

LIBRARY CAMPAIGN

SUPPORTING FRIENDS AND USERS OF LIBRARIES

UNSTAFFED LIBRARIES



AFTER



BEFORE

PHOTO: Amit Lennon, @amitlennon

SPRING 2019
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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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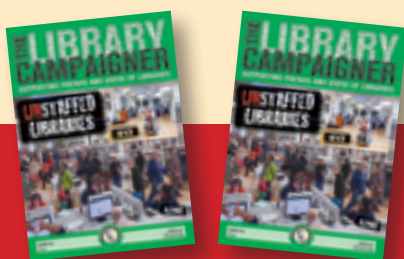
of local

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



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...

ELECTED OFFICERS

Laura Swaffield London

Andrew Coburn Essex

MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Geoffrey Dron Bolton

Bob Goodrick London

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.

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

DCMS (Department for 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.

LC (Libraries Connected) formerly 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.

Chair's report: Laura Swaffield

By chance, this issue throws light on what TLC's executive committee get up to... in their spare time...

Bob Goodrick and I continue trying to teach Lambeth councillors what libraries actually do. Last year's reality surveys (pp.11-14) took a lot of work. So has writing endless reports to the DCMS, in a vain attempt to get some reaction.

Similar frustration with the DCMS is expressed – among many others – by Barnet (pp. 15-17). Geoffrey Dron is separately pursuing the DCMS, on behalf of TLC, over its inaction in two sample boroughs. He also gives legal information to campaigners.

And Andrew Coburn, active in UNISON, is now in the thick of the campaign in Essex (pp. 9-10).

I have also been busy with press queries, ranging from local papers to the Daily Express, The i, The Bookseller and the Guardian.

It does seem that the press is waking up to the scale of the disaster in libraries. Among all the austerity horror stories, libraries are starting to take their rightful place.

All this at least shows that your committee understands the struggles campaigners go through. It also shows how much we would welcome more help.

Our mini-conference-cum-AGM last October attracted a good mix of people from Barnet, Birmingham, Haringey, Islington, Lambeth, Lewisham, Lincs, Northants and Peterborough.

All had tales of excellent, reasoned campaigns. Ultimately few could do much against the combined forces of (1) austerity and (2) indifference and sheer ignorance in the decision-makers. All wrapped up by a government that washes its hands of responsibility for both.

The challenge remains to find ways to join all these efforts together.

The devastating November report of the UN's 'special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights' (<http://tinyurl.com/yda8kphu>) puts libraries in context.



Laura with Lambeth campaigners and Alan Wylie at the November demonstration.

Some extracts:

Local authorities, especially in England, which perform vital roles in providing a real social safety net, have been gutted...

Libraries have closed in record numbers, community and youth centres shrunk and underfunded, public spaces and buildings sold off...

The compassion and mutual concern that has long been part of the British tradition has been outsourced.

At the same time many of the public places



Andrew getting petitions signed in Essex.

and institutions that previously brought communities together, such as libraries, community and recreation centres, and public parks, have been steadily dismantled or undermined...

The good news is that many of the problems could readily be solved if the government were to acknowledge the problems...

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4 YOUR LIBRARY? SHUT DOWN

Rhia Kavok's band has made protest about library closures into a song...

5 NEWS

7 THE TROUBLE WITH CIPFA

Some long-standing concerns about our official national statistics.

7 THE SECRETS OF CIPFA

Joan O'Bryan's analysis showed how CIPFA figures fail to show the good news – and could do so much more...

9 ESSEX LIBRARIES IN CRISIS

Andrew Coburn reports on a determined battle – and invites you to join in.

UNSTAFFED LIBRARIES

11 THE DIFFERENCE LIBRARIANS MAKE...

Lambeth's Defend the 10 campaign went to observe what happens when a library stays 'open' but loses its staff.

15 EMBATTLED IN BARNET

Barnet has the same problem, but the DCMS has done nothing to help – for years. Barbara Jacobson & Emily Burnham, for Save Barnet Libraries, ask for your help.

18 WHO DOES WHAT?

Ian Anstice charts a way through the jungle of different bodies responsible for public libraries.

20 LIBRARIES DELIVER PROSPERITY

Another publicity leaflet from the Taskforce you can download for free.

21 FLOTSAM IN FALMOUTH

Derek Toyne describes how a town council took over its library service from the county – and improved it.

23 CULTURE IN CHESTER

How a library authority actually invested in its libraries – with award-winning success.

24 HIDDEN HURT

Catriona Robertson & David McMenemy researched the issue of services that are 'hollowed out' rather than overtly closed, focusing on children's libraries.

24 KUDOS FROM KIDS

ASCEL & CIPFA found that libraries are very popular with children of all ages - especially the staff!

25 REASONS FOR RHYMETIME

ACE-funded research in Essex found that parent and baby groups in libraries are good for mothers' mental health.

27 BUT FIRST – THE BUMP!

A toolkit from ASCEL helps mothers get in touch with their babies before birth, with proven benefits.

28 WHAT THE ARTS COUNCIL IS SAYING

ACE (Arts Council England) is taking an in-depth look at what it does.

29 WHAT WE SAID TO ACE

The Library Campaign argues that ACE must give public libraries a major, central role in its new-look approach to culture.

33 THE DREADED SUMMER SLIDE!

The national Summer Reading Challenge for children is a huge success story for public libraries. But it's in danger...

34 LIBRARIES CHANGE LIVES!

Three library services demonstrate creative ideas that help an amazing variety of people.

36 JOIN US!

The more TLC grows, the stronger we get.

Your library? Shut down.

These are the opening lyrics – and the main theme – of ‘Shop’, latest song by Brighton ‘punk rock poet pop’ band Gulls. They call it ‘a clarion call to resist those who close libraries and open chain-stores’. And we like it! Here, Rhi Kavok describes her library journey from awed schoolkid to teacher-cum-performer with a message. Listen/buy via <https://www.gullsband.co.uk>

That guilt you wear as you get older – and adulthood presents the stark realities of what your parents did to attempt to create a happy, functional, full human – is profound.

It grows. I remember being annoyed at the incessant: ‘How was school?’. Every eye-roll, shrug and ‘Maaaam... why do you always ask me that?’ twinges now.

I realise how every time I was asked the question, I was served another reminder that I was real and important.

The guilt is particularly stark, faced as I am in my working life as a teacher, with plenty of children whose parents do not harbour such interest in them. The behaviours that result from that neglect span everything, from apathy to cruelty.

Nowhere do I feel this gratitude-guilt dichotomy as profoundly as when I consider my Mam’s belligerent adherence to her young children’s weekly trips to the local library.

The children’s section was downstairs. I can channel the awe I felt walking past the grown-ups’ book shelves, looming, Brobdingnagian, as we ventured down to the brightly coloured cavern below to sit on red plastic bucket chairs or lie on the floor, surrounded by books.

Books, books, books. The delicious torture of limitation. What kind of power dished out cruelty like a choice of only five books a week?

The below-stairs room was split in two. Bookshelves marked the half-wall partition between the children’s section and what I regarded as the clever section.

It was largely taken up by a vast table. I’m not sure if my memory has gifted that table its deep red leather surface or if that’s what the people sat at it actually leaned upon, but the whole room was simultaneously inviting and intimidating.

‘When I’m old enough and clever enough,’ I thought, ‘I’ll sit at that table and read and write clever things.’

I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have experienced a childhood, an education, with and without the internet. Research homework was a very different ballgame before Google.

CAMARADERIE

Research meant reference books. Reference books meant the clever section of the library. As a 13-year-old, childish glee merged with faux-mature entitlement as I made my way to the library and downstairs once again... but now those red plastic buckets reached my knee, and it was heavy oak my eager-to-learn self would reside on.

Having been burned before, I realised that I’d get ruined for copying out of the encyclopaedia (it has to be ‘in your own words’). I’d been busted because the teacher had asked me what some of the complex vocabulary meant, and I had no idea.

There was no way I was getting caught out again. So I heaved a dictionary and thesaurus down on to the grand table as well. Every time I came across a word I didn’t know, I looked up its definition, then its synonyms, picked the one I thought most apt and stuck it in brackets next to the challenging word.

The other people around the table were older than me. Some by a long way, some by less.

I stared at them. I marvelled at the towering walls of books like self-made carrells, part-

Kensal Rise Library, built by public subscription on a site donated by All Souls College, Oxford, was ceremoniously opened by Mark Twain in the year 1900.

It was closed by Brent Council in 2011 and sold to a property developer called Platinum Revolver.

Ali Smith, *Public Library and Other Stories*



***Your library? Shut down.
Youth club? Shut down.
Refuge? Shelter? Park? Closed.
Your high street? Shut down.
Nightclub? Shut down.
Music venue? What’s one of those?***
from Gulls’ new song ‘Shop’

isolating them inside their own intelligences.

What were they working on? What kind of research homework did adults need to do?

There were always smiles from them. Friendliness and camaraderie amidst all that depth and windowless academia.

We shared in the weighty acceptance that the books we needed couldn’t even be removed; permanent residents who lent their wisdom during visiting hours.

At school, my teacher applauded my parenthetical insurance policy. The synonyms, for me, mitigated the risk of having to do the homework again (‘in your own words’).

For my teacher, they represented an exciting resilience and a desire to broaden my understanding and vocabulary: ‘Putting the words’ meanings in brackets is such a fantastic idea, Rhian. Really impressive.’

Sweet.

At 15, the internet brought AOL chatrooms (15/f/Sussex, on an honest day). I can still hear the scraping, tinny dance of the notes that preceded 'connecting'. Research for my A Levels was via Encarta. By university, I was downloading and rehashing whole essays to hand in.

This is just a tiny part of my history with libraries and books. It is part of the reason I was so affected by Ali Smith's 'Public Library and Other Stories'.

Smith's book hit me hard, not just because of what I've felt inside libraries, but because what I've learned from books (inside and outside libraries) has everything to do with my capacity for caring.

I am equal parts stuff I've learned from books and excitement about what I might next put in my brain. The library where my brain matured is almost unrecognisable now.

Thankfully it is still in the same building. But its opening hours have been massively reduced. It doesn't open until 11am.

Mam would often take me and my brother there early in the morning. So instead of a 2019 young family making memories equivalent to those I've detailed here and those I've no room for, the doors are closed. The books are unread.

Since 2010, 737 libraries have gone. There are now 3,745 left. The risk of 'library extinction' is very real. As councils are starved of funding, ever more libraries become volunteer-only.

When the job of staffing and running services falls to members of the community who are old or just busy (who can afford to work for free in these trying times?) then opening hours reduce, number and diversity of titles diminish and we all lose.

Libraries are not closing because of lack of use. They're closing because the government doesn't care about our right to read.

Your library? Shut down.

If not already, then perhaps soon.

A library implies an act of faith

Victor Hugo



CONGRATULATIONS!

... to the indispensable Ian Anstice, one-man key information source (www.publiclibrariesnews.com), who got an OBE in the New Year honours. Other great library advocates honoured: Chris Riddell, Debbie Hicks, Julia Donaldson and SIR!! Philip Pullman.



BROKEN HERTS?

Among this year's crop of awful library plans, a rather obscure move by Hertfordshire is worrying. It plans to change its bye-laws so that volunteers become 'library officers' just like employees of the council.

Merely a tidy-up to enable volunteers to manage users' behaviour on site, says Herts.

Others say it's another slide towards classing volunteers as just the same as librarians. After all, who needs expertise to run a library?



Julia Donaldson



We are so impressed by the sheer quality of campaigners' efforts – like this stylish poster from Ealing, which is trying to make over half its libraries volunteer-run.

CILIP CONTRACTS

Librarians' association CILIP (Chartered Institute for Library & Information Professionals) has balanced its budget via a drastic cut – 11 of 54 posts, plus two contracts not renewed.

The underlying aim is a 'culture change' to work in a more joined-up way UK-wide. It will 'do more for members', despite a cheaper membership structure that has cost it in the short term.

BURY CLEVER

Bury's library service is one of those breaking new ground with its own podcasts. Catchily titled 'Dinosaurs Didn't Read', they feature librarians 'David, David and Sarah', with book reviews, anecdotes and thought-provokers such as 'Lee Child is rubbish...' **On Spotify, iTunes and online: <https://bit.ly/2CjiXaY>**



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

Philip Pullman

Taskforce moves on

Libraries are the responsibility of all too many different organisations. (On pages 17–18 is a chart by Ian Anstice sorting out the roles of the central ones.)

There are others... but also there are current moves among the big players.

The Libraries Taskforce was set up to advance the 'urgent' recommendations of the Sieghart report (see Campaigner no 91, spring 2015, on our website).

LC moves up

Meanwhile, ACE has been setting up 'Sector Support Organisations' to spearhead development.

One such is Libraries Connected – the new name for the Society of Chief Librarians.

SCL has long done heroic amounts of work on near-zero funding, and what project grants it could get.

Much of it has been brilliant, such as its promotions on Shakespeare and World War I. Some not so good, such as its support for volunteer libraries and its recent wheeze to offer advice on visas and immigration via libraries.

SSO status, however, is enabling big changes at the LC. It now gets four years of funding, so it can have a paid 'core team'.

This gives a solid foundation on which to build further fund-raising and projects. And a foundation to work closely with DCMS and ACE.

It sees itself as a 'library leadership body [with] a critical mission to look at the sector as a whole... to identify a sustainable foundation for public libraries that takes us beyond the current funding crisis'.

This also moves LC up a few notches among the players in our confused library landscape.

Opinions vary as to how well it has met hopes. But anyway, the money (£500,000 pa) runs out in March 2020.

Work is now well advanced to transfer its work (and staff) to the mainstream. That means DCMS (where it has always been based) as the policy and oversight body. And ACE (Arts Council England) as the development agency.

TLC is arguing strongly that ACE needs to take its expanded role very seriously.

Public libraries are not an arts 'extra'. They should be seen – and funded – as the essential bedrock of the nation's whole culture strategy.

Luckily (we hope), ACE is in the throes of a major review of everything it believes, and does. See pages 28–32.

NO-SHOW NOVEMBER

We have to say: the national demonstration for libraries, museums and arts last November was a shadow of the one in 2017. It numbered a couple of hundred compared to 2017's 2,500-plus.

All the same it was fun – and uplifting – for those who went. It did get media cover, ranging from London ITV to the Guardian. Plenty of cheers from the public too. It all helps.

Interestingly, the focus was on libraries, with little show from museums (etc). But even some library campaigners, it seems, are feeling the pinch.



The trouble with CIPFA

Good, accessible information is what libraries are all about. It's ironic, then, that current information on public libraries themselves falls short of what is needed to understand what's going on, and learn useful lessons



The most-used official figures on public libraries come from CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountability, a registered charity).

This puts together answers to standard questions sent in by library authorities, who pay a subscription to get the final report. The reports

Ian Anstice comments:

There's nothing magical in what CIPFA are doing. They send out a list of questions and library authorities answer them. The councils don't get paid for this data but then CIPFA charge everyone else £650 for its use. The data also takes months to be publicly available.

These two problems may once have been acceptable but not in these days of emails and spreadsheets. It strikes me that the councils themselves could simply do this themselves. Unless, of course, and I think this is sadly the case, some library services do not wish to make their data open in the first place...

are also publicly available – for a fee of £650.

There are a few problems...

1 An increasing number of councils just aren't sending in their figures. Only 86% participated in 2016-2017, compared to 100% in 2006-2007.

No time, no money or maybe a reluctance to reveal embarrassing facts...? There's no telling.

The upshot is that it gets harder to map trends.

2 The reports come out each December. They are already eight months late, as they are based on data supplied the previous April.

Why it takes so long is an enduring mystery. Meanwhile, your best source of up-to-date news is www.publiclibrariesnews.com, compiled by librarian Ian Anstice in his spare time. This is admirable, but should not be needed.

3 There's endless debate about just how accurate, or consistent, or properly verified, these figures are. This is a whole article in itself, and perhaps likely to affect any compilation of stats on anything. But it needs noting.

4 As stated, it's impossible to get hold of these (publicly-compiled) figures unless you pay CIPFA £650. Not good.

5 On top that, CIPFA is now actively encouraging councils not to give out their own CIPFA data in answer to Freedom of Information requests.

CIPFA itself is not a public body, so it has no obligations under FoI. If anyone gives out its data, it argues, that's against CIPFA's (and its subscribers') 'commercial interests'. And, it says, the information counts as 'reasonably accessible'

under FoI law – never mind the huge cost. Doubleplus ungood, we say.

6 The upshot of all this is that you and I can't get much info from CIPFA apart from its annual press releases. These give only national figures (plus some limited highlights such as regional-level figures, or the top 10 big libraries).

The national figures, obviously, blend everything together.

There's no way to highlight the good, thriving services – which really do exist – let alone analyse what they are doing right.

What a waste of this mass of figures! To see what should be possible, see below.

Result – bad news about libraries, picked up by the press every year.

Yes, it's right to publicise the scandal of this nation's war on libraries.

But the danger is the implied message that: 'All libraries are in decline. Nobody uses them.'

That gets trotted out all the time, and we campaigners have to deal with it.

ONE GOOD THING

Our regular reminder that one good thing CIPFA does – and you can actually get hold of – is 'comparative profiles'.

Each English library authority gets a report setting out some basic data in easy to read form – and showing how it matches up against other similar authorities in its 'family group'. Download yours free from: <https://www.cipfa.org/services>

NOTE: in fairness to Ed Vaizey, the departed and not-much-lamented libraries minister, these profiles are funded by DCMS, and he started them.

The secrets of CIPFA

Joan O'Bryan, MPhil student at Cambridge University, had a four-week placement with the Libraries Taskforce and looked at CIPFA statistics (2006-07 to 2016-17). In that short time, she found out a lot about what these figures could show. This is a summary of what she wrote on the Taskforce blog.

My coursework at Cambridge has largely centred on 'evidence-based policy,' a form of government practice that emphasises the need for rigorous data analysis before making policy decisions.

CIPFA statistics are one of the most referenced sources of data on British public libraries.

However, the data has not been structured for easy access, so a lot of the analysis relied on in public discussions has been relatively superficial.

For instance, the CIPFA data shows that libraries are declining. But there hasn't been any

analysis on why those trends are occurring, or how some library services are fighting them.

My report* looked in depth at 7 arguments:

- 1 Cuts: declining investment makes for lower quality product, resulting in declining use.
- 2 Failure to modernise: library leaders have failed to innovate in response to changes in demand, which prevents the acquisition of new users and hinders repeat use.
- 3 Time-poor: usage has declined because libraries face increased competition with a wider range of leisure-time options and work commitments.

Extract from the report

The dominant narrative surrounding English public libraries is one of decline. But is it true?

We lack good data on how libraries are used, and the changes they've been undergoing. Data at the national level is often incomplete, bolstered by estimations, or missing critical variables.

This report analyses what we can learn from CIPFA data and what we cannot.

Using standardised CIPFA data, it updates previously reported trends. It also analyses the data to find other potentially useful correlations and trends beyond those traditionally discussed.

Overall, the data shows a continuing decline in use (both visits and book issues). No one argument was found to be sufficient as an explanation. But:

- The downward trend may be slowing. In 2016–17, issues and visits declined by 4% and 3% relative to 2006–07, compared to all-time maximum decreases of 8% and 4%.
- The overall trend masks significant variations – across and within library services.

Over a quarter of all library services are trend-buckers. They have shown an increase in use over the past year and/or the past decade.

Analysis pointed at unmeasured variables which could distinguish the high performers from the rest – forward-thinking leadership, political support and the purchasing flexibility needed to innovate.

The data collected fails to fully reflect the changing role of public libraries.

CIPFA statistics sheets were not designed to be

a dataset. They have significant flaws that undermine their ability to be used as a definitive, authoritative source of data on trends in usage.

These fit into five broad issues: structure, consistency, accuracy, standardisation, and selection and measurement of variables.

They impair our ability to understand trends at the national level in a comprehensive way.

It may be possible to remedy this if all library services contribute in the future to a consistent and comprehensive open dataset, along the lines of the work currently being led by the Taskforce...

The nature of CIPFA's statistics sheets goes against very ethos of the library sector: proprietary data, expensive and inaccessible, is the exact opposite of the free and open information libraries are proud to provide.

- 4 Digital shift: changes in consumer behaviour, particularly a shift away from print, have left the 'physical library' obsolete.
- 5 Changing use: the way people use libraries is changing, but current metrics are failing to pick up these patterns of altered use.
- 6 Failure to market: library leaders have neglected marketing to engage non-users.
- 7 Fragmentation: devolution by national government has made it difficult to manage and strategise across English libraries (as one would a national retail chain).

To analyse them, I divided library services into quintiles and examined the effect of different variables on performance.

Of course, correlation is not causation. My data analysis could only show correlation.

However, now this initial work has been done, it could be an exciting project for another intern to do some statistical analysis of probabilities and causation. The CIPFA data is a rich and tantalising source of information on public libraries.

FOR INSTANCE...

I compared library expenditure against book issues and visits. I was trying to answer the question: 'Do declining expenditures explain declining library performance?'

Overall, expenditure seemed highly correlated with performance. Across England, when expenditure decreased, so did visits and issues.

However, the picture becomes more complex when we look at the quintiles.

THE TREND-BUCKERS

31 services increased visitor numbers in a year (2015–16 to 2016–17):

Birmingham, Bournemouth, Brent, Bromley, Calderdale, Darlington, Greenwich, Hammersmith & Fulham, Havering, Islington, Lambeth, Lewisham, Lincolnshire, Manchester, Medway, Newham, Plymouth, Redbridge, Richmond-upon-Thames, Rotherham, Sefton, Slough, Southwark, Stockport, Suffolk, Sutton, Telford & Wrekin, Windsor & Maidenhead, Wolverhampton, Worcestershire, York.

10 services increased their book issues in a year (2015–16 to 2016–17):

Brighton & Hove, Bromley, Gloucestershire, Greenwich, Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea, Leicestershire, North Yorkshire, Rochdale, Southwark.

The top quintile in visits completely bucks the trend of overall decline. They do so despite decreases to their expenditure.

In the bottom quintile, the trends are far more similar to the national trends. Expenditure declines and declines in visits are highly correlated.

The top quintile in visits had a somewhat better average percent change than the bottom quintile (–27% versus –36%), a difference of 9 points. But their average percent change in visits

(+5% versus –56%) was much higher, resulting in an over-60-point difference.

What does this mean for the 'cuts' argument?

Well, it seems to imply that – at least for visits – declining expenditure is not the most important variable. Some library services out-perform their budget cuts.

That doesn't mean that expenditure isn't important. Expenditure declines in the bottom quintile began earlier, and decreased faster, than expenditure declines in the top quintile.

This may imply the presence of an underlying variable, such as council priorities, that determines which library services are generally better supported or more used.

It's also interesting to note that performance for library services in the bottom quintile was gradually declining before expenditure declines began, and that performance declined sharply when expenditures did.

It implies that budget cuts in some library services can exacerbate existing trends, making it harder for those services to become successful.

READ ON

The full report is well worth a look. Many pet theories are examined, with real-life examples. Hard-and-fast conclusions are rare – but it does show how info could be used, with proper data...

*<http://tinyurl.com/y47mu24c>



Essex libraries in crisis

With libraries run down for years, people in Essex could only expect further cuts. But the scale of the plans was a shock. Now the whole county is united in opposition, says Andrew Coburn

The only surprise last November – when Essex County Council announced it was consulting on a proposal to close 25 of its 74 libraries, hand another 19 to the community (aka have them run by volunteers) and reduce the opening hours of the remaining 30 – was surprise at the extent of the plan.

For months Essex library staff, and those close to them, had known that reorganisation was coming. It was expected that closures would be part of it.

The rest of the service (including money for stock, and staffing outside the libraries themselves), has been salami sliced over the years. There is nowhere else to go to save money.

However, Essex has always been a forward looking library service. It was the second public library authority in the UK to have e-books. It always had the highest number of children participating in the Summer Reading Challenge.

An Essex librarian invented the concept of Quick Reads, which has now been taken on by publishers nationally. The same person pioneered

the Essex Book Festival, which celebrated its 20th anniversary earlier this year.

And as the internet began to take hold and replace printed reference books, Essex invented Answers Direct, which provided a telephone reference service second to none.

But now there are hardly any qualified librarians left. The service is managed by people who have no background in libraries. One senior manager, on meeting her staff, is alleged to have asked: 'What's the difference between fiction and non-fiction?'

The development officers, who worked on new projects such as those mentioned here, are now fewer in number. They work in the Customer Optimisation unit, covering other services as well as libraries. (And no, we don't know how you optimise a customer either.)

REACTION

Issues have fallen over the years. But then, the book fund has been halved. And what used to be 11 mobile libraries are now two.

A new Cabinet member took on responsibility for libraries in 2017. So a plan for change was no surprise. The surprise was the extent of the damage proposed (see box).

Far less surprisingly, the reaction to the proposals was instant and significant.

Within days some bright person invented the acronym SOLE – standing for Save Our Libraries Essex. Soon it was being used in communities across the county.

Petitions, both online and on paper, sprang up. Street activity to gather signatures and support soon blossomed.

A closed Facebook group brought together activists who were organising in different parts of what is a very geographically large and demographically diverse county.

Helpfully, a full county council meeting was scheduled for early December. Over 60 people gathered to lobby it beforehand. The Non-aligned Group (independents, ratepayers and the one Green councillor) put in a motion of no confidence in the Leader and the Cabinet member. To nobody's surprise it was voted down by the Conservative majority.

But the opening shots had been fired.

CAMPAIGN

A number of places held Book Raids, where they got local people to go the library and take out their maximum entitlement of items, to try and clear the shelves.

In the south of the county at Hockley, this attracted so many people that they could hardly move in the library.

When the council held drop-in sessions scheduled for a couple of hours, on a timetable at each library, 200 people turned up at Shenfield (near Brentwood). The drop-ins after that were extended to days rather than hours.

One group of SOLE campaigners from various parts of the county got together and made two important decisions.

First they agreed that SOLE should be non-party, should campaign for all 74 libraries to remain open on current hours, run by paid and trained staff, and that the plans are not a 'done deal'.

They also decided to organise a march in Chelmsford (the county town) in February, just

before the county set its budget and ten days or so before the consultation closed.

When it came to the day, nearly 1,000 people marched, carrying colourful banners and making a lot of noise in support of libraries.

The speakers afterwards included author Nicci Gerrard, national campaigner Alan Wylie, a UNISON representative and – most tellingly – the head boy of a local secondary school (his headteacher has also been very supportive) and three pupils from a Chelmsford primary school.

They performed incredibly well in front of surely the biggest crowd they had ever addressed. A few weeks later, all the pupils at that school encircled their local library (scheduled for closure) to show its importance to them by ‘hugging’ it.

The official consultation has now closed. A special council meeting was called by the leaders of all the opposition political parties and groups in March, with a motion calling for the proposals to be taken off the table.

Once again it was defeated, with no Conservatives rebelling. This despite the fact that one Cabinet member had resigned in protest against the plan to close the library in her constituency.

SOLE has now met properly – covering people across the whole county for the first time. Activity is being planned for the local elections in May, as well as for the run-up to the expected decision time in mid-June.

JOIN US IN JUNE!

SOLE is planning another march and event on Saturday 8 June. This time we hope to celebrate libraries as well as (or possibly instead of) having a string of speakers denouncing what is planned. SOLE has a public Facebook page (meaning you don't need a Facebook account to see it) where you can keep up with what is happening. We would love to see people from across the country in June.

Although there are no county council elections, the Conservatives had taken the issue to all the

district, borough and city councils to encourage them to recruit volunteers and come up with plans to cover the library deficit.

They did not always get their way. Many Conservatives are opposed to the plans on their patch. All the county's MPs have spoken out against what is planned, though again it seems possible that if their libraries are reprieved they will be satisfied.

So SOLE will be campaigning to get people to ask local council candidates what they will do to stop closures.

If the decision in June continues the original proposals (or a watered-down version of them) SOLE will continue to campaign to stop them.

As we agreed last year – it's not a done deal.



ESSEX CC PROPOSES...

Formally the Essex consultation is on a five-year plan to 2024 about 'Future Library Services'. There are three proposals.

The least worst is to close 25 libraries and to use more volunteers in most of those that remain.

The most extreme idea would have just 15 libraries (out of 74) run as now. The rest would if possible be 'run by the community with county council support'. Where the community did not come forward, 15 would be retained as a last resort. The rest would close.

The preferred plan is to close 25, with 19 to be run by 'the community' and to re-consult on any of these 19 for which they don't get an offer. Either way, these 19 would not be part of the statutory provision under the 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act. The 30 that would still be run by the council would have shorter opening hours. At least half would make more use of volunteers – by implication replacing staff to some extent.

There is reference to enabling buildings to be open without staff (OpenLibrary, as it is known in some cases). But there is no reference to how children would use these places. Where staffless libraries are operated elsewhere, children usually are not allowed in at all because there is nobody to ensure their safety.

There is a page entitled 'What does good look like?'. This lists 13 measures of success for the plan.

The first is that 'Overall use of libraries, whether online or in person, increases.' Quite how this will happen when they have removed over half the libraries from statutory provision and the rest are open for shorter hours, remains to be seen – or even to have a case made in its support.

There is clearly a faith in the increasing use of online services. However, e-books are difficult to source (many major publishers will not allow them to be used through libraries). And online reference is a relatively small part of the service compared to things offered on the premises.

The Cabinet member says that staff will be trained to deliver and 'market' services outside the library. This appears to ignore the fact that many of them have been doing so for years.

There is no reference to restoring any of the money that has been taken from the stock and resources fund (to buy books etc).

Indeed, the savings suggested by the three options range from less than £1m to £3.7m – the preferred option is about £2m.

But exactly how these savings are to be made is not specified. The numbers are described as 'indicative estimates'...

The difference librarians make

**UNSTAFFED
LIBRARIES**

A library without staff is... well, it's not a library in any real sense. This was the conclusion when Lambeth campaigners went to see what happens in the borough's mostly unstaffed 'neighbourhood libraries'.

Lambeth council in London is proud to have kept 'open' all its 10 libraries (barely adequate for a population of 320,000).

But four are now 'neighbourhood

libraries' – much reduced in size, and with no staff except for two hours a day.

Does it make a difference? Last year, Lambeth's Defend the 10 campaign sent observers for a full week's opening hours to three 'neighbourhood libraries' and one staffed full-service library, to see what happened in practice...

What a contrast!

In the 'neighbourhood libraries', group activities are necessarily almost zero and the atmosphere is bleak. There is no sense of community.

There is nobody to help the many users who need a librarian's advice and encouragement. There's no help for those

who have problems with the various machines – PCs, photocopier, self-issue machine etc.

People cannot join the library, ask questions, seek help with finding books or information, or with using the internet.

There is nobody even to make sure that children are safe from adult strangers. There are no safeguards in place, such as secure doors that require a PIN card to enter.

Without librarians, libraries do not feel welcoming, and we observed some difficult and potentially dangerous situations.

CONCLUSION: Without librarians, people cannot fully use libraries.

Waterloo Neighbourhood Library

Waterloo Library is the worst performing library in the borough, with membership falling by 1,000 a year. It's a quarter of its former size, with a commensurate reduction in study space and stock, and no space for activities.

Staff attend only two hours a day and can do little but trouble-shoot problems such as malfunctioning self-service machines.

The library is kindly hosted by the Oasis church (and thus is closed throughout the Christmas/New Year and Easter periods when all other libraries are open).

It is a pleasant building near tube and bus

routes, but it is dominated by the café on the ground and first floors. The library is invisible at the back of the first floor, behind overflow café tables.

It feels bleak and impersonal - although it is also very cramped and noisy. It is hard to bring in a push-chair or wheelchair.

Reading and study are very difficult. Loudly chattering café users are close by, the coffee machine is noisy and the café naturally plays music. Background noise level measured at 10am was 75.6db.

FEW BOOKS

The nearby café space has far more tables than the library, but the café does not like library patrons to use them.

Café users, the staff bringing their orders, people going to the toilets, and children playing tag all pass through the access gate and are erroneously counted as library users. So are those who try to use PCs, printer etc but cannot do so and leave.

The official visitor count should be reduced by at least half – at times, by as much as 80%. The alarm rarely sounds when unrecorded stock is carried through, and busy café staff do not come running when it does. We could have stolen any amount of stock.

Few people visited, apart from those using the PCs. Very few books were taken out. The collection is very small (perhaps 7,500),

compared with what was available in the former Waterloo library. Book issues have fallen sharply.

The PCs are constantly in use, usually fully taken within minutes of opening time, with people waiting. More are needed.

A good proportion of the adult users came daily – a small group who knew the ropes. They have learned to book the PCs in advance, crowding out other users, people who need to make prints etc. Staff, when present, advised these to go to another library.

The PCs for children have to be crammed in right next to those for adults, so no matter how well-behaved they are, their enjoyment disturbs others.



Saying goodbye to the former library in Waterloo



The small new library is far harder to spot...



Sign of the times in the unstaffed Waterloo neighbourhood library

A small group of under-10 boys came to play a computer game every day – and regularly got excited and noisy, sometimes running around, spinning on the chairs etc. This was only natural behaviour, but constituted a real nuisance in this cramped, unstaffed library.

Otherwise few children were seen. This was during the school holidays. Teens, girls or young adults were rarely seen.

It was not unusual to see adults come (sometimes with small children), glance briefly, see nobody to welcome them and go away (but they will figure in the count as users).

Adults can also be noisy – playing music, making phone-calls etc. Staff are rarely present to intervene.

CRAMMED

Library users are crammed together. There is no quiet space for study. There is no separate space for children, let alone teens, unless you count the minimal space between the children's bookshelves, which has no seating. Children have easy access to adult graphic novels, some of them very adult.

There is no storage space, so it is difficult to run activity sessions. When an extra craft session was laid on, nobody came.

Staff can normally run only one group activity per week – a popular mum-and-baby session, which unsurprisingly is noisy, crowds out the space, hasn't room for all to sit, disturbs other users and overflows into the café area.

The hours when staff are present vary widely, presumably to give everyone a shot at seeing a librarian at a time they can manage. Hit and miss.

People regularly turn up seeking staff, try to get the café staff to help (they can't) and ask: 'When is the library open?' Without staff, they don't see it as being open for them.

Apart from people trying to get help from each other – or telling the children to be quiet – there is no interaction between people. There is no sense of community. The close proximity of children to adult strangers – with nobody supervising – is very concerning. It is not a safe space. The (very nice) café staff cannot see what is going on.

People constantly need help with the various machines. When present, staff spend nearly all their time sorting out these problems, not on library work with people.

Even when staff are present, it is not clear who they are. They have to squat with a laptop at a tiny desk, and pack everything away when they are finished.

They race around trying to get everything done. They can do little but trouble-shoot problems with the various machines – they are continually asked technical questions about how to use the photocopier, how to access the wifi, how to make the computers work, how to book a slot on the computer etc etc. When no staff are present, users ask other users to help – or give up and leave.

Children taking part in the Summer Reading Challenge, and others needing help with reading or information needs, were rarely able to have any time with a librarian. This takes up much of librarians' time in normal libraries – as it should. SRC participation was very much reduced compared to the former staffed library.

NOTE: this observation was carried out in 2017. At the time it was the only 'neighbourhood library' open.



Minet 'Neighbourhood Library'

Minet library re-opened as a reduced 'neighbourhood library' in August 2017. The survey was carried out in mid-June 2018.

The library is in a pleasant building with good disabled access and a toilet. The building is shared with the archives service.

The library has only two PCs. The stock occupies about half the space it had when this was a full-service library. There is no separate children's area.

There are no newspapers/magazines. Much of the stock visible is not available – it belongs to the home library service, which has been brought here after previously being housed in the much more spacious Carnegie building.

One user, who had come specifically to find a book on computers, remarked on the small selection and left with nothing. Others were seen looking at the shelves and taking nothing.

Most noticeable overall was the lack of library users. Apart from the observer, the maximum attendance at any one time was three people. It was regularly completely empty.

Also noticeable was the effect of having the library staffed for only two hours per day. 21 parents with toddlers came to the wriggle and rhyme session on Tuesday, and there was good attendance at the book group (both disturbed other users, because there is no separate space). When staff left, the space emptied.

It was clear that this led to many missed opportunities. Observers frequently noted people who looked in, but not seeing any staff, left at once. Nobody at any time used the librarian phoneline offered in notices. Library users asked each other for help, e.g. to book a PC. If this was not given, they left. Otherwise there was rarely any conversation between library users.

The team in the archives section repeatedly had to explain that the librarian was not there. They regularly had to interrupt their own work to help people – e.g. to find certain books, to find the audiobooks section, to find and check out a book previously reserved, to log on to a PC, to use the self-service machine.

Carnegie 'Neighbourhood Library'



Other problems when library staff were absent:

- in one four-hour period on Saturday, four people wanted to join the library but were unable to do so;
- one boy could not use the self-issue machine, asked where the librarian was, then walked out with his books (the alarm sounded).
- an adult left with several books without using the machine.
- five people wanted to use a PC, did not know how and left.
- the lack of PCs and staff led to a few incidents when people argued over taking turns.
- there were extended periods when children were left completely alone, not visible to the archives staff and thus vulnerable to approaches from strangers. One very young child wandered into the lobby, where the door out to the road is easily opened.

When staff were present, they came to run an activity and then immediately left, or spent much of their time tidying up or helping people use the self-issue machine.

By lucky chance, a librarian was on duty when a parent and child needed help finding information on the internet, but it was rare to see a librarian able to do this kind of core librarian work.

Children/young people formed a good proportion of users – or potential users who looked and left. Currently, young users seem confined to after-school children who are confident using the various machines. Parents with pre-school children also show interest. But without staff it is not possible to develop any of the potential the library offers to a deprived community.



Saturday afternoon in 2019



Carnegie former library before it closed in 2016 – time lapse photo taken over three hours. The dense crowd in the corner is around the staff desk.

Carnegie library re-opened as a reduced 'neighbourhood library' on 15 February 2018. The survey was carried out four-and-a-half months later, during the last week in June.

It was difficult to evaluate the library's function fairly, as it shared the space with a building site (the basement excavation to house a gym to be run by GLL).

This caused problems that included dust, noise, power lines to the print/photocopying machine being severed, and closure because security staff had not arrived – or the fire alarm was set off with nobody able to stop it (it went on all weekend).

It was unpleasantly hot because the library garden has been destroyed and the garden door is locked. The library also now lacks a kitchen, toilet and disabled access.

SECURITY GUARDS

The latter, and fire safety requirements, mean that £1,500 a week is spent on security guards (two at all times, plus two GLL staff doing GLL work on laptops). These usually matched or outnumbered library users.

They were frequently asked to help users but were not able to do so, beyond occasionally manhandling a pushchair up the steps. No elderly/disabled people or wheelchair users could visit.

Usage was poor. The maximum present at any one time was 16 (on two occasions). The typical

number was four to six.

This contrasts poorly with previous usage, although the library's re-opening had been heavily publicised to all local households during the May local election.

It is arguable that usage will improve if all these problems are sorted, but in 2019 the situation is little changed.

There appear to be no plans to replace the kitchen. It is also arguable that the lack of library staff also discourages users.

Library staff are on duty only two hours per day. When present, they were mostly occupied on routine work: re-shelving books, answering queries, helping people log in to PCs, issuing books when the self-service machines did not work (or sorting out building site problems).

The only activity provided was one parent-and-toddler group. This was very well attended. Previously there was an extensive programme of



Carnegie Library in 2018

CREDIT: Amit Lennon, @amitlemon

activities. Without staff, these cannot be resumed.

There were no newspapers/magazines, except Daily Mails kindly left by security staff. Quality of bookstock was high and very current, with – for instance – the new Trump tell-all by James

Comey, and the Stephen King topping that week's best-seller list.

The space currently occupied by the main library is generous, but noise from the children's section in one corner carried all over the room. This disturbed other users, which made parents

feel very uncomfortable. The former separate children's library is closed.

The PCs were popular – although users regularly needed help from the librarian (if present). Problems with the self-service machines were also common.

Tate South Lambeth Library

Tate South Lambeth Library is a full-service, staffed, small local library. A threat by the council to downgrade it and install a gym was fought off by local opposition. The survey was carried out in the second week of July, during the heatwave.

(On Tuesdays when it is closed, the library also holds a free film club for older people, language learning sessions and a special group for people with impaired vision, coming from all over the borough, using the specialist reading equipment provided by the library.)

Observers recorded 937 people using the library, almost equally divided between male and female, with females a little ahead.

About one tenth each were pre-school and school-age, three tenths were young adults (18–30 years), just over a third were adult (31–60 years) and one seventh were seniors. (This survey was within school term time, so the numbers of school age children were lower than in holiday periods.)

All types of activity were registered. Particularly strong numbers were for use of library computers and borrowing/returning books (one fifth each), seeking help from library staff (one sixth of the total) and taking part in a library activity (just over one tenth).



Regular activities at the library are run by staff or the Friends group. They include a homework club, adult reading group, children's science club, board games, teen reading group, three English teaching sessions (mainly for the local Portuguese community), two parent and baby groups, gardening club, junior knitting/crochet club, older people's knitting group, free film club, evening talks, regular craft fairs and book sales, regular festivals in and around the library, and an annual Burns Night party.

The survey demonstrated people's dependence on library staff – by number and by nature. Many people exchanged a hello with staff as they came in. Observers recorded 153 cases of people seeking help – and always receiving it. Some needed repeated help.

The type of help provided was very diverse – answering membership enquiries, setting up or renewing library membership, helping with printing and photocopying, help and guidance on the use of the library's computers, sorting out a cabling problem on the library's computers, helping on the book issue machine, searching for books on the library system, providing information on library services and activities, registering children for the Summer Reading Challenge and helping them select books.

Observers commented on the unfailing tact, patience and friendliness of library staff in dealing with users. Particular sensitivity was displayed in talking to a recently bereaved elder. A young woman was allowed access to the desk computer to resolve a problem.

Understanding and calm was displayed in dealing with a man furious at his computer. A librarian chatted normally to a disabled regular user whose speech was unintelligible to the observer.

The library, though always very busy, had a warm and relaxed atmosphere. Users greeted the staff as friends, and also talked to each other. All who came in were made to feel welcome.



Tate South Lambeth library – welcoming, busy, staffed...

Embattled in Barnet

**UNSTAFFED
LIBRARIES**

Unstaffed libraries seriously damage the service, says SBL (Save Barnet Libraries). And this practice urgently needs testing against the law.

Barbara Jacobson and Emily Burnham, on behalf of SBL, on their efforts trying to get some action from the minister...

Where is the law when you need it? On 10 December 2016 Save Barnet Libraries (SBL) wrote to the Minister for Digital, Media, Culture & Sport (DCMS) to ask for a public inquiry into Barnet's plans to radically alter its library provision.

We believe the effect of those plans makes the borough non-compliant with the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964 requirement to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service.

A year later – after the plans had been implemented – we got the reply that the minister 'was not minded' to open an inquiry. But we were invited to submit more evidence within six weeks.

We did, including personal statements from many residents and letters from schools.

More than another year and two changes of minister later, we still have no answer, no inquiry and no library service worth the name.

How did we get to this sorry state of affairs? And what can we do now?

BIG CHANGES, SMALLER SERVICE

Barnet Council likes to boast that it has kept all its libraries open, while other local authorities have been closing theirs.

This claim is true but it is not accurate. Barnet has kept library buildings open, but it has drastically reduced library services.

The library spaces have been shrunk, in most cases by 50%. Many of the separate rooms for children have been closed. The space for children and teenagers has been shoved into a corner of what was once the adult library, thus making use of these libraries uncomfortable for people of all ages.



Way back in 2017, SBL took its campaign all the way to the DCMS office in Whitehall.

A direct consequence of less space is fewer books, seats, desks and computers.

Again, everyone is affected, but especially children, job seekers, older and disabled people, and students.

That is plenty to complain about. But if that were the extent of Barnet's actions, we might still claim to have a library service.

However, the greatest blow is the 70% cut in the number of hours staffed by library workers and the concomitant use of electronic gates to control access during unstaffed hours.

Here's what it means in practical terms. Four of the 14 libraries in the borough are classified as 'partnership' libraries, although 'volunteer-run' is a clearer description.

Managed by charities, they have no professional library staff and depend on volunteers to open for a minimum of 15 hours a week, spread over four or five days.

ELECTRONIC GATES

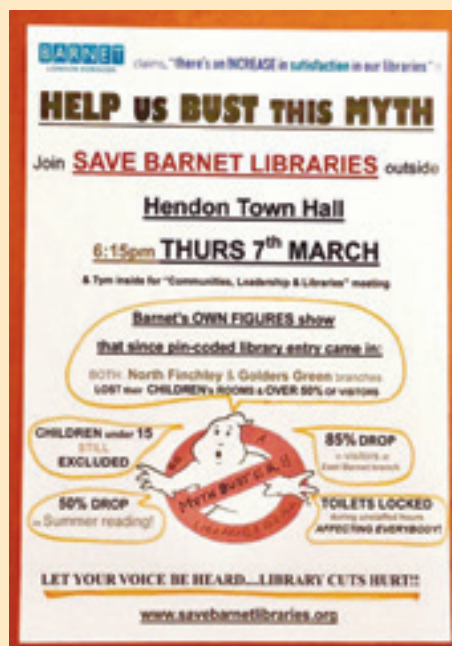
Six libraries, called 'core' libraries, have trained library staff for 15 hours a week.

The remaining four libraries, 'core plus', have trained library staff for 22.5 hours a week, spread over four and five days respectively.

During the remaining hours that these libraries are 'open', entry is controlled by a keypad that operates electronic gates.

'Open' does not mean open to everyone. You need both a library card and a PIN code to open the electronic gates.

Everyone aged at least 18 and living or working in Barnet is entitled to a card and a PIN. (Too bad if you are a visitor to the borough – our libraries are closed to you.)



SBL has worked constantly to publicise the facts... don't miss its video showing what can go wrong in an unstaffed library: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXmk618DdPM>

Barnet residents aged 16 and 17 need consent from a parent to get a PIN. Fifteen-year-olds who are in Year 11 need consent from a parent and from their school to get a PIN.

Other children can enter the library only if they are accompanied by an adult.

Thus thousands of children in Barnet under the age of 15 are denied the independent access they used to have to a safe place where they can study, read and use a computer.

This exclusion, combined with the fact that many staffed hours are during school hours, is a highly visible discrimination that led the council's own Youth Assembly to complain.

There is hidden discrimination, too.

During unstaffed hours elderly people and

people with disabilities can no longer get the help they might need to take books off high shelves, check them out or return them, or use the computer.

Vulnerable people feel unsafe in an unsupervised building, worried about needing a toilet (they're locked) or about what would happen if they fell ill.

CCTV monitored from Wales hardly seems a realistic substitute for help at hand.

The council had claimed it would have volunteers in place at least for a few hours a week to reduce these problems – but they have never materialised.

Instead, security guards were late additions to the Barnet plans. The result is that the 'cuts' are

not as cost effective as planned, and users without PIN codes are often kept out more efficiently by the guards than by the electronic gates.

The result of all these changes to the libraries has been a great reduction in the number of people using them – between 41% and 59%, where figures are available.

What is DCMS doing? We prodded the DCMS to respond to our second submission of evidence, asking our MPs to help.

WE WROTE AGAIN...

While we waited, Barnet decided that it would undertake its own review of the libraries. It announced that it would discuss the plans for it on 7 March 2019, at the meeting of the Community Leadership & Libraries Committee.

We were ready: we had questions, and were eager to contribute.

We also wrote again to the DCMS, asking it to supervise the review to ensure it was fair, open and transparent.

One week after we sent our letter and one week before the meeting, the item was pulled from the agenda.

Any questions submitted on libraries – even on the removal of the item from the agenda – would not be allowed. No comments on the review would be allowed. If the chairperson had had his way, the very word 'libraries' would not have been uttered at the meeting.



Lambeth is in the same boat. Campaigners have been regularly briefing the DCMS since 2015. Nothing has happened.

Dear DCMS...

Edited extracts from Save Barnet Libraries' latest letter

Our request that you supervise Barnet Council's review of its libraries has been superseded by its decision to postpone that review until you have reached your decision on our complaint. They say it is expected 'soon'.

We consider there are fundamental problems with the way in which you are conducting your investigation.

We urge you to order an inquiry under s.10 of the Public Libraries & Museums Act without further delay.

The wider public interest demands this: the large-scale reliance on technology to replace library staff must be tested against the statutory duty under s.7 of the Act.

We have provided your department with extensive evidence from residents and schools about the impact of the changes (March to November 2017), including drastic reductions in space, 70% reduction in staffed hours and the replacement of four branches with volunteer libraries, open only 15 hours a week.

As you are aware, the self-service entry systems and technology, the lack of staff and lack of toilet access have severely restricted independent access by children under 15, and limited access by other groups, such as older people and those with disabilities. The council has still failed to implement important measures relied on as mitigation in the original Equality Impact Assessment.

We hear of more examples almost daily:

- an older woman fainted in an unstaffed library and now doesn't feel safe to use them;
- a mother with disabilities cannot accompany her child to the library in unstaffed hours, which excludes her child as well as herself;
- a mother of a toddler has reported her child wetting himself several times because there is no toilet;
- a childminder who takes her charges to the library is criticised by the security guard for using her own PIN code to let in a mother to collect her child.
- there is so little study space in East Finchley that A-level students must travel daily to use libraries in Haringey.



The message from Barnet's children.

He didn't have his way. But he also didn't take kindly to legitimate references to libraries in comments on other items on the agenda.

The council stated it was postponing its review because it was waiting for the DCMS's decision

on our initial complaint.

This prompted our latest letter to DCMS, which you can read in full on our website (<http://www.savebarnetlibraries.org>).

It outlines our concerns that Barnet is

Please can you help?

If the Barnet system isn't yet the face of libraries around the country, it is what is planned.

Barnet is seen as the pilot, the avant garde of an unstaffed system to save money and sacrifice a once-excellent resource, vital community assets and the future of generations of children.

This issue will set a precedent for libraries throughout the UK, and the statutory role of DCMS is crucial to all of us. So we are asking you, too, to e-mail the Minister for Culture at enquiries@culture.gov.uk, urging him to reach a decision to hold an inquiry now. You will find a suggested wording on our website. <http://www.savebarnetlibraries.org>

withholding from us correspondence between it and the DCMS, which might materially affect the decision of the minister and our ability to respond. It states our reasoned belief that the DCMS is in breach of its duties of fairness and natural justice.

We have sent the letter to the Parliamentary Select Committee, to the three Barnet MPs and to the press.

Visitor numbers have fallen dramatically at six of the 14 branches: by 59% at East Barnet, 47% at South Friern, 41% at Childs Hill, 50% at Mill Hill, 51% at North Finchley, 56% at Golders Green. Unfortunately, without adequate reasons, the council has not collected data at three branches since the changes were introduced.

With data such as this, we consider that the council had no choice but to decide to carry out a review of the impact of the changes.

As you know, we wrote to you because we were concerned about whether the evidence and conclusions from the council's own review would be robust. We asked you to supervise the planned review and explained why this was necessary. We received no substantive response from you or Barnet Council. One week after our letter, the review was postponed.

Your department has been investigating the library service since August 2017.

The council has refused requests to disclose the information it has given. According to its responses to our requests, it has done so with the express approval of your department, in that there is a need for a 'safe space' for 'advice and exchange of views'.

We do not know what information is being considered by you. We believe that a fair and lawful process requires you to make public the evidence upon which you will base your final decision, before it is made.

Barnet residents need to know it is correct and comprehensive, and have the opportunity to respond if it is not. We consider that failure to provide such information is a clear breach of the principles of natural justice.

We have provided detailed representations, as well as statements from library users, headteachers and school governors, but this evidence is now over a year old. Since then you have not been in contact with us, or with those who provided evidence, to ask for any update.

In such circumstances, the postponement of the council's review in order for you to issue your decision first, only gives greater cause for concern.

Without an inquiry, it is hard to escape the suspicion that you are intent on enabling Barnet Council to avoid embarrassment by basing your conclusions on secret, incomplete and possibly partial evidence, contrary to the letter and spirit of the Act.

This suspicion gains support from the council's refusal to disclose information, its close contact with your department, and the reliance on the 'safe space' exemption as a reason to avoid disclosure.

We have raised similar concerns previously, and have met with no response. Therefore, we consider that you are in breach of your duties as the responsible minister...



Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

Secretary of State legally tasked with superintending sector. Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Arts, Heritage and Tourism (Conservative MP) has team of c.5 career civil servants. Policy lead. Advocates for libraries across central government



Ministry of Communities and Local Government



ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

Provides Arts funding for libraries, which bidding with other Arts services. + £1.5m for specific "NPO"s. Under 10 libraries-only staff. From start of 2019 to March 2020 also has (Libraries Taskforce) 3.6 FTE to promote libraries to funders and government and best practice. £750k for R & D. Advocates to councillors/local govt.

Superintends

Funds activities + supports

151 Councils responsible

Volunteer Libraries

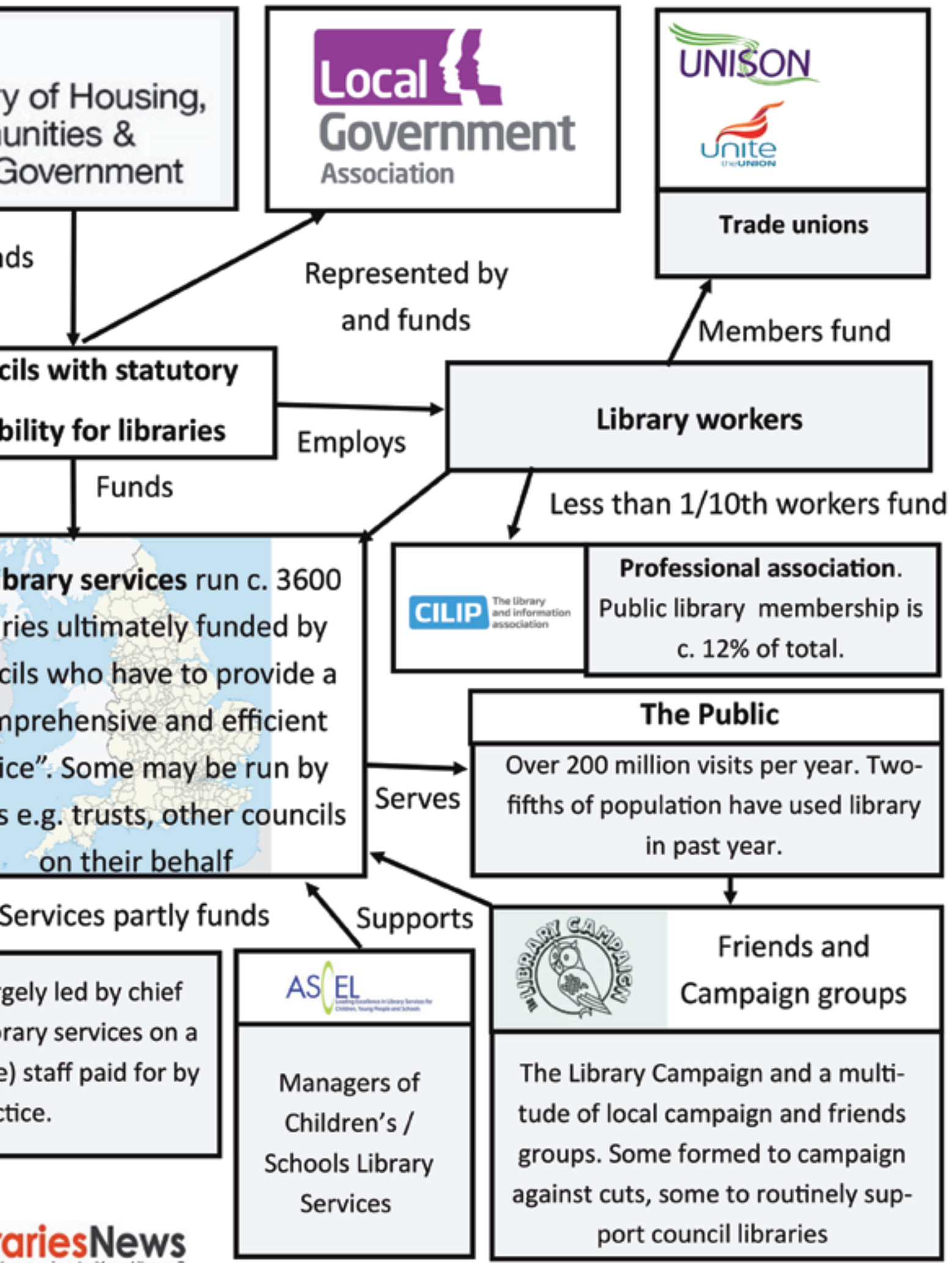
Widely varied in funding and links to councils, statutory status etc.tc.

151 libraries
libraries
councils
"community services" others



Libraries Connected

Formed in 2018 to succeed the largely unfunded SCL. Large number of librarians, one of which is President. LC assists member libraries at national and regional scale. 6 staff (half of whom part-time). Works closely with Arts Council England. Advocates for best practice



HOW LIBRARIES PROMOTE PROSPERITY

Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021

LIBRARIES TASKFORCE

Greater prosperity

From a simple idea to the creation of a thriving business, libraries can help budding entrepreneurs to make their dreams a reality. They can also play a crucial role in helping people to find their ideal job, and give them the tools to succeed.

Greater prosperity

Libraries are helping businesses across the UK to flourish by providing access to information and expertise. In turn, this is helping to improve the prosperity of local areas – crucial for residents' wellbeing and quality of life. But, as well as supporting businesses and increasing their productivity, libraries also help individuals into work by running job clubs, CV surgeries and facilitated events with partner agencies. They also provide training and support for digital skills and lifelong learning to prepare people for successful careers.

CASE STUDY

Business support 'on every high street'

The Business & Intellectual Property Centre (BIPC) National Network is a collaboration between the British Library and ten library authorities in England to deliver the government's Industrial Strategy to make the UK the best place in Europe to innovate, patent new ideas and set up and expand a business.

The BIPC National Network is a unique initiative that takes advantage of the existing public library infrastructure to provide critical business and IP information not available from any other business support provider. Centres – based in London and across the ten authorities – provide physical, shared spaces with wifi, PCs, and friendly staff, where people can find:

- Free access to market intelligence/insights on sectors, trends and consumer behaviour, UK and global company information, UK/global patents, trademarks and registered designs
- Free or discounted library-led workshops
- Events delivered by private sector partners on setting up and running a business, marketing, finance, and much more
- One-to-one coaching on IP and business research, and clinics with local partners.

Since launching in 2006, the British Library BIPC has supported thousands of entrepreneurs and small businesses. In 2017/18 the network supported 18,700 individuals, 59% of whom were women, and 35% from black and Asian-minority ethnic groups. An evaluation of the Arts Council funded 'Entreprising Libraries' programme demonstrated a strong return on investment – generating £25 for every £1 invested (March 2018).

The National Network will continue to reduce the high failure rate of businesses and will continue to connect with the wider library network to make the best use of existing expertise, resources and buildings – with the aspiration for there to be business support on every high street.

Only 22% of UK businesses are owned by women and only 5% by black and Asian-minority ethnic groups.

Department for Business Innovation and Skills, Small Business Survey (2016)

Libraries Deliver

PROSPERITY

- Help with job searches
- Physical spaces for people to work from
- Free access to business expertise and data
- Opportunities for people to broaden their skills
- Ways for partner organisations to help people
- Support for CV writing

CASE STUDY

The Glass Box in Somerset

An innovative town-centre project in Somerset is demonstrating how the ambitions of BIPCs can be complemented and supported at a local level. Taunton library's 'Glass Box' offers an engaging space for budding business owners and entrepreneurs, where they can find resources such as company data, market reports and equipment. Glass Box has a key focus on 'digital inspiration' for younger visitors and has provided the following since its launch in 2016:

- Google Digital training for over 100 local businesses (pictured above)
- Social media workshops
- The Somerset Digital Skills Academy – aimed at children in years 9 and 10
- 'Meet the Expert' with The Federation of Small Businesses and Somerset Business Agency
- Showcasing the innovative HP Sprout Pro
- Code Clubs and digital making.

The project continues to be successful – with more than 25,000 visitors in the last 12 months.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES:

- Encourage funding for libraries to develop BIPCs or similar free services for aspiring business owners and entrepreneurs.
- Local councils to consider taking advantage of library resources when developing economic growth strategies.
- Work with partners, such as Jobcentre Plus, to refer people to free library services which can help them get back into work.

CASE STUDY

Helping job seekers in Solihull

Job seekers in Solihull have been getting expert IT training and advice thanks to a partnership between the library service and a local charity.

Solihull Libraries teamed up with FitCom, a local charity set up to help individuals, the community and organisations by running computer clubs for the over 55s, and IT training – all with the goal of bringing people closer to employment.

Demand for the service has grown steadily since its inception – with 596 appointments, providing one-to-one support, offered in just a three-month period.

"I feel my computer skills have really improved, that's why I am confident to attend the group job search sessions now."

Job Seeker in Solihull

"I used the British Library to research trademark registrations and the world of intellectual property – a critically vital area for any business but especially for consumer brands and businesses with their own designs and innovations."

Paul Lillis, Founder of Elix's Stores

Libraries Deliver

NEXT STEPS

- Get in touch with your local libraries to see how you can work together
- Read the Libraries Deliver: Ambition report
- Talk to small business networks about partnership working
- Liaise with your local growth hubs or Chamber of Commerce to see how you could work together

Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England.
www.gov.uk/government/publications/libraries-deliver-ambition-for-public-libraries-in-england-2016-to-2021

Follow progress on our Action Plan via:
 Our website: www.gov.uk/government/groups/libraries-taskforce
 Our blog: libraries-taskforce.blog.gov.uk
 Twitter: @LibTaskforce

Contact the Libraries Taskforce team:
 Email: libraries-taskforce@culture.gov.uk

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Another promotion leaflet from the Libraries Taskforce. Set of four at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/libraries-deliver-ambition-for-public-libraries-in-england-2016-to-2021>
 Download (A4 size) free, or the Taskforce will send a reasonable number of paper copies if you email: librarytaskforce@culture.gov.uk

Flotsam in Falmouth

Derek Toyne tells the story of a library rescued (largely) by being transferred (largely) to town council level. As he emphasises, one size does not fit all and every library solution is unique. All the same, the full story will ring many bells with library campaigners everywhere ...

A friend of mine who knows the library predicament only too well suggested it is now like swimming amongst the wreckage of a once great system, looking for something to grab hold of.

There is no chance of re-floating the old ship. But if we can find a suitable bit of buoyant flotsam, who knows? We just may survive.

Falmouth's public library opened in a blaze of glory. The moving spirit and chief financier was Cornish philanthropist and local boy made good John Passmore Edwards. In April 1894 the foundation stone was laid in the town centre.

Two years later, on May 1 1896, an imposing stone building was opened with PASSMORE EDWARDS FREE LIBRARY carved in large capital letters across the front of a grand balcony. In the first year of operation 19,389 books were loaned!

CULL

I arrived in Falmouth as Librarian at the School of Art in 1967. Clearly the then Borough Library had done well over its first 71 years. It had busy lending, large reference, and excellent local history departments. It was, however, feeling its age. Like other remaining Cornish independent libraries, it was soon taken over as a branch of Cornwall County Library.

All went well until the mid-1990s, when county councillors became dazzled by the promises of computerisation.

The county library was removed from the Education Department to be re-sited as part of a new Information Services Group. In 1996 an IT expert was head-hunted by the council's chief officer and was installed as the Group's Director,

part of her portfolio being the library. One of her early moves was to begin a cull of clearly out-dated professional librarians.

I was told by a recruitment agency at this stage that Cornwall had become a laughing stock and that newly qualified students would not apply! This was, of course, hotly denied by the county.

Then came a whistle-blower. It appeared there was a large hole in the finances, and the local press had a field day. The Director of Information Services 'retired' for 'family reasons' if I remember rightly, and the paper shredders at County Hall went into overdrive.

A senior officer from another department was drafted in to steady the ship, and for a while things went well, though too late to avert the cull of qualified librarians.

However, pressure to save money was building from the top. Part of Cornwall's response was to rationalise the old committee framework so that groups of responsibilities could be handled by a single portfolio holder. Portfolio holders could then meet as a super-committee to agree policy.

One can see how this might save money, but in practice it meant that individual portfolio holders probably had little specific knowledge or enthusiasm for all of the areas under their control.

As a money saving exercise, however, clearly it worked. Falmouth branch library hours were reduced to 25-and-a-half per week, spread over three-and-a-half days. Experienced library staff were sent to collect council tax in One Stop Shops. We, as locals, moaned.

CAMPAIGNER

However, a born library campaigner appeared in a local junior school and put us to shame. He now prefers to remain anonymous, but then he mounted a campaign against reduced library opening hours, and Cornwall's failure to appreciate the importance of libraries.

'War Horse' was then at the height of its fame and Michael Morpurgo was invited to speak. A petition was raised and interest taken by ITV and the national press (a word of warning for anyone who involves the national media: they are on their own side, not yours, and a spectacular headline Trumps a valid argument).

Our campaigner was manoeuvred into catching out a Minister on live TV, which of



Falmouth Library.

course was headline material. Nevertheless he was invited to address a meeting of the whole council in November 2014.

Councillors were clearly impressed, and applauded. They could not find money to meet his demands, but at least agreed to keep them for consideration when next the matter arose.

He was obviously disappointed, and I think genuinely surprised when I was able to tell him four years later that his efforts had borne fruit!

On April Fools Day 2009, Cornwall County Council had become a unitary authority. District councils, the old middle layers of local government, were abolished. The old County became a simple Cornwall Council.

CREATIVE

Theoretically this should have had no effect on the old County Library system, though it did herald more top-down attempts to save more money. In effect, however, it did smooth the path to what came next.

Should any politician, minister, party political or penny-pinching councillor read what follows, a word of warning: Cornwall has more writers, visual artists, musicians, local historians, performers and creative folk per square foot than 'normal' places.

What is more, our town has a reputation for being stropy. In Falmouth there is still a large helping of community spirit and pride.

Probably we have had more good luck than we deserve. And as any clear-sighted person must realise, we may have taken a wrong turning.

Throughout the depressing days which followed the cull, a knot of unqualified but experienced and dedicated staff had kept the library open.

Opening hours were, of course, reduced and I suspect the staff were paid the minimum legal wages. But they believed in libraries, enjoyed working in one, and were unfailingly welcoming and helpful.

Without them, I suspect, the eventual outcome could have been different. As it was, the unitary authority inherited an established presence in the local community sited in an impressive Passmore Edwards building prominent at the town centre.

LOCALISM

The bedrock which supports Falmouth's recovery is the Localism Act of 2011. The Local Government Association explains that this: 'seeks to give effect to the government's ambitions to decentralise power away from Whitehall and back into the hands of local councils, communities and individuals to act on local priorities'.

In other words, in a situation such as ours, 'if you can give your community what they want and can show that you can do it better than the present provider, go ahead!'

For years Falmouth's Town Council was a 'parish' council with very limited powers, though with the right to call itself by whatever name seemed appropriate.

For years it had run an art gallery of some status. Previous gallery curators had pursued policies of public involvement, school visits and projects.

The present curator had all the necessary experience and was keen on libraries (I don't want to embarrass her, but the optician said to me yesterday: 'You'd follow her anywhere!').

Now, armed with the evidence gathered and submitted by the young campaigner mentioned

above and guided by an enthusiastic Town Clerk, our council approached the unitary authority.

Again good luck played a part, in that the right people were in the right place at the right moment. Our one-time MP, the much-loved, much-missed late Candy Atherton, was then both a town and a county councillor.

I should warn at this point that as a long retired academic librarian, I was a total outsider to these events. My contacts with Candy had always been amicable and productive, but I have heard she could be fierce and frightening.

Doubtless there were complex negotiations, but the story goes that Candy, with a foot in both camps, told Cornwall Council: 'This is what Falmouth wants, and this is what you are going to do!' They did it.

BUDGETS

In November 2016, responsibility for the managing of Falmouth's public library reverted to the town council.

It was agreed that Falmouth would continue to benefit from the unitary authority's mass book buying and processing arrangements, with a small pot of money available for local purchases.

The authority would also maintain the IT catalogue, issue and public access computer systems, thus fulfilling its responsibilities under the 1964 Act.

Falmouth would have responsibility for staff and the staff training budget, opening hours (now increased from 25 to 37 hours per week), local policies and the properties which they have owned since Passmore Edwards' generous endowment.

On the basis of these outgoings, the Town Clerk works out annual budgets, which are



Shallal Dance Theatre performance at the library.

approved by the unitary authority and collected as a precept on the local council tax.

The unitary authority can only accept (or possibly refuse, though this has not happened as yet) the total sum. They have no right to interfere with allocations as set out in the Town Clerk's budget.

It is therefore Falmouth Town Council which has taken the decision to pay its 30-odd staff in line with the National Living Wage and provide a small staff training fund. We have three-and-a-half (counted in hours) very experienced library assistant survivors from the bad old days.

CULTURE

A significant change in the structure of Falmouth Town Council was the transformation of the Gallery Committee into Cultural Services.

Though this may sound like trendy juggling with words, it was more akin to the creation of a mini-Arts Council which actually liked and understood libraries.

The Art Gallery Curator became Cultural Services Director, and interprets culture in its widest possible sense. This includes performance, music, visual arts, talks, recitals, outreach projects, and of course the storehouse of recorded culture, the Passmore Edwards Free Library.



Shallal Dance Theatre performance at the library.

Library staff are to some extent interchangeable with the gallery, and vice versa. This is of course far more congenial than sitting in an office receiving council tax, as happened earlier.

And it facilitates a timetable in which there are always two salaried and experienced library assistants, supported by two volunteers, available during opening hours. When first mooted by a philistine government I abhorred the idea of volunteers, but now I have to accept that as an addition to professional staff it can work.

No doubt shelving is still as tiring and irksome as it was 50 years ago, but this is a worthwhile and enjoyable place to work where one is appreciated by old friends and strangers who come through the door.

GREED AND FEAR

An aspect of the place, which in a sense sums up the atmosphere, is that suggestions from any level of the establishment are appreciated and often acted on. One is appreciated by the management as well as the customers.

A thought for the future is that library assistants could be part of a wide-ranging Cultural Services staff. Though usually to be

found in the library, they would be experienced in other areas of the department and of course able to cover elsewhere in times of sickness etc.

The crucial benefit of this multi-field approach would be that visitors could be directed smoothly from one cultural speciality to another, as fitted their interests.

I am not a member of any political party, and am aware that not every reader will agree with the analysis which follows. Apologies in advance.

It seems to me that every government since the 80s has fostered a socio-economic model driven by greed and fear, and based on the preposterous illusion that continual expansion is possible within a finite situation.

The very idea carries the seeds of its own destruction. Now we have a rise in violent crime, an expanding gap between rich and poor, homelessness, disillusion and despair, not to mention the destruction of the best public library system in the world (this came from a horrified American professor, not me. Pinch of salt maybe, though I am inclined to believe it.)

Governments suggest various hypothetical technical fixes to sort matters out, but we know from experience that they will not work.

If we are to find happy, fulfilling, peaceful lifestyles for ourselves and our descendants, I suggest we need such things as empathy, creativity, imagination and respect for the ecosystem which supports life.

BUOYANT

The much vaunted STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, medicine) are good and well in their own right. They deserve a place in any library. But alone they present an arid, reductive view of life.

The qualities we need are embedded in and best passed on through culture. Hence my enthusiasm for our Cultural Services Committee.

It is a well known truism that one size does not fit all. It is also worth remembering that Falmouth's success is the result of the fortuitous coming together of a group of talented, enthusiastic, dedicated people in the right place at the right moment.

Ours may not be the bit of buoyant flotsam from the wreck of the old system which will support another struggling branch. All I can say with confidence is that our bit of buoyant wreckage has turned out to be a well-crewed lifeboat.

Culture in Chester

At the other end of the scale... Cheshire West & Chester's library service has won the top award – in a national contest open not just to libraries but to all public services.

Chester's £37m Storyhouse library, theatre and cinema, run by the council's library team, has won the Guardian Public Service Award 2018.

In the two years up to 2016, library visits had dropped by nearly 100,000. But instead of knee-jerk cuts, the council 'rejected retrenchment and went on the front foot with a stunning investment that has not only breathed new life into its libraries, but triggered a much wider cultural and community reawakening,' says David Brindle, Guardian public services editor.

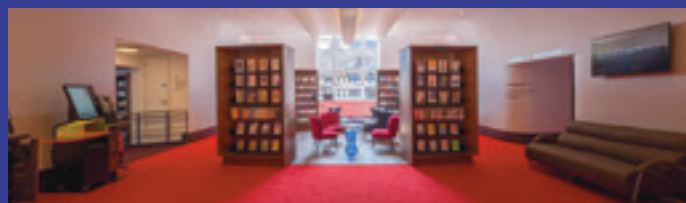
'It took years of planning and scratching round to raise the money. But the end result shows brilliantly that councils can still find and skilfully deploy funds to arrest the depressing decline in their services, even though day-to-day revenue continues to be so squeezed.'

Now visits are up by over half a million (1.37m to 1.96m), membership by 6% – 11% among teenagers – and book loans are rising.

'Not to have a cinema [or theatre], to have a library in decline, and not have any sort of cultural hub was quite a big miss,' says executive support officer Robert Butler.

Yet right in the middle of the city was a disused cinema – art deco, Grade II-listed – that had been empty for a decade... ripe for development.

With £33m of council capital funding and extra money from ACE (Arts Council England) and other trusts, Storyhouse opened in 2017.



The new library is the only one in the UK open daily until 11pm (though it's unstaffed after 7pm). It has a children's area and study space – but books are the big feature.

'The library goes through the whole of the building,' explains Butler.

'There are bookcases all the way around. It's unlike anywhere else I've ever seen. It's attractive and it does inspire you to read.'

The development – refreshingly – has not been at the expense of smaller libraries: 1,514 of the 16,500 new members registered at libraries outside the city. These now run more activities. The council's attitude has energised all the library staff.

'We're really positive about what we can offer,' says Rachel Foster, senior library services manager. 'I don't think that's the case everywhere.'

'All have seen a positive impact,' says Butler. 'It's a big borough with more than 300,000 people. You don't want just the children of Chester to be educated.'

Hidden hurt

Library closures – deservedly – get plenty of outraged publicity. Far less researched is the more subtle problem of ‘hollowing out’. That is, libraries that remain council-run and open – but have lost staff, activities, stock, opening hours etc.

A Commons report on library closures assumed that ‘reductions in opening hours and the loss of professional staff may damage the service more than the close of particular buildings’ (Culture, Media & Sport Committee, 2012).

That seems logical.

Yet ‘the last major study on the impact of library cuts was published in 1998’, says a research report*.

That’s pretty amazing, given that the real damage to libraries began around 2010 in England – later in Wales and Scotland.

The new study is the first in the world to consider ‘hollowing out’ in relation to public libraries. The focus was on children’s services. This area, again, is under-researched, with no major report since 2000.

Freedom of Information requests were made to local authorities in England for data from 2010 onwards.

It found: ‘Some continue to provide a similar or better investment and standard of service as they did in 2010.’

But overall there’s a ‘significant downward trend... specialist staff had been cut by 40%, children’s book budgets by 23% and opening hours by 11%’.

The researchers say: ‘Children in England are subject to a “postcode lottery”. Some will have an excellent service at their doorstep, others will not.’

Does it matter? Yes. ‘Children’s library services are a core aspect of public libraries and critical to supporting literacy and promoting reading. This is recognised by the government, which aims for all children to be “active members of a public library”’ (Department for Education, 2015).

The authors also stress the importance of libraries as physical spaces. Here, children ‘engage with their neighbourhood and community, build social and inter-generational networks, and learn how to responsibly contribute to the library community through borrowing and returning books.’

Wider studies argue that libraries can actively create social capital through building a network

of trust between patrons and staff, and providing a positive communal space for all.

The current study places the damage to children’s services firmly in context by tying it to a general paper on hollowing out that dates way back to 1994.

That paper** looked at political and economic trends developing at that time. It argued that

private sector standards of ‘economy, efficiency and effectiveness’ clashed with public sector values...

* Robertson, Catriona and McMenemy, David (2018) The hollowing out of children’s public library services in England from 2010–2016. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*. <https://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/63564>

** Rhodes, R. A. W. (1994) ‘The hollowing out of the state: the changing nature of the public service in Britain’, *Political Quarterly*, 65(2), pp. 138–151.

Kudos from kids

A smaller survey* underlines how important children’s libraries are. This one looked at just 344 libraries in 18 local authorities – but went into much more detail about children’s experience.

Every fortnight, 536,997 young people UK-wide use the library service.

So say library professionals from ASCEL (Association of Senior Children’s & Education Librarians). Working with CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy) they surveyed over 40,000 children (age 0–16) and their families in 2014–17.

And they love libraries! Overall, 74% scored their library nine or 10 out of 10 (85% among 7–11 year olds, 65% for 11–16s).

They also liked library staff – 67% of all participants (parents and children aged 0 to 11) scored staff 10 out of 10 for helpfulness.

Teenagers prefer to use books or computers rather than ask staff for help. But those who did seek help rated staff above books and computers for helpfulness.

Reading for pleasure is still valued by all ages. For the youngest, choosing books is by far the most popular activity in libraries.

77% of older children said the library had helped with ‘enjoying reading a lot’. Eight in 10 seven-to-11s borrowed a book to read for pleasure – most often because ‘it looked interesting’.

Even among teenagers, 62% had borrowed at least one book in the last term to read for pleasure. 82% of parents said the library helped children get ready for school; 85% said it



PHOTO: ESSEX CC

helped with speaking and listening skills.

On average, libraries were rated nine out of 10 for the welcome they gave both children and families.

Children in deprived areas used libraries more (and liked them slightly better) than others – but can’t travel as far to reach them.

They also valued libraries more in terms of helping with reading, homework, using computers, writing and even maths.

Children from Black and Asian backgrounds rated libraries more highly than other children for support for projects and homework, using computers, writing and maths.

Over half of older children visit the library alone (39% of 11 year olds, 71% of 16 year olds).

This ‘Young People’s Library Survey’ is to be repeated annually, although there’s no sign yet of the 2015–2018 version.

* Go to <http://www.ascel.org.uk/whats-new> and scroll down.

Reasons for rhymetime

Oh, the irony! Not long before Essex announced plans to wreck its library service, its librarians took part in research that spells out the profound value of that most basic of local library activities – mother and baby rhymetimes.

Few libraries fail to offer some kind of mum-and-baby session, whatever they are called. They are popular. They introduce families to their library. They teach skills such as pattern recognition that build towards literacy.

In Essex, research turned the spotlight on to another aspect – mothers' mental health. It's estimated that about one-fifth of mothers have some kind of mental health problem in pregnancy or the baby's first year. First-time mothers are the least likely to seek help.

Could rhymetimes show measurable benefits here? The answer turns out to be yes. As one staff member said: 'We used to look at rhymetimes from a child's point of view, but this has showed us just how phenomenal it is for mums.'

And could specific, easy-to-adopt tips enhance those benefits? Yes again.

HAPPY HORMONE

This project was funded by ACE (Arts Council England). Research partners Shared Intelligence began with desk research.

Some findings were obvious: mothers benefit

REDUCING ANXIETY

First-time mum F stated that both during and after her pregnancy she suffered from anxiety and felt slightly fearful of going outside. The sessions became a 'safe space' for her. She highlighted the warm, relaxing environment and the relatively short length as two things that made her feel welcome and 'at home'.



PHOTO: ESSEX CC

from meeting others. Some were more specific: singing to a baby lifts mood and helps mother-baby bonding; rhymes or songs with face-to-face or synchronised parent-child movement and sounds (like 'Row your boat' or 'Round and round the garden') are especially effective. They increase levels of the 'happy hormone' dopamine, which supports human bonding.

Working with experienced staff in eight Essex libraries, the project identified further likely ideas. For instance, every session should start by congratulating parents just 'for getting here!'. Mothers with poor mental wellbeing may struggle to get out of the house, and this should be recognised.

And staff should specifically say that it's OK for kids to move around – or even cry – so parents won't worry about doing the wrong thing.

WARM WELCOME

Each library then picked the 'modifications' that felt right to try at their own sessions. Crucially, say the researchers: 'The objective here was to modify existing rhymetimes, not create a special mental health rhymetime.'

Inevitably, the effects had to be measured. This was done via the usual focus groups, interviews etc, plus simple 'mood charts'.

The charts showed that 95% of mothers felt happy or very happy after the session compared to 77% before.

The 77% start point was an unusually high score. The researchers guess that this might be because by the time mothers got to the charts, staff had already made sure they felt welcome,

PROGRESS OVER TIME

D's anxiety was so bad that during her first session, she had to leave halfway through. She felt her repeated attendance helped her deal with her anxiety by 'taking her out of her comfort zone'. Rhyme time 'forced' her to interact with strangers, which initially felt uncomfortable. Over time she felt more at ease, so she now looks forward to meeting new people.

and praised them for just managing to turn up.

Three in five (61%) attendees were first-time mothers. Proof that rhymetimes are an effective way to reach those most needing help.

Social class/deprivation levels were fairly evenly spread. Findings showed that three features caused the biggest uplift in mood during the 30-minute sessions: the 'warm welcome'; seeing their child enjoy themselves; the act of singing.

For many, simply getting to the rhymetime brought structure to the day, a sense of achievement and half an hour of respite.

ANXIETY

Longer-term benefits were also reported, including increased personal confidence to join in activities, a sense of routine and new friendships.

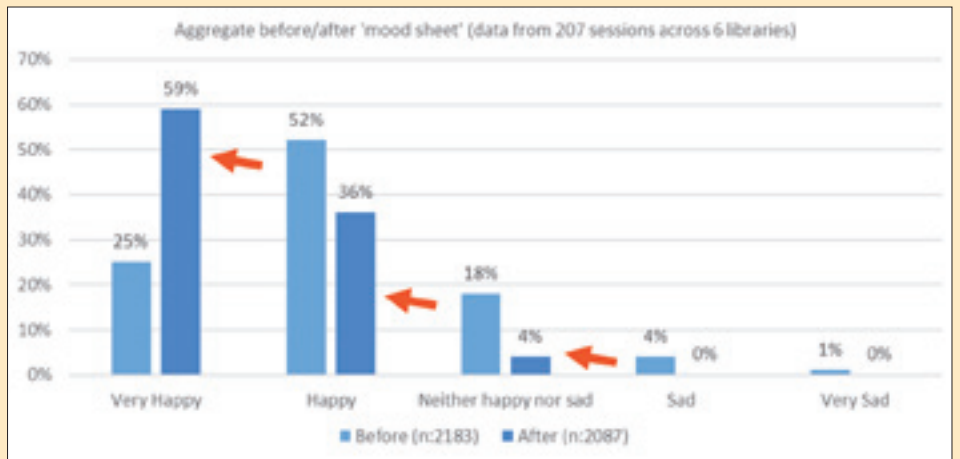
Several interviewees revealed that they had suffered from varying types of anxiety or social anxiety when their children were infants, affecting their overall confidence. Rhymetime had helped.

WHAT PARENTS LIKED BEST:

- The Wheels on the Bus, as my son joined in with me
- singing together, seeing everyone, mums and babies – and talking to people
- singing, atmosphere, being in a group of people
- meeting people who are the same as me – a new mum
- the warm welcome
- it makes your mood better seeing your children interacting and singing
- being able to sit down for half an hour
- feelings of achievement at making it there in the first place
- enjoyment from social singing and stories
- chance to interact with other mothers
- structure to the day
- seeing your child enjoy themselves
- reassurance as a parent
- respite – a break from ‘one of those days’.

Many mothers said that rhymetime sessions provided them with an event to plan their day around, helped structure the day and increased their sense of control. It could also provide a goal, something to look forward to.

Because the sessions followed the same structure every time, they could relax and feel less anxious. They knew exactly what to expect and were not worried about having to do something that would make them feel



Before and after: mood changes over time.

uncomfortable. Attending a regular event also instilled a sense of familiarity and belonging.

Mothers mentioned the importance of meeting and engaging with other mums, and other new mums in particular. They valued the safe environment and the fact they could interact with others but did not feel forced to.

CABIN FEVER

Simply associating with other adults, even if only for a few minutes, and even if no words were exchanged, was brought up a number of times as a beneficial aspect – it was ‘just nice to be around other adults’.

The sense of achievement in managing to leave the house was mentioned often. Several mothers said rhymetime alleviated ‘cabin fever’ when they were stuck indoors with their child – feeling irritable and lethargic.

The sessions made people feel more confident as parents. It was reassuring (by seeing other children) to observe that children develop at different speeds, and to talk to other parents about parenting.

The feeling of pride that came when mothers saw their child doing something praiseworthy was mentioned often, as a boost to both mood and confidence.

PARENTS’ IDEAS

One mother explained: ‘When you see your baby do something nice it makes you feel you’re doing well as a parent.’ Examples were seeing your baby share a book with another child, or helping the rhymetime leader clear up at the end of the session.

A bit late in the day, the researchers thought to ask participating parents for their own ideas. A single session, near the end of the project, asked some of them to help design promotional materials.

This was a success. The result was a very clear brief based on messages like ‘Have you had one of those mornings? Why not try going to rhyme time?’

Parents also gave a strong steer towards graphic rather than text based materials, and to



The mood charts.

PHOTO: BEN LEE

WHAT FRONTLINE STAFF LIKED BEST:

- their sense of ownership and involvement in creating and systematically applying the modifications (Essex has now made some of these standard practice in all libraries)
- increased knowledge of maternal mental health, which further motivated them to make improvements
- realising they could make a difference.

INCREASED CONFIDENCE

B had more serious mental problems. She suffered from perinatal post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety. This knocked both her overall confidence and her belief in herself as a mother. Attending rhymetimes had a large part in changing this. B attributed her interaction with other mothers on a regular basis as one of the things that helped her.

be direct about mental health (but to use humour to avoid 'worthiness').

WHAT ABOUT THE STAFF?

The expertise of frontline staff was drawn on in thinking of ways to 'modify' the standard rhyme time sessions. This also ensured that changes were introduced (and evaluated) consistently.

They discussed the changes with other staff at their branches, so that everyone 'owned' the project.

Staff involved the project also met regularly to discuss problems and share learning.

A session with outside agency Parents First helped them develop their empathy and insight – and to find the right words to talk to people about any problems. One said: 'We looked at mothers differently – who was that mum we didn't recognise, or the one who sat quietly?'

It worked. Several mothers stated that the presence of the rhymetime leader was integral to their enjoyment. The personality of the leader and their ability to create a fun, welcoming and relaxed atmosphere was one of the aspects of the session most valued by mothers.

One said that she wouldn't have been able to continue her attendance were it not for the welcoming approach of that particular leader. This, and repeated attendance, helped her rebuild her confidence.

Some staff felt the training would be valuable for all public-facing staff, given the prevalence of maternal mental health problems and the fact that young families make up such a large proportion of library users.

Tellingly, when the research results were more widely shared within the council, 'it was clear that council managers outside the library service had

18 TRIED & TESTED TIPS TO MAKE THE MOST OF RHYMETIME

Setting up:

- Set up a noticeboard with details of activities and support, including for mental health
- Be in the rhymetime area 15 minutes before and after the session to welcome and encourage attendees to socialise – welcome anyone 'hanging back'

Before the session:

- Look out for new mums and encourage them to chat to more experienced mums
- Ask who has not been before – make them feel welcome

During the session:

- Recognise the achievement of getting to rhymetime
- Explain rhymetime can help with maternal mental health
- Explain socialising is important, especially for mental health
- Say not to worry if you don't know the words, or if your child cries
- Encourage adults to learn songs and sing along
- Explain about adult-child interaction and getting a mood boost
- Have a welcome song - always the same
- Have one face-to-face song and explain about 'happy hormones'
- Have a goodbye/finishing song – always the same
- Encourage adults to sing to their children at home

Afterwards:

- Remind parents to stay and socialise – offer refreshments if possible. Look out for new attendees
- Point to information sources and promote other events
- Give out flyers, including the welcome/finishing song and sources of local support
- Remind people about the noticeboard.

probably not imagined the library service could impact maternal mental health in this way'...

Need we say more?

But first – the bump!

Bump Booster is an online resource to help library staff support parents-to-be. It includes guidance for library staff, ideas for parents-to-be and 'great rhymes to sing to a bump'.



Babies in the womb can hear their parents and the world around them. Parents can give their child an early start by singing and talking to them before they are born. So says ASCEL (Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians).

It was commissioned by ACE (Arts Council England) and Libraries Connected to develop easy-to-use tools to help libraries – and parents – make the most of the service.

Result – Bump Booster! This focuses on three simple messages that can make a huge difference to a baby's development:

Talk to your bump

- Your baby can hear you from 18 weeks.
- Talking to your bump helps your baby to get ahead with speaking and listening.

Read to your bump

- Your baby remembers noises from the womb.
- Hearing your familiar voice helps to comfort your baby after birth.

Bond with your bump

- Reading and singing to your bump helps you to bond with your baby.
- Help your baby get to know you.

The staff section includes key messages, good practice examples, how to get started talking to parents-to-be, a flier to download and tips on organising sessions for parents-to-be.

Parents-to-be can read more about why talking and singing works, learn new rhymes and songs from a list recommended by other parents and get hints and tips about singing and talking with their bump.

* <http://www.ascel.org.uk/bump-booster>

READ IT UP: Full report, and booklet outlining 'shareable tools' to run and evaluate effective rhymetimes at: <https://sharedintelligence.net> – look under 'Our work'.

What the Arts Council is saying

Now that the work of the Taskforce is gradually being handed over to ACE (Arts Council England), ACE is becoming even more powerful in the libraries world. Luckily, it is open to new ideas ...

Libraries (in England) were handed to ACE in 2013, after the government killed off the MLA (Museums, Libraries & Archives Council).

It has never been an easy fit. While public libraries, of course, are central to culture they have many other sides – economics, business, health, education at all levels and so on.

ACE has done some good work in these areas, but it's been partial and peripheral.

More worrying has been ACE's attitude to the 'culture' bit. Its overall funding has long been skewed in favour of 'art' and performance rather than reading and writing.

And it's widely felt that libraries are more likely to get ACE funding as a venue for a dance troupe than for literature activities.

But things seem to be changing.

In the last issue (page 25 onwards) TLC featured a major new ACE report on the way libraries reach out to everyone. Plus recognition from ACE's chair, Nicholas Serota, that: 'The arts and cultural sector can perhaps learn from the way that libraries interact with their local communities...

'I believe that our deeper relationship with libraries will increase the availability and quality of cultural activity in public libraries for communities around the country.'

Now there's more. ACE is now consulting widely on its next '10-year strategy'. The feedback so far has been illuminating.

A longish research report finds some interesting perceptions among 'the public' and 'the sector'. For instance ...

People value 'the arts' and want public funding for them – but only if they get lots of people involved.

There's too much focus on 'art forms such as classical music, ballet and opera, underplaying the potential role of the sector in people's lives.

'In addition, the public often do not know what opportunities are available in their local area. The sector and the public alike think that there is a need to promote the sector more.'

And: 'The public want to see a local arts and culture offer that is tailored to local areas.'

The public thought that getting people involved is more important than funding 'high quality work' and experimentation. (The sector disagreed!)

Based on all this, ACE is contemplating some changes ...

All change?

The possible changes are set out in a short paper – worth a look – at [Shaping the next ten years online consultation_Oct2018.pdf](#)

If accepted in the new round of consultations, there would be a whole new emphasis on access, celebrating diversity, defining 'arts' and 'culture' much more widely and working at local level, with communities.

That, TLC believes, is libraries' territory. From craft sessions to activity groups, author visits to local performers - never mind the books and information – libraries are (despite vicious cuts) still the most widespread and accessible first step into culture for most people.

They should be absolutely central to ACE's new, local, diverse, accessible approach.

Some bits relevant to libraries include:

While the breadth of creativity and cultural activity in England today is extraordinary, ACE has generally focused on those activities that come under a traditional definition of 'the arts'.



We believe we should be looking to develop, advocate for and invest in a far wider range of culture and creativity. We want to celebrate more of the culture and activities that people are passionate about, and help more people to lead creative lives.

Culture and creativity make a positive difference to society, to the economy and to people's lives. This case must be made more effectively, and demonstrated through stronger evidence.

Cultural organisations will work together and with local communities to create and develop cultural experiences that involve a far wider range of people.

All organisations that receive public funding will tackle the barriers that prevent people from taking part in publicly funded cultural experiences.

ACE, and the organisations we work with, will help more people find and access a wide range of cultural activities.

The importance of developing creativity in children and young people will be better understood and more widely emphasised.

What we said to ACE ...

Memo from TLC – time to see libraries in a whole new way ... as ACE's key asset!

The Library Campaign believes strongly that the arts – across the full spectrum from literature to fine arts, the performance arts to digital media – are essential to wellbeing. In an age of austerity and increasing social division, they are more vital than ever.

We also believe that both enjoyment and active participation can be available to everyone regardless of age, income, disability or background.

Everyone should be able to find a life-enhancing arts medium that suits their needs and aspirations.

THE KEYS

The keys are wide choice and easy, everyday access.

We are therefore very happy with the outcomes identified in the report 'Shaping the next ten years'.

In particular, we fully support:

- widening the focus beyond a narrow definition of 'the arts';
- valuing diversity (in its widest sense) as a criterion for policy and funding;
- making a strong case for culture's benefits in social, health and economic terms;
- investing in 'the culture and creativity that are part of people's everyday lives';
- working closely with communities and



Patrick Gale and Julia Copus in a 26-venue literature tour in the south-west.

tackling the barriers to participation in people of every background;

- helping people to 'find and access a wide range of cultural activities';
- better provision for children, young people and families.

We trust that ACE will now appreciate even more that public libraries are not just a peripheral addition to arts provision (possibly as extra venues), with added roles in business, economic and social health that sit uneasily with a purely 'arts' agenda.

On the contrary, they are key to ACE's exciting new perception.

They are a massive resource, already at work in the areas identified, at local grassroots level, nationwide. Investment in the support they badly need will be a major contributor to ACE's ten-year aspirations. Probably the largest single contributor.

We acknowledge – and welcome – the already increasing depth of ACE's understanding of the role of public libraries.

Nicholas Serota made this clear in his blogpost on 9 October 2017 (<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/blog/increasing-access-arts-and-culture-libraries>): 'The arts and cultural sector can perhaps learn from the way that libraries interact with their local communities.'

LIBRARIES

'Again and again, the public tells us that they see libraries as trusted spaces, that they are welcoming to everyone and offer a safe, creative environment where knowledge is respected – people don't feel intimidated to enter them.'

'As a result, libraries can reach many different audiences ...

'I believe that our deeper relationship with libraries will increase the availability and quality of cultural activity in public libraries for communities around the country.'

Building on this, we would argue for a fundamental re-orientation of ACE's attitude to public libraries.

Yes, they are a convenient and uniquely accessible venue for ACE-funded arts activities.



Bhangra at Longsight library Fun Palace event.

But they are far more than this.

Libraries are the bedrock of the nation's entire culture strategy. They underpin every other endeavour.

In particular:

1. They foster the basic tools required for access to, and appreciation of, the arts – literacy, emotional literacy, digital literacy, information literacy – as well as more subtle enablers such as self-esteem and self-confidence, health, social cohesion, a sense of belonging, a sense of place, acquisition of skills, the knowledge required for the exercise of citizenship, the feeling one can have influence in one's locality, even the ability to make a decent living or launch a business or arts project.

2. Despite recent devastating cuts, they remain far more widely provided than any other cultural resource. Many local authorities have no municipal theatre, museum or art gallery. They all have libraries. In many areas libraries are, quite simply, the sole local cultural resource.

Local libraries therefore function as an irreplaceable 'first step' to every other aspect of the arts.

It might be simply finding out what's on locally (a major issue for many people). It might be taking part in an activity based on reading or crafts.

It might be borrowing play-sets or music for a local group. It might be being guided to access expensive online arts reference resources, or digitised arts and museum collections including the British Library's.

FREE OF CHARGE

The possibilities are endless. And access is free of charge, which is far less likely to be true of other culture facilities. This is of central importance.

Properly funded and staffed libraries, within a national network, enable simple one-step access from the smallest library to a wealth of resources, both digital and physical.

No other neighbourhood facility can possibly provide all this.

Children, students, people on low incomes, older people, people with poor English and many other disadvantaged groups can, at the very least, sample a wide choice of books to help them discover what interests them.

They can read or study in peace, meet others and join in group activities if they wish to, and



PHOTO: ALAN FLETCHER/ACE

Warwickshire's Fantastic Fun with Words Festival.

experience a civilised space that belongs to them and does not demand any payment from them.

Libraries are the most accessible cultural venue for all population groups – BAME people in particular – and are seen by the public to be so.

The popularity of libraries among families also enables the appreciation of a full cultural offer at a formative stage for young children. This is more important than ever, with the narrowing of the school curriculum.

ADDED ACTIVITY

On this basic provision has been built – up to now – a rich layer of added activity that is 'cultural' in the very widest sense.

Obviously libraries give free access to reading (and films). A wide choice of free material enables people to experiment, go beyond the mass market offer, find things they might not have expected to like, ideas that challenge.

This is underpinned by, for instance, pre-literacy sessions for small children and book clubs catering for all ages and abilities (from children and teens to people with mental health



PHOTO: STAFFORDSHIRE LIBRARY & ARTS

Touring exhibition exploring Tolkien's wartime stay in Staffordshire.

or other disabilities), and all kinds of reading (from poetry to manga, politics to sci-fi).

Reading for pleasure has been proven time and again to confer major benefits in terms of educational attainment, empathy, mental health, etc. Talking about reading is a simple step into human connection and self-expression. It comes very high on the list of popular means for cultural participation.

ACE has, up to now, dedicated far too little of its overall budget to literature, support for authors and events linked to literature. It is also widely perceived to have done too little to support libraries' work in this area. This needs to be urgently reconsidered.

Reading-based activities are just the beginning.

The ACE-funded report 'Libraries welcome everyone' spells out the enormous range of activities available in libraries nationwide. These arise quite naturally out of libraries' basic remit to educate and entertain, and to be available to all. They are successful in attracting a diverse range of people and bringing them together.

The report also notes that 'so much of this work is seen to be "everyday" (ie, not something special) that it often passes unrecognised'.

This is a point that needs emphasising.

FIRST STEP

Also worth emphasising is the 'first step' culture opportunities these activities offer. TS Eliot defined culture widely, and summarised it as 'simply that which makes life worth living'.

All library activities enable people to meet and communicate. ACE's research shows a keen appetite in the sector, and among the public, to

encourage diversity and inter-action between different cultural groups.

Most also have an obvious creative element – drawing, writing, movement, craft work, etc. These can be built on, by developing and publishing or exhibiting the results.

ACE's research shows clearly that many people see 'art' mainly as classical music, ballet and opera – things that are 'not for them'.

The kind of simple, very local, informal activities offered by libraries are a first step for many people intimidated by the idea of 'art' or the thought of going into premises such as theatres or museums.

It has to be noted, of course, that many people currently see libraries as 'not for them'.

But libraries are in a far better position than any other venues to counter such prejudices: a national campaign can publicise attractions that can then be found at local level by anyone, anywhere. (This unique attribute has been badly damaged by the proliferation of volunteer libraries, which cannot be guaranteed to make any nationally consistent offer, but it has not been completely destroyed.)

Above the 'everyday' level, many library services still manage to run author visits, local book prizes (usually working with schools), and entire literature festivals.

OPPORTUNITIES

The library also can – and does – serve as a meeting space and as a default venue for arts and crafts activities, art exhibitions (by professional artists and local clubs) and performances of all kinds (ditto).

Facilities for video and music creation, 3D printing and digital arts are a growing area. A



PHOTO: NEWCASTLE LIBRARY

Family arts session in Newcastle.

number of libraries have developed an outstanding role as venues for music performances.

Festivals small and large – often multi-ethnic and multi-media – are run by library services or individual libraries, sometimes with professional performers, sometimes with considerable input from volunteers and from local cultural groups.

Local-level activities do much to counter the current imbalance in provision between London and the regions. This is something ACE could nurture and build on.

They also make it much easier to incorporate local people's ideas and contributions into what is offered. This is very much wanted by the public.

All these activities foster opportunities for people to do their own creative work and

perform or show it, at the library or more widely. This could be as simple as reading aloud in a group, or placing something you have created in a library exhibition or craft fair. It could be writing or performing, depending on what the library offers.

As well as providing personal fulfilment and self-confidence, these outlets also contribute to the diversity of the local arts scene and can stimulate insights among other participants.

KEY RESOURCE

Libraries are thus established as the nation's single key arts resource – simply by doing what we all know they do. This needs to be properly acknowledged.

This is not a power grab for the library sector. It is a concept that can offer a great many opportunities to the cultural sector in general.

We do not need to spell out the extent of the recent destruction within the public library service. Hundreds of libraries have closed, or been handed to volunteers to run as best they can.

The national network function has been badly damaged. Where they survive, more and more libraries are having to cut back on any activity beyond an irreducible core.

Importantly, the loss of expert staff has severely diminished libraries' power to help people find the information they need, or to run or host arts activities of any kind.

ACE therefore needs to address the current emergency in public libraries – their everyday funding and functioning. This has not, so far, been the case.



Nationwide programme to read out the whole of Orwell's 1984

We would argue that ACE needs to adjust its vision and see libraries as central, and essential, to its whole approach to the arts.

To discount (and oversee further reduction in) public libraries' considerable role in the arts is to deny access to millions of people who will have no alternative resource.

It is also to deny many exciting outlets, development opportunities and new audiences to arts bodies.

We recognise that libraries' statutory status may make it a little awkward to find ways to fund basic functions.

Nevertheless, the current unprecedented situation means it is no longer possible to avoid grasping this nettle.



PHOTO: JULIA CHANDLER/TASKFORCE

Body painting at Brixton library, Lambeth, Fun Palace science event.

WE SUGGEST:

- 1** A major national publicity campaign to make the public aware of what libraries offer. Hugely successful projects have been run by the National Literacy trust (twice) and by The Reading Agency (Love libraries) - only to be abandoned.
- 2** A major national publicity campaign to make decision-makers - national and local - similarly aware how libraries contribute to their agendas, not just 'arts' as such but the whole range of 'that which makes life worth living'. We know attempts are regularly made in this area, but a much stronger approach is needed.
- 3** An acknowledged role for, and support for, library users and campaigners as ACE's partners. These are a massive resource of knowledge and ideas, should have a central role in developing policy and are a voice for libraries at local and national level that ACE sorely needs to back up its work.
- 4** An acknowledged role for, and support for, frontline library staff as ACE's partners. As above.
- 5** Full, articulate support for the value of trained library staff, and specialist posts in arts, music, children's work etc.
- 6** Grants to support special collections in art, music, drama.
- 7** ACE-funded posts for arts development officers in public libraries. This is merely a stratagem to enable librarians to continue doing what they have always been able to do as part of their job, but needs must.
- 8** ACE-funded posts for schools arts liaison in libraries. As above. We note that the need is greater than ever, with schools increasingly dropping arts provision under pressure to concentrate on 'good' exam results, while reading for pleasure is badly undermined by an over-analytical approach to reading and comprehension.
- 9** ACE-funded posts for arts outreach in libraries. As above.
- 10** Training in arts awareness, management and development for library staff.
- 11** Better access to arts contacts, and information on possible funding, via ACE. Libraries already function to some extent as chains of venues for touring performances and exhibitions. ACE could do much to strengthen this, for the benefit of both.
- 12** Acknowledgement by ACE that many libraries are very much in touch with their local arts scene, and actively develop budding writers and performers. Their experience and 'finds' should be valued and used.
- 13** A far larger proportion of ACE's budget should be devoted to literature (currently a derisory 3.5%). In particular, far more funding for author visits, storytelling, books-related performances, poetry jams, local book prizes, literature festivals etc. Much of this would logically be channelled through libraries.
- 14** Far better use of existing knowledge and resources. In particular, MLA had a massive website with all kinds of information, from research results to reports of library projects - and evaluation of what worked, and why. This has been lost. We hope it is mothballed somewhere. It needs to be revived and made searchable.
- 15** Relevant further research. Top of the list is sensible evaluation of volunteer libraries. So far, research has concentrated on whether they are sustainable (Answer: we have no idea, they are all so different). Nothing has been done to find out how they match the functions of a properly staffed library - as libraries.
- 16** Proper use of CIPFA data. This is well known to be flawed in many ways, but can still be analysed to find out where - and how - library services flourish. A student on a recent short placement at the Taskforce has gained better value from the data than we have ever seen before. This could be followed by a (well-funded) peer review system to pass on knowledge, and distribute it widely.
- 17** Encouragement of easy methods to assess effectiveness of library-based activities across a wide spectrum of culture-and-wellbeing indicators, including development of the MLA Inspiring Learning for All evaluation framework. (We do, however, caution that asking questions of participants can add unwanted formality and intrusiveness in an environment that depends on being welcoming and informal.)
- 18** A checklist, possibly based on the Taskforce's work in this area, to list what a full public library service should provide. This would be a useful tool for all services, and preserve awareness in volunteer libraries of what may be missing. Annotated with local information, it could serve the public as a guide to the full range of services they can access, especially if their starting point is a volunteer library. National standards would, obviously, be an even better tool.
- 19** A coherent national development plan, slotting together the work of disparate organisations such as ACE, CILIP, LC, TRA, Taskforce - like the Framework for the Future once used by the DCMS. Too often the different agencies seem each to want to have their own 'vision', 'ambition' or 'offer', leading to confusion and duplication.
- 20** More funding for library work in general - and a clearly articulated message that cuts to library services are endangering the whole basis of a civilised society.

The dreaded summer slide!

The national Summer Reading Challenge for children is a huge success story for public libraries. But it's in danger...



Last year 699,076 children (age 11–14) took part in the Summer Reading Challenge.

That's an impressive total. But it's a drop of 8% from the number who participated in 2017. That means almost 60,000 fewer children. With hundreds of libraries closed, or turned over to volunteers, it is only to be expected. But it's absolutely crazy.

There is already evidence that SRC helps children overcome the effect of the summer break from school, when reading skills and confidence can dip – commonly known as the 'summer slide'. This places disadvantaged pupils even further behind when school starts again.

Others are turned on to the enjoyment of reading for the very first time. Time and again, reading purely for pleasure has been shown to be the key to success in learning. And fun.

LOW-COST

So – what is SRC? This national, fun scheme is run by The Reading Agency*. TRA provides low-cost promotional material, ideas, a website and goodies such as stickers and certificates to encourage children to read at least six books over the summer holiday.

It's the perfect example of what can be achieved when local libraries are enabled to work together on a national basis.

That is – or was – the point of having a national libraries network, sharing resources and enabling everyone, everywhere, to get access to a common range of high quality services.

That has already been lost. So many local councils now go their own way, providing a ramshackle patchwork of 'libraries' that could be anything from a professional service to a bunch of volunteers.

This year is SRC's 20th anniversary. There's a different theme every year. In 2018 it was 'mischief makers' – cartoon characters. This year it is 'space race'.

Almost all library services take part in SRC. They add their own free summer activities to the core provision. Just how many volunteer libraries have a go at taking part is – as so often – not known.

Undeterred, TRA is setting out to prove just how useful SRC is.

Now TRA is partnering with ASCEL (Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians) and Libraries Connected to commission an independent, external evaluation of 'the impact of taking part in SRC'.

ENJOYMENT

It will focus on the summer slide, as it affects both reading skills and reading enjoyment. ACE (Arts Council England) is funding the project to the tune of £120,000.

The study will also explore the role a public library based reading activity such as SRC can have on building wider school and family engagement with reading.

The project will use standardised testing to focus on complex issues of reading comprehension and confidence.

The researchers will also interview children, teachers and parents/carers to explore children's perceptions of their own enjoyment of reading, reading skills, reading confidence and feelings of wellbeing.

Twenty schools will be recruited to take part, with emphasis on the most deprived areas, where research shows that the summer slide is worse.

TRA says: 'We hope this large-scale piece of independent research will give us and our library partners a strong evidence base to help us develop and advocate SRC for many years to come.'

EVIDENCE

Janene Cox, chair of the SRC strategy group, says: 'It will enable TRA to... evidence the strengths and opportunities that this important programme provides and also, hopefully identify areas where we need to focus and improve.'

Sue Williamson, ACE's Libraries Director, says: 'We want libraries to continue to be places where culture and creativity thrive in local communities.'

So do we all. We note, however, that there's often a big gap between proving that investment in libraries makes sense and getting local councils to grasp the idea...

The results should, however, give library campaigners an extra weapon. Libraries are a vital support to children's education. Councils need to understand how.

* <https://readingagency.org.uk>



Libraries change lives!

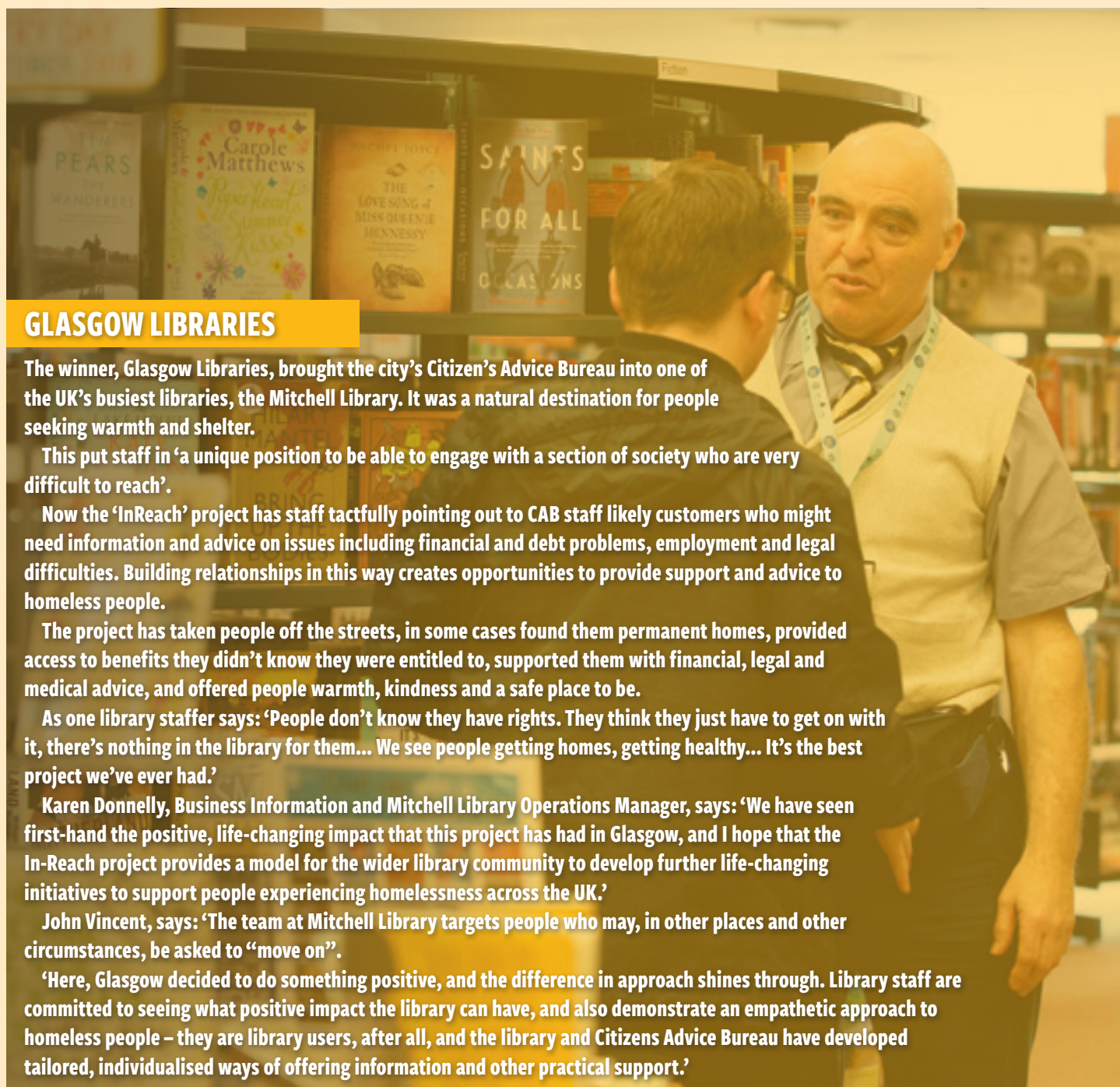
More proof of the amazing things public libraries can do – when not beaten into the ground by cuts. Libraries Change Lives is a national award for ‘excellence and innovation’ organised by the Community, Diversity & Equality Group of CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals). What’s striking about the 2018 winners is their sheer variety – from sympathetic provision for very needy people to a wildly creative take on classic literature.

John Vincent, Chair of Judges, says: ‘All three demonstrate the ways in which library staff engage with people, both in libraries and in the wider community, helping to meet their information and reading needs – but also adding so much more.

‘Their work shows powerful connections being formed between libraries and their communities – connections that can readily be created elsewhere.’

Past winners that have created wider ripples include Bookstart (the government-backed scheme piloted by Birmingham Libraries, which now distributes books to three million babies UK-wide); and the HMP Edinburgh/libraries partnership, which has transformed engagement among inmates, tackling social exclusion and providing education and employment support for a better transition to community life.

SEE THE VIDEOS ON: <https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/ShortlistLCLA2018>



GLASGOW LIBRARIES

The winner, Glasgow Libraries, brought the city’s Citizen’s Advice Bureau into one of the UK’s busiest libraries, the Mitchell Library. It was a natural destination for people seeking warmth and shelter.

This put staff in ‘a unique position to be able to engage with a section of society who are very difficult to reach’.

Now the ‘InReach’ project has staff tactfully pointing out to CAB staff likely customers who might need information and advice on issues including financial and debt problems, employment and legal difficulties. Building relationships in this way creates opportunities to provide support and advice to homeless people.

The project has taken people off the streets, in some cases found them permanent homes, provided access to benefits they didn’t know they were entitled to, supported them with financial, legal and medical advice, and offered people warmth, kindness and a safe place to be.

As one library staffer says: ‘People don’t know they have rights. They think they just have to get on with it, there’s nothing in the library for them... We see people getting homes, getting healthy... It’s the best project we’ve ever had.’

Karen Donnelly, Business Information and Mitchell Library Operations Manager, says: ‘We have seen first-hand the positive, life-changing impact that this project has had in Glasgow, and I hope that the In-Reach project provides a model for the wider library community to develop further life-changing initiatives to support people experiencing homelessness across the UK.’

John Vincent, says: ‘The team at Mitchell Library targets people who may, in other places and other circumstances, be asked to “move on”.

‘Here, Glasgow decided to do something positive, and the difference in approach shines through. Library staff are committed to seeing what positive impact the library can have, and also demonstrate an empathetic approach to homeless people – they are library users, after all, and the library and Citizens Advice Bureau have developed tailored, individualised ways of offering information and other practical support.’

KIRKLEES LIBRARIES

Kirklees Libraries was shortlisted for its Well into Words: Sensory project. This uses a multi-sensory approach to storytelling, making the classics accessible to a diverse range of groups including people with learning difficulties, visual impairments and those living with dementia. Care homes and special needs schools are also visited.

Using objects, sounds and smells for an immersive experience, the project facilitates an understanding of the (sometimes challenging) themes contained within classic books, stories and poems. This opens up literature to many who would find a traditional book format challenging or impossible.

What this means in practice is eye-popping. The video shows students engaging with Jane Eyre through bridal veils, masks, bells, joke false teeth, bubbles, biscuits, scents, feathers, mysterious mixtures to touch or smell, chair exercises – and more.

‘I wouldn’t have thought of using Jane Eyre with my students, it’s so language rich,’ says a delighted tutor.



NEWCASTLE LIBRARIES

Newcastle Libraries was shortlisted for its Get Online Newcastle partnership, formed with with Your Homes Newcastle to provide digital training to its housing clients. It has so far changed the lives of over 1,800 residents, helping them to access and use the internet, and develop their skills and confidence using devices.

Get Online Newcastle started by training social housing tenants to provide digital skills support in their communities. It has expanded to include weekly digital skills courses and training to charity and community organisations. These are delivered at libraries all across the city.

Volunteers help to give one-to-one support (to about 1,700 people so far). The knock-on benefits include increased confidence in jobseekers (60 have found jobs directly through the project).

