

LIBRARY CAMPAIGNER

SUPPORTING FRIENDS AND USERS OF LIBRARIES



A galaxy
far, far
away...

the gulf between what
local campaigners
fight for and what
government offers



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THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN – AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

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



The Library Campaign

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The following organisations send representatives to attend steering group meetings:

Unison,

Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals (CILIP).

WHO'S WHO?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

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

JOIN US!

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

Our membership form is on
page 28. Get extra (and larger)
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[www.librarycampaign.com/
join-the-library-campaign/](http://www.librarycampaign.com/join-the-library-campaign/)

Queries: 020 8651 9552 or
thelibrarycampaign@gmail.com

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

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

2016 MEETINGS:

Next meeting Saturday 25 June

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

Gulf war?

Here's a new photo of TLC chair Laura Swaffield. Less smiley. Addressing a huge crowd of 2,000 library supporters in crisis-hit Lambeth. It's amazing what we all find ourselves driven to do...

The Library Campaign (TLC) began in 1984 – as a response to vicious cuts to local councils that threatened library services. Things looked bad.

But nobody would have predicted the disaster we face today. Closures come to around 705 just since 2003-4, with many, many more in the pipeline. Plus a massive loss of professional staff, cuts to stock and opening hours. Already, many people have lost sight of what a really good public library service could do for them.

And certainly nobody dreamed of recent phenomena such as the huge – completely uncontrolled – growth in volunteer libraries (invariably run by people who actually want a properly-run professional service). And the most recent crazy development – 'libraries' with no staff at all.

Some things have stayed the same, though. The same basic problems have been outlined in report after report, usually labelled 'urgent'.

Fragmented organisation, with hundreds of local authorities and dozens of bodies, large and small, that have something to do with libraries. Uncertain funding. Failure by the decision-makers to understand what libraries do. Failure to get that message across.

Also unchanged – or worse – is the depth of the gulf between local campaigners and the various national bodies responsible for libraries.

The former, turn by turn, learn of disastrous plans to wreck their local service. They work round the clock (in their spare time!) to publicise the danger, argue their case, demonstrate local support (always strong), suggest viable alternatives... And they have to do it at break-neck speed, as councils ignore all reason and forge ahead.

But the national bodies have no sense of emergency at all.

In their various ways they discuss new skills, or 'exciting' ideas to expand libraries into all kinds of new areas, from hiring out workspaces (called... er... workaries) to digital makerspaces.

But the reality on the ground, too often, is that there are barely enough resources to offer a decent basic service, barely enough staff, fewer and fewer actual libraries to do anything at all in.

The national bodies are just not taking this on board. They are determined to be 'positive'. That's fine – we badly need a proper, unified campaign to publicise the value of libraries.

Local people never have any trouble understanding this. No local service is better loved.



None gets so much angry, articulate support when under threat.

But the national bodies seem to have a growing tendency to dismiss local campaigners as an embarrassing distraction, tiresomely 'negative'. They need to look at the real world, and engage with what should be their most important supporters.

The root of the problem, as ever, is the DCMS (Department for Culture, Media & Sport). True, the strong intervention powers in the 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act have been used only once in 54 years. But in the past we have seen the DCMS do sensible research, produce useful guidance, support real action, even find funding.

Not any more.

Minister Ed Vaizey – where the buck really stops – has moved from vaguely supportive to inactive to effectively hostile. His enthusiasm for volunteer libraries says it all. Recent funding for wifi does not make up for ignoring the massive nationwide destruction of the public library network.

The new Taskforce has declined to speak out on this. Not positive enough. Other national bodies don't want to rock the boat. There are signs that both UNISON (already invaluable) and CILIP are upping their game. More news soon, we hope.

But the DCMS and the Taskforce are wedded to a national government that has clearly stated its intention to reduce (dismantle, more like) the public sector altogether. It has chosen austerity, for political not economic reasons.

And it is doing it the coward's way, by devolving savage cuts to local authorities and pretending the resulting devastation is purely a local decision. Libraries are a prime example.

TLC has never been party political, and still isn't. The fact is, there is little sign that opposition parties grasp the importance of libraries. At local level, Labour and Conservative councils are equal perpetrators of stupid, destructive plans.

Campaigners are doing the heavy lifting for national bodies that decline to speak out. Meanwhile, TLC itself is struggling. Frankly, the workload is now immense and our (few) officers are snowed under with work on their own local campaigns.

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The more we grow, the more we can do.

We need more offers of help. Maybe a whole new way of working. Our AGM in the autumn will discuss the whole picture. We need ideas, support and clear ways to link all those local campaigners into a national force for change.

KEEP FIGHTING! KEEP IN TOUCH!

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



11 library trends from 2015

Every year, for three years now, we've published an early-year analysis by **Ian Anstice** (www.publiclibrariesnews.com) about the trends he has noticed over the past 12 months.

We're late with it this year. It still stands up pretty well... though some developments perhaps look a little different (usually worse) than we might have hoped.



1 The General Election. The election of the Conservatives for the next five years means deep cuts to local council budgets up to 2020. We have seen what that has meant since 2010.

The vote is the most important thing that has happened to public libraries this year, and for the next five. Expect deep cuts to public libraries, with as hands-free direction as possible from central government.

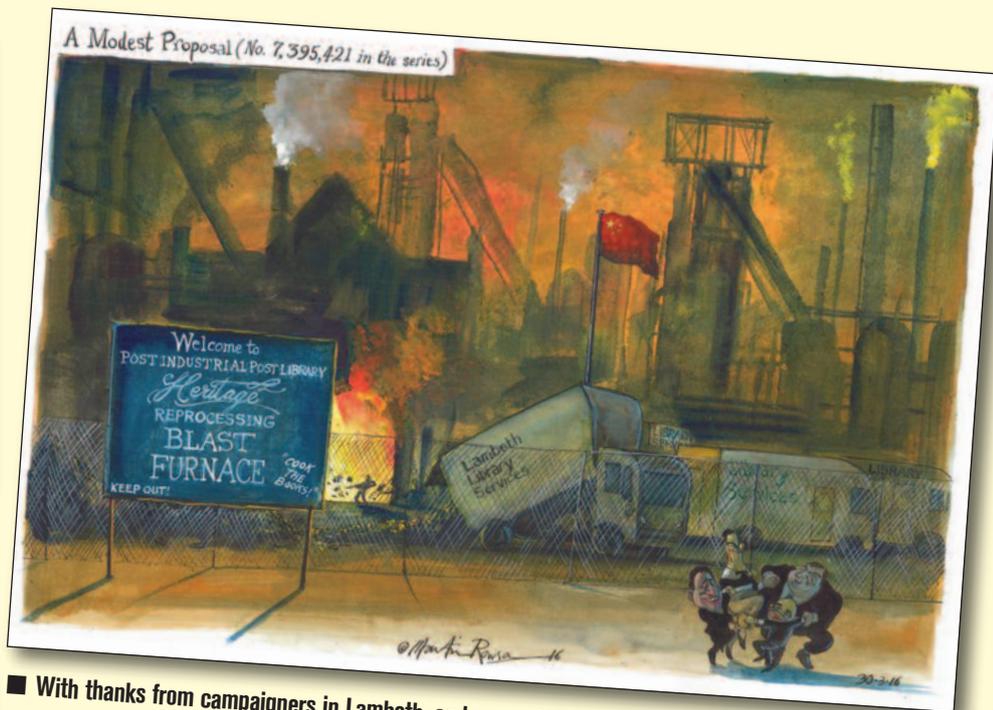
Councils are going to find it very hard to maintain libraries (indeed some, like Herefordshire and Lincolnshire, are barely trying even now). With library services already cut to the bone in many places, it is hard to see much light at the end of the tunnel for smaller branches nationwide.

2 The Leadership for Libraries Taskforce begins. This got up and running in 2015. The main thing resulting from it so far is a whole ton of visits to public libraries and interested agencies, including government departments.

Not overly much else has been achieved yet (with the debatable but not insignificant exception of finally getting pretty much every public library to receive WiFi).

The fear of many is that the group will have insufficient actual leadership. However, at the very least, they're another voice supporting libraries and they have started making a (limited) impact.

[See update, pp.8-11]



■ With thanks from campaigners in Lambeth, and everywhere, to Guardian cartoonist Martin Rowson.

3 CILIP takes a more active role. It's been a pleasure to see Nick Poole take over as CEO, with a new bunch of trustees. The organisation has finally started commenting on the news when councils announce big cuts to libraries.

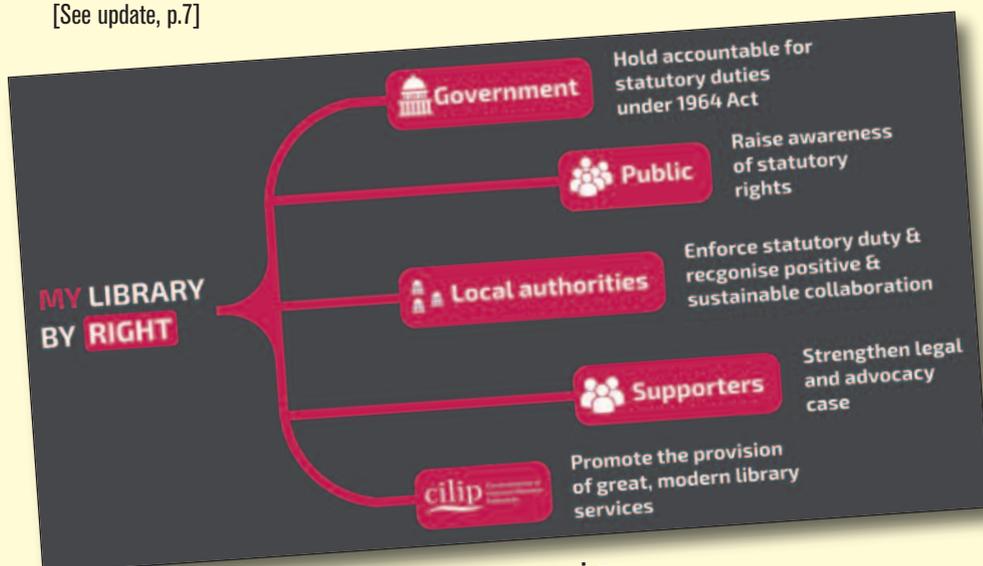
I know from conversations held that they also have big plans for campaigning in the future, including on the all-important statutory nature of libraries (on which they have received pro bono legal advice).

I just hope that the organisation can avoid the obsession with internal matters that so dogged the previous five years (rebranding, anyone?) and actually start doing things for public libraries. Fingers crossed. (Declaration of interest: thanks very much for the honorary fellowship this year, CILIP.)

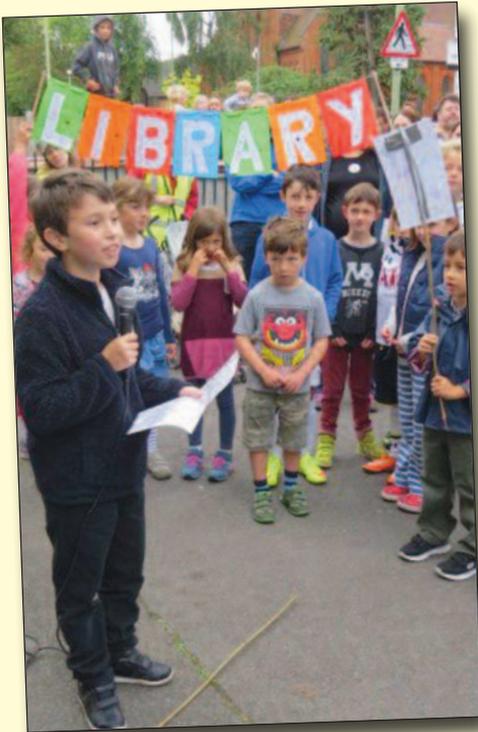
[See update, p.7]

4 Remote control libraries. For better or for worse, the Bibliotheca Open+ system has attracted the attention of many authorities. This allows for an unstaffed library to be open to the public, with buildings remotely supervised via CCTV and the public getting in via their library card and PIN.

A big problem is that it looks like under-16s are not allowed in without a parent (and that's a massive issue). But for councils who see only the headline of 'library kept open' or even 'library opening hours extended' and not the deeper issue of the quality of service, it's very tempting.



■ Action plan for CILIP's My Library - My Right campaign.



■ Child speaker in Barnet, which is piloting unstaffed library sessions where unaccompanied children must be excluded for safeguarding reasons.

5 Decline in usage and funding. The recent CIPFA figures show a big drop in usage, most notably in children's issues. This is very distressing.

My suspicion, strengthened by seeing what is happening in other countries where there is no such drop in popularity, is that usage depends on budgets and, at least five years into an absence of money, people are seriously starting to notice the 'hollowed out' nature of many library services.

My worry is that politicians, and insufficiently interested observers, will see only the decline in visits and not the reasons behind them and draw the entirely erroneous conclusion that libraries are declining entirely by themselves.

6 CIPFA in need of reform. It's not just a case of shooting the messenger but an increasing realisation that data on public library performance is in an awful state.

For the full figures to come out a full eight months after they are collected is abysmal. For them to be available to the public only for the massive cost of £475 (plus VAT, naturally) is positively hateful.

Then we have the lack of easy comparison with previous years, avoidance of anything on outcomes (it's all outputs, folks) and the realisation that this whole mess is about a sector which should specialise in giving out relevant information to the public... one realises that something needs to be done.

Thankfully, the Taskforce and others appear to be on the case on this one. We'll see what influence they have this time next year.

[See update, p.8-11]

7 The joy that is Manchester Central Library. This was the most highly visited library in the UK last year, and the reasons are obvious. I am highly privileged to visit this library on a regular basis and it is always a pleasure.

After a major refurbishment, the place is positively palatial – and packed. There's a ton of different things on offer, from the essential (but sometimes overlooked) big quiet study space to a media lounge, big events and, interestingly, quite a lot of income generation (donation boxes, café and library shop). Their recent collaboration with Google won't hurt their reputation with the bosses, or with business, either.



8 The embarrassment that is the Library of Birmingham. This place should have been the most highly visited library last year, considering its new build and massive cost. But instead it does not even make the top five.

The reason is not hard to see: cuts to the budget. Opening hours at one time were almost halved to a pathetic 40 hours per week due to lack of money. To make up for this, the LoB is now looking to moving a foreign language school into it – losing a lot of space in the process – to make ends meet.

The sad thing here is that the new Library should have been a symbol of how superb the city is. Instead it's a byword for its incompetence. Let's hope that lessons are learned and the library returns to its rightful place in the forefront of the city's civic pride.

9 Coding, Lego and makerspaces. It was great to see the very useful (if strangely named) Code Green guidance from SCL about coding being very useful, with a statement of intent. It's also been good to see a smattering of 3D printers and other maker facilities being made available but, well, they cost money, while code clubs are low-cost thanks to the volunteers.

10 Cuts seriously start hitting Wales and Scotland. One of the things that have been highly notable over the past five years is how the experience of austerity in English libraries has not been so notable in the other nations of the UK. All that came to an end this year, with big reductions to library numbers in Wales (a 11% cut no less) and the announcement in Fife of the possible loss of 16 branches.

11 With the apparent success of Suffolk and York as library mutuals, a fair few more authorities are thinking the same way, with probably 18 more (and those are just the ones the media knows about, I know of others privately) considering making the move to non-profit.

Bear in mind that there are already 30 or so trusts running library services in the UK and you can see what a force they have become. There are pros and cons...

(One factor which could be pro or con for trusts, depending on your point of view, came home to me when I asked Warrington LiveWire for some information on the relative size of their new Central Library compared to the old one (I suspected it was going to be a lot smaller as the size is not mentioned in their press releases), reductions to their bookfund in the last few years and the extent of their professional staffing. They simply pointed out to me that as a trust, they are not obliged to answer Freedom of Information requests.



■ Ian Anstice, with a telling visual aid ...

Count libraries as culture!

How do we 'preserve and promote UK's cultural wealth'? That's the subject of a current inquiry by the Commons select committee for culture, media and sport. It builds on the committee's 2014 inquiry into ACE (Arts Council England), which found that too much is spent on London. Rather unusually, it also admits that... ahem... 'local authority budget cuts are constraining the cultural offering in the regions'.

Just one problem. When it talks of the value of the 'huge cultural and artistic riches in [the] regions and nations' – it doesn't mention public libraries! Incredible, but not untypical. This is what we told them...

The Library Campaign, founded in 1984 and now a charity, is the sole national representative of library users, Friends groups and campaigners.

We work with Unison, Campaign for the Book and Voices for the Library through the Speak Up For Libraries coalition, holding well-attended annual conferences and working on a national SUFL website of resources.

Our own website (www.librarycampaign.com) serves a large number of members and non-members, eg by maintaining the only national list of library groups. We also publish the only national magazine on public libraries.

- **We have good reason for sending evidence to the current inquiry.**
- **We are appalled to see no mention at all of public libraries in its terms.**

We argue that public libraries are – especially in times of austerity – a major resource for culture, and of particular relevance to problems of access, inequality and the enduring regional imbalance in funding. This is brought into sharp focus by recent deep cuts in funding to local authorities, which continue to see libraries as a soft option for service cuts.

We sent evidence to the select committee's inquiry into the work of ACE in 2014.

Ironically, we argued against the placement of public libraries within ACE's arts-oriented remit.

We said: **'There is some overlap, but public libraries have a far wider role than their cultural aspect: information, IT access and support, business, employment, health, education at all life stages, economic regeneration, role in deprived areas etc.**

'A little work has been done by ACE in some of these areas, largely in grants to other bodies, but it is indeed very little.

'ACE is widely seen as tending merely to add 'and libraries' into its general pronouncements about the arts (a very different overall area).'

Now we find that even this narrow definition of libraries' role, the cultural aspect, is being ignored.

Public libraries are the sole local cultural resource that is statutory. In a number of areas they are, quite simply, the sole local cultural resource.

Obviously they give access to reading and literature. This is under-pinned by special collections (including music and play sets for local music and drama groups), pre-literacy sessions for small children and book clubs catering for all ages and abilities, from children and teens to people with mental health or other disabilities. Many services still manage to run author visits, local

book prizes usually working with schools, and entire literature festivals.

An increasing number of local authorities have no municipal theatre, museum or art gallery. Closures, particularly of small museums, and severe reductions in grants, are epidemic.

The library can – and does – serve as a meeting space and as a default venue for arts and crafts activities, art exhibitions (by professional artists and local clubs) and performances of all kinds (ditto). Facilities for video and music creation, 3D printing and digital arts are a growing area. A number of libraries have developed an outstanding role as venues for music performances.

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

Given this extensive background, the select committee should concern itself with the cultural implications of the appalling level of cuts to local library services.

The DCMS is vague about the extent of the damage, and official CIPFA figures fail to keep up with its extent (those currently available date back to 31 March 2015).

The best up-to-date estimate, by the Public Libraries News website (www.publiclibrariesnews.com) shows a loss of 705 libraries in just over 10 years. Most of the losses so far have been in England.

This does not take account of severe cuts to those libraries remaining – reduced stock, reduced



■ Brazilian carnival night at Tate South Lambeth Library, London.

EXAMPLES:

An easy way to get a picture is offered via national resources. For instance:

1. Even the reading-based resources of The Reading Agency – widely used by public libraries – develop into creative digital skills, artwork, music and song-writing.

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

2. ACE itself has a fund for arts activities in libraries, which have ranged from graphics workshops for teens to dance projects, work with writers to a sculpture court.

See: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/grants-arts-libraries-fund>

opening hours and a huge reduction in the professional staff needed to run the 'extra' events that add so much to libraries' all-round cultural offer.

The larger town centre libraries are certainly in danger of having to reduce their offer to core essentials, with much reduced scope to continue their wider cultural activities.

But the main damage is focused on the smaller local libraries. Large numbers have closed completely. An increasing number are being hived off to volunteers to run as best they can – not very successfully, going by experience to date.

These libraries are an irreplaceable 'first step' to a wealth of resources, both digital and physical. Small children, students, people on low incomes, older people and many disadvantaged groups can, at the very least, sample a wide choice of books to help them discover what interests them. They can read or study in peace, meet others and join in group activities if they wish to, and experience a civilised space that belongs to them and does not demand any payment from them.

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

Properly funded and staffed libraries, within a national network, enable simple one-step access from the smallest library to expensive online arts reference resources, digitised arts and museum collections including the British Library's, information on local and national arts provision, and on site arts exhibitions, events and activities.

No other neighbourhood facility can possibly provide this. To discount and reduce public libraries' considerable role in the arts is to deny access to millions of people who will have no alternative resource.

CILIP's fillip

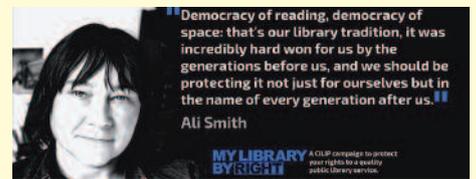
Librarians' professional association CILIP is growing some welcome teeth. Its My Library, My Right campaign is now launched. It's about upholding that statutory right to a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service, which seems to get us nowhere at the moment.

The website has some useful info. There's a petition (the numbers are not yet impressive, showing that not even all CILIP's members have yet signed – so do please support it). There's some celebrity backing (including a new poster, see p.9). And there's an ambitious schedule of action, including:

- Writing directly to portfolio holders and local MPs calling on them to abide by their statutory and civic duty toward library services and the people who use them;
- Supporting evidence for use by members when articulating the value and impact of their services;
- Direct support for members at risk of redundancy – including an advice line, financial support, careers information and CV clinics;
- Direct engagement with English ministers across Whitehall; support for colleagues in Wales and Northern Ireland;
- Published legal advice from a leading human rights barrister clarifying the definition of 'comprehensive and efficient' and the duty of improvement it places on the Secretary of State.

We look forward to more news. To get the latest, follow the links from <http://www.cilip.org.uk>, via [advocacy-campaigns-awards](http://www.cilip.org.uk/advocacy-campaigns-awards).

MY LIBRARY BY RIGHT



Ch-ch-ch-change in Labour's line-up

Another day, another shadow minister for culture, libraries etc. Now it's Chi Onwurah, MP for Newcastle upon Tyne Central. Alan Wylie (Voices for the Library) worked hard to get a meeting with her for Speak Up for Libraries. Finally we got there – Alan for Voices, plus Elizabeth, Laura and Andrew Coburn for TLC.

We suggested Labour needs an updated libraries policy (the current one dates back to Dan Jarvis in 2013). We pointed out (with examples) that Labour councils can treat libraries as appallingly as any Tory council. She was pleasant and receptive. Alan sent her a dossier of good practice. Since then, nothing.



■ Chi Onwurah

Star campaigners

Look out for a new 54-minute documentary (independent cinemas only, alas) that spells out the value of public libraries. It's called 'The Safe House: a decline of ideas'. An elegaic plea for survival, then.

It features library campaigners (hooray!) and celebs including John Cooper Clarke, Stephen Fry, writers Daisy Goodwin and Irvine Welsh, Harry Potter star Bonnie Wright and film directors Amma Asante and Mike Figgis. Co-director Greta Bellamacina says: 'I used the library to get through my A-levels. It was a quiet space to study, one I couldn't get anywhere else. But now that space has gone.'

'It's really depressing that the role of the library is being taken away, because so many of the people we interviewed said that libraries saved their lives.'

See the trailer here:

<http://tinyurl.com/hrj98qp>

UNISON gears up

As we go to press, UNISON is holding a seminar for library members 'to inform and contribute to UNISON's campaign to protect our public library service'. We hope for great things.

UNISON says: 'The day will be dedicated to sharing best practice from branches on how to fight threats on a local level, and to get a clear message on what support campaigners need from UNISON.'

'The focus will then shift to fighting the attacks on a UK level. Delegates will be asked for their ideas on how we can hold the government to account for their stance, and what can be done to turn the attacks on our library service into a major political issue.'

Ambitious? Well...

'Ambition' is the new report from the Leadership for Libraries Taskforce. Extracts overleaf.

The Taskforce is effectively the only game in town for developing public libraries' work.

It pulls together – and supplements – the activities of the assorted agencies that have a role (or a potential role), from the BBC to The Reading Agency. That's a good thing.

But its very large steering group excludes any representative of library users or staff (such as TLC or UNISON). That's a bad thing.

It also suffers from being funded, and indeed housed, by the government (the DCMS). And the Local Government Association (not a fervent advocate for spending on libraries) gets equal billing with DCMS and local government ministers in sponsoring it.

Result: a completely different perspective from that of staff and campaigners. People on the

frontline are fighting disastrous cuts in real time. Many were hoping the Taskforce would somehow be the cavalry coming to the rescue. It isn't.

That's rather ironic. The Taskforce was set up after the December 2014 Sieghart report. William Sieghart had been greeted everywhere, he said, with the cry: 'The last thing we need is another bl**dy report!'

He insisted on a Taskforce to get some action. Staff were fully put in place only in October 2015. Now, in 2016, it produces... another bl**dy report. This is meant to pull together a coherent programme, agreed by all, for the next five years.

So – how ambitious is 'Ambition'? Not very, some say. But we'd been warned. At last year's SUFL (Speak Up For Libraries) conference [see pp.19–22] the Taskforce bosses made it clear that they aren't a lobbying body.

So, for instance, 'Ambition' just accepts that council budgets will be 'constrained' for ever. No argument for more money from central government, or even ring-fencing the funds.

FUNDING

The Taskforce now has £500,000 a year for four years (to 2019–20). This funds its five core staff plus events, workshops etc. ACE (Arts Council England) has added £174,000 so far for seconded staff and some research. The Taskforce is seeking further funding.

The only hope, it seems, is to explain to government departments what libraries do for them, and ask for money. But the Taskforce told SUFL last November that it had already asked them all (as had Sieghart). Result so far: not much.

And 'Ambition' says nothing about the massive growth in volunteer-run libraries. That surely is a major development, which must be factored in.

Yet it also says: 'There is potential to strengthen the value of public libraries as a joined-up and integrated England-wide brand and develop their services to provide a consistent quality of experience across the country.'

How? That potential is being killed off fast. Already, a 'library' can be anything from a properly-run public service to a bunch of untrained, unfunded locals trying to do their best.

Forget, too, any last hope of getting national standards for England. The Taskforce does suggest a couple of (entirely voluntary) schemes that would set some standards if anyone wanted them [see TWO SUGGESTIONS overleaf].

What incentive would there ever be to get accredited? Who would fund this elaborate enterprise? And how would volunteer libraries fit in?

'Ambition' also skirts round one very fundamental matter: public libraries as a neutral space, uniquely trusted. If they lose that, they lose everything.

It talks about co-location, partnerships with other bodies including commercial ones, different 'models' including mutuals, trusts and Community Interest Companies.

It states: 'It is essential that... the neutrality of the public library service is maintained.' But how?

'Ambition' says nothing about the big underlying problem: 151 authorities in England – fragmented, wasteful, inconsistent. Granted, that's a tall order with government so keen to 'devolve', ie cut councils adrift and abandon responsibility for their problems.

It does promise, at least, to 'promote, and consider ways to incentivise libraries to exploit, opportunities for collaboration, eg shared service models and/or combined authorities, which could effectively reduce the number of library management bodies over time'.

Plus 'work with local authorities to support them in adopting new approaches to procurement, including considering national procurement frameworks to promote consistency and reduce procurement overheads'.

WHAT HAS THE TASKFORCE DONE SO FAR?

It's hard to untangle what the Taskforce has achieved itself, from things that are being done anyway by this or that 'member' organisation (sometimes with a grant from another 'member' organisation, sometimes from an outside body).

So its activities are listed mostly as 'supporting' or 'working with' others, and meeting lots of people. It's hard to tell what difference this makes. ACE and DCMS are presumably doing the same. However, it's building on all this experience, collating information and starting to produce its own guidance papers.

All its own work are:

- Two 'good practice' toolkits, with case studies. These are presented as works permanently in progress, with comments and additions welcomed.

Libraries Shaping the Future (<http://tinyurl.com/hjal3hc>) News, ideas and possible resources, with lots of links to follow up. We're not mad about some of the ideas – outsourcing? volunteer libraries? – but it's useful to have a picture of what's going on. One section we like outlines just how much public libraries do to support all the work that local councils do. Most councils badly need to be told this!

Community Libraries (<http://tinyurl.com/jyx67dl>) This is actually about volunteer-run libraries. So calling them 'community libraries' has set campaigners' teeth on edge. It's a comprehensive checklist for absolute beginners. It lists a lot of thorny issues, but takes a sunny view. The case studies are all successes, which gives a biased picture. Even here, it often indicates killer problems looming up – such as lack of funding and lack of volunteers. But it just calls these 'considerations'. Future updates badly need to explain the downside. Campaigners' contributions on this would no doubt be welcomed...

- Guidance on the legal status quo – **Libraries as a statutory service** (<http://tinyurl.com/h9xv75u>). This is a useful summary of the state of the law on public libraries – DCMS decisions, judicial review decisions. It does not, of course, comment on the fact that the DCMS could – and should – have done a heck of a lot more. Nor does it comment on the fact that desperate campaigners have been forced to mount expensive and risky judicial reviews to try to get some action. Library policy is, in effect, being decided via a mish-mash of decisions by individual judges.
- And now, of course, the draft report about the future – **Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016–2021** (<http://tinyurl.com/hhm52zc>)

Similarly, 'a joined-up approach to the use of digital tools and innovative technologies' is 'essential... Taskforce members will review proposals for the Single Library Digital Presence and develop an implementation plan, including working with partners to establish a sustainable governance and funding model'. Quite a challenge.

The Taskforce clearly speaks from experience when it boldly calls for 'a re-assessment of the many national structures and organisations involved in providing leadership to, and support for, local library services.'

'These bodies (such as SCL, ACE, CILIP) have all been providing valuable input for many years, but their individual capacity to provide support is often severely limited, either by a lack of resource or limitations to their role and remit. A long-term, sustainable solution needs to be developed.'

Quite right. But it (wisely?) dumps this hot potato on to the DCMS, which should 'commission an independent review'. Another bl**dy report, then.

It wants every council to 'carry out a data-driven, community-informed mapping exercise... to develop a clear delivery plan for its area'. But shouldn't they be doing that anyway? It's usually called a needs assessment, and it's already a basic requirement established in judicial review judgements.

We do like this idea: 'authorities considering making changes should send notification of their proposals at the earliest possible stage (and definitely prior to public engagement) to the DCMS'.

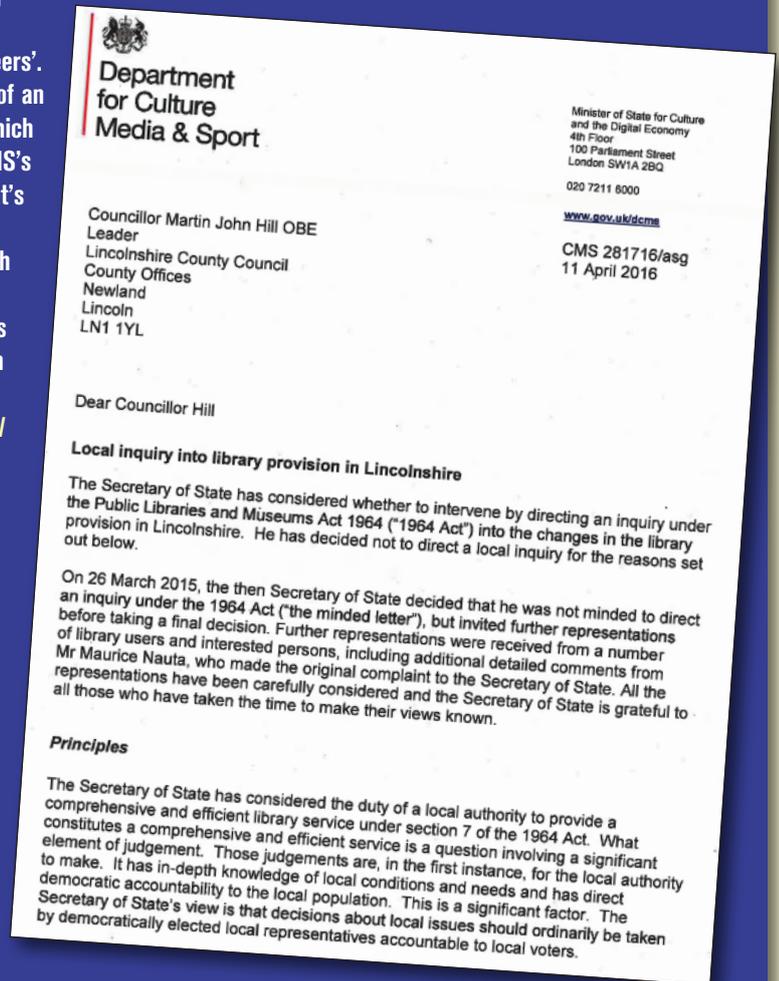
But that does rather assume the DCMS will do something with such info... and so far, there's little

Meanwhile... the DCMS continues not being 'minded' to intervene in public on any library destruction plan. (We know that sometimes a private word with a council has some effect. We just don't know how often, or how permanent the effect).

Sadly, the latest 'not minded' - issued long after the damage was done - has finally killed off all hope for Lincolnshire. Save Lincs Libraries fought a brilliant campaign to prevent 30 out of 45 libraries being dumped on to reluctant 'volunteers'.

Here's page 1 of an 11-page letter which sets out the DCMS's basic attitude - it's a local matter, nothing to do with us.

For the DCMS's anthology of such letters, see <http://tinyurl.com/jdyxose>



sign of this. Just what can the Taskforce do about that?

The Taskforce thinks it's vital to sort out the awful state of the data on public libraries' performance, especially the stuff that limps out (months late) from CIPFA [see overleaf]. Yes, yes! It's about the first thing CEO Kathy Settle mentioned when we interviewed her [see Campaigner no.92]. Shouldn't we be seeing results on that by now, not just ambitions?

Likewise, 'Ambition' wants to see strong national publicity about the value of libraries [see overleaf]. Yes, yes! Campaigners have to produce local material overnight. And they do. In their spare time. If the Taskforce saw things our way, they'd have got on with this as a first priority. And how useful it would have been.

So, what about the real needs of the people fighting for libraries, as the losses mount daily? The Taskforce 'will engage with campaigners who are combating the loss or reduction of individual services to develop a shared set of messages which reduce the risk of appearing divided within the library community'. We have absolutely no idea what that means.

It's a curious report altogether. It alludes (rather indirectly) to the horrendous scale of some of the problems. Others it ignores. It seems to accept its lack of teeth. Suggested actions are all about 'encouraging', 'supporting', 'promoting' and so on. Is that really going to work?

The Taskforce wants comments. What it needs is a strong mandate to back up a stronger approach.

FIND OUT MORE

The Taskforce is transparent - though only if you're online. Its website publishes all documents and minutes, plus six-monthly reports (two so far). There's a blog, an email address and tweets.

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/libraries-taskforce>
- libriestaskforce.blog.gov.uk
- libriestaskforce@culture.gov.uk
- @LibTaskforce
- 100 Parliament Street, London SW1A 2BQ



■ The Taskforce says national publicity is a priority. It's CILIP that has taken concrete action with its poster featuring Stephen Fry. Download it free (A4, A3 or A2): <http://tinyurl.com/z6woq8h>

The Taskforce's Ambition

Highlights from 'Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021'. Read it in full at: <http://tinyurl.com/hhm52zc>

VISION

Our vision is of a vibrant public library network for the 21st century that supports a strong, sustainable and democratic society and delivers a wide range of benefits to people, communities and the nation:

- available to everyone, free at the point of use
- appropriately resourced and sustainable
- nationally consistent but responsive to local needs and priorities
- marketed effectively to promote use by the widest possible audience.

For the physical library, our preferred approach is a strong network of libraries that is nationally developed, regionally supported and locally led, delivered through a partnership between local authorities, communities and the library profession, and through effective collaboration with other cultural and learning organisations.

TRENDS

- The economic conditions for public libraries will change, as the wider remit of local government changes. Budgets will continue to be constrained. There will be increasing expectations of transparency around the use of public funds.
- Libraries will navigate a complex legal and regulatory environment, addressing issues around privacy, copyright, statutory services and data management.
- Changes in society include an ageing population, different working patterns and new models for formal and informal learning.
- Technology will change our lives, shaping expectations and allowing new ways to deliver services.
- Public libraries will compete with other sources of information and entertainment, physically and virtually.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

- compliance with the 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act
- focus on public benefit
- be responsive to local needs
- promote a high quality customer experience
- work towards a consistent England-wide offer
- use public funds effectively and efficiently
- promote innovation and enterprise
- make decisions informed by evidence
- build on success

THE WORKFORCE

Excellent public library services need access to a range of skills including:

- leadership
- partnership working
- community engagement
- advocacy and communications
- commercial skills
- digital skills, including online privacy
- entrepreneurship and innovation
- customer service

Public libraries contribute directly to community cohesion by creating a sense of place for their users and providing an inclusive, free and safe space for all. Each is at the heart of its community, supported by trained staff skilled in community engagement and customer service. Libraries can uniquely partner with community organisations and liaise between communities and government.

Taskforce 'Ambition' paper

AMBITIONS FOR 2021

To achieve all these seven purposes, we need to ensure the public library network is secured on a long-term sustainable footing.

1: READING & LITERACY

- improved literacy ranking literacy by the OECD
- universal library membership for children, active borrowing, participation in reading-based activity
- a wide range of reading programmes including the Summer Reading Challenge; more children, young people, adults and families participating (both as readers and volunteers)
- systematic evaluation of literacy and reading programmes
- more people reading for pleasure.

2: DIGITAL LITERACY

- digital literacy recognised as a core skill
- active digital inclusion programme in all libraries
- long-term partnership with Go ON UK and related digital literacy initiatives
- Assisted Digital / Digital Inclusion support in all libraries
- libraries seen as spaces where the community comes together to co-create and make things.

3: HEALTH & WELLBEING

- libraries a key partner for Public Health England, the NHS and local health bodies
- measurable savings for health services through library initiatives
- improvements in health and wellbeing indicators delivered through libraries
- more Books on Prescription offers to cover the most common health conditions
- more libraries commissioned to deliver health agendas
- more co-locations / shared services between public libraries and health-related organisations

4: ECONOMIC GROWTH

- British Library Business & IP Centre network expanded from eight to 20
- start-up and business support in all public libraries; enterprise spaces where appropriate
- more employment support in all public libraries
- public libraries fully integrated into local economic development partnerships
- skills development programmes, eg volunteering opportunities

5: CULTURE & CREATIVITY

- universal participation in National Libraries Day and World Book Night, increased participation and engagement overall
- support for local creative businesses in all libraries
- greater collaboration between arts and cultural organisations to provide seamless access to resources through activities and use of space
- more children from disadvantaged backgrounds having access to cultural events

6: COMMUNITIES

- library development plans created in partnership with communities
- libraries celebrated as a vital part of community life
- libraries as community centres that provide Universal Offers plus additional facilities at main hubs
- libraries making effective use of the skills volunteers can bring alongside paid staff

7: LEARNING

- measurable improvements in learning support in libraries
- investment in learning and skills programmes in libraries
- increased partnerships with learning providers, including schools and colleges, prisons and the informal sector



TWO SUGGESTIONS

An Expectation Set: to provide libraries with a sector-led benchmark to use for self-assessment, planning and improvement. This would be a clear statement of what makes an excellent service – a higher bar than ‘comprehensive and efficient’. It would be outcome-focused (specifying the ‘what’ rather than the ‘how’) and would be likely to include:

- buildings and facilities, including location, accessibility and furnishing
- books, e-books, online resources and other reference and reading materials
- workforce
- public internet access and support
- information services
- public programmes, events and engagement activities

A voluntary accreditation scheme to provide an external assessment of the quality and effectiveness of services and their delivery against the Expectation Set. (If an authority applied for accreditation but did not achieve it, that would not necessarily mean it is failing to be ‘comprehensive and efficient’.) Benefits could include:

- raising awareness and understanding of library services
- building confidence and credibility with decision makers and the public
- helping libraries improve their services
- supporting planning and development for the workforce
- supporting improvement by strengthening policies and procedures
- strengthening the case for third party investment and funding
- helping libraries meet statutory requirements, including equalities legislation.

If responsibility were transferred from local authority direct provision to a third party, the local authority would need to ensure the Expectation Set continued to be met, to maintain accredited status. Regular re-assessment would be built in to the scheme.

USE OF DATA

Current data provision has:

- a focus on inputs rather than outputs and long-term impact
- an emphasis on collecting quantitative over qualitative data
- delay in accessing up-to-date information
- ‘siloes’ datasets which limit the ability to compare multiple sources of information
- data held behind pay walls, not accessible to all
- lack of resources to make effective use of available data

We want to develop a culture of monitoring and data-sharing to support planning, investment and improvement. To stimulate this, we will publish a model basic data set, and support creation of a process to ensure that this information is provided and shared in as transparent and automated a way as possible.

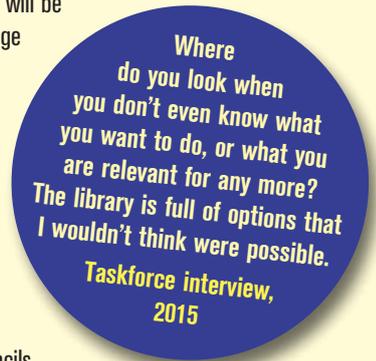
INCOME GENERATION

Exploring the role of income generation will be essential. Libraries have identified a range of approaches. These include:

- non-library public service contracts
- private sector service contracts and partnerships
- direct trading and retail
- paid-for services
- fundraising from charities, trusts, foundations and individuals (eg crowdfunding)
- precepts from parish and town councils
- Community Infrastructure Levy and S106 Agreements

Public libraries can be enterprises in their own right, supporting local businesses and strengthening local economies.

There will be a continued need for national oversight of funding to make sure that inequalities in local circumstances do not disadvantage communities unfairly. This sits alongside the responsibility of the Secretary of State to promote the long-term improvement of the public library network.



COMMUNICATION

Significant improvements need to be made to awareness of public libraries, the services they provide and the benefits they bring.

- regionally and locally, through service-wide promotional campaigns and targeted marketing
- nationally, through a joined-up annual programme to promote public engagement. This will include: promotion of the Universal Offers developed by SCL; a UK-wide National Libraries Day campaign; The Reading Agency’s Summer Reading Challenge and World Book Night, in partnership with publishers and booksellers.

Current media attention is mainly focused on consultations over changes, and the perceived diminishing role of public libraries due to the internet. It is time to shift this focus with an active campaign of positive media engagement – developing a clear offer and ensuring this is reinforced in interviews, placed editorial and other media coverage.

We will use initiatives such as the CILIP Libraries Change Lives awards to highlight and celebrate the transformative work that public library staff do every day.

It is important that the interests of public libraries are represented in, and promoted by, central government and local authorities. This is best achieved by focusing on what the organisation is trying to deliver, then positioning libraries as a mechanism to achieve this, rather than being library-centric. Five connected priorities:

- engagement with policymakers to promote awareness and understanding of the full range of public library services and their impact on other policy areas
- developing an influential voice at a national level to secure policy and regulation which supports public libraries
- developing influence with local councillors and decision-makers
- celebrating the commitment and achievements of local leaders in supporting their public library offer
- showcasing the impact of library activities on health, wellbeing, employment and skills development.





SHAMING LAMBETH!

Laura Swaffield writes...

I didn't plan to get locked inside the Carnegie Library, Lambeth, for 10 days in April. But I'm glad I did.

There I was, in a stunningly beautiful building. Outside, a delightful garden, for which the Friends raised thousands (they are locked out of it now). Inside, over 20,000 books (stock has improved dramatically under our clever head of libraries, Susanna Barnes).

And the food! Anything from home-made cakes to take-aways sent by the gourmet outlets at Pop Brixton. Plus fruit, coffee, cheese, biscuits, chocolate – all brought by well-wishers. We were overwhelmed.

A councillor re-tweeted a photo of us drinking some wine we'd been given, implying that we were somehow living it up at the expense of the poor. Wine donations shot up, as a direct result.

Plus blankets, sleeping bags, clothing, posh toiletries, flowers... anything people thought we might need.

Visitors came day and night to the barred entrance to say: 'Thank you. You're doing this for us. Is there anything else you need?'

The Carnegie steps became the place to be. Every day there were songs (including a sing-song led by the local church), poets and performers, children giving readings, playing chess, making brilliant posters... sometimes the crowd filled the street.

We were humbled to be joined by junior doctors on their demonstration day. They spoke from the steps, as did the National Union of Teachers, other trade unions and other Lambeth groups who don't like what the council is doing to them.

George Hamerton [see p.14] came all the way from Hampshire. Authors visited, including Toby Litt, Stella Duffy, Alex Wheatle and – to the particular



delight of the kids inside – Francesca 'Horrid Henry' Simon. Stella and Toby canvassed fellow writers to support the occupation.

They aimed at 110 (one for every year the library has been open). They had to close the flood-gates at 220. Signers included Colm Toibin, Neil Gaiman, Ali Smith, David Mitchell, Ian Rankin, Julian Barnes, Will Self, Sophie Kinsella... (see tinyurl.com/htjgmac).

Trouble is, I didn't have a second to appreciate any of it. I never opened a book. Cup after cup of coffee went cold. I ran more than I walked. I have never worked so hard.

Constant tidying and washing up (others cooked), helping with the endless visitors, singing for the TV cameras, fielding tweets and texts and emails and phone-calls, and above all dealing with the press, filled day and nights.

We got fantastic support from the whole borough

and beyond. We were featured in local press, TV and radio, the Bookseller, the Times, the Guardian, the i, even the Financial Times. Always approvingly.

Messages came from all over the borough, the UK and Africa, Switzerland, France, the USA...

When we left, we led a march to Brixton of 2,000 people – the biggest demonstration seen there in decades.

Just one problem. The councillors are the odd ones out. It has been a PR disaster for them. It's obvious their plans are crazy, and that everyone thinks so.

But they still persist. They are determined to turn four of our much-needed 10 libraries into tiny collections in a corner, with no staff – and to spend millions installing unwanted gyms in two of them. Even in crude financial terms, it makes no sense.

So the work has to intensify...

What a day!

Hundreds of library campaigners met in Westminster on February 9, 2016.

First, coffee and biscuits at Central Hall, and a chance to network – Friends groups with union members, authors with fans, everyone with everyone...

Next, a rally with library advocates and best-selling authors.

Then people went off for a mass lobby of MPs (with varying success).

The day was organised under the Speak Up For Libraries banner – by Campaign for the Book, librarians’ professional association CILIP, The Library Campaign, UNISON and Voices for the Library.



We were impressed and humbled to see how far people came to be with us. Some got up at 4am to reach London in time. Apologies to anyone we’ve left off the list: Barnet, Bexleyheath, Birmingham, Brent, Bristol, Bromley, Cambridgeshire, Camden, Cardiff, Croydon, Derbyshire, Doncaster, Dorset, Gateshead, Greenwich, Hertfordshire, Hillingdon, Islington, Kirklees, Lambeth, Lancashire, Leeds, Lewisham, Lincolnshire, Liverpool, Newcastle, Norfolk, North Wales, Sandwell, Staffordshire, Surrey, Swindon, Telford & Wrekin, Waltham Forest, the Wirral, Yorkshire.

This just shows there are problems all over the country – and people all over the country who care, and are willing to fight to keep their libraries.

The star speaker turned out to be a last-minute addition. 10-year-old George Hamerton had come from Hampshire. He had to persuade his headmistress to lift her ban on attending, with back-up for his arguments supplied by TLC’s Elizabeth Ash (a former teacher!). As Alan Gibbons said, George won the argument because the library had made him articulate and intelligent. **THAT’S WHAT LIBRARIES DO!**

TLC formed in 1984. Things looked bad then. But nobody would have dreamt that the situation would be so very much worse today.

Local campaigners are the backbone of the fight to keep libraries alive. And indeed of the struggle to explain to politicians just how vital they are.

This struggle continues at national level right now. For instance, there is now a national libraries Taskforce which is supposed to be working on common issues affecting public libraries. But library users, library campaigners, have not been given a place on the steering committee – the top table, if you like. They don’t get it. We are still fighting to get the point across.

As for the libraries minister, Ed Vaizey, that’s another problem at national level.

We’re sorry he can’t be with us today. But then, he’s never quite with us, is he. We’ve been trying for months to arrange a public debate between Ed and Alan Gibbons, which he says he is eager to have – but he just can’t fix a time for it.

Many of us are working 24/7 at local level. Today is a rare chance to find the time to show that public libraries are a national issue – a serious national problem – and politicians must take this seriously.

We really appreciate the efforts you have made to be here today.

ELIZABETH ASH & LAURA SWAFFIELD, The Library Campaign.

WHAT WE WANT

Ministers and government to

- Acknowledge that libraries are important – especially during a recession:
 - recognise libraries’ contribution to overall policy objectives including literacy, health and wellbeing, community cohesion, economic growth and skills development;
 - implement policy that supports this during the 2016 Parliament.
- Enforce the law:
 - take action when local authorities fail their legal duty to provide a “comprehensive and efficient” library service;
 - develop and implement statutory guidance on councils’ responsibilities, with advice from library professionals;
- Give libraries a long-term future:
 - develop national standards of service, based on a clear vision of libraries’ role;
 - include funding for library development and modernisation in the 2016–2020 DCMS Business Plan.
- Government and local authorities to ensure councils have enough money:
 - to provide quality services that meet people’s needs, well planned and sufficiently staffed



Is the current situation facing libraries a crisis or an opportunity?

I suppose the answer depends on who you are.

If your library has been cut or closed, then it's a crisis.

If you're isolated, vulnerable, elderly and/or disabled and your housebound or mobile service has been cut, then it's a crisis.

If you're a job-seeker and there are no trained staff to help you with Universal Jobmatch and you risk being sanctioned, then it's a crisis.

If you're poor with young kids and your local library now charges for Under-5s and Babybounce sessions, then it's a crisis.

If you're a young person and can no longer access the new staffless library, then it's a crisis.

If you're a library worker whose health is suffering due to stress and short-staffing, or you've been made redundant, then it's a crisis.

On the other hand if you're [libraries minister] Ed Vaizey, the government, a 'transformation' consultant or a privatiser, then it's one big opportunity!

ALAN WYLIE, Voices for the Library



Libraries matter. They matter to all communities, but especially to those in the most deprived areas.

And they matter to the little girl inside this author, who discovered adventures and magic within a wonderful – and often under-appreciated – haven.

This is something that really does matter and it should matter to all of us.

I was shocked at the figures on library closures. It's happening so fast, if we blink they will all be gone.

A library is a constant beacon of good, no matter how deprived an area might be.

Nye Bevan said that the NHS will last as long as there are people to fight for it. That applies to libraries too.

EVE AINSWORTH (Seven Days, The Blog of Maisy Malone, Crush – Scholastic).



I agree with the government that all children age eight or above should own a library card. But what is the point, when over 400 libraries have shut?

There is no legal requirement to have a library in schools at all, where children can access knowledge and literature.

In the holidays, children's reading skills are kept up by the Summer Reading Challenge. Without libraries, there is no Summer Reading Challenge.

What the government is doing is wrong. We need to stand up for what's right.

GEORGE HAMERTON, age 10.



■ Gembot Heyabu, Edward Martin & Mohammed Kalom, users of the resources for people with visual impairment at Tate South Lambeth Library.

Throughout our history the library has proved to be the most effective and resilient memory system for our culture and civilisation.

The public library creates a collective consciousness. Any attack on it simply adds to a social dementia.

I didn't go to college. I certainly couldn't have become a writer without the public library.

Libraries have been an integral part of my life. I look for one wherever I go and wander round it, just to calm down. It's not just the building, it's the people and the library workers. Librarians are as important as poets.

The internet is not a shared public space in the same way. There's a lack of public space, a lack of local space as well. There's no point having a huge super-library if there are no local spaces.

If library workers are prepared to go on strike to protect the service, I thank them. I thank everyone who is involved.

I was a cynical kid. When I was given a free library card I thought – what's the catch? The library still seems to me a miraculous idea – a true public space, access to books and knowledge in a way not otherwise possible. Access for everybody is important. The catch is that we have to fight for it.

JAKE ARNOTT (The Long Firm, He Kills Coppers, truecrime, Johnny Come Home, The Devil's Paintbrush, The House of Rumour) – the first two made into successful TV serials.



The local library is a port of call for: books, local information, human contact, internet access, newspapers and magazines, a safe environment, a quiet environment, help with form-filling, advice, and the countless other little things that all add up to bigger things. Speak up for libraries before there's nothing left to shout about.

One of the reasons it's so important for us to speak up is because a lot of users are unable to speak up for themselves. I want a local library where elderly people and people with disabilities don't have to take four buses to get there.

PHILIP ARDAGH, multiple award-winning comic writer and dramatist (the Grubtown Tales, Eddie Dickens & The Grunts series) – 'the loudest beard in literature'.



Without libraries, I would never have had access to books as a child, would never had stood a chance of following my dreams.

Now our public libraries are being closed all around us. We must stand together against these closures, for the sake of our children and the future of our country.

Libraries are the reason that I am an author today... but what about today's children?

It's the same story over and over. Hours cut to the bone, services handed over to communities and out of council control. Libraries closed for ever. This is a national scandal.

We need to speak up for libraries. My readers write and email me, to ask how to help. They see injustice. And so do I.

They say libraries are their safe haven, their refuge from bullies, when you come through the door you're at home. We need a change of support at government level. We need funding and joined up thinking. Let's carry our banners and lobby and protest – this matters too much to do anything else.

CATHY CASSIDY, million-selling Queen of Teen award winner (the Chocolate Box Girls series, Looking-Glass Girl).



[Rolling Stone] Keith Richards said: 'To me, the public library was a place where you got a hint there was somewhere called civilisation. It was the only place where I would willingly obey the laws, like silence. It was somewhere I could find out about things I was interested in.'

Libraries have sustained an intense attack since 2010. Hundreds have closed. Paid staff time has reduced by over 10 million hours.

The vandals in the government – who have their own private libraries – are passing on their huge budget cuts to cash-strapped local councils, which have to carry the can. Soon there will be no central rate support grant, so they will be competing with each other for businesses and business rates.

Yet at the end of January the OECD reported that England's students have the lowest literacy rates in the western world. Ed Vaizey – history will remember you for your destruction of one of our most loved public services. But it will remember you for the fightback against you, too.

It's time to restore Keith Richards' library.

HEATHER WAKEFIELD, head of local government, UNISON.



If we want a society that is literate, cultured, educated and compassionate, then a well-funded, professionally-staffed public library service is not a luxury. It is a necessity. And the destruction of service that our government is allowing is quite simply immoral.

We are mortgaging our children's future.

Ed Vaizey said plenty when in opposition about libraries ministers neglecting their duties. The DCMS now says libraries are a local matter. Yet the Department for Education micro-manages schools. It's a blatant contradiction. He has no sense of shame.

JOHN DOUGHERTY, irrepressible children's writer (the Stinkbomb & Ketchup-Face series).



Libraries are the cornerstone of a well-informed society. I strongly believe that there is not a single person working at high level in their field who has not at some point turned to a library for help. It's not rocket science, but without libraries there will be no rocket science.

Some people would have us believe libraries don't have relevance in the 21st century. If so, why are we seeing 265 million visits to public libraries last year?

My family was extremely poor. From my school, the girls went into the factory or had a baby. That didn't happen to me. The library was not just books but a safe space, with people to support me, push me beyond my expectations.

Our government has a duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient public library service. Ask your MP why this commitment is not being met. Ask why so many MPs have stood by while a vital public service is being eroded.

You people out there fighting is what has kept libraries going. This is about our future as a society.

DAWN FINCH, librarian, literacy consultant and best-selling author (Skara Brae, Brotherhood of Shades, The Book of Worth) – speaking here as President of CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals)



The public library service is being hollowed out. This is its worst crisis. Action is urgently needed to secure its future.

We have a philistine, backward, myopic government. Both Labour and the Tories used to see libraries as a major municipal service. We need to remind the Tories that this is part of their history.

The minister has said that a shelf of books in a pub is a library. It isn't. And a room with books, and no librarian, isn't a library.

If libraries stay open, books stay open, minds stay open.

Nothing else brings people together like libraries.

ALAN GIBBONS, million-selling, multiple award-winning children's writer (Shadow of the Minotaur, End Game, Hate) – tireless campaigner and international speaker.



■ UNISON members Elaine Brooks and Elaine Cotterell came from Lancashire, which plans to reduce its libraries from 73 to 44...



■ Laura & Elizabeth with illustrator extraordinaire Sarah McIntyre.

Lobbying at the Lords

Mathew Hulbert, a Trustee of The Library Campaign

It was certainly a day to remember. The lobby of Parliament was an important occasion in our ongoing campaign to get those in authority to be clear-eyed about what is happening to public libraries up and down the country, and to take action to ensure no more libraries close.

I had a very early start, leaving Leicestershire at around 5am to ensure I was in the capital for the start of the rally at Central Hall.

It was a lively affair, by turns informative, witty, passionate and compelling.

For me the highlight was hearing from schoolboy George Hamerton, who'd been given special permission to have the morning off school. He talked about why we needed to do 'the right thing' and tell those in authority doing 'the wrong thing' to stop closing libraries.

Following the rally came the lobby of Parliament itself.

We all walked the short way over to the Houses of Parliament.

It's always a pleasure and honour to be at Parliament, the heart of our democracy, but it can be easy to be beguiled by the place and to let the corridors of power overtake your reason for being there.

But I had the bit between my teeth, so to speak. Nothing was going to stop me from getting to speak to a parliamentarian to share what is happening to libraries, how aggrieved I and we all are about it, and to have a dialogue about what needs to be done to ensure public libraries remain vital parts of our society.

After a short wait I was thrilled to get a meeting with Baroness Liz Barker, the Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for the Voluntary Sector and Social Enterprises.



We chatted over coffee in a Lords tea-room. Liz has a relative who works in a library and totally got the issues involved, which was great to see and hear.

All in all, it was a great day which gave lots of library campaigners from across the country a chance to be together, to become re-enthused and re-energised, and to get to speak to decision-makers and legislators about our cause.

This isn't an end in of itself, of course, but is an important step along the road.

I very much hope that the MPs and peers we got to speak to will take up our cause with gusto.

Library users, staff and friends groups across the country are calling on them to do so!

Looking back to 1964

Patricia Richardson, Secretary of Users & Friends of Manor House Library, Lewisham

We assembled in Central Hall Westminster and circulated, networked etc. I was able to distribute the Manor House cards, outlining our current library predicament, and cards for LLL [London umbrella group Libraries for Life for Londoners].

There was a very good line-up of speakers.

Of course, all outlined and emphasised the importance and value of the public library service when comprehensive, efficient and professionally run. This is in part due to the legislation passed under the 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act by the Conservative government of the day, in order that all library authorities would achieve equality of provision and outcome.

The Secretary of State has the power to intervene and ensure this is done with any authority. The minister responsible for the public library service since 2010 has been Ed Vaizey MP. He has served first Jeremy Hunt and now John Whittingdale, both Secretaries of State at the DCMS. None has seen fit to enforce the legislation as the public library service degrades, disintegrates and fragments across the country.

While South Korea opens 180 new libraries and China has another 800, those in the UK are left to rot. And we

have not even mentioned school libraries, facing a similar fate.

Many of those present went over to Parliament or Portcullis House to present the issues to their MPs.

That evening we attended the public meeting at New Cross Learning in Lewisham [formerly a public library]. Alan Gibbons was very generous with his time and addressed the meeting in his own inimitable style. There is nobody quite like him for putting across the case.

At the end Kath and Gill, without whom there would be no community library in New Cross, made the point that they were filling the gap while this madness goes on. They were happy to do it, felt it was essential to carry on and keep the library presence in place (not wrong there, either.)

But they hoped for a return to normality so that all residents would receive the same comprehensive and efficient service.

So there we were in 1964, with a Conservative government. Fast forward to 2016 and before our eyes riches have turned to rags. How ironic that they let that happen, because it is not the will of the people.

And what will we do to stop it?





Hello fellow library fighters!

My name is Anna Karlsson. I work as a library assistant at Seaford library for East Sussex County Council. I attended the Speak Up For Libraries rally in February.

In April, I met with my MP in Brighton, Caroline Lucas. I provided her with the key lobby message from the rally, as well as an inside perspective from frontline staff.

I also tried to give a voice to people who rely on the library service but who for different reasons may not be able to speak up for themselves.

Caroline is a friend of our cause and has on several occasions spoken up for libraries.

<http://www.carolinelucas.com/latest/standing-up-for-local-libraries>

<http://www.carolinelucas.com/latest/caroline-holds-an-advice-surgery-at-the-jubilee-library-in-the-north-laine>

<http://www.carolinelucas.com/latest/emergency-exits-to-other-worlds>

Derek Toyne in Cornwall couldn't make the journey, but sent this...

A minister called Edward Vaizey
Thought funding for libraries was crazy.
Fiscal growth feeds on greed,
Not on learning to read;
Libraries just make people lazy.

The '64 Act was a bind,
But a minister surely could find
A way to negate it
(The PM must hate it)
And chancellor George wouldn't mind.

A two-pronged approach would be best
With sacred cows laid to rest:
An unbiased report
Which gives us support,
In which unwanted truths are suppressed.

Though the Arts Council knows about plays
They know little of library ways.
We'll have them suggest
It would really be best
To use staff whom nobody pays.

And although we cannot retract
That tiresome '64 Act,
Its drafting was rash
There's no mention of cash,
And that's undeniably fact.

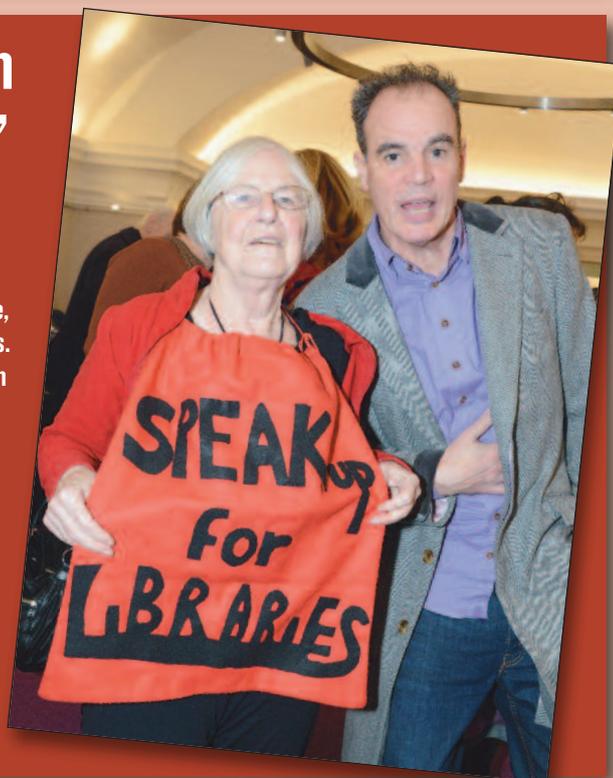
So no-one can call it a fraud
If we add in the bit they ignored!
So we just legislate
That you don't spend your rate
On libraries we cannot afford.

So three cheers for our far-sighted master
Who is driving us fast to disaster
Down a dead end street
Where we'll end up dead meat
With nothing except sticking plaster.

'Thanks for an inspiring day,'

says Julie Boston of Love our Libraries in Bristol, pictured here with Jake Arnott. She's lucky to have an MP, Thangam Debbonaire, who fully supports public libraries. Bristol has many problems, shown recently by an all-out strike of library staff faced with new and impossible working conditions. But she hopes to gain strength by linking with Swindon ('they're near-ish') and Barnet ('because they have been so brave').

Meanwhile, see her campaign's video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teWAb2sno0A>



COMMONS TOUCH

Part of the lobby was an Early Day Motion (no. 1025), which is still on the books. You can check to see if your MP has signed up: <http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2015-16/1025>

That this House recognises that public libraries are hugely important to our communities; acknowledges that many have already closed or are under threat; welcomes the Speak Up For Libraries lobby of Parliament in support of the public library service on 9 February 2016; and calls on the Government to ensure that councils have enough money to provide well-staffed quality library services to enforce the law that says local authorities must provide a comprehensive and efficient library service, to implement policy which secures people's statutory rights to a quality library service and to give libraries a long-term future by including a programme of library development and modernisation in the 2016 to 2020 Department for Culture, Media and Sport Business Plan.

It has not set the House alight, it must be said. Just 39 MPs have signed it, mostly Labour, with a handful from the Scottish National Party or the Democratic Unionist Party. So it's worth a small cheer for the solitary Conservative signatory, Edward Leigh, MP for Gainsborough. His constituency is in Lincolnshire, where libraries have been trashed by the (Conservative) council.

DETERMINATION!

A stronger-than-ever mood of determination was the keynote this year – the fourth SUFL conference, organised by Campaign for the Book, CILIP, The Library Campaign, UNISON and Voices for the Library.

But the underlying mood was very grim.

Photos: Trevor Craig; Text: Ian Anstice, Laura Swaffield



HOW IT WENT

The format was a bit different this time. Fewer speeches, more dialogue. The main focus was the new Leadership for Libraries Taskforce. This body resulted from the Sieghart Review [see Campaigner, issue no. 91]. It is now charged with co-ordinating all the action on public libraries. Back in November, it was pretty new. People wanted to know: as libraries crash and burn in their hundreds, will it actually be any help? People took full advantage of SUFL's unique status as the conference where campaigners can talk directly to decision-makers. Much of what was discussed is now reality, and is featured on our news pages. Other things – especially any real funding – we have yet to see...

PAUL BLANTERN

Paul is Chief Executive of Northamptonshire and chair of the Taskforce.

He said:

We are doing a ton of stuff. There is much sheer ignorance amongst senior council staff and politicians about libraries.

I have met no-one who actually wants to close a library. But the biggest pressure on local authorities is adult social services and safeguarding.

We need to tell councillors how libraries can help their agenda: put it in bite-size chunks so councillors can do something with it.

Virtually every government department we've seen (and we've seen them all) needs to understand what is going on in libraries: eg, libraries are vital for the digital skills needed for Universal Credit.

We then say to them: 'By the way, please can you help fund libraries to deliver your agenda?'

The other thing we have been doing on your behalf – and I need to stress I'm including work done by other bodies – is to talk to foundations and others about philanthropic funding.

We've also been out listening to librarians and campaign groups. We need to constantly reinforce a positive message about libraries.

The main decision maker agenda at the moment is combining local authority services: how do public libraries play a role in that, or in delivering personal health?

There's massive change going on in local authorities, so we need a national framework to give a context to positive messages about libraries. We ignore other council priorities at our peril.

Fighting the system is not a thing that the Taskforce will overtly do, but we do make the points you make to us.



KATHY SETTLE

Taskforce chief executive Kathy Settle wanted to know what we wanted as short-term and long-term actions, top priorities. What would success look like?

She said:

The Taskforce jointly reports to LGA (Local Government Association), DCMS (Department for Culture, Media & Sport) and DCLG (Department for Communities & Local Government), thus to central and local government. It is temporary, but will pass on documents/work for others to do at the end of the project.

There is no agreement

whatsoever about what success for public libraries would look like.

Please engage with us on social media, our blog, by letters...

Some aims:

- Libraries have a strong role in digital literacy as well as in literacy. Basic things that need to be delivered include wifi for every branch.
- We're mindful that some of the old computers are not good, so that needs upgrading. We need to show people that libraries are fit for the 21st century.
- Most people nowadays don't know what libraries do. Many senior people have never been in a library for 20 years. How do we promote and articulate about libraries?
- I've seen some great things in libraries but we're not capturing the best practice of what's going on. How do we share that?
- Workforce: professional or volunteer? How do we ensure those people are trained?
- Communications and promotion: the media narrative is very negative. Sometimes that narrative becomes too dominant. We need to stress the importance of libraries and what they do.

TASKFORCE Q & A

Is there a contradiction between discussion and doing things behind closed doors?

We have to be realistic about how we do things appropriately. As a Taskforce we are open and transparent, but embarrassing people in public is not what we want. So it is better to talk behind closed doors when necessary.

Can you sit in public?

No. But we do publish everything that has been decided and we do come out and see a lot of people.



We'll consult all the way too, but it won't work being more open.

Why are Unison/library users not included on the Steering Group?

We cannot increase the size of the Taskforce as it would be unwieldy. We will have open dialogue with [all stakeholders].

Why should we as library users have faith in a Taskforce that is keen to deliver alternative library models and outsource library services?

If councillors choose different models, our role is to give pros and cons and say what is legal.

A lot of it at the moment is reinventing the wheel. That's not optimum for them, let alone nationally.

But let's be realistic – we do need to cut costs and outsource. If you didn't have the Taskforce you'd have one less significant tank in your armoury. When a library is in the headlines we go to them and talk to them, including hassling them if they don't take up the wifi offer.



There's no real challenging of the "shrinking of the state" agenda, so what's the point of you?

We are not the Prime Minister or a politician, so getting national debt under control is not what we do. We are by definition apolitical. The question is how do we innovate?

The whole point is that we invest in prevention in order to reduce demand on the state.

Staff salaries are a pittance and can't be saving much money.

If you look at the marginal costs of closing libraries it's

Solidarity!

The one set-piece speech was the keynote by **Nick Poole**, the new chief executive of CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals). Aimed mostly at librarians, it sounded a new note of defiance...

This an opportunity to talk about an issue which we don't talk about often enough. It's an issue which commonly affects politicians aged over 40 – Empathy Deficit.

ED can ruin lives – admittedly, not their own. Of course, it can also lead to the other type of ED – Electoral Defeat.

I love libraries, and I love librarians. Librarians changed the course of my life, introduced me to ideas and literature, taught me about the value and the fragility of freedom and civil liberties.

I never want to lose sight of that. Even as we look to dark and difficult days ahead, I want to keep sight of the fact that we have brilliant libraries, full of brilliant people. Across the country today, right now, our libraries are changing lives for the better.

There's a word I've been using a lot since I started in this job in June. That word is 'solidarity'. It's an important word, and I think it has never been more so than it is today.

I want to start today by expressing solidarity with all of you – here in this room and all over the country, indeed all over the world – as you fight to defend something that I believe is incredibly precious.

I've worked in countries where the right to

knowledge is not universal. I've met families – here in the UK and elsewhere – that are struggling to support the kind of digital access that a modern education demands.

I've seen what happens to people's aspirations when their right to self-expression is curtailed. That is not the future I want.

I want to express solidarity with everyone working to deliver library services to the public – paid or unpaid, Chartered or not. Whether you're on the front desk or managing services, what you do matters.

I have visited many kinds of library since I joined CILIP. Some big metropolitan services, some community-run. Some in health premises, schools and colleges.

I can honestly say that almost every single person I have met has articulated the same passion – to help people help themselves. This is so important. We ought to stand in unity and solidarity with anyone who shares that belief.

I don't want to blame the volunteers for volunteering, I want to blame the people who are forcing our libraries to substitute paid professionals with unpaid volunteers.

For the same reason, I want to express solidarity



with the managers – the decision-makers who find themselves making decisions none of them ever wanted to make.

Yes, some of them are making arbitrary and vindictive decisions. But many are trying to keep as many plates spinning as possible with an ever-diminishing resource.

I don't imagine that the authors of the 1964 Public Libraries Act ever dreamed that the definition of 'comprehensive and efficient' would be stretched so thin.

The simple fact is that we should never have to be in the position of defending people's right to benefit from a quality library service. In an enlightened society, that right should be inalienable.

not all that much. What savings do people really make? Actually, closing one does not save much money.

The public library service is being smashed. That is the crucial issue you need to take up. We do acknowledge that libraries are being closed. The message about that needs to be balanced with positive messages. Our reason is to support the service but we are not a lobby group. Challenging the decision makers is not our role.

You should do your job and tell politicians what libraries should have. We need to reintroduce library standards and tighten up the Act. Are you making that one of your aims?

We can and do recommend to central and local government, so one of the discussions is about a framework at national level. There's a mix between wanting to strengthen the Act and those who fear doing anything will mean the Act will be abolished. The decision is that we should not push for a stronger Act but publicise what the Act actually says.

Standards are something people have pushed for



(we still have them in Wales but even there they're not a panacea and they're open to interpretation). But the current government, which people have elected, focuses on devolution, not on introducing new standards. Don't expect to see any movement from ministers on this. The LGA would resist it more than the government.

Libraries are keystone amenities, and we need to reinforce the message about accessibility. Centralised libraries are ridiculous if local ones close.

It's possible to co-locate services to distribute libraries better. Geography is changing, so some libraries need to move location.

Co-location means we lose our identities as libraries. People won't trust us then.

The criterion is whether these things work or not. You're right, though, that libraries should not be damaged in the process. The job is making sure that people understand libraries can play a real role in council agendas. Libraries absolutely have to be safe and trusted. If it makes more work for library staff, that needs funding. You need to pay for the space



Lest we forget – we are the third largest economy in Europe, possibly the second. We are the 7th largest in the world. This isn't about money, it's about ideology.

For those of us in receipt of public funding, we must always be accountable and efficient in how we use that money to benefit users. But we cannot be held to account for the value of our services solely in economic terms. In the recent words of a Parliamentarian: 'This is not a spreadsheet exercise.'

At some point all lives, all careers, all communities intersect with and benefit from the work we do. That is the definition of a universal public service.

As the UK-wide professional body for library and information professionals working to open up knowledge for the public, CILIP has a responsibility not only to stand in solidarity with everyone willing to commit to defending this ideal, but to bring our voices together at the highest levels in government to hold our elected officials to account. And that is what we will do.

We have a responsibility to ensure that the media and, through them, the public understand what it is they are at risk of losing. And that is what we will do.

We can repair the fabric of professionalism and standards that has worn thin over the past decade, strengthening the Act, advocating for national policy and seeking to secure manifesto commitments to support our community. And that is what we will do.

But I also need to ask you to do more. And I know you already do a very great deal. I need to ask you to consider some other acts of solidarity.

The first is between all library and information professionals and people working in publicly-funded libraries – public libraries, schools, colleges and the

NHS. To paraphrase, because I am part of society, the loss of any library diminishes me.

Whether you call yourself a librarian, or a data scientist or a knowledge architect or an information manager – we are stronger when we stand together and advocate for our skills, ethics and professionalism, in industry, in universities, law firms or classrooms.

The second is between young and old. Looking around the room, I would guess that some of you have enjoyed long and distinguished careers in libraries. You'll have seen austerity, recession and recovery and so you'll know that these cycles happen again and again. You'll also know the truth of the expression: 'This, too, shall pass'.

Some of you will be just embarking on your careers – whether in the public sector, in companies or even just looking for work or studying.

I would like to assure you that, despite the tempestuous times in which we live, this is still in my view the best career you could choose. You will be surrounded by passionate, committed people with a vital skillset.

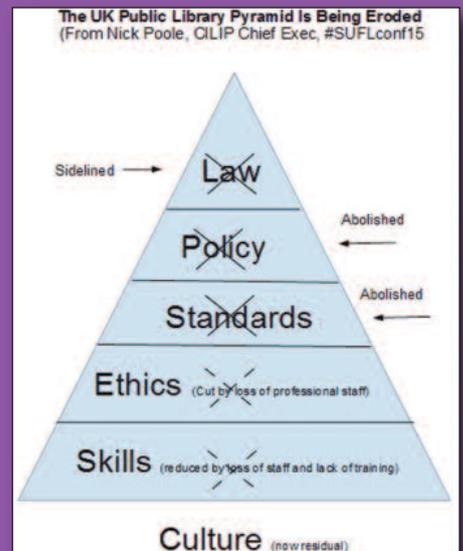
The old guard need to be patient with those who are defining new kinds of service for a changing society. Together, young and old, we must be optimistic about the possible future for the sector.

I know that many people want CILIP to be a campaigner. You want us to man the barricades and march arm-in-arm with you. Others want us to be a union – defending individuals as they go through what is often an unpleasant and distressing process.

We cannot man the barricades and we aren't a union. But it is not good enough to be defined by what we aren't, or by what we can't do. We know

that we need to step up and be defined by what we can do.

We have lost a great deal already, and we stand to lose more. I want to look back on this period and see a CILIP that stood in solidarity with our community, a CILIP that made a real and lasting difference, a CILIP that demonstrated leadership when it was needed most.



Libraries' pyramid of support, taken from Nick Poole's flipchart at a workshop. Starting at the top: (a) the law has been undermined; (b) policy – but there's no national policy any more; (c) standards – but there are no national standards in England; (d) ethics have been eroded as the profession has been eroded; (e) skills have been reduced with job losses; (f) now we're just running on library culture, which is the weakest of them all.

and ensure it does not affect the brand and values of libraries.

It's unfair to expect the community to take on library services under duress. I thought the Taskforce was neutral, but you seem to be pushing the volunteer line.

We talk to portfolio holders and always touch on volunteer libraries. We are very clear about the pros and cons. In some circumstances it may be appropriate if that's the only solution, but the onus is still with the council to be responsible for volunteers.

I have publicly said it's unacceptable to cut volunteers adrift with libraries. It works well where the council still supports the library and the community has a clear agreement.

The Taskforce is absolutely not pushing volunteer-run libraries. The ideal would be entirely paid staff. We don't know how long-term volunteer libraries will be – they may be great in five years or not, we don't know. But we can advise on practicalities.

Contact the 151 public library services and ask how many volunteer libraries there are!

A Survey Monkey has been sent to all authorities asking this. We are mapping all this and will be putting it in the public domain.

It's great that you visit libraries but can you take Mr Vaizey and Mr Whittingdale with you? They need to see how great libraries are.



WE AGREE!

Kathy Settle said:

There's a lack of data about public libraries. Sometimes there are different systems even to see who is taking out books, ebooks and audiobooks. Many of these systems don't talk to each other.

That's hard individually and it's even worse nationally. How can we make good decisions if we don't know what is going on? We need to improve that. CIPFA data is always eight months late, and the world has moved on. See gov.uk/performance for real time data about how the government is doing. That's how you manage a good service.

So we're looking at how best to manage the data we have, to look at those authorities that are doing well and learn from them. We're also looking at what data we actually need, and how we get it easily accessible.

We absolutely agree. We've had Mr Vaizey out to three libraries and we encourage all to do the same, including encouraging councillors to hold surgeries in libraries.

People know exactly what success looks like but politicians don't. We all agree that libraries should be good, and local. You're telling us that's not possible. That's telling us we can't have success, not that we don't know what success is. We take the point about success. But we need to be realistic as we don't have the money. So there are trade-offs we're not particularly thrilled about.



WE DISAGREE!

Kathy Settle asked:

What would [our] success look like? Should the Taskforce take 'reality' into account, and develop new models that are sustainable in a climate of austerity?

No, said librarian Ruth Cashman. 'You should state that everyone has the right to local libraries, better libraries, access to books and IT. Then ask the politicians why that's not available.'



'Time is not on our side,' said librarian Ian Anstice of Public Libraries News. 'Whatever you do, do it quickly.'

Support for libraries

OVERDUE

JOHN DOUGHERTY



I'm fed up with people saying libraries need to modernise. People who say that have never been in a library. It's their ideas about libraries that need to modernise.

I lived in Gloucestershire when they were wanting to cut libraries. They launched a consultation that was both patronising and made clear they weren't going to listen to anything that was said.

It really seems to me that the people in power just don't care. They don't care enough to hate libraries. They don't care enough to find out about them.

When local MP David Cameron complained to Oxfordshire, he got a unique reply. I know this is not normally the case, as letters seem to be centrally produced. I don't why David got a special reply, but I suspect it was because he is Prime Minister.

The six-page letter was very carefully written, saying there was nothing he suggested that had not already been done – or was illegal.

Even the PM does not care enough to know what his policies actually do.

Trouble in Swindon - again

Like many towns, Swindon has faced damaging closure plans before. Like many towns, it finds austerity 2016 means new threats that are worse than ever. Far worse ...

Swindon so far

Back in 2007, Shirley Burnham decided that closing her local library in Old Town, Swindon, was not on. The council's claim that the shiny new central library was 'only half a mile away' didn't hold water.

It was more like a mile, down a vertiginously steep slope and across a dual carriage-way. And Old Town was a district in itself, with streets of shops and facilities, where a small library was an obvious essential.

Her campaign saved a library for Old Town.

Elsewhere in Swindon, an early example of a volunteer library has had a mixed history, with plummeting performance [see *The Campaigner*, no.87] and problems with support from the council. Yet this is how Swindon wants all its local libraries run in future.

Shirley, meanwhile, has become a tireless and respected campaigner both in Swindon and nationally. From home, she daily provides an update on press stories nationwide, with useful background material from her extensive files.

Now she finds Swindon's future plans are worse than anyone could have imagined 10 years ago. But the whole town is rising up against them, and new people are joining the fight. It's a pattern being repeated all over the UK...

Save Swindon's Libraries - an integrated campaign



Sarah Church takes up the story

The campaign group to Save Swindon's Libraries began in February. We were born of separate library campaigns within Swindon, all fighting a common enemy: cuts to the public library service.

The plan so far from Swindon Borough Council is to reduce the service from 15 static and one mobile library, down to the one central library in town. The budget will be slashed by over 60% by 2020, with £300,000 of cuts this year.

I've found myself as Chair with a team of about ten others. The initial work we began on Save Highworth Library this year was effective in raising the profile of the issue, and we led the charge against the current round of cuts.

We were joined by veteran library campaigner Shirley Burnham, who has been standing up for Old Town Library in Swindon since 2007. What could have been a council strategy to divide and conquer library users in Swindon has unified

residents from across the borough in a common cause.

What are we fighting? A budget cut of over 60% by 2020, dressed up as a 'new vision' or an 'emerging model', based upon volunteers running libraries, local community groups administering them. Branch libraries would close where volunteers do not come forward, leaving only the large central library funded.

This is sadly not news to many others in England, Scotland and Wales. Cuts to, and by, local governments of all political colours are really biting into essential statutory services.

Our council was offered transitional funding to ease the cuts. We are pushing for wise investment of this money, but currently the council refuses to commit these funds to the libraries. This seems more than just negligent. It seems like a dereliction of duty.

Library services are provided by local government, which means that separate library campaigns are fighting locally for their own libraries. Emerging local solutions are providing an increasingly fragmented and diminished service.

In a meeting with the Rt Hon Ed Vaizey MP, where I pushed him to do more as the Minister with responsibility for the library service, he shrugged and



■ Volunteer libraries: warning sign!



claimed impotence in the face of the choices made locally. In all local authority areas, library campaigns have become political footballs, regardless of which half of the pitch you are on.

Campaigns such as The Library Campaign and My Library by Right are seeking to address the devastation of our library services on a national level, but we library campaigners need to look up from our localities and start to push a little harder nationally too.

Stalwart library campaigner, Alan Gibbons, who came to speak at our first public meeting and really inspired our campaign, is talking about campaigning for a national standard on the mysterious loophole in

the wording of the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964: the 'comprehensive and efficient' library service.

I've heard Swindon Borough councillors saying it all depends what you mean by a library, as if swindling the public out of a much-needed and much-loved service is something to be 'got away with'. Could we be doing more to stand firmly nationally to ring-fence funding and set a national standard?

Save Swindon's Libraries is making some progress in pushing Swindon Borough Council to commit to a professional, accessible and accountable library service.



■ Elizabeth Ash from The Library Campaign with Jake Arnott.

I am certain that this is because we stand as one campaign across the town. We have also intervened early in the process. Still pre-consultation, we can really make a difference, I hope.

Save Swindon's Libraries would like to thank Elizabeth Ash of the Library Campaign for coming to Swindon for our public meeting earlier this month. She inspired us in a gesture of national solidarity in the very early days of our campaign.



■ Panel of speakers at a protest meeting (L to R): writer Paul Cornell, writer Jake Arnott, Sarah Church, writer and one-man Campaign for the Book Alan Gibbons, Shirley Burnham.

This time it's a tsunami

Save Old Town Library Campaign's warnings since 2007 of a potential tsunami of assaults on Swindon's public libraries were largely ignored because they were considered to be Old Town residents' business, rather than that of the whole borough.

Others saw them as panic-mongering. They were not. They were prophetic.

Swindon currently has a very good library service. It could now be well on the way to being reduced to chaos and mediocrity.

An African proverb says: 'Only a fool tests the depth of the water with both feet'. The current threat is to the very existence of our professional, accessible service.

I find it outrageous that we are not only being asked to dive into these murky waters, but that we must suggest to councillors and officers what buoyancy aids or life-jackets could save us all from drowning. In the meantime councillors and MPs sit on the river bank, deaf to our cries and too lazy to research outcomes.



Shirley Burnham sums up

Swindon's official way forward embraces the mantra 'different strokes for different folks'. This guarantees a postcode lottery of service that is devoid of consistent standards and fairness.

Whether this mishmash of provision will be run by commercial interests, arms-length outfits or on a DIY basis by volunteers, it is unlikely to produce anything akin to excellence for Swindon. So...

... Significant numbers of like-minded people from all walks of life who care about the universal service, value it as a 'public good' and have aspirations for the town which exceed the mediocre, have rallied to the 'Save Swindon's Libraries' cause.

Our borough-wide petition, public meetings and press coverage have, I hope, alerted councillors and residents to the very real dangers of passively accepting these library cuts.

YOUR COUNCIL NEEDS YOU... PAGE 32

...to help run parks and libraries

By Gareth Davies
gareth.davies@croydonadvertiser.co.uk

THE cash-strapped council is to ask residents to run some of Croydon's libraries and parks.

Cabinet members this week approved two major consultation processes focused on how the public can take responsibility for services currently provided by the council.

Community groups are to be asked whether they would be willing to take over some of the borough's 13 libraries.

If volunteers cannot be found to manage underused branches, professional staff are likely to be replaced with self-service machines.

The public will also be asked to manage some of Croydon's 127 parks and green spaces.

The council says the current system, where maintenance is outsourced then overseen by council officers, is unsustainable due to reduced Government funding.

Spending cuts of £29 million will be made over the next three years and the council says residents, including Croydon's 33 parks groups, will have to do more to help balance the books.

Asked why taxpayers should provide services traditionally managed by the council, Timothy Godfrey, cabinet member for culture, leisure and sport, said: "It's the new world we're in."

O&11 ONLINE: Have your say on this at croydonadvertiser.co.uk

Croydon casebook

One borough's story illustrates common factors seen everywhere as library services are dismantled... Different political parties can be as bad as each other.

Cuts in the past are no protection against even more cuts in the future.

Outsourcing is far from the magic wand claimed by some. In fact, in Croydon it seems to be leading seamlessly into dumping most libraries on to volunteers – if any can be found. And, as usual, any 'consultation' with the public is hard to access, skewed and looks only too likely to come up with the results the council wants. Elizabeth Ash reports.

Croydon's library service was outsourced in late 2013 by the then Tory administration. The contract went to John Laing, which quickly passed it on to Carillion.

Already, the service had been cut. Staffing and bookstock were slashed to such an extent that once-full shelving was removed, and the absence or delay

of just one member of staff meant a library could not open.

The outsourcing plan was vigorously opposed by Croydon Labour whilst in opposition.

➤ They called on advice from Tim Coates, who slammed the excessive loading of back office costs on to the libraries budget.

- They declared that, if appointed, they would not work with a private company to run libraries.
- Labour's lead on libraries, Timothy Godfrey, promised that Croydon Labour would tear up the libraries contract if they gained control of the council.
- Cllr Godfrey also promised that Croydon Labour would be there 'to pick up the pieces and re-build our library service in a cost effective, efficient way that engages properly with local people'.

The reality...

Having gained control of the council in May 2014, Croydon Labour have done little to deliver on these promises. Half-way through their term in office, libraries have sunk deeper into disarray.

➤ The ridiculous promise to rip up the contract with Carillion has not been mentioned again, a promise they must have known they could never keep.

- The offer of help from Tim Coates (who offered to travel from America to advise again, at no cost to the council) was spurned, without even the courtesy of a reply.
- The library service has been eroded beyond recognition under Carillion, overseen by the Conservatives and now Labour, with further staff cuts and stock extremely poor.
- Staff are left vulnerable and library users without help, with just one member of staff per floor in a larger library or on the desk/pod of a branch library. Several floors at Croydon Central are completely devoid of staff.

Library's ridiculous system will not let me study there

I have never been in a library where I am promoted to leave if I want to study.

I visited Croydon central library recently and discovered a ridiculous table pass system whereby blue and red tables are for studying tables (and are always full) and yellow tables for no studying (which are always empty).

Students are turned away, yet yellow tables are empty all day. Evidently the "study pass" system does not work, as there are different fluxes of people studying and people not studying

in the library at different times. Sitting at a yellow table, students are told off and forced to leave if studying.

In one particular case two, (note two), boys were forced to move to a tiny table with one chair. Thus, we had to pretend to be "leisurely reading" in order to sit at a yellow table.

On another occasion I was resigned to squish on a sofa next to the noisy escalator and near empty yellow tables, studying for my degree.

I was then told to move my books and if I continue showing

opposition I will be asked to leave. I am a 20-year-old woman sat quietly studying for a degree. How does this promote a library's purpose?

All students are patronised, argued with and discriminated against. Particularly as older people "studying" on sofas were not told to move books or to leave. Plus the nonsensical "only a 30-minute break" rule is patronising. Why visit this condescending institution!

My easy solution would be the following:

☐ to promote studying in all

areas of the library at desks

☐ Sofas and a designated area for "recreational" reading.

☐ An increased amount of tables and study areas as there is excess space on all floors.

☐ Explaining to "recreational" readers that at exam periods there will be a lack of space in the library.

This is a free country and as a resident I deserve the right to peacefully work in my local library.

ELINOR MEREDITH
Student and
ex-Croydon library user

explanation. Lack of staffing has meant that volunteers have had to step in at short notice to run activities.

- Volunteers are not being trained adequately, further impacting on staff time and providing a poorer service.
- Carillion have introduced charges, including a fee for PC use over two hours and a fee for events and talks by visiting authors.
- The library management system is very poor, leading to reserved items never surfacing or taking as long as three months to appear.
- Carillion also oversaw the controversial gaffer tape approach to seat allocation. Crudely applied strips of industrial tape on the tables in Croydon Central distinguished between tables for study or leisure. Study table passes for students were issued on a day basis only.
- The extremely popular Summer Book Trail (a librarian-led version of the Reading Agency's Summer Reading Challenge, encouraging children to read from a wide selection of titles and chosen authors, with questions and quizzes devised by staff on each title, and prizes) has gone. It has been replaced by the Reading Agency's version – but with only volunteers to run it. This has led to a marked decline in uptake. The once heaving libraries witnessed in summers past are now often empty, with bored volunteers drumming their fingers....

Croydon Labour have done little to deliver their promises

There have been some small wins such as the re-opening of the entrance to Croydon Central Library. This had previously been closed, allowing access only via the exit, masking the lack of staff, the length of unstaffed counter space and the loss of the dedicated returns, reservations and enquiries counters at the entrance.

The student pass system has been removed in Croydon Central, along with the gaffer tape. Students no longer need to queue daily for a pass to use the tables deemed to be study desks.

Perhaps I should add the removal of the onus on already hard-pressed library staff to be keepers of

the daily key code to the public toilets in the Croydon Clocktower complex, which houses Croydon Central...

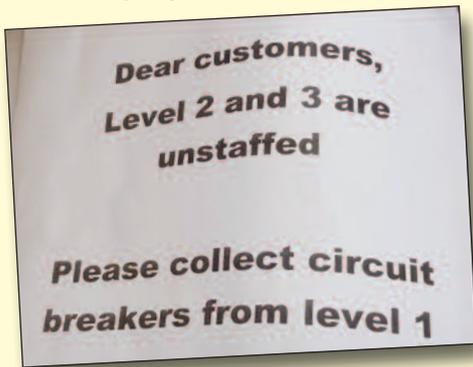
On the downside, Croydon has had anything but clear messages about plans for libraries under Labour....

- All but one 'statutory' library (ie, Croydon Central) may close, the local press has announced.
- Cllr Godfrey has hit the headlines again with his call for volunteers to run parks and libraries (Croydon is already struggling to cover the extensive volunteer opportunities it offers in libraries and elsewhere).
- Support for Lambeth's 'co-operative' model was mentioned both before and after the elections, without any consultation or mandate. Given the outcry in Lambeth [see p.12] and the shoddy treatment of Upper Norwood Library, it is unlikely that this model will meet with acceptance from Croydon residents.

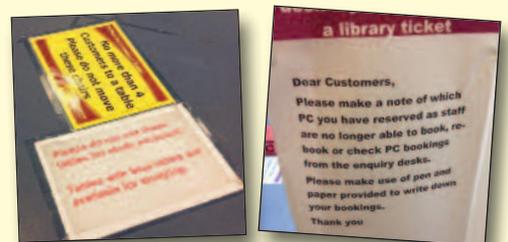
The promised consultation has been anything but. It is not even called a consultation but an 'engagement exercise' (thus possibly evading the requirements for consultations). It is merely an online survey, earning the title of 'possibly the crappiest survey on libraries ever', from tweeter Matt Imrie, who summed the situation up well in 140 characters!

Even the councillors who spoke in support at the cabinet meeting stumbled over the terms, some referring to a consultation, others to an engagement exercise. These councillors also reported feedback from residents calling for gift and souvenir shops in libraries, coffee shops, art classes and pottery workshops.

The council officer responsible for the engagement exercise was firm that the survey was to be available only online and there would be no



- Queues in libraries are lengthy, leaving library users waiting and little time for staff to help with queries.
- Self-service machines have been introduced in all but a handful of smaller libraries. These often sit idle, while library users queue to speak to staff.
- Carillion's lack of promotion is marked, with promotional material not listing the events in all libraries and issued late, even though they moved from monthly to quarterly to address this issue.
- The boards by the exit at Central for community notices have been reassigned to library notices only, so library users must travel up to higher floors where leaflets are now housed.
- The social media presence is almost non-existent, failing to promote what the service has to offer and events such as World Book Night.
- Carillion have not been called to speak at a scrutiny meeting, as is part of their contract, to account to the council and the public for their actions.
- Carillion have cut activities in libraries and halted youth activities at short notice, without



notices in any library. (Notices did start appearing in some libraries – but not all, with a display in one library and no notice whatsoever in another. A bundle of 100 paper copies was delivered to one library, when requested. Another received just 10 copies, others none at all.

Some residents did manage to receive a single hard copy by giving their details at a library, which were passed on to the council officer, who posted them. Any request had to go via the library manager. Quite whether my own request was not approved by the library manager or whether it was the council officer who blocked it, I'll never know, but I did not receive a hard copy.

Due to the low response, the exercise was extended from the original closing date of 2 May until 16 May, but there was little notice of this. An extension beyond this was given to at least one resident, who planned to canvass the views of classes in one primary school, starting the day after the consultation closed!

The survey itself was skewed towards volunteering. It noted library staff in the question on what is valued now, but omitted this from the list of options for what respondents would like to see in the future service. Some listed aspects married across, others didn't, which would skew the results further.



Residents reported finding the online survey difficult to complete. Tiny text boxes obscured the already input text, and many found the survey closed before they'd had the chance to note all they wished to say.

The promised focus groups in libraries were held without notice – and not in libraries. Not even the library staff could advise those who wished to take part, as they had not been informed.

There were no public meetings, just a meeting run by a community group, to which the cabinet member tabled apologies (but only on the day).

The engagement exercise was branded 'Ambitious for the Library Service in Croydon'. Yet it is hard to see how the council could be any less ambitious.

The engagement process could not be any more flawed. It is highly unlikely that it will produce data of any worth to inform decisions. A proper consultation is needed, allowing all residents to have a say, whether this be online, in writing or verbally, in a public meeting or a focus group.

The Croydon library service is being dismantled, piece by piece, by a private company which clearly cares little for the service.

Croydon residents need to understand why the council is not holding Carillion to account for ripping the heart out of a once successful library service, a service that has seen a 15.5% drop in book issues in just one year, and a poor ranking nationally.

Serious and urgent action must be taken before it is too late.

81% of people who took part in an Advertiser poll said they would not be willing to help run their local library because "that's the council's job".

White mischief?

The 'first white paper for culture in more than 50 years', from the DCMS, has a foreword by minister Ed Vaizey, responsible for libraries...
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/culture-white-paper>

Public libraries are (just about – but not for much longer) a massive national cultural resource like no other. Many of the key principles laid out in the white paper are highly relevant, you'd think:

1. Everyone should enjoy the opportunities culture offers, no matter where they start in life... culture should be an essential part of every child's education, both in and out of school.

2. The riches of our culture should benefit communities across the country... we will promote the role that culture has in building stronger and healthier communities and boosting economic growth... our historic built environment is a unique asset and local communities will be supported to make the most of the buildings they cherish.

4. Cultural investment, resilience and reform... the government will continue to invest in our growing cultural sectors.

Number 4 will start to raise hackles...

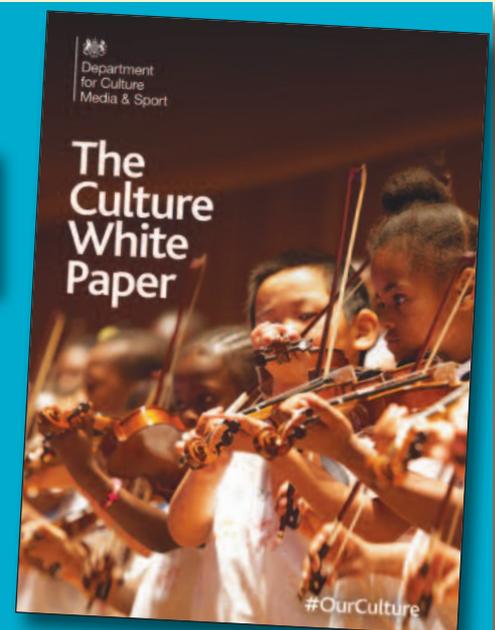
Specific mentions of libraries are few: the Summer Reading Challenge, the Taskforce and the British Library (billed as one of the 'bodies with UK-wide remits' funded by the government – public libraries don't seem to count).

That's about it. Why are we not surprised?

It's good to read, somewhere buried in the text, that: 'Culture creates inspiration, enriches lives and improves our outlook on life.'

'One study showed that 16–18 year olds who participated in the arts and those who visited heritage sites or libraries were more likely to go on to further education in subsequent years.'

Elsewhere we find that: 'While the government considers that many of the elements needed to provide quality cultural opportunities for children and young people already exist, the network of provision remains patchy, with geographical and social



barriers stacking the odds against those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

'We need a clearer focus on those who are currently least well served.'

We sure do. Meanwhile, government under-funding and indifference hack away at a resource that should be the foundation for everything it claims to want to offer nationwide.

Remind us, which government department is responsible for public libraries? Oh yes, the DCMS.

