

LIBRARY CAMPAIGN

SUPPORTING FRIENDS AND USERS OF LIBRARIES

Think this
looks sad?

Alas, it's just
the start ... unless
we take action.

Kensal Rise library, Brent, London
on National Libraries Day 2014

Photo: Martin Francis, Brent Green party, <http://wembleymatters.blogspot.co.uk>



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THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN – AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

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



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FRIENDS GROUPS LIAISON AND CO-ORDINATOR: Vacant – if interested, please contact the Secretary

The following organisations send representatives to attend steering group meetings:

Unison,

Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals (CILIP),

Association of University Teachers,

University of the Third Age.

JOIN US!

It costs you little.
It makes library users
much stronger.

Our membership form is on
page 20. Get extra (and larger)
copies at:

[www.librarycampaign.com/
join-the-library-campaign/](http://www.librarycampaign.com/join-the-library-campaign/)

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

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

WHO'S WHO?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

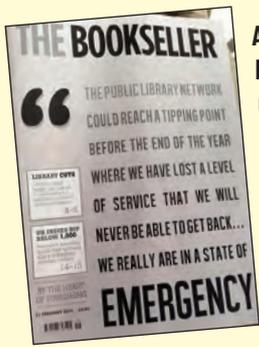
MLA (Museums, Libraries & Archives Council): ACE's predecessor.

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

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

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

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



A quote from The Library Campaign takes up the whole front page of *The Bookseller* (21 February 2014), widely read in the library world. (Followed by more doom from us inside the magazine).

We'd rather this did not need saying. However, it is evidence that we are increasingly successful in publicising library campaigners' concerns.

Another publicity success was our press release last July, which got major cover in the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, *The Bookseller*, *CILIP Update* and elsewhere.

Its main point – that 1,000 libraries are likely to be lost by 2016 – has been widely quoted, and is still being quoted this month.

Again, we'd rather not have to be saying this. But, frankly, nobody else is saying it. As so often – locally and nationally – it is only library users who are speaking out for libraries and librarians. The national bodies are largely silent.

All this is part of The Library Campaign's work on your behalf. There is a lot of it.

We have just sent evidence to the Parliamentary select committee on the libraries work of ACE – Arts Council England (summary – not much good). We are meeting ACE soon (we think it's getting better).

We have written to the same committee, pointing out that the minister's promised report on library closures (delivered in January) avoided the issue.

We have briefed Helen Goodman, the new shadow minister for libraries. We have briefed the All-Party Parliamentary Group on libraries. We regularly meet the Society of Chief Librarians. We are working with Campaign for the Book (Alan Gibbons), *CILIP*, *Unison* and *Voices for the Library as Speak Up for Libraries*.

And, of course, we are in constant, dogged correspondence with libraries minister Ed Vaizey, trying to get him to take an interest in what is actually happening. For an example, see page 15. Possibly his decision to have – oh no! – yet another inquiry into libraries is a result... (see overleaf).

On top of all this, executive committee member Geof Dron is sending a stream of painstaking Freedom of Information queries to the DCMS, ACE, the DCLG, the Cabinet Office, the Department for Education... mostly uncovering a blend of confusion and inaction.

Our website has been revamped – take a look – with new areas for library campaigners' views, and the only national list of library groups and campaigns.

We support www.publiclibrariesnews.com, the only national information source on public library issues – another vital resource not provided nationally.

Finally, of course, we publish the only national magazine solely devoted to public libraries.

CHAIR'S REPORT

Laura Swaffield
Campaign Chair



This is a lot of work. We could do even more with more help (see overleaf for some ideas – please!)

All this happens against a background that has never looked more grim. It became very clear to me at SUFL's November conference.

I was grateful for the honesty of our national-level speakers. But they came over as somewhat powerless. And it was clear there is often quite a gulf between their world and ours.

Where good work is being done, it is un-coordinated and patchily funded. I felt confused, and frustrated at the muddle and waste.

Also very clear was the failure of so many councils to realise what a fantastic – cheap – resource they have in their libraries.

Worse, many refuse point-blank to listen when their own residents tell them the facts. Consultation is often a farce. Alternative ideas are rejected without consideration. And there seems no way to enforce decent practice here.

Ill-will

And, more than ever, we know that libraries' plight is just one sign of political ill-will towards the whole concept of public service and public good.

The Library Campaign takes no party political stance. Unfortunately, we do not need to. All the major parties are wedded to a daft economic view that worships 'the market', sees public services as a cost instead of an investment, and is happy to see the death of vital services nationwide.

The Prime Minister has cheerfully announced a much smaller state is to be permanent policy. Even when the dodgy excuse of 'austerity' no longer applies.

Reluctant 'volunteers' must take on the running of just about everything that makes for a civil society, while the financial sector swallows billions to support its greedy, incompetent and sometimes criminal practices.

That, of course, is exactly why libraries are so important. Especially the small local ones. They provide a whole heap of essential services.

But they do more. They are a model of public service, mutual respect and community spirit. They demonstrate this day-to-day.

The way it works is clear even to two-year-old Johnny as he asks the nice lady for help freely given, or waits to share a toy (or screen), or enjoys books and rhyme-times that are provided just because they are a Good Thing – not because they make a profit.

The Library Campaign is working harder than ever. We have to.

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SECRETARY'S REPORT

Elizabeth Ash
Campaign Secretary



More than ever, The Library Campaign has to champion libraries and to act as a voice for library users and library workers. The current unnerving pace of cuts and closures demands real action, on many fronts.

But we cannot do it without your help. So please get involved – and encourage others to do so!

Every membership of The Library Campaign helps to further our work, adds another piece to the jigsaw and gives a further voice to library users.

We use the membership database, for example, to monitor what is going on locally and to meet requests from the media for contacts with local campaigns and groups, often at short notice. This all helps to highlight the real situation.

Spread the word!

We now send out two copies of the magazine to members. Please pass on your extra copy (and any back issues you no longer have use for) to someone who might be interested in taking up membership.

Share it with a group or place it somewhere public – a library, a GP surgery, a community centre or hall.

We plan to develop other promotional materials shortly. If you have any ideas, suggestions or wish to help with this, please let us know.

Join us for a meeting

Meetings of the committee are generally held every two months, at a central London venue (but the committee is open to meeting in other places).

All members of The Library Campaign may attend any meeting, and I'd encourage you to do so. You'll be made very welcome.

We are usually joined by representatives of CILIP and UNISON, as well as having international visitors on occasion. It is the ideal way to find out more and get involved, support the charity, learn all the current news and tell us yours.

By the way, it would be really useful to have someone to take the minutes for us. That's a small job, once every two months – but a big help to us.

If you would like to know more, please call or email me or our Chair, Laura (contact details on inside front cover).

Write a post

We've recently updated the website – please excuse our appearance, as it is a work in progress. We've added a new Your Views section.

The first post, by a library worker on the imposition of self-serve kiosks, is attracting much

attention and debate. As a result of this, we've already had two other posts offered on other library-related issues.

Could you write a post for us on an issue important to you? And should we introduce a specific section to list updates from members of The Library Campaign on what is happening locally to them? Please let us know if this would be of interest.

Follow us and engage on social media

If you are on Twitter, follow The Library Campaign at @LibraryCampaign.

On Facebook, follow us at The Library Campaign <https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Library-Campaign/118572038309734>.

It's a great way to keep in touch with current news (including the seemingly incessant number of public inquiries on libraries) with daily digests of library articles in the news, collated by one of our members (and national library campaigner) Shirley Burnham.

Send us your images

We are building up a bank of free images to show on our website, and to make available for others to use. All kinds of things could be of interest – for example, a snap of a demonstration, a closed or endangered library (we want to make a collection of these), a library event, a self-service kiosk, a child reading a book, people using library computers, a favourite read, a consultation document or library notice. If you have taken an image that you are willing to share, please send it to us.

Library Campaign and Friends groups listings

Much work has gone on to reconstruct our list of Friends and campaign groups over the past year. It is the only such list available. But it requires constant updating. If you know of a group not listed, please let us know. Similarly, please let us know if you spot an error or dead link.

Take up and keep up your membership

The more members we have involved, the more we can achieve as a charity. For this reason I would not only encourage members to attend our committee meetings, but to promote membership to others and to seriously consider joining the committee.

A strong membership helps The Library Campaign to better represent the views of the various campaigners and friends of libraries groups.

Get involved

Our AGM is in May. Get in touch if you might be interested in joining the committee. The Library Campaign is needed now more than ever to protect and advocate for the value of libraries. We need active members and a strengthened committee to drive our work forward. Donations toward our work – and any help offered – are always appreciated. Please get in touch.

STOP PRESS!

Independent inquiry on public libraries!

It's the last thing we expected. And, frankly, the last thing we really need, when The Library Campaign has already been calling for urgent action for years.

Nevertheless, we welcome the expert panel that will be doing the job. We will be sending evidence on library staff/users' behalf. And we are already arranging a face-to-face meeting with the chair.

Please send them your own views, too!

The report has been jointly commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport and the Department for Communities & Local Government.

'Key questions' are listed as:

- What are the core principles of a public library into the future?
- Is the current model of delivery the most comprehensive and efficient?
- What is the role of community libraries?

William Sieghart, Chair: philanthropist, entrepreneur, publisher, founder of the Forward Prizes for Poetry, Big Arts Week and Street Smart. Former member of Arts Council England (2000–2006). Trustee of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Free Word Centre and Reprieve.

Sue Charteris: Director, Equal Value consultancy, independent adviser on public policy/services. Former chief of Merton and Kirklees councils. Author of the respected Wirral report.

Janene Cox, President, Society of Chief Librarians, Commissioner for Tourism & the Cultural County, Staffordshire. Trustee of the Reading Agency.

Luke Johnson, Chair of Risk Capital Partners, former Chair of Channel 4 TV, Royal Society for the Arts and PizzaExpress.

Roly Keating, Chief Executive, British Library. Former Controller of BBC 2 and BBC 4 and Director of Archive Content, with oversight of BBC online services.

Caroline Michel, Chief Executive, Peters Fraser & Dunlop. Former chief of William Morris Agency, Vintage at Random House and Harper Press at Harper Collins.

Stephen Page, Chief Executive, Faber & Faber. Former bookseller, Managing Director of Fourth Estate and President of the Publishers' Association.

Joanna Trollope, author.

LINK FOR MORE DETAILS (and our view!):

www.librarycampaign.com/oh-no-another-time-wasting-inquiry

PLEASE SEND YOUR OWN VIEWS TO:

Library-secretariat@culture.gsi.gov.uk
OR Library Secretariat, DCMS, 4th Floor,
100 Parliament Street, London SW1A 2BQ.

DEADLINE 21 MARCH

What's going on?

Ian Anstice's guide to the top UK public library trends of 2013

1. Big cuts continue ...

The deep year-on-year budget cuts are continuing. Official figures showed budgets fell by 4.4% in 2012-13, with the official estimate being a further 5% for 2013-14. This means that the overall national budget may dip below £1 billion this year.

To put this in context, that means that the total budget for all of the UK will be more than £63 million less than it was just for England six years ago.

This one fact has more bearing on the year than anything else and is, indeed, responsible for much of it. One cannot emphasise the importance of the cuts enough ... it's at a historic level. It explains almost all that is happening at the moment to, at and in public libraries (e-books notwithstanding).

2. ... but with fewer closures

The surprise, then, is that the number of actual library closures has reduced in 2012-13 compared to the year before. It is still low for the rest of the year, with 61 withdrawn from April onwards, compared to 201 for all of 2011-12.

So how is this happening? Well, a few different ways. These can be roughly divided into 'efficiency' and 'hollowing out'.

The former includes merging services, different types of governance, co-locations and all sorts of other factors. The latter includes cuts in bookfund, opening hours, services provided and volunteers.

Some would argue that some of the former also counts as 'hollowing out', and others would doubtless argue vice versa ...

3. The inexorable rise of the volunteer-run library

Official figures show that the number of volunteers rose by a staggering 44.5% in 2012-13. And there's no reason to suppose that the increase slowed in the rest of the year.

The figure may be as high as 425 branches as of now. This means 12% of all branches (almost always the smallest ones) in England may now be volunteer-run.

4. Large-scale protests continue

Campaigns up and down the country (including, amongst others, Lincolnshire, Moray, Herefordshire and Newcastle) continue to show how much the public think of their libraries.

Petitions in the thousands and marches in the streets, backed up by legal action, continue to be the order of the day in authorities that consider cuts.

5. The advent of the multi-authority library service.

Until 2011, with one or two exceptions, there was one library organisation running the library service of one council. That has now changed.

Starting with the Tri-borough (Kensington & Chelsea, Hammersmith & Fulham and Westminster) in mid-2011, London now has three multi-authority services.

The second is Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) which runs Greenwich and Wandsworth as part of a non-profit trust.



■ Ian Anstice

The third is Carillion which now now runs libraries in Croydon, Ealing, Harrow and Hounslow after purchasing them from Laing in late October. Within weeks, it announced prospective large-scale job losses.

The purchase of this library contract is, I believe, the first time in history that one private company has bought the contract for library services from another in the UK. There are signs that this phenomenon may expand beyond the capital, with GLL having been interested in Lincolnshire.

These multi-authority organisations may de facto end up providing the economies of scale that spectators have been advocating for years but with, at least in the case of Carillion, the danger of those efficiencies going to shareholders rather than to the taxpayer.

6. Usage is strong among children, not so much with adults ... and all that entails

The fantastic Summer Reading Challenge saw a 9% increase in usage this year. This project, where children gain rewards for reading, is 99% taken up by library authorities and is administered by The Reading Agency.

On the other hand, adult usage appears not so strong, possibly because of alternatives such as e-books. This, especially among those who have never used libraries before in the first place (step forward more than a few councillors) is being used more and more as an excuse to cease funding them. This is regardless of the increased demand placed on libraries as providers of online access for job-seekers and others, who find that the internet is now essential.

7. Big Shiny New Libraries

(i) The new Library of Birmingham

The largest public library in Europe opened in a brand new building in September. No expense was spared, with some £188 million being spent. This (via its PFI contract) will become considerably more in the future.



■ Central Library, Liverpool. Photo: Mark McNulty



■ Spring Hill library, Birmingham: threatened with closure, while the city centre Library of Birmingham soaks up millions.

Photo: <http://birminghamlibrariescampaigns.wordpress.com>

I like it but it's controversial, as perhaps all big new projects should be. The exterior, with its coloured layers and circles, has been compared to a wedding cake or a mosque. Inside, it's a mixture of really quite big public spaces, bookshelves, multimedia displays, impressed visitors and quiet study spaces. Two months in, when I visited, I was still overhearing people talking about it in the town centre, with definite pride ... and I am aware of more than a few people having made the trip to the city just to see it.

(ii) Liverpool Library reopens

This is on a smaller scale than Birmingham, but it still came in at over £50 million and is utterly fantastic in its own right.

For my money, its merging of the old and the new was far more successful than that of its larger kin – several utterly beautiful (there's no other way

to describe it) period rooms living side by side in perfect harmony with the modern. The only disappointment in the project, at least to me, is the children's library, which appears to be multi-purpose in design and uninspiring. Everyone else also loves the place. It has become the number one tourist spot in the city, according to TripAdvisor.

9. Wales and Scotland libraries start joining the England libraries crisis

I remember being at the CILIP Wales conference two years ago. Everyone there was worried about what was happening in England, and concerned that it would spread across the border.

Well, 2013 is the year that that happened, with cuts announced in many Welsh authorities. Similarly, in Scotland, where the councillors in Moray showed that there was nothing being done in England that couldn't be done just as badly north of the border.

However, the differences between the two nations and England is instructive. In England, there has not been a murmur from the libraries minister (of whom more later). But in both Scotland and Wales the relevant ministers have issued stern statements about the danger of cuts. Whether this will be enough will be seen next year.

10. CILIP rebranding

This is a bit of librarian navel-gazing perhaps. But it certainly exercised a lot of librarian attention this year, even if the organisation itself is – probably quite rightly – trying to put a gloss over the whole affair and move on.

The librarians' professional association (Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals) pushed strongly for a change of name. It finally came up with the much-maligned suggestion of 'Information and Library Professionals UK' (it stressed that the obvious and unfortunate initials ILPUK would never be used by anyone, ever, no sir, of course not).

This failed to gain significant support and lost by a large margin at the AGM. Possibly linked to this, or not, was a notable changing of the guard on CILIP Council at the elections later in the year.

11. No confidence in Ed Vaizey



■ Ed Vaizey

It's probably fair to say that the morale of the public library profession has never been so low as now. Faced with an official 6.8% cut in numbers in 2012-13 and no sign of slowing this year, this is hardly surprising. But there is more to it than that.

When faced with the perfect storm of budget cuts and technological change, it's hard to know who to blame. Or it would be, if there wasn't a minister in charge of libraries who was adamant in their defence while in opposition but has barely lifted a finger to save them while in office.

Step forward Ed 'Evaizey' Vaizey, who even managed to get the famously non-militant CILIP to pass a vote of no confidence in him.

12. Arts Council England increasingly on stage

Or not, as the case may be, depending on what you think it should be doing. It is libraries' official quango, following the death of MLA (Museums, Libraries & Archives Council).

ACE been spending the £6 million the government gave it according to the brief it was given. This means that libraries up and down the country have benefited from projects with artists, museums, sculptures and such-like. Some are quite something.

On the other hand, such spending in times of austerity can lead to some pretty weird looking decisions. Step forward Bury, where ACE is helping to convert two-thirds of the ground floor of the Central Library into a sculpture centre ... and Bristol, where the council has decided to rent out a few floors of its Central Library to a free school.



■ Kensal Rise library, Brent, London: closed despite strong public protests.

Photo: Lily Jones, Friends of Kensal Rise Library

What sort of people are we?



There are not many good reasons for getting up at 6am on a Saturday morning to catch the early train from Cardiff to London, but speaking up for libraries is one of them. And somebody has to.

Because it seems that the minister with responsibility for libraries has disappeared. So much so, that I wondered whether he was still in post or whether he'd been reshuffled. To my surprise, when I looked through the list of ministerial responsibilities, I saw that he's still in the job.

Not minded...

His political epitaph will be 'not minded to intervene'. In a period in which the financial black hole facing councils is widening by £2.1 billion a year and will reach £14.4 billion by 2020.

In the last few years in libraries, we've seen:

- Thousands of jobs lost, with the associated expertise.
- Hundreds of libraries closed or taken out of public control.
- Staffing levels down in many of the libraries that remain, and redeployment of many staff to additional council duties in so-called 'hubs'.
- Cuts in opening hours.
- Depletion of the bookstock.

Many libraries are in a form of slow motion closure:

- by the hour,
- by the member of staff,
- by the book.

If that's not a crisis, I don't know what is.

But let's take a step back from that for a moment. The foundation of the library network is the local branch library ...

Human knowledge

My father first took me to Whitchurch Library when I was a kid, and I took my kids to it.

It's actually quite a small local branch, but when I was six or seven it felt very big and seemed to have millions of books. I can remember trying to work out how long it would take me to read all the books in there, because then I'd know everything there was to know. That didn't quite work out.

I didn't know then that the objective of the legendary library of Alexandria was to assemble

Cutting public funding for libraries is a political decision, not an economic one. And it opens up the whole question of what kind of society the politicians want – and whether we will accept it. So said Steve Davies, lecturer in social sciences, Cardiff University, at the Speak Up For Libraries conference in 2013.



the totality of all human knowledge. Even they failed.

So my little branch library 1,600 years later didn't have much chance. But in one sense I was right.

Because although it's a small library – especially compared to others like the Library of Congress, or the Hof Bibliotek Vienna or the new Library of Birmingham – it does have something in common with all of them.

Gates to the future

Whether large or small, all libraries are 'gates to the future', as Neil Gaiman said recently [see Campaigner, no 88]. They are also doors to different worlds in time and space, as Dr Who might say.

But the current programme of cuts and closures threatens to padlock these doors for good.

So how is this justified?

Usually it's by one or both of these arguments: first, we don't need libraries any more; second, we can't afford them.

You've all heard the argument – libraries are now outdated. Time's moved on. After all, we've had libraries of one form or another virtually since the invention of writing by the Sumerians in 3,500BC.

Once the Sumerians wrote things down, they needed to catalogue what they'd written. So they probably were the first librarians. They called their

cataloguers 'ordainers of the universe', which I think is quite snappy. If CILIP ever reopen the discussion on a new name, that would be my suggestion.

Anyway, we're told technology makes libraries redundant. Everyone can get whatever they want on the internet these days. Except that they can't.

Author Terry Deary may think we're all living in some internet-driven global village [see Campaigner, no 86]. But he's in danger of appearing as the global village idiot through his ignorance of the reality.

In the first place, there is still an enormous digital divide – 7m people have never used the internet (ONS). That's not the number without a good high speed connection. This is the number of adults in Britain who have never used the internet.

That number will most likely come down. But in fact, the internet makes libraries more relevant, not less.

Information

I'm a big fan of books, although I use digital as well. Personally I don't think we're seeing the end of books. But even if we are, that's missing the point about libraries, which are about accessing information in whatever format it is held.

We face an information glut today. A week's worth of the New York Times contains more information than a person was likely to come across in a lifetime

When we talk about library closures we're really talking about wider issues:

What sort of country do we want to live in?

What sort of society do we want?

What sort of people are we?

in the 18th century. This year, the world will generate more information than in the previous 5,000 years.

It's a jungle out there. We need help to navigate the jungle. Librarians are our essential guides.

But that's not all. It's also not true that we all have unlimited access to all parts of the internet.

Libraries are tackling these issues. For instance, public library users now have free access to subscription academic journals [see page 19].

Books

The Conservative party has also given us a good example of the fragility of internet access to information. They recently removed from the internet all those embarrassing pre-election speeches with pledges not to reorganise the NHS or cut SureStart or get rid of Education Maintenance Allowance etc. But thanks to data capture by the British Library, the Tories will be unable to erase their own history.

Finally, research by Berkeley University in the USA compared the effectiveness of librarians against search engines. It was librarians who came out on top.

Another argument is that everybody buys books. They're cheap and easily available to everyone.

Except that's also not the full picture (ask any parent whether they could keep up with their kids' reading by buying new books every week).

In any event, many people simply can't afford to buy books. For example, in Wales if you earn £30,000, you're in the top decile of earners. And that's probably true of large parts of the UK.

Austerity

Finally, buying books does not preclude borrowing books. And none of these arguments about the internet and cheap books touch on the full range of what libraries offer.

David Cameron's speech¹ in November at the Lord Mayor's Banquet at Guildhall, London, reversed all his previous assurances about temporary austerity. Instead, he said: 'We are sticking to the task. But that doesn't just mean making difficult decisions on public spending.

'It also means something more profound. It means building a leaner, more efficient state. We need to do more with less. Not just now, but permanently.'

This was David Cameron's Marie Antoinette moment. And it's relevant to the point about whether we can afford libraries in a time of austerity.

This operates at several levels. At local authority level, we sometimes hear the argument that if libraries stay open, other services have to close.

Super-libraries

But other questions can be asked:

How do some authorities find the money for new central super-libraries but say they are unable to support their branch networks?

Why do councils continue to spend millions on private sector consultancies?



Why has the public sector as a whole spent £4 billion in the last year on outsourcing contracts with just four firms, according to the National Audit Office?

And why do we continue with budgetary systems which operate in silos? Closing libraries incurs significant costs elsewhere in damage to local communities, literacy and so on. There needs to be a way of capturing and reflecting the realities of the positive social and economic impact of libraries.

Political

But the cuts to local authorities are very real. Ultimately, however 'efficient' a local council is, there are limits to what it can do. So David Cameron's Guildhall speech effectively conceded that the debate is not economic. It is political.

Why does this matter? Because it confirms that, however serious the crisis – and it is a serious crisis, brought about by the financial sector – there is always more than one response, more than one potential approach.

Is the government really saying that we cannot afford to run a public library service in the 21st century – despite the World Bank categorising the UK as the sixth richest country in the world?

Cuts

What is the answer from the government? They seem to be giving us three options:

The first option seems to be a general rundown of the system through cuts.

Staff cuts massively reduce overall numbers of staff as well as the % of professional librarians in the workforce (really a process of de-skilling).

Budget cuts reduce the quality and range of books and materials, and often involve moving out of a bespoke library into other council premises. Cuts in opening hours reduce access for the public.

Some councils and ministers seem to think that a couple of bookshelves in a box room at the back of a sports centre, or a self-service machine with a few hundred books in the local Tesco, is an adequate replacement for a branch library.

But, as Michael Rosen said: a library without a librarian is just a room with books

Libraries, library staff and library users have been through difficult times before. But even at the worst point of the Great Depression or World War II there was a sense of the possibility of a better tomorrow.

The growth and development of the library service may have slowed or even stalled in these periods of national catastrophe, but it never went backwards. That is not so today.

The second option the government is encouraging is for volunteers to take over the running of local branches under threat.

In my opinion this is the most dishonest policy of the lot. It wraps itself up in feelgood phrases about choice, civic involvement and the Big Society, while cynically dumping the responsibility for running the library in the lap of volunteers desperate to keep open a valued civic amenity.

I have a lot of respect for these volunteers. Often they are the most enthusiastic supporters of the local library. And many of them are well aware of the Hobson's choice with which they are presented.

Ed Vaizey says that volunteer-run libraries are 'a way of growing the library service, not replacing it', and 'an additional element of provision'.

This is a breath-taking piece of cynical politician-speak. In reality, the attraction for ministers and some councils is precisely that it is a replacement – and thought to be cheaper. And it has obvious potential problems of sustainability, funding, quality, fragmentation and staffing.

Can volunteers play a positive supporting role? Of course. But, as many of them have pointed out, this policy is rarely an example of an expansion of the capacity of civil society, still less an imaginative involvement of the community in improving services.

Usually it is a last-ditch attempt to keep open a service under threat. Most of those involved would prefer to retain a council-funded, professionally staffed resource.



The third option being pushed by government is privatisation.

We've seen an example of where that leads in Carillion's take-over of the libraries run by Laing. As though working from the script of a Christmas panto villain, Carillion have barely had time to change the nameplate on the library service contracts they've bought than they've announced redundancies.

There was no discussion with service users about whether they wanted a different private provider. And there has been not a single word of consultation about what impact redundancies will have on the level or quality of service.

The only imperative for a commercial company is the bottom line.

Carillion's timing is impeccable, with recent criticism of the outsourcing of public services by the Public Accounts Committee.

This followed closely on the publication of the National Audit Office's report² on outsourcing, with its damning list of problems, including:

- Lack of genuine competition
- Overlong and inflexible contracts
- Hidden costs
- Inadequate scrutiny.

They might have added:

- Lack of transparency (only public services must comply with Freedom of Information)
- Patchy performance.

The Financial Times recently put it very well, accusing private contractors of hitting the targets but missing the point of public service. This is not too surprising, because:

- Where you see a library user, they see a revenue stream.
- Where you see a library, they see a profit centre.
- Where you see free and open access to the culture of the written word, they see product and market share.

Tyrants

So where does this all leave us?

It's not an accident that every tyrant, tinpot dictator and autocratic government has been in favour of book-burning and censorship.

Neither is it any accident that every social group struggling for freedom has seen literacy as an essential tool of that struggle.

This was as true of the industrial working class in Britain as it was of the slaves of the southern states of America. In both cases, when the masters could not prevent the spread of literacy they tried to control what was read. Voltaire's satirical pamphlet about the 'horrible danger of reading' captures this.

Why? Because reading leads to reflection and reflection leads to action – a dangerous thing in the eyes of tyrants.

Sharing risk and sharing gains:

When George Osborne, the trust-funded son of a millionaire and future baronet, told the Conservative party conference that he would ensure the end of the 'something for nothing' society, I thought he was going to give up his inheritance.

But no – he wants us to give up our inheritance – the inheritance of a national public library service.

I'll take the Tories' claim for volunteer libraries a bit more seriously when they start visiting volunteer dentists when they've got a toothache, or when they call a volunteer plumber to fix their boiler.

Democracy

So it really shouldn't be any surprise that public libraries have always been associated with democracy, liberty, equality and justice.

They are a unique public space. They are an example of what William Morris called 'neighbourly common sense'.

They stand against the commodification of knowledge and for universal and equal access, on the basis of right rather than wealth.

They stand against censorship, and for the public's right to know. Most of all, they stand for the citizen – not the consumer.

And what of the future?

Can libraries do things better? Of course. Can libraries allocate resources more effectively? Almost certainly. Can libraries do more to involve local communities? Without doubt. But none of this points to the wrecking ball of the current programme of cuts and closures.

Shame

Every period in our history has its own particular lexicon of words. In the future, no doubt people will

look back at Britain in the early years of the 21st century with astonishment when they see that the contribution to English vocabulary of one of the world's richest countries was:

- Payday loans
- Bedroom tax
- Food banks

Our children and grandchildren will not forgive us if we allow 'library closures' to become part of that dictionary of shame.

So what can be done?

You have already begun to change things. The Welsh social theorist, Raymond Williams, spoke of the need to draw on 'resources of hope'.

The centre of gravity of the political debate changes one email, one protest, one conference at a time. But change it can, and change it will.

All over the country, library users and supporters are campaigning, as are branches of UNISON, community groups, branches of the Women's Institute and residents' organisations.

We need to encourage the closer collaboration of these different groups in different parts of the country and link up with others attempting to change the political weather, the political commonsense.

Public services

In a very rich country like the UK, what we spend money on is dominated by politics rather than economics. Whether we choose to spend billions on Trident or subsidising French and Chinese nuclear power companies, the HS2 rail link, foreign military intervention or on public services like public libraries are essentially political decisions.

In those circumstances, all politicians are vulnerable and all policies can be changed. Politicians make political decisions about costs. We need to ensure that they understand there are political costs to their political decisions.

By defending, extending and expanding the notion of – not just libraries – but PUBLIC libraries in the context of public service, we have already begun to change the terms of the debate, which is the first step to changing the reality.



This is a lightly edited transcript of the speech given by Steve Davies at the Speak Up For Libraries conference on 23rd November 2013.

NOTES

1. www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/nov/11/david-cameron-policy-shift-leaner-efficient-state?CMP=EMCSOCML657
2. www.nao.org.uk/report/memorandum-managing-governments-suppliers

Time to tough it out

The panel session covered a lot of ground. Most of it muddy. These are the main themes of the session. Conclusion no 1: the situation is truly grim. Conclusion no 2: one clear need came out – to get across the message that libraries are a vital, powerful resource for all. Cutting them does real damage. This account is by **Ian Anstice**, trimmed and split into topics by **Laura Swaffield**. Photos and video footage by **Trevor Craig**.

TOUGH TIMES

Heather ► The Local Government Association (LGA) recently reported there will be a £14.4 billion shortfall in funding by 2020.

So, these are difficult times. The latest poll shows more satisfaction with local services, but the same people think cuts will cause widespread social unrest.

Privatisation is a worrying development. UNISON sees it as a waste of public money – via scoping,

procurement, profits, fat salaries and a huge amount of fraud. Employment practices leave much to be desired.

Two-thirds of the population think rail, mail and energy should be nationalised.

Vinnon ► I had 37 years in local government. I feel for those who have followed on since I left. There is now the worst pressure and fatigue I can remember in local services. One authority is having half of its budget taken out. Some authorities may go to the wall.

The plan is for eternal austerity. It is nothing to do with the deficit. This is an ideological war on state provision. We need to mobilise people and speak up louder.

The answer is a new government.

Alan ► An advocacy argument in favour of libraries should be made to all parties in time for the next election.



ON THE PANEL



Brian Ashley
Director, Libraries
ACE (Arts Council England)



Phil Bradley
President, CILIP (Chartered
Institute of Library & Information
Professionals)



Janene Cox
President, SCL
(Society of Chief Librarians)



Vinnon Ezra
Libraries Adviser, DCMS
(Department for Culture,
Media & Sport)



Heather Wakefield
Head of Local Government, UNISON



Alan Gibbons
Author, Educationalist
& Campaign for the Book

'There won't be money even to commission services.'
Heather Wakefield

POLITICAL REALITY

Phil ► The current cuts have nothing to do with austerity; everything to do with political expediency. Government ideology is anti-thought. Vaizey [libraries minister] is doing what he is told to do.

But none of the parties are immune to criticism.

David Owen ► It's a political situation. We see what is coming but we're still going to be cut. Time and ideology is against us.

We make sensible arguments and have knowledge, but the government is continuing to cut no matter what. Commissioning authorities are growing, and some councils have staffing down to 200 as a target.

Heather ► It's worse than that. There won't be money even to commission services.

GO LOCAL

Phil ► Campaigning is not going to work on the national level. Vaizey is clearly not interested. Far better to look at the local situation and pressure local councillors.

Consider libraries in terms of services and activities, not artefacts.

We need to go out into the community, not stay in our building.

Promote the value of the library within a community. Libraries help with job seeking, legal issues, health, Universal Credits, information and resources. Stress their positive contribution.

Vinnon ► Leadership is important – well managed authorities tend to have thriving libraries. They should be seen as integral to a council.

Campaigns have been successful when they focus on what the libraries are doing, and working with them.

Janene Cox ► Most of us want health, wealth and to stay connected to friends and families. Libraries do that.

They provide access to business and jobs. They promote and generate community prosperity and memory. We have to think innovatively, act collaboratively and manage creatively. We cannot as heads of service just say: 'Leave libraries alone!'

We need to advocate. The Universal Offers provide a framework to do that – ensuring



'I've been at meetings where some councillors make jokes about libraries and do not think they are useful except for bookworms and eccentrics.'

Heather Wakefield

authorities have the Offers embedded in them. Engaging key people is essential.

Phil > Libraries are based on their communities. An attack on a library is an attack on the community. Why should we vote for you if you're not supporting libraries?

CHANGE IS INEVITABLE

Brian > Libraries speak to people in different ways and their reach is wide.

New tech and rising expectations are driving change in libraries ...

Leaving aside substantial financial pressures, successful services remodel, redesign and reposition. Strategies and solutions have to be developed in local context, and the council will decide. What works in one place may not work in another. Don't knock people trying to find new ways of doing things.

Janene > The future will be different and challenging. There is huge need in communities for libraries to respond to. Hold on to underpinning values. Literacy, reading, learning.

We need to be flexible enough to meet changes. We also need to be ambitious and positive about the future.

What can a public library be? They must reflect community need, physical or virtual.

Peter Richardson > The difference between being statutory and the national decision not to be minded to implement it is worrying.

Yinnon > One council argued that a comprehensive and efficient service could be provided by just one library. There is a difference seen in councils' thinking between 'hard' and soft statutory services.

Libraries are seen as 'soft'. But there is no clear interpretation.

Phil > We cannot rely on this, as it can go really quickly by Act of Parliament. If it costs you money to use a computer is it comprehensive? It should be free.

Heather > Courts are very loth to intervene on political decisions, so the statutory defence is questionable.

'There is a difference seen in councils between 'hard' and soft statutory services. Libraries are a 'soft' statutory service'

Yinnon Ezra

CHILDREN ARE THE KEY

Julie Boston > Book provision is important. Every child should be registered with the library.

Janene > Children's books are hugely important. They are the area of biggest growth. Children's figures are holding up well, especially the Summer Reading Challenge.

It shows we need to invest and ensure children grow into library users. What happens is that their usage often falls away when they get older.

Alan > What about closures and loss of children's librarians?

Phil > If you want a literate and intelligent society then every school should have a library.

Julie > Money spent on SATS examinations could be spent on libraries instead.

MAKE THE CASE

Brian > 'Common sense is a very uncommon thing' is a well known quote.

Making the point is not sufficient. Find the right people to convince the decision makers ... This can be done in many ways ... megaphone, petition, quiet conversation, meeting. Keep plugging away and don't give up.

Janene > Positive messages are important.

Phil > We don't live in a sane society any longer. Politicians are thinking solely in terms of money. We



need to prove libraries make money. Talk to the people who talk to the people who make decisions. Librarians should go to local businesses, show how they save money and say: 'By the way we're about to be cut.' Businesses can then go to politicians.

MONEY

Ann Smith > We need better joint negotiation to purchase items ... a national body to negotiate on behalf of libraries?

Yinnon > Tell the council what libraries can do - eg, if it cannot afford children's centres, put them in the local library. Get people to share resources and have IT that talks to each other. There's no reason why smaller unitary councils can't share things.

There is so much libraries do for other people but we don't get funding from them ... We should.

Janene > We should look at the library footprint in the local community. Co-locate or relocate? Is the infrastructure still relevant?

MARKETING

Jo Bromley > Lobby politicians and promote positive messages. Take the public with us. Many people don't use libraries. Challenge the traditional view of what libraries are.

People don't know what we do now, and they didn't 40 years ago. We need people using libraries. What's the single message to engage people to use libraries?

Yinnon > We need strong marketing. Say who is using the service, who isn't and find ways to get to those who aren't. It's a relentless process.

Do it again, improve the message, do it again. New audiences then appear.

'The private sector is really good at competing and not so good in delivering. It is a Trojan horse'

Unison member



A STATUTORY SERVICE ...?

Steve Manley, UNISON Derbyshire > The 1964 Act's definition of 'comprehensive' has been recently decided in court to include computers and e-lending.

Heather ► Have conversations with non-users. Ask them what they want.

Phil ► A hospital is not about beds. Same with libraries. Push the idea that it's the activities, new things.

Janene ► Stress the difference libraries make to the lives of the community. Get people saying how fantastic their experience is of using libraries. We need more advocates.

Brian ► Get a clear positive message that can be shared. Convey the same message, but be aware how the message can be seen or misused by others.

We're not going to have the funds of big companies to advertise. Harness people instead.



CONSULTATION

Yinnon ► The Wirral report showed it is important to have proper processes to consult ... Councils need to be open and honest about what is being proposed. Ideas can sometimes come out of the blue from the council leader and not be properly considered.

Alan ► Lincolnshire council was a brick wall when I was in a radio debate with them, and the consultation was a total figleaf. 5,000 people on a demo was called 'paltry' by a councillor. That's not democratic.

Trevor Craig ► DCMS gives the impression it is sitting on its hands.

Yinnon ► The best way to survey people is to get someone independent to do it. Lincolnshire used a corrupted sample by asking only those interested. You need to sample across the whole piece. Ipsos/MORI have the science. You need to list options and survey honestly. It costs money but is worth it. You need to profile every library, using objective research.

Brian ► There's no one blueprint. Critical factor is the attitude. Honest? Transparent? It's very rare to have no restrictions on funds. Councils need to be upfront about that.

Elizabeth ► 20,000 people responded in Croydon. I was criticised for trying to 'skew the result' by

*'It's
a political situation.
We see what is coming
but we're still going to be
cut. Time and ideology is
against us.'*

David Owen

handing the survey out. There were not enough copies. And the council ignored the results. It was shambolic.

Gary Green ► I got this from Twitter just now: 'Dear DCMS what if local politicians don't attend? Don't respond? Or laugh over you when you read your statement?'

Diana Edmonds ► I know one authority where large libraries had a quota to fill questionnaires as much as possible. Smaller libraries had been told there was a shortage and the public had to ask for one, which was then brought from out the back.

No publicity was given.

Brian ► You need open consultation and honest open description of what cuts / options there are. However, cuts do have to be made and they're not always comfortable.

Heather ► I've been at meetings where some councillors make jokes about libraries and do not think they are useful except for bookworms and eccentrics.

PRIVATISATION

Alan Wylie ► We see dogmatic pressing of the case for free schools, academies, where malpractice and fraud are now being discovered. This is what we will see in the public library service.

Yinnon ► The commissioning model comes up all the time in my conversations with councils.

Phil ► It's wrong. Libraries are not there to make money. Libraries are there to help people and get them on their feet.

If people stand between library and community then there is a disconnect. Libraries only work well if they listen to the public and not to money.

Unison member ► Privatisation is always a bad idea. They all depend on profit. Staff terms and



conditions get cut. Trusts and mutuals and co-ops are so fluffy! The government says a co-op can be eight people out of 200. That's not a co-op.

It means when the incubation period is over, the new co-operative will have to compete with the private sector, which is really good at competing. Not so good in delivering. It is a Trojan horse.

WE NEED TO KNOW...

Trevor Craig, Oxfordshire ► Will there be research into what models work? Will anyone research if volunteer libraries actually save money?

Phil ► Ministers don't care that libraries are a 'good thing', so we need to make a strong economic case.

Brian ► In Coventry, I remember years ago Debenhams would only relocate if it was next to the library as it would ensure footfall.

We're looking very seriously about research on economic impact of libraries but this is not a firm commitment yet. We need a model of the economic impact of libraries in terms of learning etc.

ACE says there is a clear and compelling case and a continuing need for a publicly funded library service. They need to be free and for all.

ACE may do research in the future as to effectiveness of different models in libraries.

*'We
don't live in a sane
society any longer.'*

Phil Bradley

MORE FROM SUFL: Video of the rousing and entertaining opening speech by Steve Davies:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLr4cPx_PHg

Photos from the day:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/45448934@N06/sets/72157637980924425>

Ian's full report of the panel session, with useful links to follow up the background:
<http://tinyurl.com/p2bn9dp>

Video of the panel session:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NeB4a8oi9ml>

How can they let it decay?

The government doesn't care about libraries. The minister does nothing. It's political, said Alan Gibbons at the 2013 Speak up for Libraries conference.

The culture of reading is being driven into crisis in the UK – and it is being done for ideological, political reasons.

That's right: the lands that produced Shakespeare and Dickens, the Brontes and Hardy, Shelley and Burns, Heaney and Blake, have a problem with reading.

It is not a problem with everyone, of course. There is a huge reading culture in the UK. It is a golden age of children's literature, for example.

Let me tell you about two events I have been engaged in recently. The first was the Oxford Read-a-Thon run by a local teacher, Anne Wattam.

We had no idea who would turn up for storytelling, literary trails and activities, all guided by local people dressed as literary characters.

Well, 1,800 people turned up. Local MP (and libraries minister) Ed Vaizey didn't look terribly interested. So I said to him: 'Ed, this is the real Big Society.'

Then there was the Bootle Children's Literature Festival. Local charity YKids raised about £20,000 to send nine authors into local schools and then stage two events, each attended by 200 children. The kids did three writing workshops. There was not one instance of bad behaviour.

With a bit of effort, these events could be replicated across the country. Sadly, there is no appetite from the government for such inspirational work. In spite of all these good experiences, a substantial minority of non-readers drags the UK down in all kinds of literacy rankings.

Whatever our reservations about the methodology of these things, there is a problem. While most kids do read – and kids grow into adults – there is a

CHILDREN NEED LIBRARIES

Several influential surveys say:

- One in six children don't read a book in a month.
- Four million children do not have a book at home.

significant minority who don't access education and the love of reading.

There is an obvious solution to this problem. It is called A LIBRARY.



Libraries are popular, with high approval ratings from the public – much higher than for the journalists and politicians who bemoan low levels of literacy, while doing very little to turn things around.

A campaign to advertise what is there seems the obvious conclusion. But that requires leadership. It requires vision.

Libraries could be interventionist, drawing in new members. The UK would read better and do better

in education. That would start to address our problem.

Public libraries are enshrined in law. The Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964 puts a duty on the Secretary of State to provide a "comprehensive and efficient" and "improving" service. That's right: the word isn't "decaying" or "decomposing". It is "improving"!

The public library service does a good job when it is not being hacked to pieces by government neglect and misleadership.

The service could be made more effective. It is fairly easily reformable. Where there are bureaucratic failings, they could be addressed.

It does not need private expertise (especially when the branding changes by the minute), though it can always learn from new ideas and shouldn't be adverse to change.

Private providers are nibbling round the edge of the service. If somebody could prove they could make libraries qualitatively better – great. I have seen no such evidence. Events in Croydon around the management of Carillion tell me that well-run public services are the way to go.

What matters is what is best for the reading public.

The libraries of the future are taking shape at this very moment. It is great to see the new city centre libraries in Birmingham, Liverpool, Newcastle, Manchester.

But, given Cameron's call for permanent austerity, they may be the end of a chapter rather than the start of a new one.

What's more, it is the branch network that really matters. Half the library users at a library that is closed do not move to the next one. This is very bad for the young and old, who use the service most heavily, and have least access to transport.

We need the "comprehensive and efficient" service enshrined in the 1964 Act. It wouldn't take much to have a thriving library service – the envy of the world.

I was in Canada recently. The librarians kept saying that they used to see the UK as a shining beacon. They wondered how our politicians could be so stupid as to let it decay.

We could have a three-pronged service: an excellent public library service, statutory school libraries staffed by full-time, trained librarians and a school library service, providing a range of books and other resources, advice and expertise.

Our school librarians do a brilliant job, knowing the interests of all the students who come through the door.

THE MINISTER SAID...

Ed Vaizey said one thing in opposition but is doing something entirely different in office. He said: "A library without books – lots of books – is not a library."

"Andy Burnham's [Labour Secretary of State] refusal to take action in the Wirral effectively renders the 1964 Act meaningless. While it is local authorities' responsibility to provide libraries, the Act very clearly lays responsibility for ensuring a good service at the culture secretary's door.

"If Andy Burnham is not prepared to intervene when library provision is slashed in a local authority such as the Wirral, it is clear that he is ignoring his responsibilities as Secretary of State, which in the process renders any sense of libraries being a statutory requirement for local authorities meaningless."

LIBRARIES WORK

There is a mountain of evidence. Here is a bit of it:

- The National Literacy Trust study of 17,089 pupils aged 8 to 16 (rather bigger than Education Secretary Mr Gove's Premier Travel Inn ones) finds that young people who use their public library are nearly twice as likely to be above average readers than peers who don't visit their library. You might say: "Well, d'uh."
- Nearly half (44%) of the 8-16-year-olds surveyed use their public library.
- Library users are more than twice as likely to read outside of class every day (47% vs. 22%)
- 7-11s are nearly three times more likely to use the library than 14-16s (63% vs 25%)
- Over a third (38%) of young people who use the library believe it will help them to do better at school.
- The most common reasons children cited for not going to the library were that their family does not go (52%) and that their friends do not go (40%).

I sent a 7,000-signature petition to Michael Gove and asked him to make school libraries statutory. He replied that he can't tell head teachers what to do.

But he can tell them how high the school fence is, whether they should have academy status, what the curriculum should be ... On the most important issue of all, the right to read, he can't say a thing. What gross abdication!

Libraries are cheap. The entire public library service costs less than £1bn, small beer in the budget of the sixth richest country in the world.

School libraries are similar value for money. Imagine the cost of crime, disaffection and poor skills incurred by those who have not acquired the ability to read well and secure employment.

That is the good news. An excellent library service is within our reach. Most of the elements of one were in place ... until recently.

The bad news is that the culture minister, Ed Vaizey, possesses two qualities: the strategic vision of Mr Magoo, and the noblesse oblige of a slum landlord. He richly deserved the no confidence vote passed by the professional librarians' body, CILIP.

It is not true there is "no money". It has been there for free schools and academies, weekly bin collections and Trident.

Libraries appear to be being hit disproportionately, especially in the north. Here,

Labour councils have not acquitted themselves well, passing on coalition cuts.

We have hundreds fewer libraries and 12% fewer staff running them. Opening hours are slashed. Book stocks are cut.

If people think cuts are necessary, why was the recovery delayed by two years by Osborne's "austerity"? Why is the deficit, after three years of the coalition, higher than in 12 years of Labour?

Some people think cuts are necessary. I do not. I think austerity is the great con.

And oh, what irony: Cameron promised eternal austerity and an attack on the state from a golden pulpit at the Lord Mayor's banquet, while wolfing pheasant and quail, and quaffing champagne!

Even if you believe cuts are necessary (and I do not), why will the government not even look at measures that might soften their impact?

Why does it not examine why some areas are cutting few or no libraries, while others slash with relish?

I think it is simple. For ideological reasons, it does not give a damn about public service.

Instead of fighting tooth and claw in difficult conditions to preserve our libraries, the government's website openly promotes volunteer libraries. The Department for Education refuses to protect school libraries. School library services are closing.

The Parliamentary select committee declared the leadership of the public library service "woeful" in 2005. It has got progressively worse since.

It does not have to be this way.

Saving libraries would be relatively cheap, even in these straitened times. It needs vision. It needs leadership.

I will say that again. However much we argue for measures to mediate the cuts, the key question is leadership. It is not coming from Ed Vaizey.

He has no strategic vision for the public library service. He refuses to intervene, no matter how destructive the closure programmes of councils. He refuses to fulfil his duty to superintend the service.

He permits the hollowing out of the service through job cuts, closures, reduced opening hours

and falling book stocks. He uses the gov.uk website to carry propaganda for volunteer libraries.

I would accuse him of being useless, but he has already admitted that himself! Most of all, I accuse him of lack of empathy, of enjoying the benefits of literature and learning while allowing those benefits to be denied to those who did not have his luck in being born to wealth.

There are two wings of our campaign: the protest wing and the persuasion wing. We both face problems. Both wings win the argument with our opponents, but libraries continue to close because a government, deaf to our pleas, plunges them into crisis.

The protest wing has organised fantastic protests, but decades of defeats mean many don't think they can win.

The persuasion wing sounds plausible, but government is not interested.

DAFT DEARY

Author Terry Deary thinks we should close libraries and spend £3bn giving 7m poor people who don't have internet access a Kindle each [see Campaigner, no 86, page 20]. This is to save money!!!!

I don't mind taking on opponents of libraries. But when an author, who should be a friend, stabs the rest of us in the back, I feel it acutely as a form of betrayal.

This is no time to shrug, no time to become pessimistic and think change is not possible. Nobody can predict when the mood will change.

Next year could be more challenging than this.

We have no choice but to maintain the coalition of persuasion and protest, and discuss differences in a cordial manner.

We do not yet have the libraries we need, of course – but we will not get them if we allow the libraries we have to close.

However hard, however unrewarding at times, however often we are stabbed in the back by people who should know better, we have to continue to fight for our libraries.

LOOK ABROAD

- Finland's penetration of rural and mobile libraries is excellent.
- New Zealand has a coherent library plan.
- South Korea (the most internet-connected country in the world) has built 180 new libraries.
- The number of libraries in Japan is now the highest ever, up 3.4% from the last survey, with 11.3% more library workers.

All these countries have had to survive challenging economic circumstances, but there has been rather more will to improve the service than there is here in the UK.

LIBRARIES NEED

- longer opening hours
- refurbished buildings
- book borrowing, physical and digital, at their core
- an educational remit
- cultural activities
- a social space in the community
- ICT and homework support
- 'here to help you' staff, meeting and greeting the public.



A year ago, there were just a handful of 'volunteer' libraries – with very little known about how to make them work. We still don't know. But the trickle has become an uncontrolled torrent – with libraries minister Ed Vaizey actively cheering it on.

The unwanted new public library inquiry (see page 3) does have one virtue. It will examine 'the role of community libraries'. We assume this really means 'volunteer' libraries'. We hope so. A look at them is desperately needed.

We thought it might be provided way back in January 2013 by 'Learning from Experience', the promised report from ACE (Arts Council England). It was so superficial and uncritical that it sank under a storm of criticism (see Campaigner, issue 86, Spring 2013, p.13). Time wasted.

As the year progressed, more and more local authorities began to see dumping libraries on to 'volunteers' as the No. 1 way to make savings.

The Library Campaign regularly tried to get some sense out of Ed, the libraries minister (see Campaigner, issue 87, Summer 2013, p.14). Nothing. Nada.

Instead, we found an amazing appeal on the official government website – to all and sundry – to 'run a library' just for fun (see Campaigner, issue 88, Autumn 2013, p.4).

We wrote again. Finally we got an answer.²

In summary, Ed said that he isn't really pushing people to run libraries in preference to having them

properly run by professionals. Oh no. (It just looks as if he is.)

And that lots of different agencies are responsible for sorting out all the problems of volunteer libraries. Just not the libraries minister.

Then, in January, the final insult. Ed got himself quoted in the Telegraph, burlbling that 'it was prohibitively expensive for councils to set up libraries, and [he] urged communities to take matters into their own hands and set up their own libraries' ...

And much more of the same. From indifference and inaction, Ed has moved into full-flood attack.

So we need that inquiry to look into this whole mess. And to look at what Ed should be doing, too.

NOTES

1. All proper, council-run, professionally-staffed libraries are 'community libraries'!
2. www.librarycampaign.com/librarycampaign/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/11.13-letter-from-ed.pdf
3. www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/10549932/Is-the-Big-Society-finally-here-Big-surge-in-volunteers-helping-out-at-libraries.html

VOLUNTARY? REALLY?

SaveLincsLibraries are fighting a fantastic battle to save over 30 libraries threatened with the run-it-or-lose-it dilemma. As we go to press, they are just starting a judicial review procedure.

The group's website is a great read. In particular, we recommend the section* where they have invited local people to say whether they 'welcomed' the chance to run their local library – or felt forced to do so.

*<http://savelincslibraries.org.uk/2014/02/10/community-groups-give-real-reason-for-saving-libraries/>



THE VOLUNTEER DILEMMA

Mike Chaney fears that people – like him – who volunteer to save libraries are being used as 'evidence' that these libraries are a good idea.

We who run or support 'community libraries' are in the classic 'catch 22' situation.

A year ago my village library was faced with this ultimatum: either run your library yourselves or we'll close it.

Naturally the pensioners of the village buckled to and kept the show on the road. We weren't brilliant at it compared to the dedicated soul who for the last 20 years had looked after the quirky needs of the halt and the lame. But we made a go of it.

Our very success is now the excuse the library authority (Dorset County Council) needs to tell its citizens that community libraries are such a success that we must have more of them.

Thus, through our efforts, more library professionals will be shown the door – and the library users of Dorset will be offered a cheap alternative to a proper, necessary service.

Should we have let our library close? It is difficult in such an under-populated area, with such poor public transport, to accept that we were wrong.

But it is galling to realise that our efforts will now inevitably lead to more communities being offered the same shotgun choice.

It seems equally inevitable that William Sieghart's panel of worthies can come to any other conclusion than that library authorities must cut their coat according to the totally inadequate cloth they are being offered.

The public library service will be diminished – and the evasive Vaizey will have a report that he can wave at us to justify his and Pickles's departments' parsimony.

The inquiry will enable us to ventilate our frustration But it will change nothing.

READ ALL ABOUT IT

You can look at back issues of this magazine on our website: www.librarycampaign.com

MEMBERS GET A COPY OF EVERY ISSUE OF THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGNER AS IT IS PUBLISHED.

Volunteer libraries in the real world

Hazel Robinson, Chair of Friends of Charmouth Library, Dorset,
on some real issues underlying the idea of 'community-run libraries'

It seems that Arts Council England (ACE) is little more than a cut-price version of the defunct MLA (Museums, Libraries & Archives Council).

Its only remit, it seems, is to trot out platitudes, and rubber-stamp the decisions of local authorities so that the Minister remains apparently justified in maintaining the 'hands off' approach which even judicial reviews cannot, it seems, disturb.

We hear that the Minister has no intention, ever, of forming any sort of nationwide library policy group. It would contravene the notion of localism.

We could suggest that it is possible to follow this priority even more closely, by adopting the approach of the Borough of Hillingdon. This has successfully devolved responsibility for budgets and policy to individual library managers, who work face-on with their library users and can be completely reactive to what is required by them.

Hillingdon's libraries remain under local authority control and are statutory. It seems to be working very well. Now that really is local. Maybe ACE might like to investigate further and promote this model throughout the country.

Deep pit of ignorance

As far as ACE is concerned, The Library Campaign is taking the pragmatic stance that the best we can hope for is that ACE provides more support and information to the small groups being forced to set up 'community libraries'.

We can hope that this will not be just another exercise by civil servants who have no notion of what it is actually like to face the scarily deep pit of ignorance that those of us running community libraries have stared down when we first began.

Having such a source of information would be very helpful – even as a checklist to those of us who are already set up as community funded and run.

The other side of this is to get local authorities to sign up at least to a minimum amount of provision.

In Dorset, our eight community funded and staffed libraries are provided with self-serve machines, library management system, circulation of books, public-access computers with back-up and three hours' professional assistance a week.

We have all this from the county. Any library without these basics would find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to provide any sort of competent library service.

Locally, in our seaside village of Charmouth, we have improved, refurbished and renewed the building from our funds and organised social activities which

have never before been on offer. There is more of a feeling of community involvement.

Possibly all of this is, in itself, good. I certainly hope so, because **what we are definitely not is a proper professional library with informed staff and a priority perspective on the core values proposed by ACE.**

Education – how? Culture – what? All fine aspirations, which there is no chance of delivering with 40-odd volunteers trying to puzzle out how to process a book when the self-service machine trips out yet again, or someone needs help on the public computers, or Mrs B wants to tell them all about her grandchildren.

And, despite all efforts, book issue figures continue to descend alarmingly.

How much money saved?

The overriding question is: 'How much money has this saved?'

With all the library service time that has gone into training volunteers, rejigging computer systems to cover data protection issues, providing volunteer manuals, negotiating agreements, early retirement payments and so on, set against the savings (only a few inexpensive hours of part-time staff), the answer seems to be ... none.

So, what was the hidden agenda which meant that no other proposed solution to cost-saving would ever be contemplated by officers?

It appears that there was an overriding directive that each department had to reduce their property holdings by 25%. Who can fight that? No matter what sensible alternatives were proposed, they did not include disposing of properties.

All suggestions were irrelevant. Although the libraries department continues to deny it was a priority, it was obliged to rid itself of those properties



and hive them off to their communities (or sell them).

Of course, had campaigners known that this was the real issue, there just might have been other propositions.

This will not, perhaps, be the situation with every authority. But our advice would be to look at the overarching priorities – not only on the immediate battle to keep the local library. It may not be possible to find a strategy to combat those overarching priorities ... but it may.

All this is, of course, ignoring the whole party politics aspect of any authority's decision-making – let alone the way officers seem to be masters of the dark art of fulfilling their own agendas by bamboozling councillors.

It is too late for us. Our library is community staffed and funded.

We are doing our best to enhance services by becoming the local tourist information point. We are installing an internet cafe, thanks to the Big Lottery Fund, as well as a small retail area for locally-produced goods. We hire out the place. We have to survive financially.

Like so many others, ours will be not so much be a library but that cliché, a 'community hub' which just happens to have a book-borrowing service.

What a pity.



■ Charmouth Library, Dorset

Librarian incognito...

Almost nothing is known about how 'volunteer' libraries can be made to work. But one thing to emerge is that they cannot survive without support from professional librarians. Here we print the painful experience of one librarian brought in to 'support' volunteers. It doesn't happen everywhere. But watch out ...

My feelings about community run libraries are very conflicted. I am in favour of saving a library at any cost. I don't believe any should be closed.

Libraries are an important part of a community, offering free access to resources and activities to further lifelong learning. A space where communities can come together.

At the same time I feel strongly that volunteer-run libraries are not the solution.

I have worked in both public-run libraries and volunteer-run libraries. Volunteer-run libraries are not the same as public-run libraries. They simply don't function in the same way, and cannot offer the same service.

There are two reasons: lack of professional direction from qualified librarians, and conflicting interests in the volunteers.

When doing my degree to become a librarian and during my years working for the council, I learned how a public library needs to be inclusive, offering free resources and a safe haven to those often excluded by society.

This is achieved through community engagement and outreach programmes. I believe this is one of our most important roles.

Sadly, I discovered that this was not the priority of the volunteer-run library.

Quite simply, those who got involved as volunteers were the people the library ended up catering to. Many were retired and weren't really interested in catering for children or teenagers.

This was also reflected in the stock. The new books purchased were those that interested that specific group of volunteers, with other areas of stock often suffering.

Volunteer-run libraries work well in that they have more time to dedicate to activities and events. These

The writer says...



I feel passionately that I want to speak out about my experience but am frightened to identify myself. Whilst working in a volunteer-run library, my colleagues from council libraries were not very supportive. I have since left the volunteer library, feeling very disillusioned about my profession. I don't want to come across as bitter. I just want to honestly share my experiences of what it's like in a volunteer library – the things that work, and the things that can go horribly wrong.

The Library Campaign has, of course, checked this person's details.

are a great way to raise funds to run the library. But my experience is that there is a fine line between running library events and hiring out the space as just another hall for hire...

The biggest problem with volunteer-run libraries is ultimately that these are untrained volunteers. As a retired librarian I wouldn't feel comfortable walking



into a bank and volunteering to be the bank manager, yet it's acceptable for a retired bank manager to walk into a volunteer library and take on the role of a librarian.

The librarian does so much more than just stamp books. I had to study at university to become a qualified librarian.

We can teach volunteers the basics, but they will never be able to offer the same service as a knowledgeable librarian.

During my time at the volunteer library I had to catalogue the entire stock, a task that anyone without library knowledge would find very difficult.

Many times I worked behind the counter and watched as volunteers were unable to answer library users' queries and had to direct them to the nearest public library instead.

Volunteers are very good at discussing basic building procedures and organising events. But when it comes to the nitty gritty of library work, that's where they struggle and often don't bother at all.

The thing I found the most frustrating was the management and set-up. Volunteers can have very conflicting ideas. My experience was that, often, decisions took for ever.

The infighting, bickering, and Chinese whispers were horrendous. I have spoken to at least three other librarians who have all worked in volunteer libraries. All of them said the same.

My, and their, experience was ignored and belittled. It is the most frustrating thing in the world to be told by a group of people with no library experience that your knowledge through experience is wrong.

I can't tell you how many times I heard the phrase 'but that's a public library, we're running a community library'. I found this very frustrating. Surely the basic fundamentals should be the same. I heard this on such a regular basis that I started to question my own knowledge.

Ultimately, working in a volunteer library made me feel degraded, used and belittled. I've come out of it feeling quite dejected and questioning whether my profession still exists.

I taught others how to 'become librarians' for free, training them how to ultimately replace me. I feel very dismayed that I studied hard at university for a profession that is disappearing.

INVOLUNTARY ACT

by Laura Swaffield

'Volunteer' libraries began pretty much by accident. When rural counties such as Bucks tried to close local libraries, they met – surprise, surprise! – a wall of fury. The protestors refused to back down. 'Volunteer' libraries emerged, painfully, as a compromise solution.

Experience shows that such libraries can succeed only with a lot of support from the library service. Even so, it helps a lot to be in an affluent area, with plenty of retired professionals around. So – not a universal, sustainable solution. Not really a library, either. And the only savings come from sacking a few part-time, low-paid staff.

We expect a flood of such plans when 2013–14 budgets are announced in late February.

On the right lines with volunteers?

Librarian **Ian Stringer** takes a sideways look at the current trend to dump public libraries on to volunteers – and sees some hope at the end of the tunnel!



In the 1960s my family faced a crisis. My dad was made redundant. He was a railway signalman and his line had been closed by the government. They believed that railways were old-fashioned, and that no-one needed them any more.

Move forward 40 years ... My family faced a crisis. I was made redundant. I was a librarian, and my library had been cut back by the government. They believed that libraries were old-fashioned, and that no-one needed them any more.

Now look again at railways. All over the world they are booming. Usage in the UK is up. Lines are being reopened all over. This rather suggests that the government was badly out of touch with reality.

In the 1960s many stations became unstaffed, but the service hung on. The extreme example is probably Wakefield Kirkgate. It clung on to life with one service (Leeds-Sheffield) and another (Wakefield-Huddersfield) due for closure. It became unstaffed.

But gradually times changed. First the Huddersfield line was saved. Then came new services to Castleford, Pontefract and Nottingham. Then, two years ago, direct trains to London. All this time it remained unstaffed. Its usage is about 500,000 passengers per year.

Finally this last year it has had a revamp. Now it has staff again.

Another railway phenomenon is the heritage railway. When railways were closed, many people were affected. Some of them decided to do something. They took over old branch lines and tried to restart a service. Some of them have done remarkably well. Much of their success is from their use of volunteers.

So what can libraries learn from this?

- Believe that libraries are A GOOD THING. Just because the powers that be shut your service doesn't mean it is no good, or it's not needed, or it's old-fashioned.
- Don't always believe the government. They may have a different agenda. (There is more than a suspicion that Minister of Transport Ernest Marples, who appointed Dr Beeching, had a vested interest in railway closures. He ran a road haulage firm and a scrap metal company.)
- Hang in there. Look at Wakefield station!
- Seize the moment. We need action now.
- Use volunteers.

Use volunteers? I have mixed feelings here. I basically disagree with the principle. But I feel we can't bury our heads in the sand. Like it or not, many librarians are being forced to use volunteers.

Bearing this in mind, I looked outside the box.

My son is a railway engineer and a volunteer on the Severn Valley Steam Railway (SVR). Like a branch library, this was closed by a thoughtless government. The locals didn't like that, so they volunteered to keep it running.

They have spent the last 40 years doing just that. It's a tremendous success. What's really relevant is that they have done so well that now they need about 150 paid staff, many of them professionals.

I felt this was so significant that I ran a course for librarians on using volunteers. It took place on the SVR and used their staff. They told it straight.

They have stringent H&S rules for volunteers and strict timetabling requirements. They run their own training courses, and all staff have to be thoroughly

trained. The course got the best feedback I had ever had.

If you must use volunteers, why must they be in place of librarians? SVR volunteers clean stations, carriages and toilets. They mend windows, do plumbing and repair roofs. The heritage steam railways use volunteers in their legal process.

THIS IS A BIG MESSAGE. VOLUNTEERS SHOULD NOT REPLACE LIBRARY STAFF.

More money is spent on cleaning, repairs, maintenance etc. in libraries than on staff or books. This is where we should use volunteers. There is far more money to be saved by using a volunteer solicitor or accountant than by cutting counter staff.

A library is a library because of the skilled library staff, not because of the cleaners, plumbers, and accountants. Pubs have cleaners, accountants and plumbers – but they are not libraries.

I do library talks to the Women's Institute, church groups, Rotary clubs etc. When I was at Armthorpe, near Doncaster, I found that the locals had volunteered to run their library. When I said I was against the principle of volunteers taking over library jobs, they all agreed.

Their argument, however, was that they took over a library only after it was closed. They never offered before it closed.

And they felt they were there only in a holding role. If they took over the library building, it would stay in existence and not be demolished. Then, when better times come, there will be still a branch in the village.

So should we librarians see this not as someone taking our jobs, but as the first stage of a recovery – like Wakefield Kirkgate?

The right to e-read

Unless European copyright law changes, libraries will not be able to lend a decent range of e-books, says Guy Daines, Head of Policy at CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals). The campaign starts now!

Almost all public libraries now lend e-books. Have you tried to borrow one lately? If you have, you will have been astonished that libraries are unable to provide most current titles as e-books.

The simple fact is that many publishers refuse to 'sell' e-books to libraries – or demand unacceptably high prices and terms of use.

They can do this because under European copyright law the printed book is regarded as a commodity (which can be purchased and sold on – or lent – to others). But e-books are regarded as a service (access to the content has to be licensed and usage to comply with the terms of that licence).

There are cases within the European courts challenging this interpretation of copyright law, but this may take a long time to resolve.

However, the impact on public libraries is not difficult to determine. E-books now account for at least 13% of the book market. A survey by Shelf Free in early 2013 showed that 85% of e-book titles could not be purchased by public libraries and made available to users.

The danger is that publishers will determine what libraries can stock. As the penetration of e-books grows, so the mission of libraries to provide access to the world of knowledge and imagination will be compromised.

In fairness, the UK government has not been inactive on this issue. It commissioned the Sieghart Inquiry into E-lending [see Campaigner, no 87, p.19].

Now a number of pilots are taking place, overseen by the Publishers' Association and the Society of Chief Librarians, testing out various licensing models for the lending of e-books by public libraries.

Hopefully the pilots will help allay the fears of many publishers that the lending of e-books by public libraries will undermine their market, as no one will want to buy e-books. But licences are voluntary in nature, so publishers will still have the choice of not granting them to libraries.

CILIP, along with similar professional bodies across Europe, believes that this situation is unacceptable.

So the 'Right to E-Read' campaign has been launched. As well as generally raising awareness of the issue, the campaign seeks to get the existing European copyright legislation changed so that libraries will have a statutory right to lend e-books.

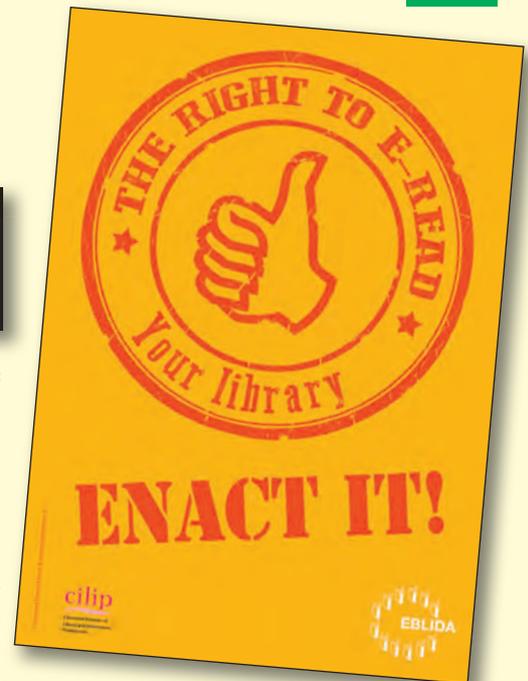
As the EU already plans to review copyright law this year, this is the right time to campaign on the issue.

Over March and April, CILIP will be contacting all UK MEPs to press them to support the necessary changes in EU copyright law.

Similarly, we will be contacting all MPs and relevant Lords, members of the Assemblies and Parliaments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and leaders of local councils. We will be asking them to lobby the EU Commission and the European Parliament.

As 23 April is the UN World Book and Copyright Day, we will be joining with other library associations across Europe in issuing a public statement urging the relevant changes to be made to EU copyright law.

The European elections in May provide another opportunity to lobby candidates and then the members of the new European Parliament and Commission.



We are campaigning for a fair copyright law that enables libraries to lend e-books as they do printed books, but also ensures publishers a fair return on their investment.

We fully support authors in their campaign to extend Public Lending Right to the lending of e-books, so that they are rewarded for such loans. This, too, may require a change to EU Copyright law to be implemented fully.

CILIP hopes library campaigners will support this campaign.

We ask campaigners to raise the matter with their local councillors and library service, encouraging them to press for the necessary changes to European law.

Campaigners could also raise the matter with their MEP and also candidates in the future European elections.

Those who use social media can follow and contribute to the campaign on Twitter.

You can find further information at www.cilip.org.uk – put 'e-reading' into the search box and follow the link.

E-note...

by Laura Swaffield

Nearly all public libraries have for years offered free e-access for library members (including remote access from home) to many major online reference works. They tend, however, to be very bad at publicising this.

Titles include Britannica, Britannica Junior, Cobra (business), newspaper archives, Grove Art and Grove Music, Who's Who, Oxford English Dictionary and Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. Each library authority chooses which books to subscribe to. So – ask!

New this year is Access to Research. This provides access to more than 8,000 academic journals worldwide. Unfortunately – at the quaint

insistence of the publishers – this is available only in library buildings, not remotely. However, it gets you 1.5m articles on a mass of topics including health, film, business, languages, politics, religion, art, architecture, biological research, engineering and social sciences.

It's a collaboration between publishers' associations and the Society of Chief Librarians. The search software was provided free by publishers ProQuest.

About 75 English authorities have already signed up to a two-year pilot roll-out. And it is open to all of them – free.

Check what's available – and whether your own library service has joined – at www.accesstoresearch.org.uk. If it hasn't – nag!

And ask yourself – if public libraries were run commercially, would things like this happen?

