet and realised that it was an opportunity to translate our role as trusted civic institutions into an entirely new, online world.

‘Libraries have always stood for freedom, literacy, tolerance, knowledge and understanding and it has never been more important to defend these ideals than it is today. The People’s Network is the natural extension of this role into the digital space.

‘The findings of this book show, really for the first time since the People’s Network was launched, exactly how its impact reaches across every part of society and the economy.

‘Nearly 20 years on, it has matured to the point at which it can genuinely claim to be our most egalitarian, universally-accessible digital infrastructure.

‘Properly funded, it has the potential to be the platform through which the aspirations of the government’s Digital Strategy will be achieved – offering universal access to skills, creativity, learning and digital innovation.

‘If left under-resourced, it will represent the squandering of one of the UK’s most successful digital initiatives.’

But one bit of the introductory blurb is, sadly, no longer quite true:

‘No matter where you are in the country, you can visit your local library and use a computer for free. If you don’t know how, a librarian can assist you.’ Badly-cut services – and hundreds of volunteer-run libraries – can no longer guarantee this.

The report visits library staff in 10 services – Brent, Camden, Kensington & Chelsea, Milton Keynes, Peterborough, Reading, Slough, Stoke on Trent, Wakefield, Windsor & Maidenhead.

Certain themes emerge consistently – the huge demand, balanced by the difficulty of getting funds to update or expand; the absolute need for trained staff to help people, though many are hard-pressed to cope.

Some quotes:

‘There is some acknowledgement from central government of the work libraries are doing... but overall the People’s Network is not adequately funded. It is patchily supported in the country as a whole, and lacks a proper national strategy.’

‘The staff are stretched pretty thinly sometimes, and if someone needs help with their e-mails, it will take staff away from the desk, where they are also needed. People use the computers for a wide variety of activities and often need support.’

‘For the customers, it means that the libraries offer services, help and advice they cannot find elsewhere in a trusted and non-threatening environment. Many would feel uncomfortable with a more “corporate” setting. In deprived areas, particularly, it is also an important factor that the service is (and remains) free.’

* <http://www.lorensbergs.co.uk/short-stories-from-the-peoples-network>

Culture, Media and Sport Committee: New! Now with added women! (but still all-white)



Desmond Clarke

We're very sad to report the death of library campaigner Desmond Clarke MBE, at the age of 72. Desmond has been an untiring campaigner for decades, always coming up with a new idea or initiative even when others felt like flagging. He leaves a large gap to fill.

He had a distinguished career in publishing – marked by brilliant innovations. At Faber & Faber, for instance, he turned poets into bestsellers with clever promotions that broke new ground. As director of the Book Marketing Council, he devised the first Best of Young British Novelists campaign (1983), now repeated every decade. He served on loads of boards and committees, always bringing fresh ideas and masses of enthusiasm.

When he turned to public libraries in retirement, his nuts-and-bolts knowledge of the book trade gave him a real edge in arguing for better organisation – of service structure, of data, of book supply and more. He well deserved the MBE he was awarded in this year's 2017 New Year Honours for 'services to British public libraries and to literature'.



Library rap

Former children's laureate Julia Donaldson is a wonderful supporter of libraries. Here's a rap from her – 'It doesn't scan as perfectly as if I'd written it as a poem!', she says.



Everyone is welcome to walk through the door.
It really doesn't matter if you're rich or poor.
There are books in boxes and books on shelves.
They're free to borrow, so help yourselves.

Come and meet your heroes, old and new,
From William the Conqueror to Winnie the Pooh.
You can look into the Mirror or read the Times,
Or bring along a toddler to chant some rhymes.

The librarians's a friend who loves to lend,
So see if there's a book that she can recommend.
Read that book, and if you're bitten
You can borrow all the other ones the author's written.

Are you into battles or biography?
Are you keen on gerbils or geography?
Gardening or ghosts? Sharks or science fiction?
There's something here for everyone, whatever your addiction.

There are students revising, deep in concentration,
And school kids doing projects, finding inspiration.
Over in the corner there's a table with seating,
So come along and join in the Book Club meeting.

Yes, come to the Library! Browse and borrow,
And help make sure it'll still be here tomorrow.



Two more famous faces feature on CILIP posters: everyone's favourite classicist Mary Beard, and poet-performer Jacob Sam La Rose.

Search for 'posters' at <http://www.cilip.org.uk> and download free.



Four more reports

Arts Council England has produced a flurry of four new reports. None contains any earth-shattering new insights. But they neatly set out what public libraries can do. And all include case histories – plus tips for success – that are worth a look. All at: <http://bit.ly/2vVZaNg>

Stand by me: the contribution of public libraries to the well-being of older people

This argues that libraries are well-placed to serve this fast-growing group – ‘among the biggest social challenges we will face over the coming decades, as a society, economically, and within our own families’.



‘There are very few other public services which achieve regular personal contact with over one-third of the 75+ population. Those which do, notably GPs, are urgently seeking ways older people can be targeted by preventative interventions which reduce the likelihood of them needing more serious help from social care agencies and the NHS.’

The study looks at five schemes:

- Halton’s reminiscence boxes;
- Hertfordshire’s Slipper Swaps fall prevention programme;
- Kent’s ‘digital independence’ home visits, training and laptop loans for housebound people;
- Norfolk’s Libraries Loneliness Project;
- Wakefield’s fully dementia friendly branch library.

‘Some examples,’ it says, ‘are of course about making a difference through books and reading, but most are more about the value of sharing information, and the support of human contact.’

Benefits include:

- helping people live in their own homes for longer;
- helping councils deliver their priorities, and their ghastly new statutory duty (under the Care Act 2014) to ‘stimulate’ a ‘market’ of ‘diverse... care and support services’ by gathering useful information, and themselves providing relevant services.

Re-writing the story: the contribution of public libraries to place-shaping

‘Public libraries are one of the most egalitarian public services and public spaces we have,’ says the report.

‘Libraries have a significant role to play in place-shaping because they are one of the most familiar, well-recognised and trusted local institutions. And... they



reach all sections and demographics of the community throughout their lives.’

Place-shaping apparently means ‘local governments and their partners in health and education act consciously to cultivate the unique strengths and assets and meet the specific needs and concerns of their communities’.

The study narrows that down to ‘library services helping ensure economic growth benefits for everyone’.

However, the case studies cited are mercifully more varied than that might imply:

- a Cambridgeshire library used as a base to develop community projects until they can stand alone;
- Devon’s Fablab and Business & IP Centre;
- Leicester’s arts-led work in libraries to boost learning, from under-5s to grandparents;
- Peterborough’s storytelling and literacy programme with schools and families;
- St Helens’ use of libraries as the ‘route’ to get people into the arts.

‘Where culture is being used as a route to opportunity, libraries are being used as routes to culture,’ says the report. And they give ‘access to lifelong learning for all without formal enrolment’.

There’s welcome support for local branches: ‘Place-shaping requires physical presence - it cannot happen through council websites or call-centres... The ability to provide well-known, high-footfall physical settings... is something few other services can provide – even schools and children’s centres can struggle due to issues around safeguarding and public access.’

Is anyone out there listening?

Evidencing Libraries Audience Reach: research findings and analysis

This one’s quite a tough read. It aims to ‘understand the reach of public libraries, and the way audience research and data are accessed and used by library practitioners’.

It uses multiple research tools, plus a literature review, and does a thorough crunching job.

The findings will surprise few. But they are presented with a welcome sense of urgency.

First, libraries are a ‘trusted, open, free public space accessible to all’, so they reach a much broader range of age and social class than other cultural activities, including more black and minority ethnic users.

Users come and go, lapsing and then re-joining at trigger points such as having children, taking up study, becoming unemployed or retiring.

Overall, ‘the public library is a trusted and well-loved brand – but poor marketing means awareness of the offer is low’.

Meanwhile, libraries are ‘sitting on a wealth of valuable, but under-utilised data’. It comes from many different sources, in far too many different frameworks.

Not surprisingly, staff ‘lack the time and resources to turn their member data into actionable insight’. Not to mention the data analysis skills. Heads of service would ‘dearly like’ to have more power to argue their case, and use in-depth info to develop services...

‘Moreover, at the national level, the sector lacks a core, shared data benchmarking framework by which to inform and improve local library service delivery, as well as being a key resource to demonstrate the impact and value of libraries at the local and national level.’

Easier said than done, as the Taskforce seems to be finding.

The report has much more to say about problems and solutions. The five anonymised case studies cover:

- identifying unmet needs;
- analysing council info and consultation results;
- communicating with users and non-users.

Libraries as Community Hubs: case studies and learning

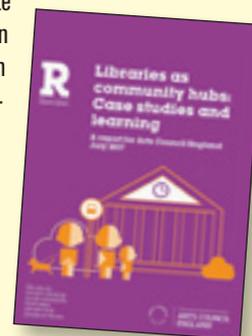
This is actually about co-location. The report admits:

‘It is important to note that libraries can be seen as community hubs in their own right – providing a trusted, welcoming space where people can access information, support, try something new, and where inequalities in society might begin to be tackled.’

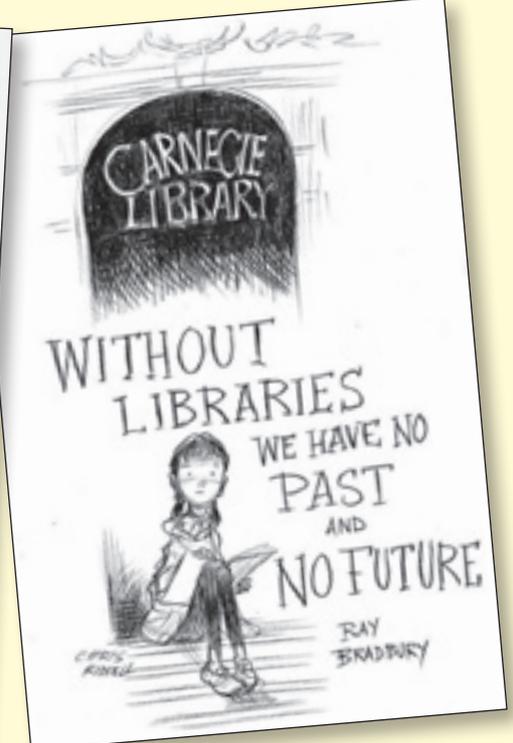
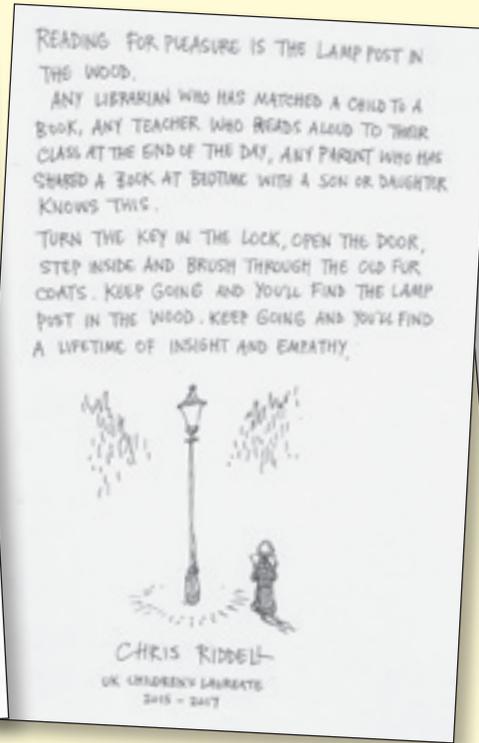
So it gets into quite a tangle when it tries to distinguish what makes a co-located service more of a community hub than a good stand-alone local library. The fact is you can’t. It all ‘varies considerably from place to place and is driven by local circumstances’.

The six co-location case studies – in Cumbria, Newcastle, Redbridge, Slough, Solihull, Weston-Super-Mare – demonstrate this in spades.

They are very detailed, with different ideas, successes and ‘challenges’. Interesting info – but you can probably use them to prove anything you want...



Laureates love libraries



Chris Riddell – writer and illustrator extraordinaire – has handed over as Children’s Laureate to Lauren Child. Like all his predecessors, he has constantly spoken out about the importance of libraries – and librarians.

As well as words, there has been a stream of wonderful cartoons that say it all. Thank you, Chris.

Summing up his two busy years, he said: ‘I think the best thing has been the opportunity to be an advocate for things I care about, specifically school libraries and the vital work school librarians do within schools.

‘And when I say that the caveat is to include libraries in the wider community...

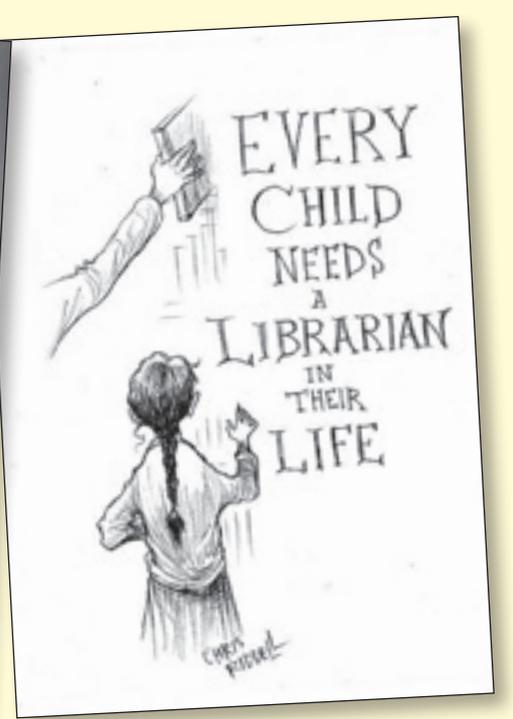
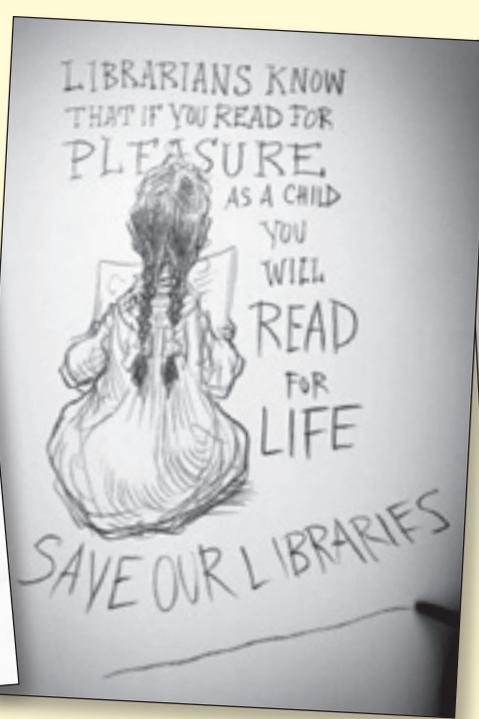
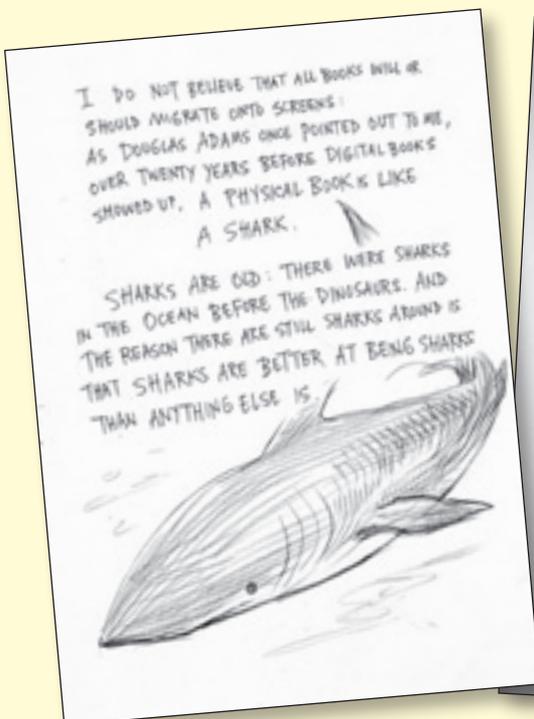
‘Librarians don’t stamp their feet and shout – doing a bit of shouting for them has been a privilege.

‘The continuing closure of libraries in our communities and schools is a blight on the intellectual development and creative future of all our children’

Lauren Child will follow right on.

She says: ‘I want to inspire children to believe in their own creative potential, to make their own stories and drawings and ignite in them the delight of reading for pleasure. In an increasingly fast paced world, children need the freedom to dream and imagine; to enjoy reading, drawing and telling their own stories without value judgement or restraint.

‘I think libraries are tremendously important, not just because it is perhaps a child’s first access to a book, but because of the community aspect. I will continue to support them in any way I can.’



Frustration and fear – the librarian's tale

As we all know, library staff are not allowed to speak out, no matter how stupid or destructive their authority's library plans. Speaking for them is high on the list of tasks for campaigners.

A few months ago, Gemma Todd was brave enough to publish her viewpoint in *The Bookseller* – to high acclaim. We republish it here with their permission.

Libraries have changed a lot over the past decade. On the surface, for anyone interested, our evolution is easy to follow: every library has a website now; they have leaflets and noticeboards and eager staff who promote their services; some of the best libraries even have entertaining social media platforms.

At our core, we've always been about books, about information, and providing it for free wherever possible and in the most accessible ways.

But the modern library has branched out far beyond those staple needs. I could list everything we offer nowadays – job-seeking advice, homework clubs, cradle and toddler groups, over-50s clubs, writing groups, book clubs, Lego workshops, computer classes, knit-and-natter groups – but the list would be endless.

Community

In essence, we're a community hub in a society that is moving further and further away from being a community.

But, most importantly, we're a haven for people who are lost, or need help, or just want a friendly smile and a chat. Where else can you go where you're

always welcome and absolutely nothing is expected of you?

But all of that is on the surface. You can find any of that information with a click of a mouse, a dial of a phone number, a flick of a thumb on Twitter, or with a visit to your local library (if, indeed, you still have a local library).

What I want to talk about instead is what has changed below the surface. The things that you, the public, don't see, and are not told.

Enthusiasm

When I first began working for public libraries in 2002, it was a wonderful time. Libraries and cultural services were supported, both financially and politically.

The enthusiasm and passion of staff was felt not only on the counters and on the library floor, but behind the closed doors of the work- and staff-rooms. It was a bubbling pot of laughter and fun. In short, it was a great place to work.

In many ways, it's still a great place to work.

But behind those closed doors today there are many of us who have moved from anger, to despondency, to downright exhaustion. Over time,

that indignant fury has settled like sediment in our bones. It doesn't spark with fire any more, but it burns steadily at low heat.

Library workers across the country have had six years of being at risk of losing our jobs and our libraries.

Every year, we go through the same process of budget proposals, potential cuts, risk of redundancy letters, and consultation processes where we must ask all our customers to fill in questionnaires.

Every year, we get nominated for cuts and every year we don't know if we'll even have a library or a job in six months' time.

Insecurity

A rolling process of insecurity, fear, frustration and helplessness. Helplessness because, as employees, we're not allowed to canvass for support. We're not allowed to have any personal opinion on what we think of our local government's plans (as one example, it wants to cut 16 libraries down to one in a borough of 270,000 residents).

On the surface, we smile and chat to customers as if everything is okay, because that is our job and if we don't follow our Code of Conduct, there's the serious threat of dismissal.

You would never suspect how desperately depressed many library workers are and, worse, apathetic – and not simply because they may lose their monthly wage and have to re-enter the world of job-seeking, but because they love libraries and the very thing they love is systematically being decimated by bureaucrats who have little to no idea what libraries actually do.



■ Gemma Todd

Gemma Todd was a mobile librarian in Walsall. She is part of an amazing group – mostly librarians – called ThankBookFor. Its website, events, broadcasts and sparkling use of social media make it an outstanding promotion for books and reading.

Have a look: www.ThankBookFor.com

But developments in Walsall have now reached the peak of absurdity – though there's nothing to laugh at.

In March, Walsall's library service was shortlisted for Library of the Year in the British Book Awards.

The judges called the service 'a fine example of how libraries can go on changing lives despite constant uncertainty over funding'.

The service was also recognised for its 'dedicated staff' who put on 'an energetic programme of events, led by the 2016 Walsall Year Of Reading...'

'Overall visits to the libraries increased year-on-year – no mean feat given the budget cuts inflicted on the service.'

Despite all this, the council persisted in pushing through massive cuts to this outstanding, cost-effective, already heavily-cut service.

It has been slashed from 16 to just seven branches, and one mobile van has been cut. All despite the usual protests, accusations of lousy consultation and failure to understand what libraries actually do – especially for the most vulnerable people...

The closures have now taken place. Gemma has taken voluntary redundancy, along with a lot of other staff.

So, day in and day out, I watch my colleagues who, not that long ago, were outgoing, vibrant workers. And it's like seeing a tiger in a zoo, walking listlessly back and forth, the grass beneath its paws dead and turned to sand.

That may sound dramatic, but it's true. All they can do is go through the motions because they have become resigned to having that sword hanging over their heads.

Of course, the passion and enthusiasm I witnessed upon entering libraries 14 years ago is still there – especially in front of the public – but behind the scenes, the undercurrent of disillusionment is choking.

You also don't know about the customers who ask, with genuine fear, if the service will be closing.

Valued

The parents who can't afford to buy their kids books; kids who, because they love to read so much, easily get through 15 books a week.

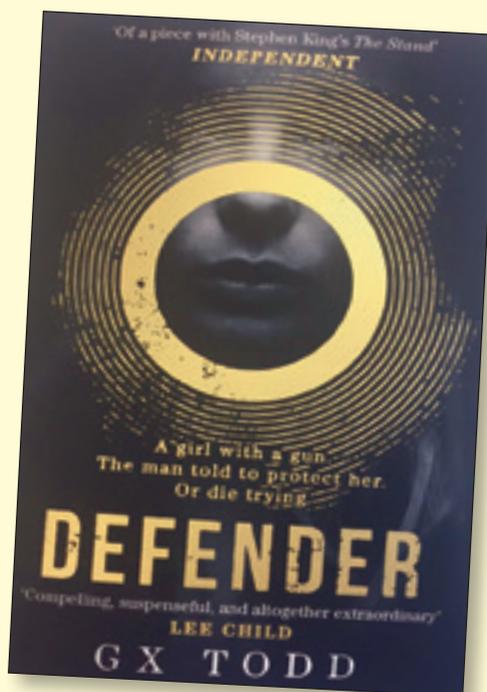
The people who can't afford to purchase their own computers or don't have the internet at home.

The unemployed who are desperate to work but lack the skills to create CVs or set up email accounts, and often lack interview experience.

I know there are countless people out there who would be happy to see libraries shut, mainly people who, I dare say, have never used a library. But with all due respect, who are you to take a valued service away from others who need and want it?

Sadly, I don't visit parks and arboreturns as often as I should, but would I want to stop others enjoying them? I'd like to think I'd never be so selfish in my views.

I work for the Mobile Libraries department, which is a slightly different kettle of fish, only inasmuch as we deal with a larger percentage of our most vulnerable demographics. We take our vans to sheltered accommodation and retirement homes,



■ Gemma is also author G X Todd. Her first novel – *Defender* – came out this year, to some great reviews – including from Lee Child! Described as a post-apocalyptic thriller, it is surely a must-buy for library-lovers and librarian-lovers... and it is already out in paperback!

schools, adult-education centres, as well as having weekly stops on public streets.

If the van fits, we go there. If it doesn't, we carry a crate of books to your front door. It is heartbreaking to see how isolated many of our elderly and disabled customers are: for some, we are the only people they see each month.

Recently, my colleague came back to the office and told me about a woman who had been living and sleeping in her kitchen for two weeks because her heating hadn't been working and it was the only

warm room in the house. He got straight on the phone and made some calls. He made sure something was done.

Our government treats these two groups of society so poorly, and here it is trying to strip away yet more services that improve their quality of life.

And what about the kids? Thousands of nursery and school visits to libraries every year, where library staff play a pivotal role in introducing children to reading for pleasure. These are children who will grow up with a love of reading, which will, in turn, improve their literacy levels, make them more empathic citizens, more creative, less depressed (because, yes, reading has also been shown to help improve mental health).

Anger

I wouldn't even be here, writing this article and writing books, if I hadn't been introduced to free books at the age of 12 after setting foot inside my school library.

The numerous advantages to having a well-run library service are documented and known, and yet they're still being stripped to the bare bones.

What are we to do, then, when many library staff feel so at a loss that they can't see a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel?

It means the rest of us need to be vocal.

I'm expecting to get a severe wrist-slapping from my employers for writing this article: I'm not supposed to be speaking about these issues.

But although my anger has been smothered into slow-burning ashes after years of uncertainty and helplessness in the face of such short-sighted austerity measures, I guess there's still a little spark of rebellion somewhere inside me.

<http://www.thebookseller.com/blogs/insecurity-fear-frustration-and-helplessness-446191>

Could this help? Well...

We desperately need a handout for councillors, to explain libraries – why they matter, how to run them. But the latest one from the LGA (Local Government Association) is a bit wanting.

Catchily titled 'Delivering Local Solutions for Public Library Services: a guide for councillors', this 48-pager is a pretty stodgy read.

Inevitably, it reflects the prevailing orthodoxy. That seems to be change at all costs. Not because of the money, mind, but because 'how people use libraries is changing. If we want our services to continue to be at the heart of communities for generations to come libraries must change as well.'

There follows a pretty scary ride through all the possible new options, stressing that it's different

everywhere. You need a whole tailor-made 'strategic framework'. Eek!

The guide does say that 'many councils recognise that library services are critical to the effective delivery of a wide range of desired strategic outcomes'. And it does explain what this means in terms of the seven outcomes laid down in the Taskforce Ambition blueprint – reading/literacy; digital; culture; health; stronger communities; prosperity; education.

The guide also gives a much-needed, fairly comprehensive, run-down on funds from developers: 'Traditionally, only a small proportion of infrastructure development funds have gone towards libraries.'

There's some bits missing, though. The statutory duty is briefly mentioned in the foreword but it's not spelt out. You could easily miss it altogether. Odd.

There's precious little on proper consultation. The legally crucial 'Gunning' principles (not name-checked) get a partial airing in the middle of one paragraph. That's not nearly enough.

And there's no guidance at all on how to work with communities – or staff.

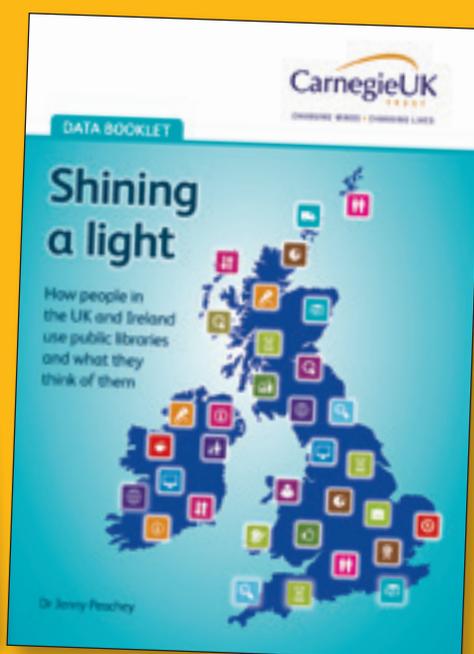
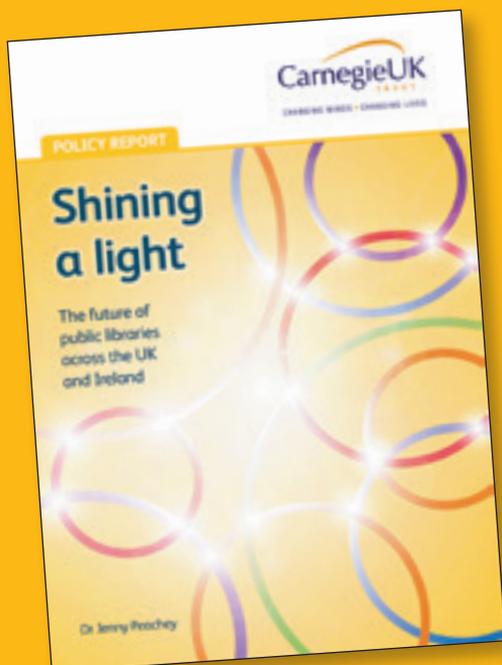
As so many councils get all this horribly wrong, these are serious omissions.

On volunteer-run libraries, the porkies are jaw-dropping: 'In some areas... local people are taking a more active role in running their libraries. In these situations, councils, in consultation with local communities, have re-designed their library services to give communities the opportunity to run or support library services.'

The 11 case histories include some that no clued-up library user would endorse.

So – useful in some ways. But handle with care.

<https://www.local.gov.uk/delivering-local-solutions-public-library-services>



Shining a light – new report

WHAT IS IT?

Shining a Light is an update of a survey last carried out in 2011 by the Carnegie Trust UK, a charity that aims to support public libraries through research and funding innovation.

It covers (and compares) people's views in England, Wales, Scotland, N Ireland and Ireland.

Some topics have been added since 2011 to take in new developments, such as increasing digitisation - and volunteer-run libraries.

There is a main report (23 pages), a 'data booklet' (68 pages) showing the findings in a mass of colourful charts, and a summary booklet (16 pages) for each nation.

- Number surveyed: 10,000.
- Period covered: 2011-16.

<http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk> under 'Publications'

INFORMATION WAR?

As The Library Campaign regularly points out, libraries are a tale of two planets. Hundreds are being closed, starved or dumped on to reluctant volunteers.

Yet they remain uniquely useful, popular and are fiercely defended by their communities. Their potential to develop remains unlimited.

But unless government (national and local) gets a grip, the future is grim.

Meanwhile, better information is badly needed. This report from Carnegie Trust UK has plenty of good news as well as bad. Veteran campaigner Tim Coates says it should have highlighted the bad - before it's too late.

Which do you support? Take your pick.

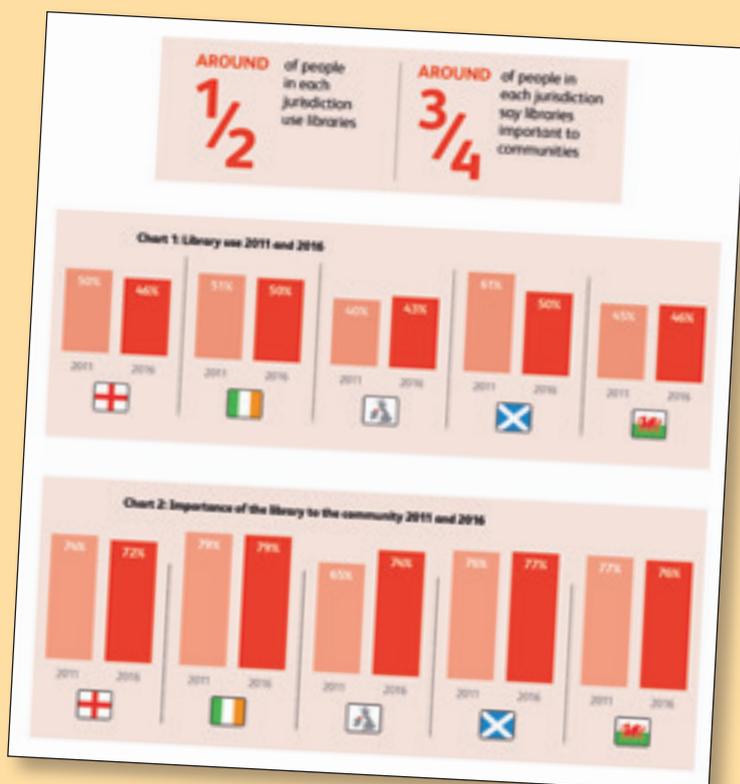
OVERALL HIGHLIGHTS

- 72% say libraries are essential or very important to their community.
- Of these, only 40% say they are essential or very important to themselves personally.
- 46% have used a library in the past year.
- Young people (aged 15-24) are the most likely age group to use libraries in England (51%).
- Almost half (46%) of 25-34 year olds now use them, 2% up on 2011.
- Over-55s are least likely to use the library.

- Libraries in England now serve more people who are not avid readers: 37% of those who read only one book a year use a public library; 40% (up 5 percentage points from 2011) of people who only read one book every six months are library users.
- A sizeable percentage (21%) of people who rarely or never read books use the library.

THE BAD NEWS

- Overall library use has dropped 4% - from 50% to 46% - in the past five years.
- Frequent library use (once a month) has dropped from 52% to 46%.

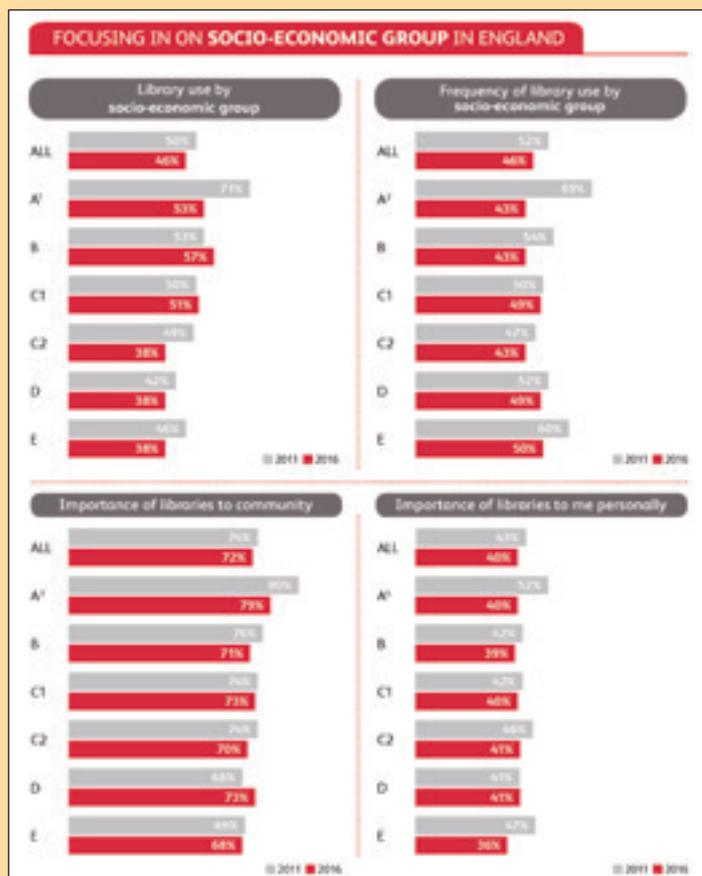
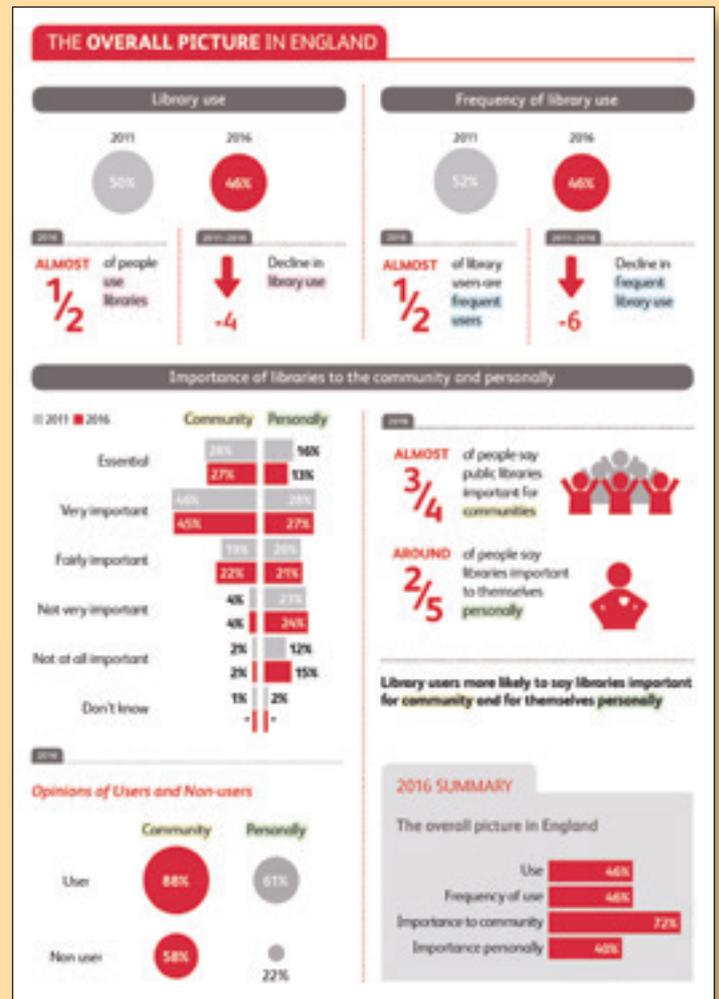


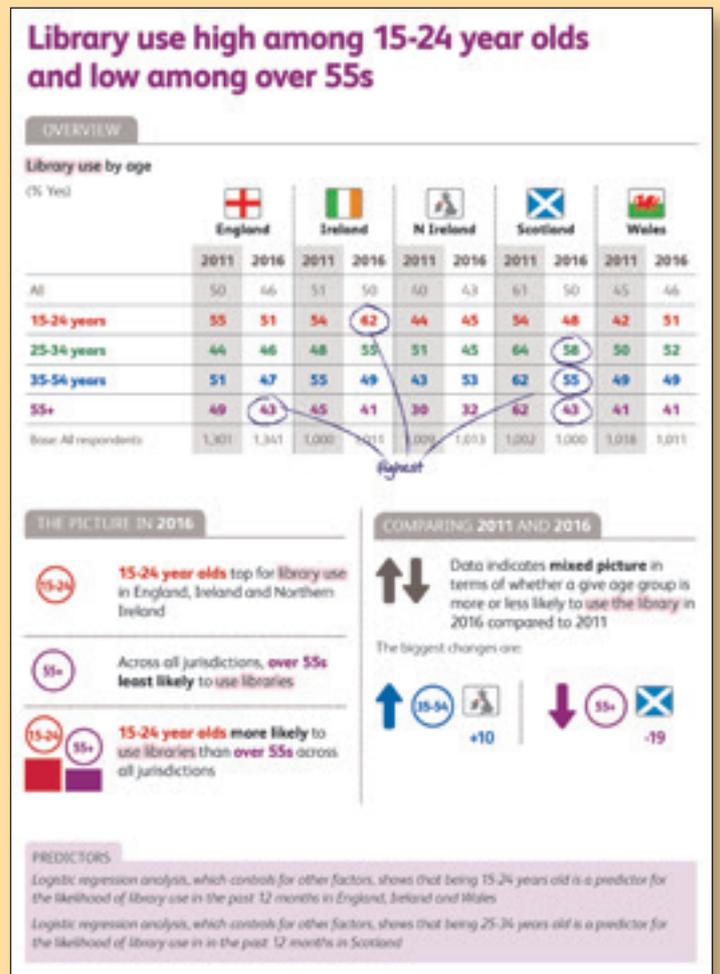
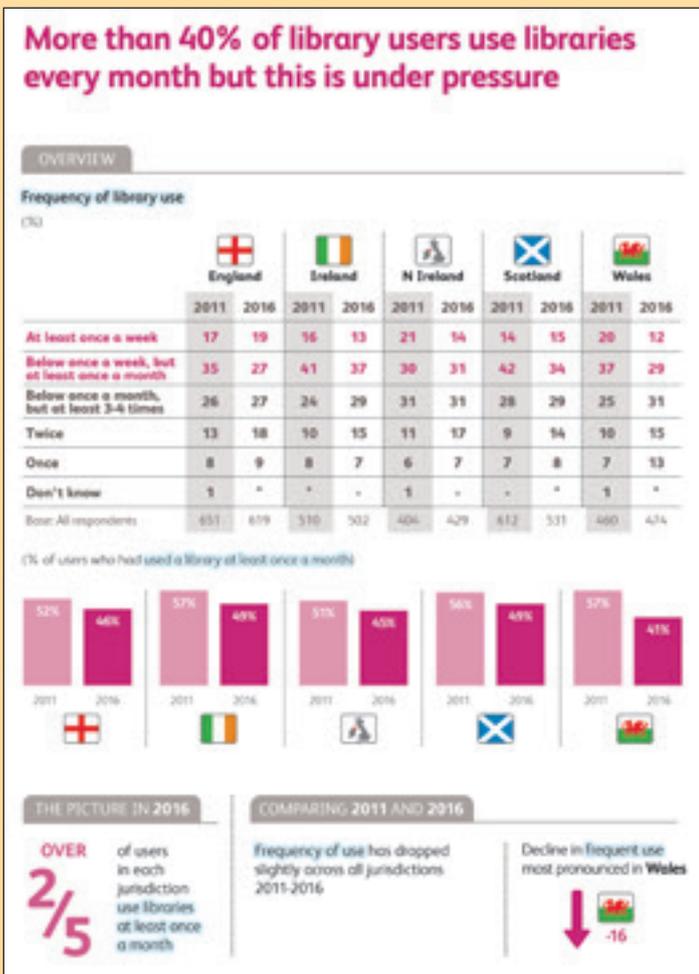
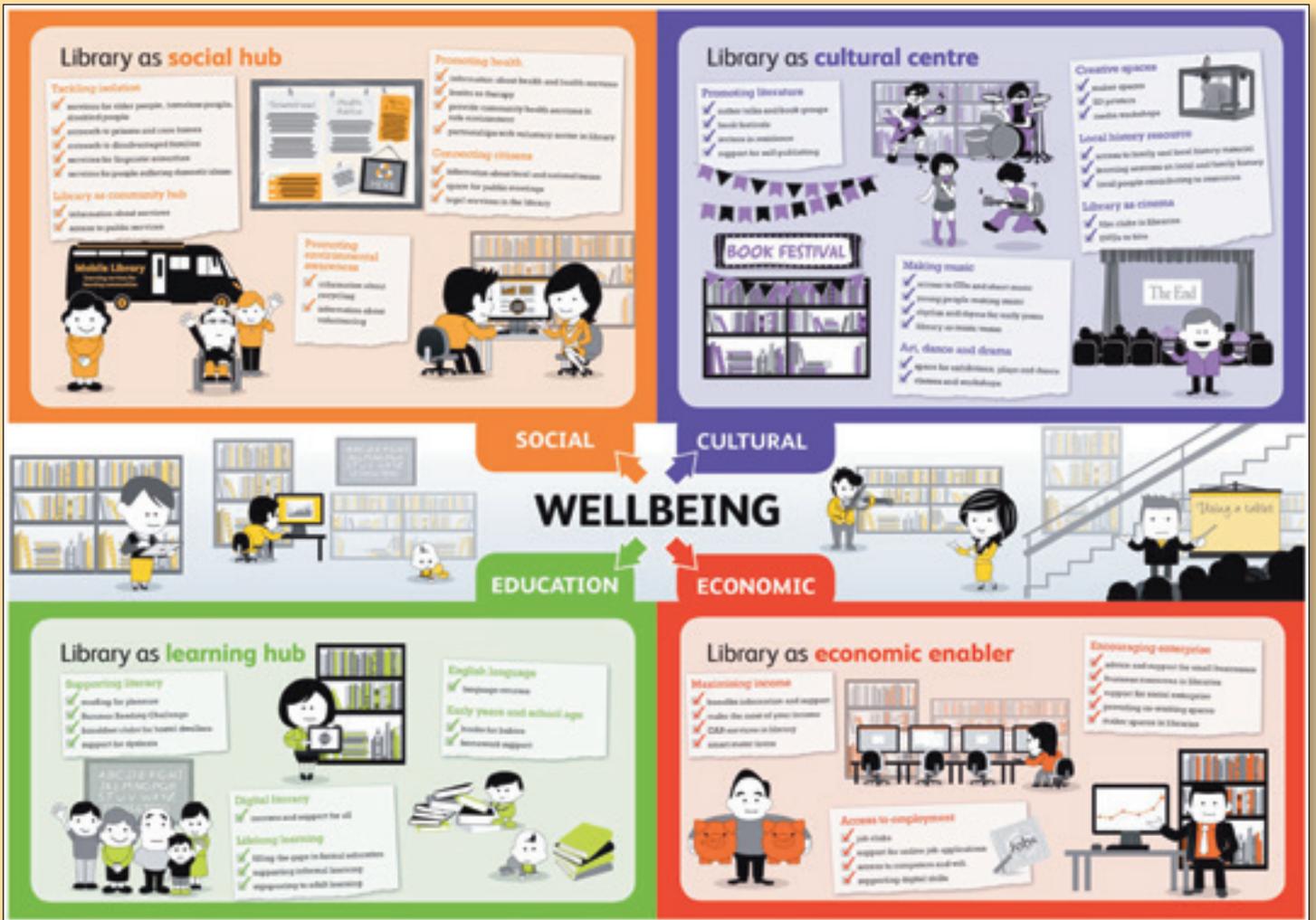
QUESTIONS

- Are people choosing to use the library less often – or are they finding it more difficult to do so?
- Why do so many people recognise the importance of libraries for others - but not themselves? Is it that they don't recognise what a library offers as relevant to them? Does the library, in fact, have little to offer them? Don't they know what services libraries offer? Or is it a combination of all three? For instance, 48% of people said they would use the library more if they could search for and reserve books online – a service that is, in fact, already on offer.

ACTION

- Since 2011, more people in England say they would use a library if a range of suggested changes and improvements were made (most popular: better information about the service; more events; providing other council services in the library).
- Public libraries need to go on cultivating their ability to future-gaze, innovate and test out new ideas.
- Plus – as ever – the need for better communications and branding.





EXTRACTS FROM THE REPORT:

In the report's own words ...

TWO PICTURES...

There is no doubt that public libraries face unprecedented challenges and very real threats. In response, the vociferous and visible campaign against the closure of library buildings has swelled, in England in particular.

The campaigns have often focused on specific local decisions but point to broader trends and pressures.

Two pictures of the public library service often surface in discussions around the future of libraries.

On the one hand, there is an image of a service in sharp and dramatic decline, with reduced resources, declines in book lending, fewer library buildings, fewer paid staff and compromised models of service delivery.

On the other, there is a portrayal of a forward-thinking, innovative, popular and flourishing service with a high level of use, new 'super' city libraries, pioneering models of service delivery, a unique and growing role in the knowledge economy, and enhanced digital offers to further learning and equality of opportunity.

There is truth, of course, in both views, but also a severe tension between those who adopt an optimistic narrative about the future of libraries and those who fear for their future and campaign on the basis that they are in crisis.

This report seeks to contribute to the debate by sharing the 'state of play' for public libraries in the UK and Ireland revealed by our research.

FIVE LESSONS

We set out five lessons, drawn directly from the data, for how libraries can continue to improve people's wellbeing both in today's political, economic and social context and into the future:

- Demonstrate value to policy makers, decision makers and funders to maximise public and other investment
- Increase focus on tailored, personalised services whilst maintaining a focus on delivering a universal service
- Accelerate the development of a user-centred, data-rich service with a strong online presence
- Invest in innovation, leadership and outcomes-based partnerships
- Enhance learning between libraries and across jurisdictions.

SWOT analysis of public libraries

There are strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with public libraries and their future as a core public service.

S

STRENGTHS

- Trusted, neutral spaces
- Networked
- Universal service 'for all'
- Qualified staff
- Libraries are seen as important for communities
- Strong and trusted brand
- Strong latent support and positive sentiment for libraries among local communities
- Growing confidence in partnership working to deliver shared outcomes and joined up services

W

WEAKNESSES

- Premises may be intimidating to some groups
- Online digital presence and digital offer requires investment and development
- Physical constraints of some premises, with many requiring refurbishment or modernisation
- Community support and positive sentiment is not matched by levels of use
- Libraries are much less likely to be seen as relevant for people personally
- Public perception of library brand does not always reflect the library offer
- Debates regarding libraries can be informed by nostalgia and emotive assertion rather than evidence
- Skills development required to enable the development of a workforce able to deliver the potential positive outcomes for evolving community needs
- Limited evidence on full impact of what libraries deliver for local communities

O

OPPORTUNITIES

- Capacity to contribute to many policy and social goals
- Capacity to contribute to digital participation and engagement
- Capacity to contribute to knowledge economy
- Capacity to contribute to education, an informed citizenry, health literacy and culture
- Capacity to harness skilled volunteers seeking to complement the role of paid staff
- Capacity to carve out 21st century contribution in relation to discovering and navigating information and learning sources, and enabling creativity and co-creation of resources

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THREATS

- Decrease in funding available to local authorities
- Physical constraints of some facilities
- Overall decline in levels of use and book lending make it easier for local authorities looking to cut services
- Competition both for use of leisure time and from alternative providers of services traditionally offered by libraries
- Lack of understanding and buy-in among decision makers and the public regarding the broader aims and purpose of libraries
- Potential fragmentation of library offer where there are increases in volunteer-run libraries
- Dominant media narrative about libraries is negative
- Challenges in attracting new talent to the sector

Volunteer libraries – why?

Here it is: the long-awaited report from the Taskforce about volunteer libraries and whether they work. **Laura Swaffield** asks: Does it answer the questions? Does it even ask the right questions?



■ Gargrave library, Yorkshire

THE BACKGROUND

The report is full of facts – all kinds of them, and charts, and quotes. What does not emerge is any kind of coherent picture. The basic message is: ‘Well, it all depends...’

The report is peppered with warnings that the small sample size, and the huge variations between libraries, means the findings aren’t truly representative.

This is not the fault of the research team (at Plymouth University). There is no coherent picture to find. Few lessons can be gleaned beyond the obvious.

The DCMS (now the DDCMS) stands indicted. It has sat back and watched an uncontrolled rise in volunteer-run libraries – and hopelessly confusing variations in the ways they are run – with no proper evaluation or research. What started as a trickle has become a torrent. There are hundreds now. Nobody really knows.

Councils seized on the idea as an easy

answer to budget cuts, claiming success in other boroughs on no evidence at all. Invariably, local residents have fought the idea to the bitter end, but have been ignored.

Unforgivably, the DDCMS has also failed to do anything to help councils adopting a model it seems to advocate. No guidance, no tools to share. Each council has struggled to find its own solutions, service level agreements, training, structures, etc etc. This has ensured maximum trouble and expense (for the unfortunate library services landed with the job) and minimal (if any) savings.

Result: in a few short years, we have lost what was once the main point of the public library service. No longer is it a national network, where anyone can be sure to find certain basics – plus a gateway to all the nation offers in terms of books, knowledge, educational resources, reference material, contacts.

Now it’s pot luck whether your ‘library’ is a full service with expert staff who can guide you to whatever you need, or some nice people with some cast-off books donated by other nice people. Or something – almost anything – in between.

The full library service is itself becoming a rarity in many places, thanks to cuts in stock and specialist staff.

The upshot, then, is that many people (and certainly councils) no longer even know what a proper library service should be. They don’t know what has been lost.

Partly we can blame public library services, which have mostly been bad at promoting themselves. We can also blame the DDCMS, and its various agencies. Nobody has promoted real libraries at national level, where a small investment would have done the most good.

So the destruction is now widespread, and probably irretrievable.

RESEARCH? WHAT RESEARCH?

The team started by looking for existing research. They didn’t find much: ‘information regarding community libraries within existing literature, specifically concerning their effectiveness and sustainability, was found to be limited’.

The Campaigner has documented most of it, so you can look it up in the BACK ISSUES on our website: www.librarycampaign.com

The truth is this:

Back in 2011, the now-departed MLA (Museums, Libraries & Archives Council) did some preliminary research. At the time there were very few ‘community-managed libraries’ – just 29 – and they were all very different, so it was hard to draw any conclusions. But the pace of change was already too fast to track. (Campaigner no 82, page 16).

Forward to 2013 and an Arts Council England report – vague on specifics and optimistic, to say the least. It included case studies of libraries that were very new, or not

yet operational at all. Case studies were to become the approach of choice, since wild variation was already the norm and drawing general conclusions well-nigh impossible. (Campaigner no 86, pp.13-15).

A National Federation of Women’s Institutes report the same year – based on the real experience of volunteers – wiped the floor with it. Volunteers need a lot of support, it said, and must not be used as ‘sticking plaster’ to cover cuts. (Campaigner no 86, pp.5-6).

The trend was now starting to hit Wales. To its credit, Wales did some comprehensive research early on in 2015. It set out pros, cons and success factors. Overall conclusions: admiration for volunteers but much support needed. Problems likely with getting enough of them, and enough funds. (Campaigner no 91, pp.10-13).

In 2015 Scotland was also in the early stages of the rush to volunteering. Its rather more sketchy piece of work stressed that

volunteers can do great things but cannot run full library services (especially in deprived areas). They are likely to have trouble with recruiting, funding and building maintenance. (Campaigner no 92, pp.18-19).

In 2016 the Taskforce produced its ‘toolkit’ for ‘community managed libraries’. It gives a lot of useful basic info. It cites case histories, as usual so varied that you can draw any conclusion you like from them. They are all, however, doing OK. A bit biased? It does discuss possible problems, but calls them ‘considerations’ and generally takes a sunny view. (<http://tinyurl.com/jyx67dl>).



■ South Chingford library, London

NEVER MIND THE QUALITY...

Does the new report get to grips with the key issue of quality? Nope.

The main reason is its narrow remit. It set out to 'understand more about how community managed libraries operate, and what lessons can be learnt and examples shared about their effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability'.

This is just asking if they are likely to survive. It is not asking whether they are any good as libraries. There is no input from experts (ie, librarians) on the quality of what they offer.

For instance, how about the range and depth of the bookstock? Does it meet the needs of families, schoolkids, students, local businesses, ethnic groups? What does IT provision consist of in practice, including support available for unskilled users? How did the users compare with the demographics of the area served? And so on.

I asked Lee Richards, the senior research manager. He said: 'No, we did not seek separate expert input (ie, from a librarian) on

the specific metrics you described – notwithstanding... where the respondent was a professional librarian supporting the community library. In the main the respondents were volunteers... The scope of the research we were commissioned to provide focused on the experiences/perceptions of these volunteers in the main.

'However, in order to provide some context and insight into the transition from publicly run library to community managed library, we did interview expert stakeholders (local authority representatives responsible for library services).'

Oh dear. We all know that local councillors rarely know much about libraries – least of all those who pushed for them to be run by volunteers.

So the Taskforce itself ruled out proper consideration of quality right from the start. This is very grim news.

... FEEL THE WIDTH!

Does the new report take the obvious route of comparing a volunteer-run library's performance against its performance when it was still council-run? There's now plenty of 'anecdotal' evidence of steep declines, which should be investigated properly.

No, it doesn't.

This is partly (again) due to its narrow remit – and partly the hopelessness of drawing any conclusions at all from the confused jungle of different 'library' set-ups.

Lee Richards told me: 'Yes, I think you are right in saying it would be interesting to make a comparison of basic services between a newly run volunteer service and when it was council run.

Unfortunately, this was outside of the scope/resources available for the work we were commissioned to provide...

'I would also add, however, that even if resources were available to make these comparisons, from our experience... the range of different models and barriers affecting newly, or more established, community libraries vary greatly – as you will no doubt see from the research.

'Therefore, even if such a comparison were to be made I suspect there would be a diverse range of results with specific nuances that

would make a straight comparison between the two models complex.

'However, I agree it could be an interesting avenue of research to follow in the future to add to the overall understanding within the sector.'

The report itself makes the issue super-clear. It tried to sort 'community libraries' into categories: community-supported, community-managed, independent.

It didn't work. For instance, local councils provide anything from no staff to a full-time library assistant, nothing to £50,000 a year. Support may be likely to continue indefinitely – or about to stop altogether. The individual libraries all provide a different mix of services and facilities. For instance, only 26% offer access to computers.

The research team concluded: 'Despite areas of commonality, in practice there is great variation in the operational structures and services offered... There are even situations where more than one model is used within one council area. Therefore, the community library sector cannot be fully understood by segregating library types into operational models alone.'

Or by any other method, as far as we can see.

GOOD NEWS?

The research team noted that England (unlike Wales or Scotland) no longer has any national standard by which to judge library performance.

So the small sample of libraries (61, out of 442 invited to take part) were asked for their own views. All thought themselves efficient and effective in 'most' areas, and their users satisfied. Most thought their volunteers (and staff, if any) were 'generally satisfied with their role'. Most users (a small sample of 161) were satisfied too.

A very small (10) number of 'stakeholders' (i.e. councils) were asked if the volunteer libraries met their expectations. Most said yes. Unsurprisingly, cost-saving was by far the main expectation, but most were also happy with opening hours, visits, issues and 'social capital'.

Even so, many felt they did not meet all the seven basic 'outcomes' listed in the Taskforce 'Ambition' document. They felt OK about digital access/literacy, cultural enrichment, reading/literacy and stronger communities. Not so good were 'healthier/happier lives', 'greater prosperity' and 'helping everyone achieve their full potential'.

Eight of the 10 identified some areas where a council-run library would be better. But five 'stressed that simply keeping the library open

THE CASE STUDIES

- Alford library, Lincolnshire
- Jesmond library, Newcastle
- Castle Vale library, Birmingham
- Anonymous library, Surrey
- South Chingford library, Waltham Forest, London
- Gargrave & Malhamdale library, North Yorkshire
- Somersham library, Cambridgeshire
- Delph library, Oldham
- Mitcheldean library, Gloucestershire



■ Anonymous library, Surrey

Photo: Taskforce

and maintaining a service which would not be there had it not been for the community, was a huge triumph and achievement'.

Again we ask – is it really the best approach to ask people to mark their own homework?

All the same, from these questions and from the case studies, it's clear that people are grateful to have any kind of library – or indeed, any kind of local facility.

Typical comments: 'A very important part of our village. Villagers would need to travel... to reach the nearest (other) library.'

'A meeting place for the community to engage with one another, creating a social forum.'

'There is a motivation to keep the library, because what else is there?'

Some liked the volunteer library better than the previous council-run one – more approachable, more going on.

So the volunteer libraries really score best in terms of 'community cohesion'. Many offer a lot of extra activities – if only because they need them to raise funds. This gets people together (though it may put a dent in the key concept of the library as a free public space).

But it's also a wake-up call to council-run libraries to look at what activities they offer, how welcoming they are and how responsive they are to local people.



■ Frecheville library, Sheffield Photo: Taskforce

BAD NEWS

The report puts things politely:

'The importance of volunteers should not be under-estimated, and many community libraries cited volunteer availability and capability as a potential barrier [to sustainability]...

'... a lack of volunteers with the appropriate experience and skillset was cited as a concern amongst all libraries, particularly regarding their ability to deliver effective services.

'Income generation activities are critical to longer-term sustainability. The majority of community libraries... intend to grow the number and scale of their enhanced or income generating services in the future, supporting their sustainable growth.

'However, limited sources of funding and building restrictions were also seen as potential barriers. Also, despite ambitions to grow, library models demonstrated a high dependency on volunteer performance and availability, and a high level of sensitivity to additional financial burden, such as increasing overhead costs.

'Therefore, the rates of sustainable growth identified in the research should be considered as fragile...

'Another regular theme was the value of ongoing ad-hoc or targeted support from local authorities that does not necessarily relate to direct funding – for example, informal advice, support with accessing local volunteer networks, and combined training sessions.' [NB: it may not be 'direct funding' but support like this still costs money! Can councils continue this indefinitely, when they thought volunteer libraries were supposed to save a fortune?]

'The requirement for greater communication, understanding, and

strengthening of links between local authorities and community libraries was also commonly cited, as was community libraries' wish to see increased cohesion and learning between libraries developed through a nationwide peer support group.'

In other words, future funding and staffing are major unknowns. And if you've got problems with those two fundamentals, it's obviously serious.

Volunteer (or even partly volunteer) libraries need a fair bit of support, and always will. They are not a cheap solution at all.

With such a patchwork of funding patterns – none with a guaranteed future – there is simply no way of telling how 'sustainable' non-council libraries will be.

All the research team could find out was that they share quite a list of fundamental weak points.

Councils always start by burbling on about the joys of community engagement, empowerment and so on. So it's surprising that a common complaint was lack of 'communication, understanding, and... links' between councils and their volunteer libraries, so early in the day. It seems they are pretty much being left in the lurch – right from the start.

Also needed, says the report, is more research, and much work at national level – setting up networks, providing guidance, sharing training and information. Just who is going to do all that? And what will it cost?



■ Alford library, Lincolnshire

TLC COMMENTS

Lee Richard says: 'Something that consistently stood out... was the dedication and optimism of volunteers and staff that strive to keep valuable community assets open for the benefit of their local community.

'Their determination and entrepreneurial drive to find new services that both ensure their future sustainability and enhance their local area was an impressive reminder of the power of social enterprise.'

Yes.

The Library Campaign has always had full sympathy with the many local groups that have run brilliant campaigns to fight library closures – against councils that refused to listen.

We understand why many finally had to give in and take on their library – to keep the building in public use, with hopes of getting a proper service back sometime.

Many are doing a good job, against the odds. But can they keep it up?

Some, we are sure, are preferred by locals to a bad council-run service – at least in terms of being a welcoming community facility, with plenty of activities. But is this the right comparison to be making?

We have to conclude that the future looks uncertain. The mass move to volunteer libraries is the biggest change in decades, but there wasn't nearly enough research in the early stages. And it's now such a mess that it is probably too late to make any sense of it at all.

Even more worrying: the Taskforce responsible for libraries does not even think of asking how these new models match up to a proper library service.

For a key public service, in an affluent country, this is shameful.

About those book issues...

Trevor Craig pursues the strange case of the missing data on book issues in volunteer libraries.

The libraries Taskforce has been, almost on a daily basis, producing reports and 'toolkits' on their blog. There's so many toolkits it's in danger of turning into a giant Swiss army knife.

I've no idea how useful any of these toolkits are. There's lots of research but it all seems to be to be lacking in any academic rigour. There seems to be no real hard data or proper trials of approaches.

The various library authorities all seem to be making it up as they go along. The Taskforce is trying to pull all of these approaches together. But where is the hard data on what's working and what isn't?

I know the obsession at the minute is with all things shiny shiny, but I expect if you asked most users what they want from a library, it would still be the humble old paper book.

This brings me to my main frustration with what the Taskforce isn't doing. The latest report, I was hoping, would have some stuff in it showing what happens to book issues when libraries become 'community libraries' (whatever that means).

There is plenty of good stuff in the report – don't get me wrong. But, frustratingly, book issues wasn't really part of the study.

I stuck an email to the author, Lee Richard, who seems a very nice chap. He very kindly gave me permission to publish his reply:

'The reason we did not look into the metric of book loans in more detail was due to the limitations of the information that community libraries were able to provide and the variability in the systems being used across different community library/statutory library services...

'For example, some community libraries were using the LMS system, whilst others were not. There was insufficient data to provide any meaningful comparison of this metric between different community managed library models.

'In addition the focus of the research was engaging with the community libraries themselves, so researching this metric in detail with the local authority library service (where applicable, and where more data may have been held) fell outside the scope of the research we were commissioned to provide.

'However, we did complete some research with library users, to provide some context as to the reasons why people visit community libraries and to illustrate the breadth of the services people are now accessing outside of what may be considered 'traditional' library services, ie, to illustrate how community managed libraries are developing their services.

'Clearly, from the user survey, book loans are still a key part of the service community libraries provide.

'But we wanted to explore how community managed libraries are diversifying into different community based services to ensure their sustainability for the future, and given the general decline in the availability of public funding.

'Therefore there was more focus in the research to look at how effective they are in achieving this and what support they may need to continue to develop.'

I can understand the reasoning why comparing the book issues didn't happen. I know not all community libraries have access to the LMS or self service.

What I find the most frustrating though, is that there are lots of library authorities that do – or the community libraries have a self service machine for issuing books. This data exists within the library sector. There are senior librarians who know what happens to book issues when libraries are handed over.

Data

But unless it's good news, it's not the sort of thing that ends up in a press release (and thus into the excellent www.publiclibrariesnews.com). Considering what libraries are, the ethics and ethos of what librarianship is (I'm not a expert here, by the way) why isn't there some honesty from the sector on what is happening?

This data belongs to all of us to see what is happening. I can think of no more important metric of the success of a library that book issues. Visits is woolly, collected using different methods, at different times, there's all sorts of variables that could mean you're never comparing like with like. But book issues should be a consistent and easy thing to measure and compare.

A few years ago I went to meet the volunteers running Walcot library in Swindon. I made a FoI (Freedom of Information) request to their data. The issues after it was handed over to volunteers fell off a cliff.

This is what happened to the book issues:



■ Trevor Craig

The other Swindon libraries didn't have this level of decrease in issues. Are all the other libraries in England handed over to volunteers having a similar decrease in issues? Somebody knows, but they're not saying.

The civil servants and the DDCMS need to temper their EVERYTHING IS AWESOME approach to libraries and try to utilise the data they and the library authorities have. Then we could see what is really going on with community libraries. Then when other councils consider their approach to cuts, they will have a better idea beforehand what sort of impact going down certain routes will have on book issues.

I suspect they already know. But the political direction of travel is clearly to keep going down this route. The Taskforce should try to be less political, pull this data together and actually publish it so we can see how successful these community libraries really are. I'll probably end up doing a FoI to find out myself, but really...

The final quick point I want to touch on with the Taskforce is how it's still not got any representation on it from library users. There's plenty of people from various organisations, but the humble user who pays for all this stuff doesn't get a seat at the table, or even to watch proceedings. I have asked a few times but we're not allowed.

They should have someone on there from a libraries group where things aren't great, or from The Library Campaign, to inject a little bit of real talk into their deliberations. Everything isn't awesome, and to pretend otherwise does all of us a disservice.

Trevor's full report on Swindon is at:

<http://tinyurl.com/pyrmeat>

More about Swindon, and charts of

performance in Lewisham, in *The*

Campaigner no 87 (pp 6-7) in *BACK ISSUES*

on our website: www.librarycampaign.com

Volunteers – why not?

When an expert librarian looks at the pros and cons of volunteers – in terms of actually providing a library service – the picture is rather different.

Dawn Finch offers a warning...

Many councils are now announcing that their libraries will be 'saved', and that thanks to their glorious new restructuring it will instead be run by 'skilled volunteers'.

Hmmm, let's have a look at the truth and workability of that statement, shall we? The cost is losing trained and professional staff, ie librarians.

I've worked in the service a long time and (because I've worked my way up) I've seen pretty much every aspect of it. I've worked as a volunteer, and I've worked with them, and I've organised them.

The truth about volunteers is a harsh one, and I apologise to any volunteers if they know that this is not them. But in my experience the points below show the truth of what happens when you rely on volunteers in the long term.

It's fine (and incredibly helpful) to use them for occasional top-ups (for example during the hugely busy Summer Reading Scheme season) or for supporting outreach services, such as book deliveries for the housebound or for care homes. But not for core or essential services

Apart from the obvious denigration of the skills of trained professionals, why can't we use volunteers for everything?

Here are a few reasons why...

You can't timetable them

Volunteers want to work at a time that suits them, not you and not the service. You can't insist that they work late evenings and weekends like paid staff.

They will only work at a time that is convenient for them. Of course. They are volunteers and have no contract of employment with you, so why should they work when you want them to work?

They cancel at a moment's notice

That's because they can. They are not being paid and so if the boiler man wants to come round, they cancel. Waiting on a delivery? Cancel. Daughter popped round for lunch? Cancel. Bit of a hangover? Cancel. Lovely sunny day so decided to have a day out instead? Cancel.

Of course they can do this, they aren't being paid! You have no right to expect them to come in and no contract of employment to force them to, so they have every right to ditch.

You have little or no recourse when they are bad at what they do

I've worked with many volunteers and I remember a good number of ladies who were long term volunteers for the housebound. They were rude. No two ways about it, they were rude, controlling, aggressive and arrogant.

We could do nothing at all about this because they were volunteers and without them several housebound people would have no contact with another living soul from one week to the next. We couldn't sack these ladies or demand they modify their behaviour because we had no contract of employment with them (see the pattern beginning to emerge?)

You can't insist that they undergo extensive training

It takes a vast amount of training to deliver a successful library service at the frontline. You can't insist that your well-meaning volunteer attend several dozen courses to be able to deliver that service, because they are volunteers and you have no legally binding contract of service with them.

You can't insist on an apolitical standpoint

Some volunteers may well have strong political leanings that will influence their responses and the way they deal with the public. You cannot enforce an apolitical standpoint upon them because they are volunteers and you have no contract with them to ensure that they only express neutrality.

They are not protected in the event of injury or incident

I have known a good number of librarians who have been injured during their work. This ranges from people who have put their backs out to people who were punched and one who was stabbed. These staff members were supported by their employers and were able to get well through various crises.

You can't do that with volunteers (no contract, remember!) and so their only recourse will be to sue the council. Good luck with that!

They only do what they want to do

Yes, shelving a couple of hundred books can be boring. So is heaving a load of deliveries around or doing an extensive weed or stock check – but it's all part of the job. It's much more enjoyable mooching around in the reference section, or looking through



Dawn Finch is a children's author, school librarian, literacy and children's book consultant and Past President of CILIP. She welcomes contributions to the debate. For staff who need to contact her in confidence, there is a contact form on www.dawnfinch.com. The article on volunteers – with extensive comments! – appears at <https://dawnfinch.co.uk/2015/04/05/the-truth-about-volunteers>

new books, or chatting with your friends who just happen to have dropped by.

Library assistants on a contract can be instructed to do the dull stuff because they are paid to. People who have no pay and no contract don't want to do the dull stuff – why would they?

They start off agreeing to, but all too soon you are drowning in returns and the shelves are a mess with things put back incorrectly. In my experience it takes about three weeks for someone to get to the NAD method of shelving (Near As Dammit).

The road to hell is paved with good intentions

Some volunteers will inevitably abuse their power. These will be the most reliable volunteers in terms of available time, but they will make your libraries less pleasurable places to visit. They will be controlling and suffocating and will turn people off visiting the library.

You can't do anything about this because you have no contract of employment with them and can't insist that they modify their behaviour.

They drift off

In the beginning you will have lots of volunteers. Plenty of people will come forward and say that they

will help out. For a while you will be overwhelmed by the lovely support your library has.

This will not last. In a year or two you will be left with a tiny core of people who are still devoted, but who are essentially running the library on their own.

You will be completely reliant on the two or three people who remain loyal, and they will be working full-time equivalent hours in a desperate attempt to keep the place open.

If there is one paid librarian left in the building to oversee this (and I stress the 'if' here), they will be on a zero hours contract that occasionally affords them a day off, but otherwise requires them to work every late, and every anti-social day (such as Saturday and Sunday) due to the lack of available volunteers.

It will become virtually impossible to get more volunteers, especially in a more rural community, because you have simply exhausted all available people, and in most areas people will tire of working that hard for free.

Students will graduate and get jobs; other people will find that it no longer fits with other aspects of their lives. Most will simply find it tiresome and demanding, and they will gradually drift away.

You can do nothing about this because they are volunteers and you have no contract with them over things like working hours, or the need to notify you well in advance that they no longer wish to do it.

They don't really know what they are doing

No offence intended to volunteers here, but the scale of work expected of them is a bit terrifying! Being a librarian is a hugely complex task that involves an incredibly broad skill set.

I've been doing this for over a quarter of a century and I pedal hard to keep up with all the relevant

changes that impact the library service and how we deliver that to our customers.

I don't have all the answers to enquiries from members of the public, but I sure as hell know where to find them. This is because I'm a professional – not a volunteer.

You can't expect volunteers to be able to do this. Customers will soon be frustrated by not being able to ask a question and receive the correct answer. They will simply stop asking, and will stop using the library. Catch 22.

This is just a very small snapshot of the potential barriers to delivering a quality service using only volunteers.

I have had many wonderful and supportive volunteers in my time. I thank them (they know who they are) and I was able to do a better job thanks to them. But they operated with me, and ultimately the buck stopped with me – the paid and experienced professional.

I am a strong-willed person who was perfectly prepared to tell a volunteer that I no longer required their services. So I was able to work with people who stuck at it and were superb.

But that meant that I went from dozens down to three who were actually reliable and trustworthy – and that was in a school, where I was lucky enough to have access to well-educated and involved parents.

When I was in public libraries it was a genuine nightmare keeping reliable and effective volunteers. It was far worse for my colleagues who were in poorer or more rural locations.

We, as members of the public, deserve better. We deserve (and are legally entitled to) a library

service that delivers not only books but is a free public access point to information.

We deserve someone qualified in knowledge and information management who is best able to provide that service – and that's a real librarian.

This is not just about saving jobs. It's about communities receiving what they are legally entitled to. If all of your health visitors or community pharmacies were run by volunteers you would not accept it. Don't accept it from your one and only community information point either.

Don't let the Powers That Be convince you that you can find out all the information you require on your own. That's a fallacy. Imagine if it was accepted that solicitors could be unqualified volunteers. You can find out all the legal information that you need on the internet – but at some point you will need a trained professional to help you.

Yes, you can wrangle around on the internet when you have a question about issues that affect you locally (or nationally) and then you can wade through 50,000+ pages of disorganised information hoping you'll strike upon the right one.

Or, you can visit the information and knowledge management specialist in your community (aka the librarian) and ask them and they'll give you the right answer.

You can't rely on a volunteer to do that.

If you are tempted to volunteer, don't. You will not be protecting your public library by volunteering. You will only be supporting a fatally flawed scheme that will eventually bring about its demise.

Running libraries on volunteers is not a cheap and effective way of saving your local library service. It is a carcinogenic scheme that will ultimately kill it.

Culture shift

Meanwhile, some welcome research comes from Bidy Casselden at Northumbria University. Her doctoral thesis is significantly titled: **A Delicate Balancing act: an investigation of volunteer use and stakeholder perspectives in public libraries.**



Bidy's abstract confirms certain fears: 'Findings clearly indicated that volunteer use has moved from additionality to replacement of staff, and is increasingly being used by local authorities as a solution to budget reductions required as a result of economic austerity.'

'A hybrid approach to library service provision has developed, using a combination of paid staff and volunteers, which indicates a

fundamental culture shift within public libraries.

'Research results identified concerns relating to the long term viability of a hybrid approach, and how this impacted on the wider community in terms of service provision.'

'Key concerns were raised concerning advocacy, sensitivity, the fragility of relationships, and the provision of an accountable and high quality service.'

A whole new professional skill of managing volunteers is needed, she concludes, because volunteer-run libraries are here to stay.

Ian Anstice has an interesting interview with Bidy on Public Libraries News (<http://tinyurl.com/y9llu5n2>).

In it, she expresses concern that what's happening is not a coherent move to a new way of providing public services, but 'simply a knee-jerk reaction to austerity measures'.

Reading groups – their real meaning

A new report on reading groups turns into a thought-provoking insight into how libraries work in general, why they matter – and how vulnerable it all is.

The report is written by three (retired) specialists in education. They were 'spurred on by our own experience as members of a reading group and our awareness of the huge growth in reading groups in recent years,' say Lesley Dee, Susan Hart and Cathy Jennings.

That's one theme for starters. Reading groups were a rarity not so long ago. Now they are everywhere – and come in huge variety.

Libraries have always adapted, developed, innovated quite naturally – just by doing what they do.

The researchers prominently quote a reading group facilitator who said: 'I hope the powers-that-be that read the report understand the importance of the work that we do.'

Pivotal

Another theme. They are now taken for granted and their real value often overlooked (indeed, they didn't appear at all in the first version of the Taskforce's 'Ambition' report).

The researchers talked to national experts, library managers, reading group facilitators and members in five library services.

It soon emerged that reading groups do a heck of a lot. 'When we embarked on this study,' the researchers say, 'we saw reading groups as just one of many activities that occur in libraries. Gradually, however, we have come to appreciate why they can and should occupy a pivotal place in libraries' work.'

Unpicking this value is the core of the report.

But there's a final theme. Cut-backs are starting to undermine the whole thing.

The basic causes are prosaic, and all too familiar:

- reduced opening hours, which in turn limits who can attend;
- loss of local branches, which kills the local knowledge and networks needed to develop groups that people want and need;
- fewer books to choose from – sometimes talking books are reduced to a single copy;
- loss of staff, leading to fewer groups in general, fewer for harder-to-reach members such as disabled people, do-it-yourself groups.

Do professional staff matter all that much? Well, the report is partly a fascinating day-in-the-life account of just what it takes to service reading groups, and develop new ones. There's more to it than you might think.

Empowering

Running a group needs a professional approach, too: 'Although we heard of many different ways of facilitating a group, common to all were the challenges (and rewards) of leading in a way that was empowering for every participant. As a facilitator said: "Done right, it fulfils a basic human need for interaction and... being heard."'

A library assistant said: '[Reading groups] are really vital, this is really important stuff. This is what communities are about.

'There used to be more opportunities for people to get together in lots of different ways, in cinemas, in libraries, in pubs. All that's going, and the service I'm part of is keeping that alive.'

People said that their reading experience had been enriched by taking part in a reading group. It had, for example:

- Increased their enjoyment
- Challenged their understanding
- Made them think more deeply about reading
- Opened up their experience
- Widened their perspectives by hearing others' views
- Enriched and broadened their reading choices
- Increased their willingness to persevere in reading a challenging text
- Provided further insight into people's motives.

The researchers take it further. 'In the context of this study,' they say, 'people invoked the idea of community to explain the value of reading groups in two distinct ways.

On the one hand, they had discovered from their experience that reading groups can become powerful, supportive communities in their own right, bringing about the many benefits for members individually that this and many prior studies have shown.

'On the other hand, they also used it to refer to the networks of people living and working in the localities served by libraries. Recognising that the benefits were felt far beyond the groups themselves, they used it to express their conviction that reading groups have an important contribution to make to social inclusion and connectedness, to people's identification with and sense of belonging to their local communities.'

Inclusive

The groups also brought members into contact with a wider range of people than they would normally meet.

It all underpins the much-vaunted role of the library as a 'community hub'. 'Fundamental to this process,' says the report, 'is the work of creating an ethos in which people feel welcomed and where librarians are regarded as trusted members of the local community.'

As one librarian said: 'The ethos of the library is to make people from a very diverse customer base all feel welcome... I felt proud to be part of such an inclusive service.'

This brings into sharp focus the importance of finding 'creative and innovative ways... to engage

A number of people noted with regret the trend in libraries for people to be replaced by machines: 'People think information is all online now and people can have access to it. What's missing is the personal touch, interpretive stuff that only people could do.'

One senior librarian spoke for many when she said that libraries should be places where people come to enjoy human interaction around books and literature, precisely what reading groups provide: 'So many people feel lost in today's society. There's very little place for community.'

'A lot of people say to us: "You're the first person I've talked to today." They go to the bank and meet a machine, and the supermarket.

When do they have a chance to meet someone who goes "Hello, how are you?" There's no opportunity, and how can that be right?'

members of local communities who did not use libraries and did not usually read for pleasure. A senior librarian explained: 'I think the days of "you come to us" are gone. We have to go out to them.'

And librarians are doing plenty to 'go out' to new people. Local knowledge is important here.

The researchers were 'impressed' at the range of creative ideas, including:

- establishing groups in a range of locations such as places of work, care homes, doctors' surgeries, prisons;
- broadening the range of groups to appeal to different people, for example father and son groups, graphic novel groups for younger people, young mothers' groups;
- Shared Reading groups (where poems, short stories and novels are read aloud in the meeting) to encourage less confident readers;
- building partnerships, for example with local community groups, adult health and social care, arts organisations, local colleges and charitable groups, to sustain and extend what libraries could do alone.

Shared Reading – reading texts aloud, section by section, and talking about the meaning – helps make them accessible to people who are inexperienced readers or have learning disabilities, mental health problems, etc.

Well-being

Reading poetry can help people who have limited memory or attention span. One group included a man with dementia and his wife. Poetry worked 'simply because it's shorter. By halfway through a story, he may have completely forgotten the beginning, but the poem he can usually respond to very well'.

Poetry can also evoke strong memories and feelings, 'and when the focus of a discussion is feelings, people, whatever their background, are on an equal footing. As one facilitator said: "Emotions are a level playing field, no matter who you are. There's never any conflict there."

A librarian who started a reading group in a men's prison said: 'I think they appreciated just being a human being instead of being told to do this... Being asked "what do you think?" – that's quite a lot to cope with if nobody's ever asked you that before.'

Today it is recognised that reading groups have a key role in promoting health and well-being, and countering social isolation (a major cause of ill-health in itself). One manager explained: 'They are a lifeline for people who don't see anyone else for a long time... It's a way of making friends, keeping the brain active in old age. It covers a massive range.'

But it's important to note that 'the focus of the groups was not primarily therapeutic. People came together as readers. It was the power of literature itself, the process of engaging with good literature as a member of a supportive group, that brought the feelings of increased well-being frequently noted by members and facilitators alike.'

In a Midlands metropolitan borough, a project was set up by a group who later became founder members of The Shared Reading Company, a social enterprise, in partnership with the local primary care trust and library services. With funding from the Big Lottery Communities Programme, the project aimed to run Shared Reading groups in local libraries, with Read to Lead training by The Reader.

The project was designed to complement the Reading Well: Books on Prescription scheme developed by The Reading Agency in partnership with the Society of Chief Librarians.

The project ran successfully for six years, and involved over 200 participants. Then the funding ran out. Libraries continue to be supportive in principle, and provide meeting rooms, but they are now unable to offer funding or staff due to local authority cutbacks.

All these benefits were 'integrally bound up with the collective experience. Members appreciated being valued and listened to, feeling a sense of belonging. Knowledge and understandings were created by people together, as they shared their ideas and made links with their own experience. The camaraderie, mutual support and community feeling that were so frequently mentioned by participants were created by, and in turn enabled, the group's activities.'

Cuts

It isn't always easy to explain all this to decision-makers. A senior librarian said: 'It took a while to get our strategic bosses on board, who were looking at numbers and costing. But we were saying if you have a look at the type of people coming and the things they are saying, both the qualitative and quantitative evidence they are giving, it's something we can't afford not to do.'

But budget cuts are steadily breaking down the infrastructure that underpins reading groups.

In theory, with all those health and social benefits, they are ideal for the funding 'partnerships' that libraries are being urged to form.

But, say the researchers, 'short-term funding can mean that projects are often short-lived and consequently fragile. Funding streams that have been protected may themselves dry up.'

'The continual need to write bids for funding is expensive of time and can be a distraction from the development of the initiative.'

Worse, external funding usually requires formal evaluation. But the pressure to collect statistical data can alter the atmosphere of a group.

Barrier

One senior manager explained: 'We want people to be able to use our services anonymously, so tracking people is quite difficult for us because we know that can be a real barrier. We want people to feel relaxed and comfortable about dropping in and out as it suits them, without having to tell us anything about themselves. So we're always very apologetic when we give people a questionnaire to fill in, and say: 'It's really useful for our funding if you can tell us this.'

Another said: '[The evaluation] is changing the whole nature of the group, the anonymity, the fact of just being here and being yourself. Instead people feel they're being watched, they're a statistic.'

Staff felt that something vital is being lost as libraries become more finance-driven. One said: 'They're looking for a different kind of manager now, making the library service a business rather than a service, attracting funding, which is very important.'

'But some of these things which are perhaps not utilitarian are going by the board a little bit...'



■ The Reader organisation, which develops Shared Reading groups nationwide (www.thereader.org.uk)

Libraries and Section 106 – where's the money?

Ben Rymer highlights the issue of regeneration and the frequent failure of London councils to support libraries with funds from developers. (Is it any better elsewhere?)

Recent analysis of London's booming property industry contains a notable omission: the public library.

Despite recent cuts and closures, public libraries in England still welcomed 225m visitors in 2015. They regularly feature among the most-used services for London boroughs, and are central to key outcomes across public health, skills and employment, social exclusion and community cohesion.

Far from being 'old hat', public libraries are hugely undervalued. They deliver a wide range of services on shoestring budgets and with minimal staffing, while being at the centre of many of our communities.

However, local government funding cuts have presented a major challenge to library services. The challenge has coincided with a surge in London's construction sector.

You may have assumed that libraries – among the most-used services across London – would be big winners from the contributions made by property developers to mitigate the increased need for public services driven by residents in their new developments (these contributions, negotiated between council and developer, are known as 'Section 106' (S106) funds).

But you would be wrong.

Far from being one of the winners from London's construction boom, library budgets in many areas of the capital have not seen a penny from S106.

Data obtained through Freedom of Information queries show a clear pattern of neglect for library services across London's councils when negotiating S106 agreements with developers. Year after year and borough after borough, despite hundreds of millions of pounds of S106 funds being secured and spent, libraries simply do not get their fair share.

The figures show a clear pattern. Despite some London councils receiving tens of millions in S106 in recent years, the amount directed to public libraries is mostly trivial, with many spending no S106 funds at all on their library services.

While only 16 out of 32 councils responded to FoI requests for information on their S106 library spend, these 16 have seen S106 income of £387m over the seven financial years prior to 2016–17. Of this, just £5.4m (1.4%) was directed to libraries.

Out of this, £4.9m came from just three boroughs – Tower Hamlets, Greenwich and Hammersmith & Fulham (H&F) – and some of these funds went to



supporting the effective part-privatisation of libraries to become 'healthy living centres', ie gyms with a downgraded library offering.

The others – Barnet, Camden, City of London, Haringey, Islington, Kensington & Chelsea, Merton, Richmond-upon-Thames, Waltham Forest and Wandsworth – spent no S106 funds at all on libraries over the entire seven year period.

This was a time of drastic government austerity, when library budgets were cut to the bone, staff numbers decimated and volunteers increasingly called upon to run local libraries.

Even this partial picture shows libraries have been almost totally overlooked in S106 negotiations, to the huge detriment of the many thousands of people who have seen their library service downgraded or their local library close.

There are several plausible causes of this neglect of libraries. First is the consultation method used to prioritise S106 spending. This is often based on relatively small groups whose views are collected via survey or interview.

My own area of Lambeth is instructive. The recently published Community and Local Investment Plan (CLIP), which sets out how S106 will be spent in my area from 2017–2022, mentions libraries just twice, stating curtly that '[t]he council's programme for libraries is being taken forward separately'.

Strikingly, the plan was based on the views of just 651 of the 48,000+ residents who will be affected by the CLIP's outcomes.

And a search of Lambeth's recent S106 reports shows libraries' omission from S106 allocation is not new. No S106 was spent on libraries at all for two full years in 2013–14 and 2014–15, just before the council announced its intention to close/downgrade services of several libraries 'due to lack of funds'.

This trend is illustrated by Keybridge House, a new 'high end' development near Vauxhall, where a 43 square metre apartment costs a cool £515,000.

Although it is just a few hundred yards from the brilliant, bustling Tate South Lambeth (TSL) library, which in 2016 was threatened with closure due to council cuts, none of the £2m+ in S106 funds from Keybridge House have gone to support TSL, nor Lambeth's library services more widely.

Regeneration is also likely to have a role in the neglect of libraries. A recent open letter from Haringey Council Leader Cllr Claire Kober, justifying a controversial new joint venture, explicitly mentions libraries, painting a stark choice between economic growth (via the 'Haringey Development Vehicle') and an 'inevitable decline' for libraries and other services.

However, the letter fails to mention that Haringey received a total of £15,539,466 in S106 funding from 2010–11 to 2016–17. These funds could probably have refurbished the borough's library service several times over.

Libraries are exactly the sort of community infrastructure S106 should be helping in tough times. But the money just isn't reaching these vital frontline services, despite the proliferation of costly luxury developments in recent years.

Whatever the cause, S106 is not working for libraries. New ways must be found to secure these funds for a service under huge pressure.

One idea would be to ring-fence an amount – 1% would not be unrealistic – of all S106 funds for libraries. Such simple mechanisms are used to good effect in other countries to fund cultural services and would provide a reliable source of funding for library services.

We also need to know far more about how S106 spending decisions are made.

No-one pretends that recent years have been anything but terrible for local government finances. However, this makes it even more important that value is achieved in all cases, and that funding is linked to levels of need and use.

Whatever the method, it is surely time to rethink a system which fails to support a service used and loved by millions of Londoners.

Hard cash

Nick Poole, CILIP's chief executive, gives an optimistic view of libraries' ability to impress the cash-counters.

I've worked in social enterprises and the public sector for nearly 20 years. In all that time I have yet to come across an organisation that doesn't use money. From the tiniest volunteer-led community organisation to international collaborations like Wikipedia, we all have bills to pay.

All the social good we deliver needs to be built on a strong foundation of economic strength. There is an idea that 'money' is a dirty word for libraries, that it

sullies our professional ethics. That libraries live in an idealised world far away from the world of commerce. But if the past eight years of austerity have taught us anything, it's that all of the social good we deliver needs to be built on a strong foundation of economic strength.

There is a world of difference between being motivated by money – making choices that are primarily financially-driven – and seeing money as a means to deliver a social purpose.

I'm a great believer in social enterprise – that we can house income generation and value creation under the same roof in order to deliver thrilling services that make a profound difference to people's lives.

We can deliver balanced, universally accessible and equitable access to knowledge and literacy and still work in partnership with the private sector – so long as we are transparent and accountable, and ensure that those partnerships don't tip over into product placement.

We need to look at income generation alongside



■ Nick Poole

the wider question of the economic value we deliver for our places and our communities.

There's a concept called the circular economy which I think is really important. It's also called a 'regenerative economy'. The idea is that we both consume and create value, and the value we create – the social and economic capital – is reinvested into our communities to create a virtuous and sustainable cycle.



The economic contribution of libraries

So – what's out there to prove what to us is so obvious – that public libraries are a fantastic investment, even in the strictest money terms?

Published December 2015, Arts Council England's research review* on the economic value of libraries is interesting, but a bit dispiriting...

It finds there's a strong case for libraries, ranging from individual benefit to long-term benefit for the whole nation. Every cost-benefit study shows libraries deliver more than they cost. But the figures vary wildly, according to the research method.

It's hard to do the kind of research that the bean-counters like, such as: large-scale, long-term studies; standard methodologies; quantitative data; proof of short-term cause and effect; easy ways to measure the effect of libraries as distinct from anything else.

Libraries – and life – aren't quite like that.

The report says: 'While we know that the benefit-cost of public libraries is positive, we do not know whether this is one-and-a-half, twice or ten times the cost of provision...

'Evidence is already sufficient to conclude that public libraries provide positive outcomes for people and communities in many areas – far exceeding the traditional perception of libraries as just places from which to borrow books.

'Public libraries, first and foremost, contribute to long term processes of human capital formation, the maintenance of mental and physical wellbeing, social inclusivity and the cohesion of communities. This is the real economic contribution that public libraries make to the UK.

'The fact that these processes are long term, that the financial benefits arise downstream from libraries' activities, that libraries make only a contribution to what are multi-dimensional, complex processes of human and social development, suggests that attempting to derive a realistic and accurate overall monetary valuation for this is akin to the search for the holy grail.

'What it does show is that measuring libraries' short term economic impact provides only a very thin, diminished account of their true value.'

* <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/exploring-value-arts-and-culture/value-libraries>



The monetary value of libraries

More immediately useful is research carried out elsewhere in the UK. It took a more local and personal view.

In May 2014, the Alliance of Libraries Museums & Archives (ALMA) UK published its report* on The Economic Impact of Libraries.

A key finding was that users of libraries place a theoretical monetary value on their library services of between £24 and £27 per visit. This is between 5.5 and 7.5 times greater than the cost of provision.

Public Libraries in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales contributed to the research. It was based on over 4,000 user surveys conducted at 50 public libraries in Scotland, 25 in Wales and eight in Northern Ireland,

The study measured economic value by focusing on individual libraries (or whole services). In particular:

- the amount of expenditure by a library and jobs provided by a library within a locality as well as the indirect expenditure and jobs this produces along the supply chain;
- the average monetary value of an individual visit to a library; and
- the average annual monetary saving of visitors to a library through use of services provided.

The operation of the libraries was found to support employment and supply chains locally, as spending by library employees creates profits for suppliers of goods and services that multiply through the economy.

The research estimated that in 2012-13 public libraries supported 1,296 jobs in Scotland, 596 jobs in Wales and 327 in Northern Ireland, over and above those directly employed by the service.

And that's quite apart from the huge monetary value placed on the library by individual users. They should know...

ALMA-UK also launched a toolkit to enable individual library services to measure their own economic impact.

* <http://scottishlibraries.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/alma-uk-final-report-01-04-2014-1.pdf>



Libraries are a great example of the circular economy. Our communities invest value, money, time, support into us, and we generate a huge return on that investment – socially and economically.

Libraries have a huge amount going for them when it comes to generating both direct revenue and indirect economic impact. I think there are six components of our offer which give us a real advantage:

- 1 Brand equity – the trust and accessibility of being a library gives us a unique opportunity to develop services that are clearly differentiated from the endless noise of people trying to sell you products. (There's a wonderful line on Twitter from Matt Haig: 'Libraries are the last remaining public spaces that don't like our wallets more than they like us');
- 2 Buildings – we have the best physical infrastructure of attractive, accessible buildings anywhere outside the schools sector;
- 3 Audience – 265m visits in 2015, with one of the most strongly diversified audiences of any sector, anywhere;
- 4 People – a profession built on a customer service ethos, with a strong professional ethic;
- 5 Value-added services – in an age of information overload and white noise, we deliver rich, meaningful experiences that help people fill a genuine need in their lives;
- 6 Relationships – your libraries are your communities; they're indivisible. You're not flying services in from outside, but directly meeting identified local needs.

How do we take those elements and use them to build a solid foundation of economic activity and value that ensures those services are sustainable?

In an unguarded moment, a former libraries minister referred to libraries looking for 'handouts' from the public purse.

I don't know about you, but I've got no interest in handouts. I think we have a powerful economic case to make for libraries and it is vital that we make it well.

Being able to articulate the economic impact of publicly-funded library services is one of the most fundamental elements of our political advocacy in the years ahead.

UK-wide each year, the nation spends around £700m on library services. That gives us a huge economic impact, for example on the publishing sector as well as local economies.

We already know that library services can save money for other public sectors – for example, the £27.5m that public libraries save the NHS each year by reducing dependency on GPs for frontline information (<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/blog/hearts-and-minds>).

Other examples include thinking about ways of showing people what they saved by using the library. There's an innovative example of a library that provides users with a receipt showing what they would have had to spend to buy the books they're borrowing.

So I think there is a real opportunity both to take a pragmatic and practical look at how economic activity

can make our service more sustainable and a broader look at how we embrace economic impact as a great argument for public funding.

I think it is important to be bold, to be realistic, but also to be opportunistic in how we build a sustainable financial model for our services.

This is an edited transcript of a talk Nick gave at "Libraries Pay: Public Libraries Supporting Economic Prosperity", a CILIP Public & Mobile Libraries Group event on 20 September, 2016.



Lending writes

Public Lending Right (PLR) is just one way that public libraries support writers. For some, even a modest payment is a lifeline.

PLR is also a great source of free information on what gets borrowed most. Fascinating and often surprising. Here's a sample.

For more, including breakdowns by region and historical lists, go to: www.plr.uk.com

This year PLR has £6.6m to distribute to an estimated 22,202 authors at 7.82p per loan (book or audiobook).

The payments are calculated from a sample of 30 library authorities, covering around 1,000 individual branches. Volunteer-run libraries aren't included.

Authors are eligible if their PLR earnings reach £1. The maximum payment is £6,600 for top-lending authors, to protect funding for others. This year, 205 authors will receive the maximum.

From 2018, PLR will extend for the first time to e-books and e-audiobooks – a change long campaigned for. The UK is one of the first countries to do this. However, the £6.6m annual funding will remain unchanged until 2019.

Last year e-book lending saw an increase of 38%, according to the British Library, with more than 4m e-book loans and almost 1m e-audiobook loans in Great Britain in the 12 months to April 2016.

Most borrowed authors 1997/98 and 2015/16

Most Borrowed Authors (Adult Fiction)

July 1997–June 1998

- 1 Catherine Cookson
- 2 Danielle Steel
- 3 Dick Francis
- 4 Josephine Cox
- 5 Ruth Rendell
- 6 Jack Higgins
- 7 Agatha Christie
- 8 Emma Blair
- 9 Terry Pratchett
- 10 Barbara Taylor Bradford

July 2015–June 2016

- 1 James Patterson
- 2 M C Beaton
- 3 Nora Roberts
- 4 Anna Jacobs
- 5 Lee Child
- 6 David Baldacci
- 7 Danielle Steel
- 8 Clive Cussler
- 9 Michael Connelly
- 10 John Grisham

Most Borrowed Children's Authors

July 1997–June 1998

- 1 R L Stine
- 2 Allan & Janet Ahlberg
- 3 Ann M Martin
- 4 Roald Dahl
- 5 Enid Blyton
- 6 Dick King-Smith
- 7 John Cunliffe
- 8 Rene Goscinny
- 9 Mick Inkpen
- 10 Eric Hill

July 2015–June 2016

- 1 Julia Donaldson
- 2 Daisy Meadows
- 3 Roderick Hunt
- 4 Francesca Simon
- 5 Adam Blade
- 6 Jacqueline Wilson
- 7 Roald Dahl
- 8 Fiona Watt
- 9 Michael Morpurgo
- 10 Lucy Cousins

Most Borrowed Classic Authors

July 1997–June 1998

- 1 Beatrix Potter
- 2 Daphne Du Maurier
- 3 A A Milne
- 4 Jane Austen
- 5 William Shakespeare
- 6 J R R Tolkien
- 7 Charles Dickens
- 8 Thomas Hardy
- 9 Anthony Trollope
- 10 E M Forster

July 2015–June 2016

- 1 Roald Dahl
- 2 Enid Blyton
- 3 Agatha Christie
- 4 Beatrix Potter
- 5 Harper Lee
- 6 Charles Dickens
- 7 Georgette Heyer
- 8 William Shakespeare
- 9 P G Wodehouse
- 10 J R R Tolkien

Library borrowing – five interesting facts & figures

1. The 'King of Library Lending'

Prolific US writer James Patterson was the most borrowed author from UK public libraries during 2015/16 for the tenth consecutive year. He has held this title since 2006/07 and during that time his books have been borrowed over 20 million times. His most popular title with library borrowers during 2015/16 was *Alert*.

2. Classic author hits the Top 10

Go Set a Watchman by Harper Lee made a splash in the Top 10 most borrowed books from UK libraries during 2015/16 by being the 7th most popular book with UK library borrowers.

She was also the fifth most borrowed classic author during 2015/16 and has regularly featured in the top 20 most borrowed classic authors. The popularity of *Go Set a Watchman* ensured she moved up from 18th position in 2014/15. *To Kill a Mockingbird* has been the most borrowed classic title for the last three years.

3. 'Magic Key' popular choice with younger borrowers

Libraries continue to be important for children. New to the top 10 was UK author Roderick Hunt, who became the fourth most popular author in UK public libraries during 2015/16 with over 1 million loans. He moved up 10 places from the previous year (14th). Two years ago he was in 30th position.

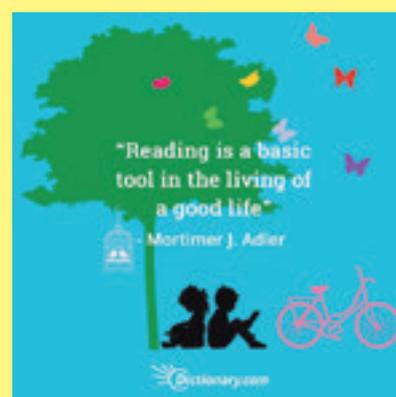
Roderick Hunt, author of the 'Magic Key' series which form part of the Oxford Reading Tree scheme, commented: "It's a great privilege to be one of PLR's most borrowed authors as I hope my stories encourage children to love reading and become life-long readers. There is no better place to discover the rich treasure-trove of books to be read for both pleasure and for information than in local libraries. And where better than the library to browse and borrow and be beguiled by books?"

4. Top non-fiction author

Mary Berry was the most borrowed non-fiction author during 2015/16 and overall was the 193rd most popular author with borrowers. *Mary Berry Cooks the Perfect* was her most borrowed title and clocked up over 14,000 loans.

5. Payments to authors for library loans

Public Lending Right (PLR) was established by Act of Parliament in 1979 and is the responsibility of the British Library. PLR gives authors the legal right to receive payment from government each time their books are loaned through the public library system.



The borrowing habits of the nation – UK library chart toppers 2015/16

Most borrowed author: James Patterson

Most borrowed children's author: Julia Donaldson

Most borrowed non-fiction author: Mary Berry

Most borrowed classic author: Roald Dahl

'The millionaires' – 5 authors with over 1 million loans in 2015-2016

1. James Patterson
2. Julia Donaldson
3. Daisy Meadows
4. Roderick Hunt
5. Francesca Simon

7 authors 'on the up'

- Roderick Hunt (4th from 14th last year)
David Walliams (18th from 39th last year)
Liz Pichon (38th from 61st last year)
Peter Bently (46th from 81st last year)
Peter May (61st from 93rd last year)
Tess Gerritsen (79th from 104th last year)
Rachel Renee Russell (82nd from 163rd last year)

Most borrowed titles

1. The Girl on the Train by Paula Hawkins
2. Personal by Lee Child
3. Make Me by Lee Child
4. Diary of a Wimpy Kid by Jeff Kinney
5. Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Long Haul by Jeff Kinney

Authors with most appearances in the Top 100 most borrowed titles

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------|
| James Patterson (13) | Liz Pichon (5) |
| Jeff Kinney (10) | Lee Child (4) |
| David Walliams (10) | John Grisham (3) |

Most borrowed non-fiction titles (adult)

1. Guinness World Records 2015 by Guinness World Records
2. The Road to Little Dribbling by Bill Bryson
3. Save with Jamie by Jamie Oliver
4. The Official DSA Theory Test for Car Drivers by Driving Standards Agency
5. Davina's 5 Weeks to Sugar-free by Davina McCall

Most borrowed children's titles

1. Diary of a Wimpy Kid by Jeff Kinney
2. Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Long Haul by Jeff Kinney
3. Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Cabin Fever by Jeff Kinney
4. Awful Auntie by David Walliams (illus Tony Ross)
5. Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules by Jeff Kinney

Most borrowed 'classic' authors (last year's positions in brackets)

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Roald Dahl (1) | 5. Harper Lee (18) |
| 2. Enid Blyton (2) | 6. Charles Dickens (6) |
| 3. Agatha Christie (3) | 7. Georgette Heyer (5) |
| 4. Beatrix Potter (4) | |

All the above could have earned the maximum possible PLR payment of £6,600 for 2015/16, had they been alive.

Most borrowed audio titles

1. Ratburger by David Walliams, read by David Walliams
2. Billionaire Boy by David Walliams, read by David Walliams & Matt Lucas
3. Gangsta Granny by David Walliams, read by David Walliams
4. Demon Dentist by David Walliams, read by David Walliams
5. Mr Stink by David Walliams, read by David Walliams & Matt Lucas

Most borrowed books 2015/2016

1	The Girl On The Train	Paula Hawkins	2015
2	Personal	Lee Child	2014
3	Make Me	Lee Child	2015
4	Diary Of A Wimpy Kid	Jeff Kinney	2008
5	The Long Haul	Jeff Kinney	2014
6	Alert	James Patterson	2015
7	Go Set A Watchman	Harper Lee William	2015
8	Cabin Fever	Jeff Kinney	2013
9	Awful Auntie	David Walliams	2014
10	Truth Or Die	James Patterson	2015
11	The Burning Room	Michael Connelly	2014
12	Afternoon Tea At The Sunflower Cafe	Milly Johnson	2015
13	Personal	Lee Child	2015
14	Rodrick Rules	Jeff Kinney	2009
15	Mightier Than The Sword	Jeffrey Archer	2015
16	Gray Mountain	John Grisham	2015
17	Gray Mountain	John Grisham	2014
18	14th Deadly Sin	James Patterson	2015
19	You Are Dead	Peter James	2015
20	Dog Days	Jeff Kinney	2010
21	The Last Straw	Jeff Kinney	2009
22	Tom Gates Is Absolutely Fantastic (At Some Things)	Liz Pichon	2013
23	Memory Man	David Baldacci	2015
24	Summer At Shell Cottage	Lucy Diamond	2015
25	Time Of Death	Mark Billingham	2015
26	Hard Luck	Jeff Kinney	2015
27	The Crossing	Michael Connelly	2015
28	Pretty Girls: A Novel	Karin Slaughter	2015
29	The Third Wheel	Jeff Kinney	2014
30	Murder House	James Patterson	2015

Loans of books by category (%) 2014/15 – 2015/16

	2014/15	2015/16
Adult		
The Arts	1.1	0.9
Biography and True Stories	2.9	2.8
Language	0.4	0.4
Literature and Literary Studies	0.4	0.4
English Language Teaching (ELT)	0.3	0.2
Fiction and Related Items	41.5	40.1
Reference, Information and Interdisciplinary Subjects	0.1	0.1
Humanities	1.8	1.8
Society and Social Sciences	0.9	1.2
Economics, Finance, Business and Management	0.5	0.6
Law	0.1	0.1
Medicine	0.1	0.3
Mathematics and Science	0.4	0.4
Earth Sciences, Geography, Environment, Planning	0.1	0.1
Technology, Engineering, Agriculture	0.1	0.1
Computing and Information Technology	0.7	0.7
Health and Personal Development	2.6	2.5
Lifestyle, Sport and Leisure	6.5	6.3
Children		
Children's, Teenage and Educational	39.5	41.0
Total	100	100

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Account Name:

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Sort Code:

--	--	--	--	--	--

Account Number:

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