

THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN

SUPPORTING FRIENDS AND USERS OF LIBRARIES

PHOTO: SUFFOLK LIBRARIES



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THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN – AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

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



The Library Campaign

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Registered charity (England & Wales) No. 1102634

THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN

maintains a

FREE LIST

of local

FRIENDS AND USER GROUPS

with their contact details, on our website.

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

thelibrarycampaign@gmail.com



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

ELECTED OFFICERS

Laura Swaffield London

Andrew Coburn Essex

MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Geoffrey Dron Bolton

Bob Goodrick London

The following organisations send representatives to attend steering group meetings:

Unison,

Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals (CILIP).

WHO'S WHO?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LIBRARIES CONNECTED (formerly Society of Chief Librarians) advises LGA on libraries. Does a lot of useful work, including research and resources, but tends to stick 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.

Save the date! 25 MARCH 2023 – 2pm

We're having an **OPEN MEETING** for everyone interested in public libraries, whether or not they are Library Campaign members, at **UNISON CENTRE, 130 EUSTON ROAD, LONDON, NW1 2AY.**

GUEST SPEAKER: Isobel Hunter (Chief Executive, Libraries Connected) with LC's analysis of the current library landscape, to start our discussions – including on the Sanderson inquiry into public libraries in England, which will foreshadow a new government Public Library Strategy in 2023 **plus** anything else you want to talk about! The venue is close to the train and tube stations at Euston and King's Cross.



We hope to see as many people as possible face-to-face (over tea, coffee and biscuits) but...

YOU CAN ATTEND ONLINE

The meeting will be available using Microsoft Teams. You do not need to download Teams to attend online but you must register on Eventbrite and say that you want to attend via Teams. A link will be sent closer to the time of the meeting.

NEXT for Library Campaign members only – OUR AGM

We'll be brief, but we'll cover our recent activities, the accounts, elections of officers – and our trustee panel.

WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

We are looking for new members of our advisory panel (called trustees because we are a charity). We want your ideas, your experiences and your news, to keep us fully in touch and responsive to your needs. It doesn't mean a lot of work. To find out more, see page 35.

BOOK VIA Eventbrite: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/annual-general-meeting-sanderson-inquiry-into-public-libraries-tickets-551496971287>

THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGNER SPRING 2023, No.104

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CLIP has put some basic information into an attractive package

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Suffolk's library service adds to its file of research that proves that libraries are a fantastic bargain – even in terms of hard cash

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News catch-up

TLC's website, Twitter and Instagram are the places to go for news as it happens. Here's a round-up of some recent stories that are still topical – with a few updates.

January 2023

Make your library famous!

The project to give England's libraries a much-needed 'digital presence' is gradually making progress. It now has a name – LibraryOn.

We hope 2023 will show visible results. And you can get in on the ground floor – if you have photos of your library.

The team (at the British Library) wants to stockpile some 'high-quality images to use on the platform that demonstrate what the modern public library does and their impact.

For example:

- places where people can work, study and learn
- groups offering support, learning and companionship
- friendly interactions between staff and customers
- storytimes that children and carers enjoy together.

'If you have pictures that fit the bill, please send them to us, including relevant information such as the name of the library and the setting. If they're large files, you might want to send them in a zipped folder, use a file-sharing tool like WeTransfer or send us a link to an online photo album.

'Please ensure you've secured all relevant permissions before submitting them, and include photo credits. Send to: hello@libraryon.org, with the subject line 'Library photos'.



Brixton library, London

November 2022

Libraries provide a happy ending...

In our spring 2022 magazine (no 102) we reported on a rather mysterious nationwide project. The one thing we knew was that libraries would be involved.

It had begun as Theresa May's idea to celebrate the UK's creative wonders in the post-Brexit world to come. It never did shake off its label as 'The Festival of Brexit', though it was never called that.

At the last minute it acquired the mystifying name 'Unboxed'. It didn't help. The verdict now is that it was a poor way to spend £120m.

Participation didn't quite reach its... ahem... 'stretch target' of 66 million worldwide. 2.8 million is the latest official figure.

Published comment has ranged from unconvinced to downright scathing.

But wait!

The big success was the libraries! Fifteen services staged the high tech Unboxed mix of virtual reality experiences and outdoor guided trails telling local stories.

The Reading Agency reports 'exceptionally high footfall, with many authorities experiencing visitor numbers not seen prior to the Covid pandemic'.

'Of the high percentage of new visitors, 67% said they thought they were now more likely to visit the library as a result of experiencing StoryTrails.'

Protect partner Professor James Bennett says: 'StoryTrails has provided thousands with their first taste of immersive storytelling: and they loved it! 91% rated our 3D local map experience 4* or 5*.'



‘Most libraries reported a two- or three-fold increase in footfall, reconnecting visitors to their local library spaces which are such crucial centres of storytelling in our communities.’

Proof yet again that libraries are a uniquely trusted venue for new experiences. And that library staff are well able to learn new skills and adapt to almost anything...

December 2022

UK or Ukraine – libraries matter

It's seldom easy to get the mainstream press to cover library stories.

The Guardian is better than most. And it has started off December with – we hope – a message that can't be brushed aside.

A Guardian leader on Saturday 3 December spelled out the seriousness of the current situation. It refers to the mass closures during ‘austerity’ up to 2019. It links this to the loss of a quarter of their funding. This point is often overlooked in clever-dick analyses that see any decline as proof of libraries’ ‘irrelevance’.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/dec/04/the-guardian-view-on-local-libraries-a-resource-that-must-be-protected>

Then it brings us sharply up to date: ‘It has taken the catastrophic cost of living crisis of the last few months to reassert the claim of the 3,000 surviving outlets to be the beating heart of their communities: places where people can go not only to find books, information and internet access, but also to play, meet up and keep warm.’

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/oct/12/martin-lewis-libraries-winter-warm-banks>

Arts Council England, it notes, is getting the point. Improved funding for selected leading



services is ‘a step change’. But that is still peanuts, rising from £1.5m to just £4.1m.

And it's not the point. The Guardian quotes the recent select committee's call for proper basic government funding for all libraries, as we reported last month.

And it adds: ‘Responsibility for core costs remains with local authorities, and this is where the real anxieties lie, as councils struggle to balance the books in the face of yet more cuts...’

‘It is vital that the government steps up. The cost of not doing so is unimaginable.’

A longer, darker, story appeared on Sunday 4 December in the Observer, the Guardian's sister paper. It's about Ukraine.

Our Library Campaigner magazine got there first, with a feature on Ukraine's heroic librarians in our last issue (no 103, page 15). Kate Thompson focused mainly on their humanitarian work – sheltering, comforting and equipping local people.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/dec/04/our-mission-is-crucial-meet-the-warrior-librarians-of-ukraine>
<https://librarycampaign.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/103-COMLETE.pdf>

But the Observer looks at even deeper issues. Russia, right from the start, has deliberately bombed and ransacked archives, state records and cultural collections. Including records of its own activities, now and in the past. The aim is simple – to destroy Ukraine's national memory, and its national identity.

Everyone should read this account of Ukraine's impressive fightback.

The people know what is at stake. Do we in the UK realise just how much libraries matter?

Does the government?

November 2022

Not new is good news

Sighs of relief all round this week when the government announced – it is not changing the libraries minister! It's still Lord Parkinson. (Apologies to those who caught up with Liz Truss's short-lived appointment / allocation of the library brief to someone else.)

Over the years, libraries ministers have changed almost as rapidly as Prime Ministers in the past few weeks. Each time, DCMS civil servants and library bodies have patiently taken them on visits, talked to them and taught them what libraries do. They usually need it.



So it's good not to have to start all over again. Libraries Connected trustee Ayub Khan told an LC webinar: ‘He's been pragmatic and thoughtful, shown a genuine interest. I'm really, really pleased.’

UPDATE:

The re-shuffle in February left Lord Parkinson in place. Good!

The Secretary of State is (usually) far less important for libraries day-to-day. But, just for the record, Michelle Donelan was appointed on 6 September 2022 to replace the controversial Nadine Dorries. She had several previous ministerial posts in education, including just two days as Secretary of State for Education during the turbulent times of July 2022.

But now she's moved to the new Department for Science, Innovation & Technology – taking with her the ‘digital’ bit of the DCMS, including the contentious online safety bill.

The slimmed-down DCMS is to ‘re-focus on the creative industries’.

The new SoS (for now) is Lucy Frazer. A lawyer, she has had several fairly short-lived posts, including justice, the Treasury, transport and most recently just four months in housing...



She has no record of huge (political) interest in culture, but has tweeted that DCMS is 'such a critical department in Whitehall, and the home of some of the most exciting and fastest growing parts of the UK economy – so can't wait to get stuck in.'

Finally, from January 2023, the Commons DCMS committee has a new 'acting chair' in the shape of Damian Green MP, already a member of the committee. This is while the previous chair deals with certain 'allegations'...

November 2022

Levelling how?

A well-timed boost to libraries - tying them very firmly in to the levelling up agenda (what's left of it) – from the Parliamentary select committee for culture*.

It endorses libraries as 'an important part of a community's infrastructure for people who are digitally excluded or who live in deprived neighbourhoods' – but also for quality of life, flourishing local high streets and as 'engines for entrepreneurship, economic growth and job creation'.

And it actually asks for proper funding. (Grim footnote: 'Evidence to our inquiry posited that, for every £1 spent on library services in 2009–10, 58p was spent in 2017–18: an even sharper decline than spending on culture and heritage in the round'.)

Here again, no change is good news. Michael Gove is back in the saddle as secretary of state for levelling up. Whatever one might think of him in general, it's good not to have to start all over again with a new boy. And the starter work he supervised was mostly well thought of. The one agreed flaw – lack of proper, stable funding...

* <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/1744/reimagining-where-we-live-cultural-placemaking-and-the-levelling-up-agenda/publications>

August 2022

Make a date with the Laureate!

Does your library's name or location in the UK (village, town or city, but not street) begin with the letters E, F, G or Welsh Ff or Ng? If so, you can ask the Poet Laureate, Simon Armitage, to visit you on his next library tour: March 20–25, 2023.

Simon plans to give free readings in libraries for one week each spring, 'from the flagship libraries of the big cities to smaller or mobile libraries serving rural areas... from A to Z,



wherever the invitations take me'.

His ten-year journey will involve local communities, poets, high school students and/or writers' groups in activities around the visit and in the audience. Each visit will also be live-streamed for an online audience.

Simon adds: 'I also want to find a way of including alphabet letters from other languages spoken in these islands such as Welsh, Urdu or Chinese, and to involve communities where English might not be the first language.' Ideas welcome.

He launched his tour in 2021 in Ashby-de-la-Zouch (A to Z in one go, as librarians suggested!), with C–D in 2022.

UPDATE:

Starting on 17 March, the poet will deliver readings at libraries in Exeter (17 March), Glastonbury (20 March), Eastbourne (21 March), Fakenham, Norfolk (22 March), Gladstone's Library in Flintshire (23 March) and Ellesmere Port (23 March).

Most of these sessions will include performances by fellow poets. All are live events, free but you need to book.

Simon says: 'I want to celebrate the physical space of libraries and take my work

back into places that have given me so much...

'My experience of reading and writing began in the village library where I grew up, then in the nearby town library, then in libraries at various places of study and teaching. For many people they are an invaluable aspect of everyday life, giving access not just to books but to services, learning, conversation and creative thinking.

'I want to pay my respects to these unique institutions. By planning readings up to a decade in advance I'm being optimistic about the future of our libraries, and challenging those authorities who would consider closing them down.

'It would have been easy to stream these events from my office or garden shed, but at a time when libraries are under threat and have been out of bounds during the pandemic, reading from inside their physical structures feels like an act of solidarity – with books, with poetry, and with communities.'

Details and booking: <https://www.simonarmitage.com/how-to-book-e-to-g-libraries-tour-2023>

PUBLIC LIBRARIES STRATEGY 2023

A new libraries strategy for 2023!

The story so far... as told in TLC's website and newsletters.

September 2022

SURPRISE! A NEW LIBRARY STRATEGY!

Well! There is to be 'a new public libraries strategy due in 2023... to make sure [they] are providing the best possible service for their communities'.

Whatever that means, it will be based on work by a new 'advisory panel' led by one Baroness Sanderson. Her job will be to act as an 'independent chair' and 'provide a fresh, challenging and impartial perspective on libraries to help formulate innovative new policy ideas'.

It's not yet known who will be on this panel. TLC has been quick to urge that it should include library users.

In a hastily-sent email to the Baroness, we said: 'We believe that library users and supporters have a lot to contribute to any review of the service at national level, as well as whatever contribution they may make locally.'

'Their perspective will be different from most, if not all, of the library bodies and others who have in the past been part of this sort of panel / review.'

Baroness Sanderson is billed as 'an experienced former journalist [for the Mail on Sunday] and government adviser [to Theresa May] who joined the government benches in the House of Lords in 2019'.

Meanwhile, we must go by what she has so far said: 'I'm thrilled to be taking up this new role.'

'Libraries play such an important part in our lives, be that instilling a love of reading in childhood or encouraging economic, social and mental wellbeing throughout adulthood and into old age.'

'Too often undervalued, they are one of the most critical forms of social infrastructure we have and I look forward to working alongside the experts, and listening to a wide range of voices, so that we may help develop ideas as to how we may promote and protect our libraries into the future.'

The government claims there has only been one previous national strategy, in 2016. TLC would say there have been quite a few, under different names. If you want to check up on the 2016 version, it's all there in the back issues of our magazine on our website: issues no 93 and 94.

More details: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/baroness-sanderson-to-help-develop-new-public-libraries-strategy>

October 2022

LIBRARIES REVIEW GETS GOING

Busy taking notes, here's Baroness Sanderson on a fact-finding tour.

She is, you'll remember, chair of a panel working on 'a new public libraries strategy', as we reported on this website on 5 September.

We gather that the library sector was keen to get this set up before any big changes took place in the political world. How right they were!

'As someone from outside the sector,' she says, 'I have a lot to learn and a lot of people to meet but my first priority was to visit frontline library staff and volunteers – to see for myself the work that they do and to understand the challenges they face.'



Fact-finding in Yeovil

Her first tour included Wimbleton, Woodford, Yeovil, Taunton, Sutton and the Deepings volunteer-run library in Lincs.

'Readiness to adapt, while working with the local community to address their specific needs, has been central to every library branch I've visited,' she reports, 'whatever their size, location or management structure ...'

'They should be recognised as one of the most valuable community assets we have ... I feel privileged to work with the sector to help develop ideas as to how we may protect them into the future and widen the understanding of what they do – across government departments and more widely through society.'

Hear hear to all of that!

For her full report, go to: <https://dcmslibraries.blog.gov.uk/2022/10/13/stamford-to-sutton-and-beyond-visiting-library-branches-across-england>

January 2023

WE BEGIN WITH ...

... a save the date call: MARCH 25, when we will be holding a public meeting and our AGM

There will be the facility to participate online – but it will be an in-person event as well! We will be delighted if you can make it. Full details will be announced in next month's newsletter.

We'd like to see as many people as possible in London. The venue will be the UNISON Centre on Euston Road – a short walk from Euston, Kings Cross and St Pancras stations and several tube / bus stops.

We will start with an open meeting (i.e. you don't need to be a Library Campaign member to attend) on a topic of current interest in public libraries – the Sanderson review for the 2023 public libraries strategy. We are planning to invite a guest speaker with insight ...

... and we hope TLC members will stay on for the AGM.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES STRATEGY 2023

Liz, Baroness Sanderson, was appointed in September but was delayed in getting started, not least by the death of the Queen. Her priority, sensibly, was to visit a lot of libraries. She met Friends and users as well as staff.

So – what’s it all about? Her role is not to write the official national strategy; she will have ‘nothing to do with it’.

But she will feed in her findings, gather as many views/examples as possible, and generally ‘take a fresh look’. If she gains insights that aren’t strictly part of her brief, she will pass them on anyway.

The work will be structured around the headings already developed by the national Ambition project in 2016. This came as a huge relief to us. The last thing anyone needs is yet another ‘review’, starting from scratch and spending ages sorting out the basics.

Liz, as yet, has no clear view of what public libraries need. Quite rightly. She is not making up her mind until she has heard from everyone.

Ideas

She is certainly not short of ideas, but all are strictly provisional and open to change as she learns more.

She is already pretty well-informed. Few matters we suggested were completely new to her.

To find out more, she is holding ‘round tables’ with as many relevant organisations as possible – including CILIP, The Reading Agency, the British Library, publishers, library staff and, of course, The Library Campaign.

TLC will be doing its own further research into what Friends and users think, including at our meeting on 25 March.

There are, for efficiency, just two standing members of the round tables – the Local Government Association and Libraries Connected (representing the heads of local library services). She is impressed by what the latter has achieved

Tea with Liz in the Lords

She signs off with a friendly ‘Liz’ in her emails to us. So there was no time-wasting formality when TLC had an initial meeting with Baroness Sanderson, over a cup of tea in the House of Lords.

in the short time since it was given proper funding.

She is also very happy with the libraries minister, Lord Parkinson:

‘He really is passionate about libraries. He has always had a library card and used it, wherever he was.’

The round table meetings will finish around May. Her report is due out sometime ‘in the summer’. She promises it won’t be as long as Ambition...

One thing she is clear about: she doesn’t want to recommend anything that adds to local authorities’ burden, but aims to ease it.

Funding

She is also honest about something else: ‘I would love to recommend more funding, but that’s not within my remit.’ In other words the government is not going to do that, whatever she thinks or says, and it may detract from other, more positive, ideas.

We did agree on a number of things. The information gathered by CIPFA is not being properly used. Libraries have strengths that can also be weaknesses: their dual status as both local and national; the fact that they do anything for anyone – not an easy message for a conventional marketing approach.

And we agreed that libraries badly need better publicity. Ideally this would be at a national level



Baroness Sanderson.

– if local councils would buy into it instead of ploughing their own furrow.

People often simply don’t know what is available. Liz admitted that libraries’ e-book offer had been news to her! She thinks it is better than certain commercial offers...

So, does she ‘get’ what libraries are about? A quote from her first blog as she toured libraries gives us reason to believe that she does: ‘Too often undervalued, they are one of the most critical forms of social infrastructure we have.’

Libraries have a unique and precious role in communities across the country – something which was thrown into relief during the pandemic.

As we bounce back from that, we want to make sure we are drawing on a wide range of expertise and best practice to give them the support they need to keep serving the public so well.

Lord Parkinson

Misinformation matters

Daily there is evidence that misinformation is a serious problem – whether it’s anti-vaxxers, dodgy advertisements, harmful social media or dubious claims by politicians. A Commons select committee is examining the problem. This is the evidence that TLC sent to them...

The creation of reliable information is important – but so is its delivery to where it is needed. While schools aim to work on this with children, there are few means to reach adults. This should be a priority area. We will focus on this angle rather than on the sources of information.

Public libraries and librarians are constantly cited as uniquely trusted. No other institution or profession (except perhaps the NHS) has anything like this reputation.

They are also uniquely accessible. Although 12 years of local government austerity have led to over 800 closures, the remainder still form a national network of walk-in centres with branches in every locality – where people already expect to find information. Information from an unbiased source with no hidden agenda of any kind.

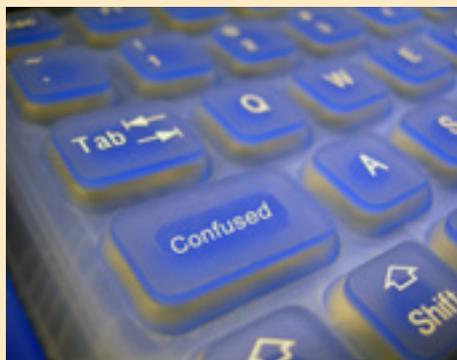
Trained staff

Professional and trained library staff may be asked directly to provide information, or may be asked to help a library user trying to do their own research. The object might be anything from basic information on local services to complex health issues or academic research papers. Obviously, this creates many day-to-day opportunities to steer people in the right direction, on matters that concern them.

Many people are entirely reliant on public libraries for internet access, and many need help and support in using it. Again, this creates many natural opportunities to ensure reliable information is obtained, and to teach some information assessment skills.

Specialist reference librarians are a particularly valuable resource – both in helping individual library users and in compiling relevant information for identified local needs.

We need hardly add that there has been a sharp decline in both general and specialist posts for professional librarians in the past 12 years. Nor has it been easy to expand and update the skills of those that remain.



Of equal concern is the creation of some 500 volunteer-run “community managed libraries” by many local authorities. These are labelled “libraries”, often with nothing to distinguish them from professional council-run libraries, and will be used and trusted as libraries – but they are highly unlikely to have anyone on site with any kind of qualification. It is unclear what ethical standards or vetting procedures might be in place. This is of very obvious concern.

Public libraries, properly funded, can contribute hugely to the prevention of misinformation, and the supply of reliable information. The main restrictions are funding and staff training.

Proactive

Libraries are already being proactive in this area. There are obvious outlets where misinformation can be brought into the discussion, such as coding clubs, IT skills courses, interest clubs, reading groups and special sessions on specific topics.

Some libraries provide training to users in how to use the internet, including safeguarding and scam spotting. Others have partnered with outside organisations such as banks.

There is great scope for adding to this provision.

For example, Reading Well is a nationwide scheme that promotes collections of books on selected physical and mental health topics. These have all been selected by relevant experts, including the National Academies. Non-users of libraries can be referred to them by GPs etc.

One of the national library bodies could be commissioned to create and share lists of useful websites, in a similar way.

Local services are well placed to spot local groups and relevant topics for exploration on a more personal level. Library users and local Friends groups could be a valuable means of picking up ideas on both.

Focused activity

To demonstrate the huge range of focused activity among existing library provision, we refer you to an Arts Council England report: Libraries welcome everyone: Six stories of diversity and inclusion from libraries in England (it lists far more than six initiatives) <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/libraries-welcome-everyone-six-stories-diversity-and-inclusion-libraries-england>

The library professional bodies are already well on top of the issues. They have been working collaboratively on solutions for some time via the Media and Information Literacy Alliance (MILA), co-sponsored by CILIP and the CILIP Information Literacy Group. We have no doubt that they will be sending their own evidence.

The remit

How to ensure the public has sufficient access to authoritative information on matters of national debate is to be examined by the DCMS (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport) Committee in an inquiry looking at the role of trusted voices in combating the spread of misinformation.

The Committee will explore which organisations are the most trusted sources of information in the UK and examine the part played in the national debate of the publicly funded and independent National Academies, which represent the UK’s science, arts, engineering and medical research communities.

Campaign catch-up

Even in these terrible times, campaigning still works! Our new e-newsletter gives you monthly updates on news good and bad. Often, the message is that libraries have a very strong case for survival – but someone has to be there to argue it...

DERBY

Derby City is proposing to cut over £100,000 from books and other 'resources', plus a £55,000 cut by ending all funding and support to its fleet of 'community managed libraries' (ie, usually volunteer run), carrying with it another £107,000 cut in the staff that served CMLs.

All this, it chirps, will enable 'wider community opportunities, locality working and asset efficiencies to be explored'. If these were not forthcoming in the heady days when these CMLs were first set up to 'save libraries', we wonder if they will pop up now. Latest news is that the council has found £415,000 to keep them open for about a year, while it goes on searching.

The figures show just how much it has cost one council to support these supposed money-savers. The real cost and viability of CMLs has never been properly researched...

ESSEX

Way back in 2019, SOLE (Save Our Libraries Essex) formed to fight an awful plan that could have closed all but 15 of the county's 74 libraries. They had to cover a huge area, a lot of libraries – and carry on through lockdown. But public support was demonstrated everywhere, including



by a march of almost 1,000 people.

The council wisely gave in. It promised to keep all 74 branches open – but hoped to get as many as possible run by 'the community'. SOLE said this was no solution. It produced a paper explaining why (still very useful – find it in TLC's magazine no 98). As plans and councillors came and went, it produced its own list of basic requirements.

Now, finally, real progress! On 14 January, SOLE asked the council's deputy leader a clear question: 'Are you currently seeking, or will you accept, offers from voluntary groups to take over and run our currently professionally run libraries?' The answer: no. SOLE comments: 'This

is the reassurance we have been seeking for some time.

'A closure by stealth plan cancelled!' But it will go on watching.

BRISTOL

Some campaigns work rather faster... Late last November, Bristol floated the possibility of moving the Central Library out of its iconic, splendidly sited, Grade I listed building. By mid-December, there were over 4,000 signatures on petitions and all-party furious opposition.

By 11 January, the idea was 'off the table'. Coincidentally, there was soon to be a by-election in the ward where the library is sited...

HENDON

Hendon, in north London, is an example of a growing trend – where a library is not threatened directly to save money or 'modernise the service' (ha ha), but is collateral damage carelessly caused by some awful mega-development.

So the battle may be about planning law, not library law. It's new territory. Save Hendon has been showing the way since 2021. An early focus of its excellent campaign against a massive 'Hendon hub' was the listed library. This was to be gutted, turned into a business centre for Middlesex University and replaced by an obscure glass box dwarfed by student housing blocks.

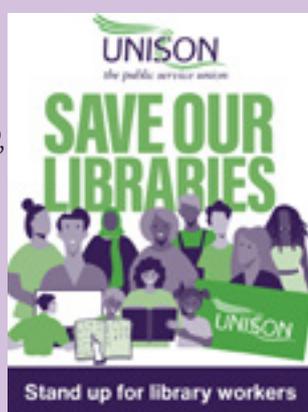
CHECK YOUR COUNCIL'S CUTS!

UNISON is doing some great work on cuts to local councils. Its #SaveOurServices website includes a link for you to email your MP, and puts libraries at the front of its message: 'Libraries are shutting, waste collections are reducing, and social services are shrinking. More and more essential services that we all rely on every day are crumbling away.' <https://www.unison.org.uk/our-campaigns/save-our-local-services>

Best of all, the site links to an impressive visual that shows exactly what the shortfall is in every single council in England, Wales and Scotland. Find out about yours!

You can get there directly via: <https://councilcuts.unison.org.uk/data-visualisation>

UNISON has also produced some new materials – placards, flags and stickers – for their reps in libraries to support library campaigns.



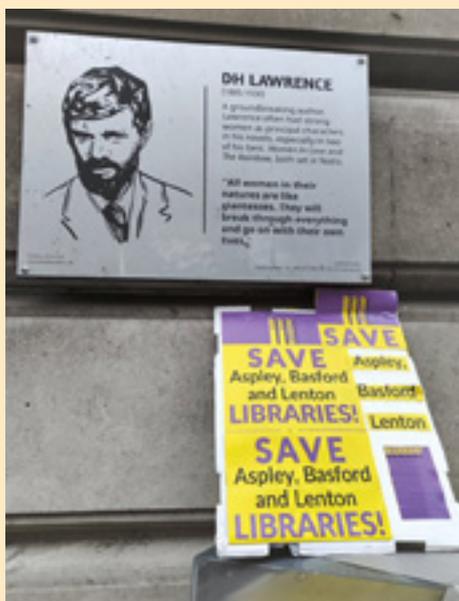
Save Hendon harnessed public support for the library and 100% opposition to all the hub's planning applications. Meanwhile, a local resident started a judicial review (JR) process challenging the legal status of the whole plan. The underlying issue was the council's determination to proceed with minimal scrutiny or consultation.

While the JR churned on through 2022, local elections changed Barnet council from Tory to Labour. The new council asked to pause the JR, then withdrew the planning document altogether. So, no JR but a point won. That story can only now be told, as the legal costs have finally been settled (Barnet has to pay most of them).

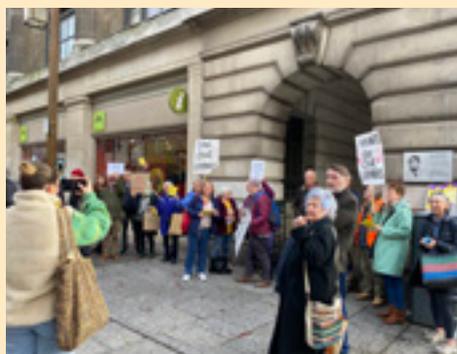
The chance was lost to test the hub concept in court. But all the delays have saved the library (so far). The overall fight continues, with Save Hendon still playing its part.

NOTTINGHAM

It's been a cliff-hanger, but at last it's official – Nottingham will not close three libraries to save money. It all started with a new Central Library being built in a new town centre, with its fit-out costs to be met by selling the old site. Covid, and some deals collapsing, left the library service with no such income – and savings of £233,000 a year to make. Losing three branches was part of the proposed solution.



We have to thank Save Nottingham Libraries, who united authors and public in a strong campaign. We also thank the library management, who arranged a (Zoom) meeting where we outlined our concerns before sending our evidence to the consultation. Then it made changes that reduced the required saving to just



£79,000. Closing three branches to save this paltry sum was just too ridiculous an idea to survive. We have yet to evaluate the 'staff restructure' that achieved this...

WIRRAL

Wirral's library service has the distinction of being the only one ever to be subject to a full enquiry under the 1964 Act (in 2009, when Andy Burnham was DCMS Secretary of State). Its drastic closure plans were held to be in breach of the law – and hastily withdrawn. The case is still cited by the DCMS as guidance to follow (it's all explained on our website: <https://librarycampaign.com/beyond-the-council>).



Yet last year the council announced similar drastic cuts. The only real difference was that it hoped to turn over many libraries to 'the community'. It didn't go well. Only two local groups managed to produce a viable business case. Nine libraries closed late last year.

The council went on trying to find takers for them. And contemplated closing or re-siting even more...

Meanwhile public opposition exploded, notably via the very active Friends of Wallasey Central Library. After much to-ing and fro-ing, a dramatic council meeting in February proposed to keep nine libraries open after all, and avoid moving the two libraries in Birkenhead and Wallasey.

CROYDON

Croydon's dire financial state is well known, with new horrors still being discovered. No surprise, then, that its much-contested previous plan to prevent library closures by inviting in 'the community' has been replaced by a grim statement from the Mayor that even that can't be guaranteed.

Now a survey is asking locals to rank nine services in order of their importance: support for elderly and vulnerable adults; services for children, young people and families, and education; rubbish and recycling collection; keeping streets safe and clean; housing services and homelessness prevention; libraries and culture; parks and open spaces; leisure and sports facilities; economic growth, job creation and regeneration.

Tricky point for library supporters: libraries, of course, make a solid contribution to almost all these areas!

CARDIFF

Wholesale closures are not currently on the menu in Cardiff – probably because the council remembers the huge row in 2015 that forced it to reverse plans to close seven libraries. Instead, it's offering a choice of savings to affect all libraries: fewer staff and more volunteers; closing on Saturday afternoons; closing one day a week; finding savings “elsewhere”.

A strong campaign is arguing that these seemingly limited cuts could lead directly to complete closures in future. Cardiff People's Assembly argues: ‘Cardiff Council proposals to slash library opening times and recruit more unpaid volunteers is a classic technique.

‘Opening hours are cut, the service is run down, use falls as residents find their local library is not open when they want and does not have what they want, this is then used as an excuse to close libraries.’



HACKNEY

Here the fight (against staff cuts and more) is led by Unison. And it has a way to go yet...



PEACEHAVEN AND REDDITCH

These two towns – one in East Sussex, one in Worcestershire – are keeping us busy. In each case, a flourishing local library is seen as being in the way of a big shopping centre development.

In each case, the development is being handled at town/borough council level. But the library is the responsibility of the county council – the official library authority.

In each case, there are plans to re-site the library. But they are either reassuring but very much open to query (Worcs) – or would mean a library far smaller than the current one (East Sussex).

In each case, local Friends groups have done admirable detective work uncovering the flaws – and arguing for something better.

TLC is closely involved in both cases. Watch this space!



Shirley Burnham

We are beyond sad to record the death of Shirley Burnham – campaigner extraordinaire. Her life took her all over the world, including a brief flirtation with the Mormons at Brigham Young University in Utah, then Honduras, Bangladesh, Pakistan... and finally Swindon.

Here was the tiny Old Town library. ‘I loved it from the day I found it. In early 2008 someone told me our library could close and asked if anyone could get up a petition. So I did...’

There followed a Friends group, a website, a successful campaign to move it to a new home... and a whole new career.

Shirley was clever, interesting, funny and kind to everyone – including those she disagreed with. She acquired a huge and subtle understanding of library matters, and she put it to use helping campaigns all over the country.

Increasingly via Twitter, she advised, encouraged and cheered up many, many people she never actually met. With caring responsibilities, she hardly ever left Swindon. It didn't hold her back at all.

Tributes to Shirley have flooded in from campaigners, but also from the library high-ups she often locked horns with. She aroused both respect and affection.

She once said: ‘In government there are people who think they are education experts because they went to school when they were kids, and others who pretend to be medical experts because they sometimes go to the doctor.

‘I am not a politician, a consultant or a librarian, so should people like me speak out? Yes, because it is the users who must tell the policy makers what the service they value should be like and why it matters to them.’

A memorial page has been set up for her: <https://everloved.com/life-of/shirley-burnham-swindon-uk>

Engines for entrepreneurs!

Public libraries are a vital resource for people starting a new business, says Libraries Connected.

Politicians of all parties have announced their ambition for Britain to be the best place in the world to start and grow a business. There is remarkable consensus that if the UK economy is to recover and grow after recent economic shocks, we must drive innovation and make the most of entrepreneurial potential.

Public libraries are central to realising this ambition. Through Business & IP Centres and other localised services, the library network has become one of the country's most effective and accessible sources of support for new and growing businesses.



Clare Dryden, Founder of Brownie Queen

Supported by BIPC Humber Partnership
(Goole Library)

'I started my business in June 2020, during the first lockdown. The BIPC have helped me with a range of workshops and one-to-one sessions through the business idea clinic. The support that's available at Goole library is absolutely fantastic. When you're a small business owner you often feel like you're the only person that's in your shoes. It can be quite a lonely experience. The fact that Goole library is five minutes from my house, it's free and everybody's so supportive and encouraging really makes it an absolutely outstanding tool.'



As the DCMS (Department for Culture, Media & Sport) Commons committee recently put it, libraries act as 'engines for entrepreneurship, economic growth and job creation'.¹

Libraries are welcoming, non-judgmental spaces – and most of their business services are completely free. It's understandable that first-time entrepreneurs can feel more comfortable seeking advice from a library than from a bank, trade association or consultant.

That's why the businesses that libraries support are more likely to be run by women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

As they focus on building a more resilient, dynamic and inclusive economy, local and national decision-makers have much to learn from public libraries and the many thousands of businesses that have benefited from their support.

Our new survey² shows that:

- Almost every library service (98%) offers some form of specialist support to entrepreneurs, startups and SMEs. This makes the national library network one of the leading providers of services to new and growing businesses.
- Almost three-quarters (73%) offer one-to-one personalised business advice, including coaching and mentoring.
- Three-quarters (75%) offer specialist advice on intellectual property, helping entrepreneurs protect their business ideas.

- Over four-fifths (84%) of library services give free access to leading business databases, significantly reducing the time and cost of developing a business plan.
- More than three-quarters (77%) provide networking opportunities, helping entrepreneurs build strong business relationships and find new clients.
- Three-quarters (75%) provide free workshops, seminars and training for those starting or growing a business.



Suki Pantal, Founder of Suki's Curries and Spices Supported by BIPC
Worcestershire (Worcester Library)

'The BIPC has been so supportive to me throughout my journey of launching the company. I've attended a lot of the webinars and they've advised me on getting my website done and about IP rights. The support has been tremendous to a lot of new and upcoming small businesses. I have a phone call every other week with the BIPC to see how I'm doing and where I'm headed with the business. The library is just a stone's throw away and it has just been amazing. If your heart is in the right place and you have the passion, I don't think anything can stop you.'

¹ House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, Reimagining where we live: cultural placemaking and the levelling up agenda, November 2022 (HC 155)

² <https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/news/libraries-vital-new-and-growing-businesses-briefing-reveals>
The briefing includes examples of local library business services, and quotes from users.

WHAT LIBRARIES OFFER

Access to business databases

Getting a business idea off the ground, and persuading banks or investors to fund it, requires thorough market, customer and competitor research. Over four-fifths (84%) of library services in our survey offer free access to subscription-only business and research databases, such as COBRA, Mintel and GrantFinder. This can significantly reduce the time and cost of developing an idea or business plan.

Networking opportunities

For those just getting started in business, networking events are an important way to become part of the local business community, make new contacts and meet potential clients. More than three-quarters (77%) of the library services we surveyed provide these networking opportunities, which can be a crucial source of advice, support and leads. Many libraries opt for a relaxed approach, encouraging informal conversation over coffee or refreshments.

Intellectual property advice

Intellectual property is vital to the business process. Knowing how to protect your idea, whether it's an invention or a brand name, can save considerable time and money. Three-quarters (75%) of the library services in our survey provided specialist IP advice on copyright, patents, trademarks and registered designs.

Working space

Libraries are also convenient places to work and do business: two-thirds (66%) offer meeting and interview rooms, over a third (36%) house co-working spaces and 18% have private office space for hire.

With many small businesses concerned about rising bills, libraries offer a low-cost alternative to the home office. Such working spaces not only provide a quiet, convenient and comfortable place to work – they bring users into contact with other entrepreneurs and businesses, providing another valuable networking opportunity.

Training, workshops and seminars

Three quarters (75%) of the library services we surveyed provide a programme of free or low-cost training events exploring a range of business topics, from writing a business plan to exhibiting at trade shows. These could be online or in-person, providing yet another important networking opportunity. Often these are run in partnership with a local business – a marketing agency might deliver a workshop on social media strategy, for example – adding further value and networking opportunities.

One to one advice

Almost three-quarters (73%) offer one-to-one personalised business advice, including coaching and mentoring. These sessions can focus on sector-specific issues, or give more general support on registering a business, protecting intellectual property, developing a business plan, attracting funding or writing a marketing strategy.

Digital demands

Libraries are instrumental in helping users find jobs, save money and develop digital skills, says Lorensbergs, the netloan provider. Footfall has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels, but demand is still high...

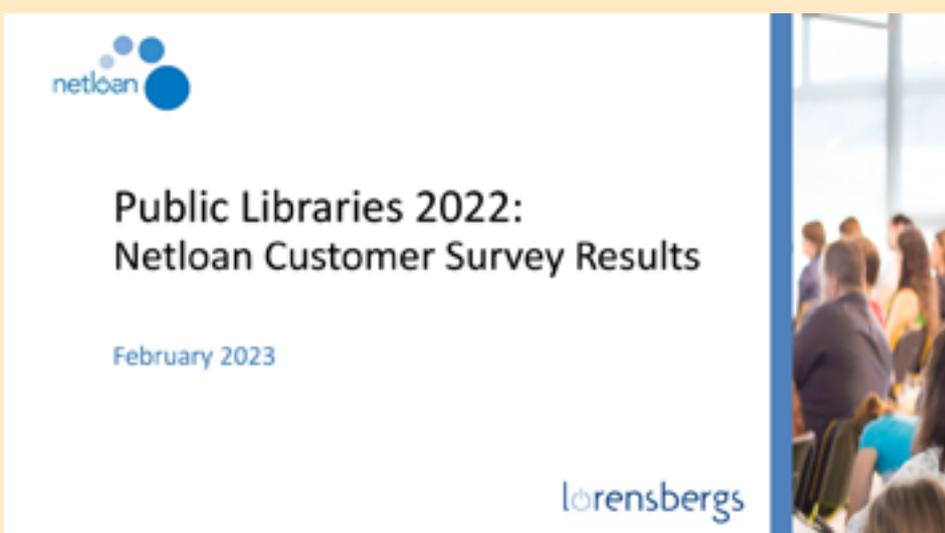
Lorensbergs carries out research every year to explore how library needs and usage are changing. The 2022 survey was answered by 80 library authorities, and some took part in discussion workshops.

As libraries continue to provide vital space and resources for work, skills development and study, we look at their technology investment plans for the year ahead.

This year the findings also highlight the achievements of libraries in regaining footfall – and the initiatives and efforts that are meeting greatest success.

Key findings include:

- Library PCs remain essential to job-seeking. In 75% of libraries, users access computers and receive staff help to find new jobs on all or most days.
- Around half of libraries are seeing an increase in requests for digital skills support, with



- almost all others seeing steady demand. Around 50% give time and resources every day to helping users develop their digital skills.
- With the cost of living crisis biting hard, PC access in libraries is essential. Over half of

libraries help users save money on all or most days.

- Every week, new business ideas are progressed in nearly 40% of libraries with the help of computers and staff.

- On all or most days, staff and PC access in over 70% of libraries support users with social inclusion, benefit applications and homework.
- Demand for wireless printing in the library continues to rise. Over half of libraries are investing in this service in 2023. Top benefits are reported as greater convenience, better support for BYOD (bring your own device) users, a more modern library, and attracting new types of users.
- Over 50% of transactions in libraries take place via self-service. More than half of libraries aim to reach 75% or more by 2024, freeing up staff for other services. A third of libraries plan to invest in kiosks or open access/unstaffed library models in 2023.
- Nearly 30% of libraries are planning a PC refresh this year, investing in modern library services and digital inclusivity.
- Average footfall has reached nearly 70% of pre-Covid levels, up from around 50% at end of 2021. Successes in regaining footfall include both resuming previously popular activities and trying new initiatives. Publicity and social media, promoting the community aspect of what libraries provide, are achieving results.

Although lockdowns finished in early 2022, it is still early days returning to normal services for many libraries. Staffing levels and user behaviour are both still very different compared to before the pandemic.

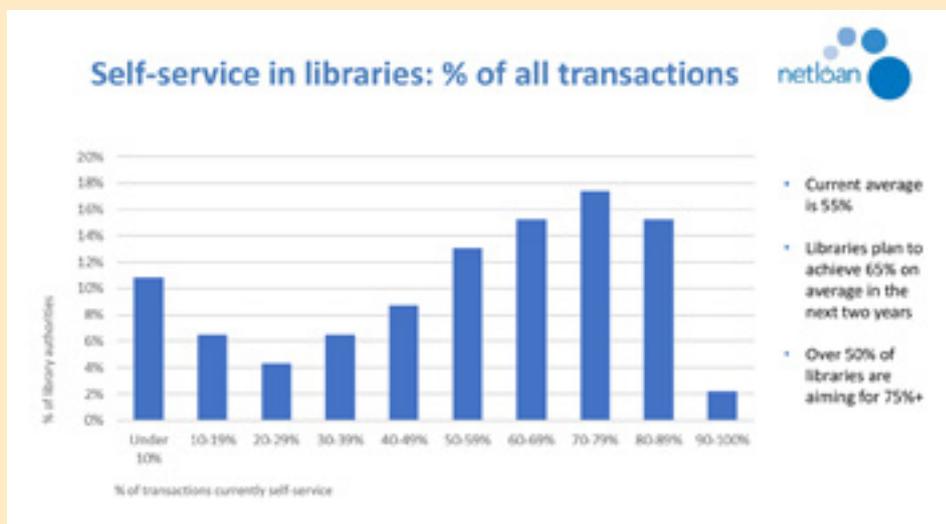
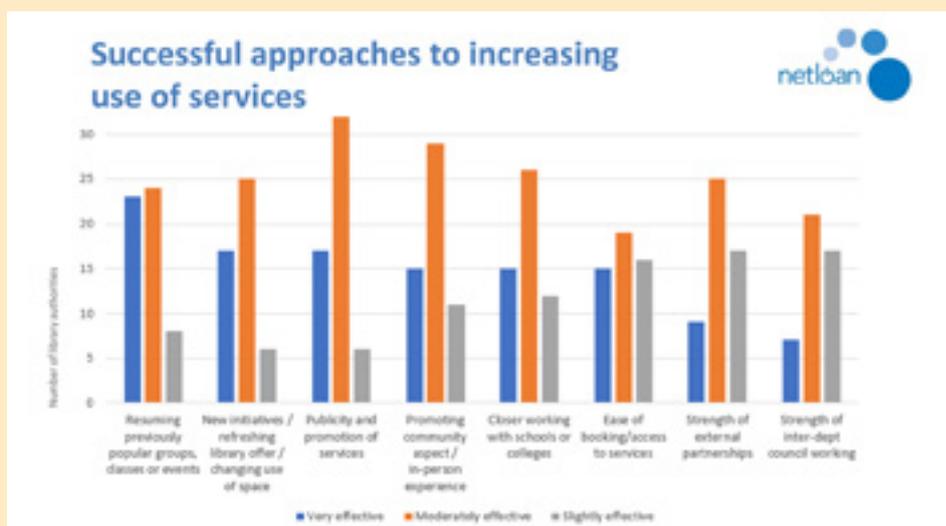
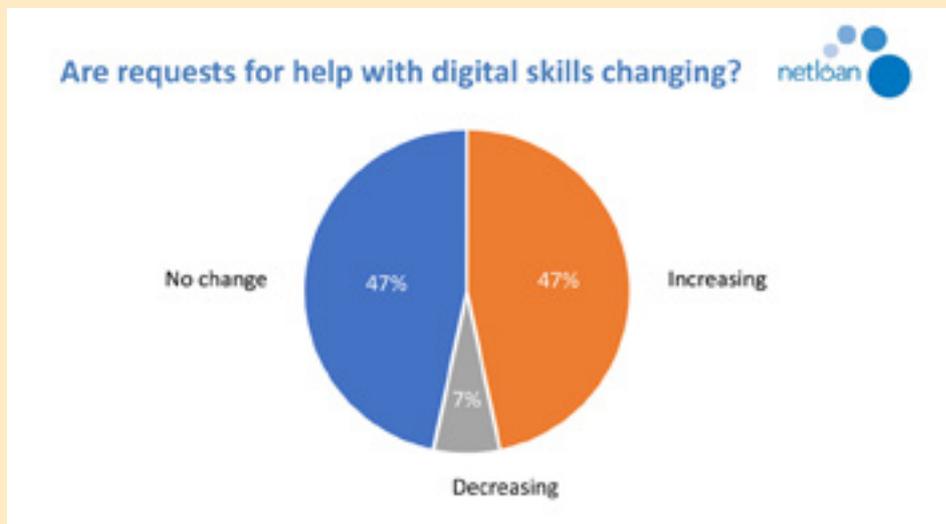
New staff, or those in new roles, are still finding their feet. Many users are only just starting to venture back. These are just two of many challenges.

Footfall recovery is lagging behind other statistics: book issues and PC hours are increasing. However, these increases are driven by users borrowing more books or staying longer – not more users coming in.

Libraries are trying a range of approaches, from bringing back previously popular or important services, to trying new initiatives.

Some instances have brought in large numbers of users. However, these might be difficult to repeat. They have tended to be beyond the libraries' control or influence – for example, helping with council tax rebates or refugee influxes.

Libraries are working hard providing critical support but this doesn't always translate into much greater footfall. Some important services given to the most needy are difficult to scale up. Staffing issues appear to be a universal problem at present – for example, coaching or advice



sessions that are usually delivered one to one, such as IT support.

Some libraries are committing to a certain number of hours of delivered sessions, and working hard to fulfil these as far as possible. It often isn't sufficient to meet demand.

Not all users are prepared to wait for the help required. They want their IT questions answered right away. One authority reported that help with bus pass and blue badge applications had a waiting list of two to three weeks.

Here we see the importance of improving staffing levels, increasing volunteer recruitment and retention, and building new partnerships that support the library's work.

Two things have clearly helped libraries succeed. First, close working with the council or other parties (eg, charities) ensures users are signposted to libraries, while staff are better able to recognise and meet their needs.

Second, libraries aim to build on what might be a user's one-off interaction with them and

encourage them to use their other services. One-time users are very welcome, but it's return visits that help build better footfall levels and social capital over time.

In general, participants described a lot of work and communications taking place across a range of initiatives. However, understanding what makes the most difference isn't easy.

Libraries are still experimenting, and many have exciting new plans that are yet to be carried out. It's too soon to say with confidence what's been a success in every case. So libraries



continue to persevere, making sure they've covered enough bases with the necessary investment to reach a return to former footfall levels.

LIBRARYON

Talking of tech... 2023 looks to be the year that England's libraries finally get the online shop window they've been crying out for for years.

During lockdown, for instance, libraries devised a fantastic array of online services. Thousands of people found them almost despite their not-very-good local authority websites.

In normal times, too, it would be good to have a single online shop window. Something easy to find, showing what libraries do and leading people to their own local service.

Wales, after all, has done this for years – in two languages! (<http://https://libraries.wales> and <https://llyfrgelloedd.cymru>)

A huge project for England has been grinding on – very, very thoroughly – for years. It's now masterminded by a team at the British Library, and was boosted by £3.4m from Arts Council England back in 2021.

Up to now it's been called the 'Single Digital Presence'. Now it has a catchier, less sinister name – LibraryON. And a logo.

Website

And a website is finally being developed. In March, a beta version will be available. It will start testing with a small number of people.

The content will include 'emotive stories about public libraries, what they offer and how they are relevant to individuals and communities' in order to 'inspire and motivate people to engage with and visit their local library'.

Also starting in March, local libraries will be able to bid for a total of £1.1m in grants. LibraryON says: 'It will fund initiatives that make it easier for the public to find, discover, explore and access the range of services libraries offer.'

'Projects could include upgrading existing websites or online offers and services, or piloting something brand new.'

Meanwhile, LibraryON has been hosting online 'drop-in sessions' for library staff to feed in their views and ideas. Three of us from TLC attended the first, and found they had plenty to say...

The hope is to have a big launch to coincide with Libraries Week in October. Fingers crossed!

You can keep up with the news here:

- <https://libraryon.org>
- <https://www.bl.uk/projects/library-on>
- hello@libraryon.org to join the mailing list

Libraries say 'hi' to hybrids

Hybrid workers are choosing to work in local businesses and libraries to reduce their home energy bills, according to connectivity provider TalkTalk Business.

New network data¹ and research² in TalkTalk's latest Internet Insights report³ reveals significant year vs. year rises in broadband usage at libraries, coffee shops, pubs and restaurants across the UK. Library usage is growing fastest:

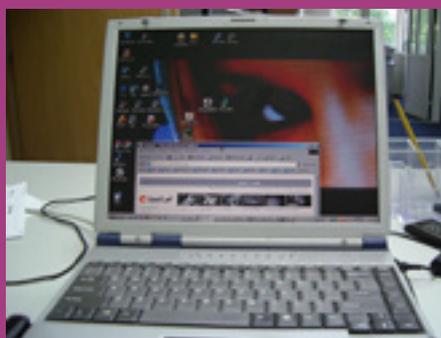
- Libraries (+147%)
- Coffee shops (+38%)
- Restaurants (+27%)
- Pubs (+25%)

Hybrid working, giving employees the flexibility to split their time between the office and remote working, is likely to be a driving factor. Research among hybrid workers found that more than half (52%) have worked from a local venue recently.

Half (50%) of those that have used such venues for work are now doing so for one or two days a week, with a further third (29%) for three or four days a week. One in 10 (10%) now work from local venues for the full five-day working week.

Nine in 10 (90%) Brits say they are concerned about the impact of remote working on their home energy bills, and a further 7% expect to start working from a local business or library in the near future.

The data also brings into focus the crucial role that libraries play in their communities. Eight in 10 (79%) hybrid workers asked said they are an essential local resource, and 77% said that being able to work from local businesses and venues benefits the wider community.



Laura Swaffield, chair of The Library Campaign, said: 'It's great to see TalkTalk adding to the mass of evidence that libraries are well-used, and very much needed.'

'From businesspeople using the workspaces to those who can't access internet at home, libraries are still hugely valued as physical spaces, and are a lifeline to all kinds of people.'



- ¹ Total annual usage across more than 50,000 TalkTalk Business customers, comparing 2020-21 and 2021-22 .
- ² Research in November 2022 among 1,003 workers who work from home at least one day a week.
- ³ <https://www.talktalkgroup.com/newsroom/wfh-doesnt-just-mean-home-internet-usage-at-libraries-cafes-and-local-businesses-rockets-as-remote-workers-look-to-reduce-energy-bills>



TELL US MORE!

We want to know more about our members, our non-members and library Friends groups in general.

What are you doing? How can TLC help?

You're busy. So to make it as easy as possible, we have put as much as we can into tick-box form.

But if you want to tell us more, we'd be delighted!

**If you want more space, please email thelibrarycampaign@gmail.com,
or write to The Library Campaign, 127 Old Gloucester Street, London WC1N 3AX**

1. ARE YOU A MEMBER OF THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN? Yes No IF NO, GO TO QUESTION 6

2. Can we have your preferred email address? (We may already have it but we would like to be sure.
Please fill it in here – and consider subscribing to our monthly e-newsletter).

Email address

Please subscribe me to the newsletter (I can cancel this at any time)

3. When/why did you join?.....
.....
.....

4. What benefits of TLC membership do you value?

- My subscription helps support public libraries
- Source of information
- Source of advice
- TLC will be there if I ever need information/advice on libraries
- Website
- Magazine
- e-Newsletter
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Facebook
- Conferences / meetings (live)
- Conferences / meetings (on Zoom)
- Contact with government/ library organisations
- Other

5. What else would you like TLC to do or provide?.....
.....
.....

6. ARE YOU A MEMBER OF A LIBRARY FRIENDS GROUP? (including local campaign groups etc)

Yes No

7. When/why did you join?.....

8. Name of group.....

9. Name of library

10. Name of local council

11. Are you part of an umbrella group of Friends (or other) groups?

eg, one bringing together all the groups in one local authority.

Yes No

Name of umbrella group.....

Do you have good relations with:

12. local staff? **13.** local library management **14.** Head of Service? **15.** the council?

16. Do you have regular/occasional meetings with any of these?

Yes No Other

17. Do you have input into the library's work, e.g. choosing stock, planning, jointly running events?

Yes No

Please give a few details

.....

18. Does your Friends group have a constitution? Yes No

19. Does it have a formalised structure, e.g. as a charity or CIC?

Yes (please give details)

No

20. What does the group do, or has it done in the past?

Campaign to save a library or prevent cuts (e.g. to opening hours)

Say things the library staff are not allowed to say

Provide feedback/ideas on the service

Help publicise the service: personal contacts/social media/other

Raise funds/ examples of things you have bought

Run talks

Run craft or other fairs

Run reading group

Run other groups

Film club

Exhibitions

Local history research

Gardening

Volunteer to support staff e.g. computer buddies/ meet & greet/home deliveries

Take over the running of the library to prevent closure

Other

Please give some brief details if you have time

21. Do you have a website? Yes No

22. Please give us the address so we can list it on the TLC website www.librarycampaign.com

.....

23. Which social media does your Friends Group use?

- Facebook page
- Newsletter
- Twitter
- Instagram
- TikTok
- SnapChat
- Other online presence (please give details)

24. If appropriate, please give us details of your social media pages so that we can follow you and list you on our website.

What problems do you have as a Friends group? Please score from 1 (no problem) to 7 (big problem)

- 25. Not enough time
- 26. Not enough money
- 27. Hard to find officers (chair, secretary, treasurer etc)
- 28. Not enough members
- 29. Library service does not welcome our input
- 30. Councillors do not value libraries
- 31. Hard to get local press to take an interest
- 31a. Other. Please state.....

32. Is there something you do really well, or a success you are proud of, or a story you'd like to tell, or something else that other groups might like to know about?

Please give brief details

33. Would you be interested in occasionally advising other groups? Yes No

What experience/skills could you pass on?

34. Is there anything your group would like, to help support their work?

- Funding
- National publicity
- Contact with other groups
- More information about
- Other

Please give us your name and a contact address (post or email)

.....

This is your space!

Did we ask the questions you wanted to answer?
Please add comments here – or we'd love you to send anything more you want to say to the address below.

TO POST, FOLD ALONG THE DOTTED LINES, TUCK ONE SIDE INSIDE THE OTHER, AND (PLEASE!) ADD A STAMP

FOLD

PLEASE
ADD A STAMP

The Library Campaign,
127 Old Gloucester Street
London WC1N 3AX

FOLD

Private Eye and public libraries

We need to keep mainstream journalists up to date with library issues.

Ian Anstice, librarian and website whiz, got the chance to do it over an interesting lunch...

Private Eye lunches are something of a legend. They're where the editor and celebrity, Ian Hislop, hosts a bunch of invited guests, normally politicians and national reporters, for a three course meal in a nice pub in Soho.

They go on for quite a long time – 1pm to 4pm not being unusual – and are used for gossip, information-seeking and having a good time. Who attends them, other than the Private Eye staff, is a confidential affair. It's fine to out oneself, as this article shows, but not to say who else was there.

This is because people may be there without their employer's knowledge, and of course one would hate others to find out who gave some particularly tasty piece of news to the magazine.

Censoring

I'm lucky enough that my recent lunch there was not my first. That was in 2015, when library cuts were brutal and people at the meal were learning that, gosh, social media can be biased and that library staff are sometimes replaced by volunteers. More innocent times.

This time round, that sort of thing is rather taken for granted. But, as before, libraries were still an important part of the discussion. This was pretty good going considering there were 12 other people there, including a couple I recognised off the telly.

The general feeling was that public libraries are incredibly important institutions where people can go in for free and be sure of being given books and information that are, say, not made up by a certain former ex-US president.

The importance of 'warm libraries', where libraries welcome anyone to come in and get warm, was also appreciated.

Interestingly, though, a major topic of conversation was who decides what books are being bought. This is something of a huge thing in the USA at the moment. Library after library is facing challenges over the titles on the shelves,

including anything which may be seen to criticise Christianity or promote anything LGBT or anything about race.

Florida school libraries are facing panic at the moment because every challenged book has to be taken off the shelf – and they are getting hundreds of challenges. Librarians in North Dakota face the possibility of 30 days in prison if they refuse to take off a banned book. And, yes, they have banned books in the USA.



High school library, Florida, 2023: all these books were removed after a complaint by just one man.

Those that think such things could never happen here are deluding themselves. People who think that censoring (although of course the word 'censor' is rarely used) library shelves is a good idea exist in Britain too. And they have access to the same social media and how-to-ban-books webpages that Americans use.

I know from my contacts that there are increasing challenges in this country already, although thankfully few. But a sign that it can happen here is the related matter of vocal, and potentially violent, protests against drag queen

story times. They were quite a factor in Britain last summer and are sadly still continuing.

Then there was the Private Eye gossip. My goodness me. You know all that stuff about how politicians can't be trusted? Well, if half of what I heard during that meal was true then wowzers, it's worse than that.

As Prince Harry's book had just come out, there was a lot of talk about that as well. Books still have power to dominate conversations, it seems.

That book has long waiting lists in public libraries up and down the country, meaning that anyone can read it. The same way as they can read about other current events, biographies, adventure stories and whodunnits. Libraries are rather wonderful that way. I tell you what, though, I heard something about a certain author that has put me off them for life.

Contacts

Why was I invited to the lunch? Well, Jane who works at the Eye does their 'Library News' bits and uses my website (www.publiclibrariesnews.com) on a regular basis. So I guess this was in the way of thanks.

She even showed me the Private Eye offices afterwards – think small crowded townhouse full of computers, books, very intelligent people and cartoons – which was rather amazing.

So, thank you, Library Campaign, for agreeing to pay my travel from the North West to London to attend. I hope I put forward the case for libraries around the table sufficiently, while enjoying the food. And I hope I made more contacts there, who hopefully know they can contact me in future if they need anything about the sector.

Fighting for public libraries is a long-term affair – I've been doing it most of my life. This strikes me as a nice little something that may help on the way.

Public library services are really important things. It's great that just occasionally they get the attention they deserve.

Helping the press is all part

It's important to keep libraries in the public eye. Hence the advice we give local Friends groups on our website (<https://librarycampaign.com/> communicate and <https://librarycampaign.com/media-tips/>).

It's certainly part of TLC's job. Sometimes it's easy. One success came via writer Kate Thompson, whose library stories have featured in our magazine twice.

Helping the campaign to save Bethnal Green library had got her interested in the man who had paid for it – the library philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. She got the Daily Express interested in a feature.

We briefed her on some details. She also wanted some recent history. So we told her about the fight by the Friends of Carnegie Library in Lambeth to save their library (twice). Result – almost two full pages in a major national newspaper on 21 November 2022. With a headline that is all too topical these days...

Sometimes it's not so easy. Before Christmas, TalkTalk published a survey showing increased use of library workspaces by small businesses. Would we comment, asked the PR agency? Of course. The result can be seen on page 16.

Then they asked would we be willing to be filmed if any broadcast media took the bait? Sure. Laura Swaffield can get to most London media studios quite easily. Then – could we arrange for the filming to be in a library? Probably tomorrow?

Cue a mad afternoon contacting Lambeth's head of service, Lambeth's publicity department and the head librarian at Brixton library. All said yes, bless them – they have a good story to tell.

Tomorrow dawned. The PR agency said THREE broadcasters had shown interest – but all had cried off. So it was all in vain. The piece did appear, however, in some local papers, HR Review and, rather pleasingly, the Daily Mail. Libraries Connected liked our quote so much, they emailed congratulations...

TO DIE RICH

A CRISP autumnal morning in 1922 and a large crowd gathers for the unveiling of Bethnal Green's first public library. The handsome red brick building has a shameful past. Only two years earlier it had operated as a lunatic asylum. The cruel incarceration of the mentally ill, replaced with learning and literacy. What a message of hope that must have sent to the community.

It was described by the Daily Herald on its opening as, "One of the finest libraries in the metropolis". Bethnal Green Library in east London fast established itself as the cultural centre of the borough and, by June 1924, the number of books issued had passed the million mark. Indeed, the father of a blind girl who, only a year after the library opened, obtained a first-class honours degree from London University, attributed her success to the assistance of the new library.

One extraordinary man made all this possible. Bethnal Green Public Library and countless others across Britain owe their creation to the philanthropy of steel magnate and industrialist Andrew Carnegie.

In one fell swoop, Carnegie offered Eastenders a legacy, enabling them to sweep away the misery and poverty of the past.

The 19th century Scottish-American remains the world's biggest and greatest philanthropist, without equal, even after Amazon boss, Jeff Bezos, one of the world's richest men, announced this week that he plans to give away his entire fortune to charity, cynics might claim in order to rehabilitate his reputation.

Bezos said he wanted to give in a way that maximised the impact of the donations. "It's not easy, it's really hard," he admitted.

Were he still alive, carny Carnegie could surely offer advice on the formula that saw him dispose of pretty much his entire fortune, worth around £250billion by today's money – making Bezos's £104billion seem modest by comparison.

THE man who famously said "to die rich, is to die disgraced," had humble beginnings. Sharron McColl, local studies supervisor at Dunfermline Carnegie Library, explains: "Carnegie was born in Dunfermline and emigrated to Allegheny, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Pittsburgh with his family as a 13-year-old boy.

"He was from a working-class family and found work as a bobbin boy in a cotton mill. He had an enormous thirst for knowledge.

"He realised he was never going to get back to education when they emigrated, so he petitioned to get access to the public library in Pittsburgh, but was turned down as they didn't allow children access.

"Carnegie passionately believed education was a way out of his poverty trap. A local benefactor named Colonel Anderson, a retired merchant heard about this and opened his private library to Carnegie and other working boys on a Saturday, allowing them to borrow a book a week."

This gesture had an extraordinary impact on the young Carnegie.

"Carnegie became a messenger boy for a telegraph company and was well known for zipping round the streets, with a book in his hand," Sharron continues.

"Through this he met the superintendent of the Pittsburgh Railway Division, who took

MESSENGER BOY TO MILLIONAIRE: Andrew Carnegie posing at his Scottish home after making his fortune



CARNEGIE EXPERT: Sharron McColl

him on as his personal assistant and that was his entry into business life."

Carnegie never looked back. By age of 30, he had amassed business interests in iron works, steamers on the Great Lakes, railroads, and oil wells. He was subsequently involved in steel production,

and built the Carnegie Steel Corporation into the largest steel manufacturing company in the world.

But if the first 40 years of his life was dedicated to the making of money, then the last forty was devoted to giving it away.

By all accounts diminutive, Carnegie was a ruthlessly ambitious, energetic and charismatic – to say nothing of garrulous – man.

His wife Louise worked out hand signals to stop him talking.

"Carnegie sold his business to US financier JP Morgan in 1901 for £400million and from that day on he spent the rest of his life trying

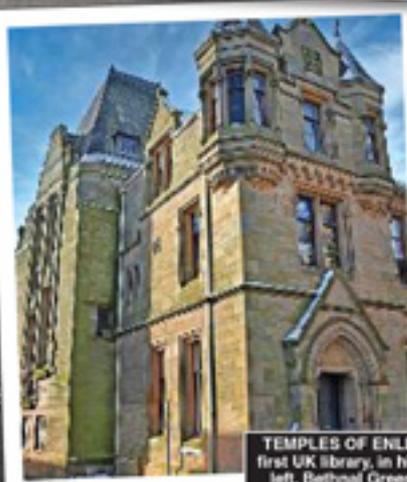
of a day's work for TLC

IS TO DIE DISGRACED

AMAZON founder Jeff Bezos has pledged to donate his £104billion fortune to good causes. But this incredible act of giving doesn't come close to steel magnate turned library builder Andrew Carnegie. KATE THOMPSON explores the extraordinary life of perhaps the world's greatest philanthropist



MONIED: Jeff Bezos and partner Lauren Sanchez, left, Andrew Carnegie and wife Louise, below



TEMPLES OF ENLIGHTENMENT: Carnegie's first UK library, in his hometown Dunfermline, left, Bethnal Green library in London, right



Sharron. "You had to get off your bum and walk into a library to become enlightened. Above my doorway there is a sign that says 'let there be light'. This was Carnegie's motto. For 30 years I have worked in Carnegie's first public library of the world and I have learnt something new every day."

At the opening of his third library in Pittsburgh, he directed his speech to the assembled working men.

He told them: "I know you would rather see more money distributed to you in the form of higher wages, but if I had paid you more money in your pay cheque, you might have bought a better cut of meat, or drink, but you need a library, a museum, a concert hall. This is what raises the working man."

BY THE time of Carnegie's death in 1919 aged 84, he had given away ninety per cent of his fortune – in today's money a staggering £250billion. No one comes close to the scale of Carnegie's philanthropy, not even Microsoft billionaire Bill Gates or his former wife Melinda.

"His legacy also goes beyond libraries," Sharron insists.

"Through the Carnegie Corporation of New York established in 1911, he also funded nuclear disarmament, helped the discovery of insulin and also gave us Sesame Street. That is some legacy. He was years ahead of his time."

One wonders what Carnegie would make of the closure today of so many of the libraries he endowed.

"With child literacy at an all-time low, he would be shocked at the sneaky way many of his libraries have been closed despite the promises made," says Laura Swaffield from national charity, The Library Campaign.

"Many children now don't have access to a public library." Since 2010, around 800 libraries in the UK – more than one in five – have either closed or been handed to volunteers to run.

Laura's own local library in Herne Hill, south London, a handsome Carnegie building, has twice fought off closures through the forming of a local Friends of Carnegie Library group.

She says: "They were determined to sell off our beautiful Grade 11 listed library. We have to keep sharp and never grow complacent. The library is always under threat and yet it is unique."

"It is the only place you can go that is safe, warm, welcoming, non-denominational and you don't have to buy anything. You can ask a librarian a question and you will get the best, most reliable, trust-worthy information he or she can find. It's the huge benefit that you can't put a price on."

Bethnal Green Library also recently had a reprieve from cuts and closures and, last week, celebrated its centenary by recreating the photo taken on its opening 100 years ago, cementing its status as a much loved and valued community space.

As the autumn sun dipped behind the rooftops, a nearby lamp-post flickered into life.

You will often find lamp-posts located near Carnegie libraries," adds Sharron. "Andrew Carnegie felt it was a subtle reminder that libraries offer enlightenment."

● Kate Thompson is the author of *The Little Wartime Library*, out now via Hodder & Stoughton

'If the first 40 years of his life was dedicated to making his fortune, the last 40 was devoted to giving it away'

to give it away to good causes," continues Sharron.

For a man educated in a library, there was one obvious route for his philanthropy.

"It was from my own early experience that I decided there was no use to which money could be applied so productive as the founding of the public library," Carnegie recalled.

Sharron continues: "He wanted to donate something back to the native Scottish town which meant so much to him and he funded the library, which still stands today."

"His own mother laid the foundation stone in 1881 and three years later in 1883 it

opened its doors." Yet Dunfermline was only the start. Carnegie went on to fund 2,509 libraries worldwide in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Of these libraries, 1,679 were built in the United States. Carnegie spent more than £46million on libraries alone, and is often referred to as the "Patron Saint of Libraries". In the UK, he is believed to have funded some 660 libraries.

Carnegie called his formula for giving the "Gospel of Wealth". He believed philanthropy was not a gift, it was a moral and ethical responsibility. A town had to prove that

they could fund staffing, books and running of the library before he would pay for the building.

He also insisted on two things: that the library contained a children's section and a reading room with a full range of newspapers and journals so people could stay abreast of current affairs.

"Carnegie believed you shouldn't be spoon fed," says

Vision for the future

Over two million people in the UK live with sight loss. Many others have problems dealing with print, for instance through dyslexia. Libraries can – and should – cater for them. Friends groups could help spread the word about what’s available, and maybe even raise funds for some useful equipment. Now is a good time to find out more – RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People) is investing in a major programme of engagement with libraries. Lara Marshall explains.

Someone in the UK begins to lose their sight every six minutes. The UK has a population of over 67 million. Over 2 million are living with sight loss. RNIB estimates that by 2030, that number will increase by 22%. The cost of sight loss to the NHS and individuals themselves is over £27 billion.

RNIB has recently put lots of funding into community engagement in line with their new strategy. In May 2022, they recruited me as their first UK Library Engagement Manager.

My role, salary and expenses are funded through a legacy payment to the RNIB Library. The fundraising team are trying to raise more money to keep me on.

My job is to empower library services to provide the best service they can for BPS (blind and partially sighted) users. I will visit libraries all over the UK, and would like to work with Friends groups.

I am developing a comprehensive offer to public libraries. The starting point is to enrich and support things already in place. It makes sense to partner up with the work that’s already been done and build on successes.

Libraries already provide accessible stock in the form of e-audio, e-books, physical talking books and large print.

Many take part in Hi-Vis Fortnight every June, to promote their own and others’ BPS services. (<https://readingsight.org.uk/hivis-2023-1-14-june-2023>).

And there is an agreed Vision & Print Impaired People’s Promise. This has been developed by RNIB, Libraries Connected and the Share the Vision umbrella group of BPS organisations.

It is part of the Libraries Connected suite of Universal Offers. So all public libraries should use it as a checklist to ensure they are covering the

basics. Outstanding services are highlighted in the Libraries Connected awards. See box.

The plan is to offer every library in the UK an ‘RNIB Package’.

It could look like this:

- **Accurate and up-to-date information.**
- **Contact for any assistance; links to local support.**
- **Technical expertise with assistive technology.**
- **Accessibility checks and recommendations.**
- **A chance to be accredited by RNIB as a ‘Visibly Better Library’.**
- **Devices distributed through libraries**
- **Recruitment and employee assistance for BPS employees or potential employees.**
- **Enabling and training library volunteers (especially BPS ones) to run sessions for BPS customers**

In return we’d like

- **Stats on how this work has impacted BPS people in public libraries.**
- **VI/BPS as an option on the library management system**
- **Assistance in gaining funding from DCMS and/or other bodies**

BPS people should also connect in to the other Universal Library Offers:

Reading – Link to the RNIB Library recommendations for audio, braille and large print for libraries. Ensure that all BPS customers find the most appropriate service for their reading needs and can make full use of the public library service.

Health and Wellbeing – Talks, info stands and groups promoting eye health. This is vitally important: half of the people living with sight

loss could have avoided it through routine eye examinations.

Culture and Creativity – Make this fully accessible in all library settings, via staff training and accessible buildings. Encourage groups such as reading groups, coffee mornings, talks by BPS authors.

For inspiration see the Crick Crack Club and its Storytelling in the Dark project (<https://crickcrackclub.com>).

Information and Digital – Tech for life hubs, RNIB accessible products, product demonstrations. ‘2nd life’ products for vulnerable BPS who don’t have internet access or any digital products. Work with library digital champions.

Children’s Promise – RNIB Bookshare gives access to educational books and literature in all accessible formats. RNIB is planning to provide resources and toolkits for accessible story and rhyme times.



Other partnerships will be developed with The Library Campaign and Share the Vision, with library services directly (local authorities, community libraries), with local groups and societies for people with sight loss, prison libraries, The Reading Agency, the British Library, the Arts Council and the Wellcome Collection.

On its website, Share The Vision has great general guidance on making buildings accessible (<https://readingsight.org.uk>). We will build on this by visiting and advising on accessibility for general use, event use, signage, lighting, etc.

RNIB will produce an official list of recommendations, and will offer accreditation as a ‘Visibly Better Building’.

Information and signposting will be mainly delivered through a Sharepoint website, where there will be general information, a bridge to the Share the Vision website, links to local RNIB regional contacts and ideas for displays, events and awareness days.



Any questions? lara.marshall@rnib.org.uk

The Vision & Print Impaired People's Promise

All public library services should:

1. Ensure that all BPS customers find the most appropriate service for their reading needs and they are able to make full use of an accessible public library service
2. Use Reading Sight, the free website supporting BPS people to access reading and reading services
3. Provide local collections of accessible reading materials and information in physical or digital formats, and be able to signpost customers to a wider range of resources
4. Plan digital and physical access strategies in consultation with BPS people
5. Designate a champion for the reading needs of BPS people, who is familiar with the specialist resources and services available
6. Support and promote Hi Vis fortnight run by Share the Vision, the annual celebration to encourage accessibility and inclusivity for all BPS people in local libraries.

<https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/universal-offers/vision-print-impaired-peoples-promise>

SHOPPING AROUND

To give you some idea of what things cost, here are two lists of the most popular equipment. The price range is huge, from £4.99 to £3,000+. One list is things to install in a library. The other is for personal use.

The people who can benefit include those with no useful sight – but also the many who have trouble reading because of dyslexia. And many middle-aged people might thank you just for sticking large letters on to the ordinary keyboards!

Suggested equipment in libraries for blind and partially sighted library users

Large Print Keyboard

£24.99 (RNIB Shop)
Essential.

Large Print Keyboard Stickers

£4.99 (RNIB Shop)
Essential if you don't have a large print keyboard readily accessible.

Braille Keyboard

£3,095.00 (RNIB Shop)

Screen reader software

£595–£1,102.50 (RNIB Shop)
This might already be installed on public PCs or part of a Microsoft package so check first! Dolphin also does a joint magnification and screen reader package. Essential.

Screen magnification software

£475.00 (Vision Aid)
This might already be installed on public PCs or part of a Microsoft package so check first! Essential.

Desktop Video Magnifier

£1395.00 (Vision Aid)
Ideal for a person who has some useful vision but needs help to read an article or book.

Text-to-Speech Equipment

£1,695.00 (Vision Aid)
A resource for someone who has no useful vision and needs to be read to. It reads aloud letters, articles or parts of a book, so has a socket for headphones.

Azabat

£30–£50 (A Z A B A T | Accessible Computer Software)
Computer games, crosswords and a typing tutor, all for blind and partially sighted people.

Optical Hand Magnifier

£13.50 (RNIB Shop)



Personal talking books equipment

Bush CD Player

£24.99 (Argos)
Very popular: plays all Daisy CDs and is the cheapest player. You do need headphones or speakers to plug in to play audio.

RNIB Communiplayer USB

£34.99 (RNIB Shop)
Most popular: the cheapest USB option. You don't need headphones.

In Your Pocket Smart Device

Various options from £26 a month to £787 upfront (RNIB Shop)
A voice-controlled smart device designed for blind and partially sighted people.

Roberts Concerto 3 Radio

£245 (RNIB Shop)
An entire sound system specially made for blind and partially sighted users. You can play radio, CDs, USBs and even cassette tapes. Popular with people who want an all-in-one system and can afford the cost

Victor Reader Stratus 4M Daisy Player

£375 (RNIB Shop)
Most popular Daisy player, as it's robust and has all the features you need such as playing, CDs, USBs and SD cards.

Amazon Alexa Echo Dot

£20.99 (Amazon)
Through a smart device, Alexa can be linked to the RNIB library to play talking books on command.

What RNIB already offers (all free of charge!)

Training

- National Health England and RNIB have curated a four-module Visual Awareness course (we hope to join this with the VPIPP training already available in the Libraries Connected online learning pool)
- In-person visual awareness courses
- Regular online webinars

Technical assistance and expertise

- RNIB regional officers in the tech for life team aim to create 'tech hubs' for blind and partially sighted people in the community.
- Free training for volunteers and library staff to upskill them on assistive technology.
- An UX team at RNIB can check websites and give accreditation if they are accessibly friendly.
- RNIB is in conversation with LibraryON (see page 16) to make sure it's as accessible as possible.

The RNIB Library and Newsagent Service

RNIB Library has over 36,000 unabridged audiobooks and over 10,000 titles in braille. It is the largest library of its kind in the UK. It has 50,000 talking book customers and 3,000 braille customers across UK. Its specialist music library has the largest selection of accessible music outside the USA. The full catalogue of titles can be searched online at www.rniblibrary.com.

RNIB Newsagent is a subscription service, which delivers more than 200 popular and best-selling publications, in a format to suit the customer: USB, Daisy CD, PDFs by email, braille, giant print.



Examples of best practice

Barking & Dagenham Libraries has digital inclusive spaces **Kensington & Chelsea** and **Westminster** are revising their whole offer for BPS.

Buckinghamshire has done some great work with **Bucks Vision** to host events for BPS people, make all their buildings and computers fully accessible and have a VI area in each of their libraries.

MONEY TALKS

Spreading it wider

ACE (Arts Council England) sparked much debate with its latest round of allocations (for 2023-26). No fewer than 990 organisations share £446m. Some get more than before, some get less – or nothing; 276 have never had a grant before, 114 are no longer on the list.

The overall aim, says ACE, is to spread the money wider (ie outside London and the south), to bring 'more creativity and culture to more people in more places'.

In this complicated context, libraries have done relatively well. We say 'relatively'... the overall allocation has risen dramatically from £1.5m. But it's still just £4.1m.

Libraries Connected has so far done loads with its grant as an 'Investment Principle Support Organisation'. That continues, at £509,000 for two years. It could gain a third year of funding if it moves its office outside London.

Meanwhile there's new status (and money) as a 'National Portfolio Organisation' for the excellent ASCEL (Association of Senior Children's & Education Librarians). It has moved fast – it has already appointed its very first chief executive. Intriguingly, Adam Tulloch is not a librarian. He comes from Total Insight, a children and young people's theatre.

Libraries Connected did plenty in its former unfunded role as the Society of Chief Librarians. But ACE funding has enabled it to do much more. We expect ASCEL will now take off in the same way, on behalf of young people.

Meanwhile there is also NPO money for 16 library services, seen as leaders in the field. Is yours on the list? Barking & Dagenham, Barnsley, Cambridge, Nottingham, East Riding, York, Gloucestershire, Hull, Kent, Libraries Unlimited (Devon), Merton, Sefton, South Tyneside, St Helens, Suffolk and Warwickshire.

Big NPO grants also go to two bodies that are about reading rather than libraries as such – Booktrust and The Reading Agency. Both have wonderful programmes administered through libraries, including Bookstart (free books for pre-schoolers) and the Summer Reading Challenge.

Altogether, ACE reckons it has given £16,027,669 to assorted 'literature' bodies.

As libraries spend their limited resources so



very efficiently, it's good to see them getting a bit more straw to spin into gold...

Levelling up

The second (£2.1 billion) round of levelling up grants has caused another huge row. Was it fair? Why should councils spend £27m bidding for pots of money that don't nearly make up for their losses under austerity? And so on.

Well, some good news: £135m has gone to eight projects that include libraries.

Isobel Hunter of Libraries Connected says: 'Libraries have been levelling up for over 170 years. With so many benefits for literacy, health, culture, digital inclusion and business, libraries have a crucial role to play in tackling place-based inequalities.'

But LC joined the chorus warning that the fund does not make up for cuts in council budgets – libraries need a more sustainable funding model.

Who gets what:

Reading: £19.1m to transform the theatre and build a new library.

Rushmore Borough Council (Farnborough): £20m for a 'state-of-the-art leisure centre, library and cultural space'

Aberdeenshire: £20m to transform a disused building into a museum, library and cultural hub, and modernise the aquarium

Hackney: £19m to 'renovate public spaces', including Hackney Central Library

Harlow: almost £20m for a new music and arts venue combining the theatre, gallery and library to house a music school and space for creative industries

Tendring District Council (Clacton): almost £20m for housing, with a new library and adult learning space

Lewisham: over £19m to revitalise the market-place, create a 'flagship culture and business hub' and improve walking and cycling routes.

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council: £17.1m to modernise Leek's market halls, upgrade the library, museum and exhibition space and build a new swimming pool.

Libraries Connected: Universal Offers Calendar 2023

The Libraries Connected calendar has been revamped for 2023, with events streamlined into ‘major’ and ‘other’. If you fancy a bigger (A3) poster, you can download one. Better still – the LC’s online version now lets you click through for information on each one. Very welcome! We researched this information in our magazines no 101 and 102. <https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/page/universal-library-offers-calendar>

MONTH	MAJOR EVENTS		OTHER DATES
January	27 Holocaust Memorial Day	International day to remember the six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust, other people killed under Nazi persecution and in genocides that followed. This year’s theme is Ordinary People.	22 Chinese New Year 28–5 National Storytelling Week
February	February is LGBT+ History Month		6–12 Children’s Mental Health Week 21 Mother Language Day
	7 Safer Internet Day	Promotes the safe, responsible and positive use of digital technology for children and young people. This year’s theme is: ‘Want to talk about it? Making space for conversations about life online’.	
March	March is Women’s History Month		2 World Book Day 10–19 British Science Week 20–26 Shakespeare Week 27–2 World Autism Acceptance Week
	8 International Women’s Day	Global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women.	
April	22 Stephen Lawrence Day	Opportunity for children and young people to have their voices heard and create a society that treats everyone with fairness and respect.	2 International Children’s Book Day 23 World Book Night
May	May is Local and Community History Month		1–7 Deaf Awareness Week 15–21 Mental Health Awareness Week
	15–21 Dementia Action Week	Alzheimer’s Society’s biggest and longest running awareness campaign, encouraging people to ‘act on dementia’.	
June	June is Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month and National Crime Reading Month		5–18 Hi-Vis Fortnight 5–11 Carers Week 12–16 Loneliness Awareness Week 19–25 Refugee Week
	8 Empathy Day	Empathy Day aims to help everyone understand and experience the transformational power of empathy through stories. Libraries across the UK take part, supported by downloadable toolkits.	
July	July is Disability Pride Month		3–9 Health Information Week 15–30 Festival of Archaeology
	10 Summer Reading Challenge launches	The Summer Reading Challenge, presented by The Reading Agency, encourages children aged 4 to 11 to enjoy the benefits of reading for pleasure over the summer holidays.	
August	2 National Playday	Playday is the national day for play in the UK, a day of activities for children and young people.	1–7 World Breastfeeding Week 12 International Youth Day
September	8 International Literacy Day	Since 1967, International Literacy Day celebrations have taken place annually around the world to remind the public of the importance of literacy as a matter of dignity and human rights.	9–18 Heritage Open Days 13 Roald Dahl Story Day 18–2 National Coding Week
October	October is Black History Month		2–8 Libraries Week 5 National Poetry Day 10 World Mental Health Day 14–29 Family Learning Festival 16–22 Get Online Week
	6–8 Fun Palaces Weekend	‘Fun Palaces’ are events made by local people for their own communities, bringing together activities in the arts and sciences, crafts, tech and digital.	
November	November is National Novel Writing Month and November		6–10 Talk Money Week
	13–17 World Nursery Rhyme Week	World Nursery Rhyme Week is a free, world-wide initiative celebrating the importance of nursery rhymes in early childhood development.	
December	1 Winter Mini Challenge launches	The Winter Mini Challenge, led by The Reading Agency, encourages children to keep up their reading habits over the winter holidays.	1 World AIDS Day 1–7 National Grief Awareness Week 18 International Migrants Day

Northamptonshire – five years of transition

In 2018, we reported¹ the sorry story of Northamptonshire. The county council was in financial meltdown -and the flak hit the libraries. Campaigners will recognise much of what happened in the early stages, as public protests were ignored.

Only the actions of local people stopped 21 out of 36 branches being closed completely.

Five years on, most of these libraries have been ‘saved’ by being taken on by their communities. It has been a long and tangled process, and there is much to learn from it. Alison Richards tells the story.



Where to begin? Or rather, *when* to begin? This is an incredible tale of libraries in my home county of Northamptonshire, which were put at risk back in 2017.

Before then, some individual branches had been threatened with closures, and the threats had nearly all been successfully repelled over a period of many years – but the statutory library system, with 36 fixed service points, had seemed reasonably secure.

Were there warning signs that this was about to unravel? Not really. However, Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) had moved to a new ‘Library Plus’ model in 2016. Libraries were also, somewhat strangely, subsumed into one of its outsourced ‘Next Generation’ companies, First for Wellbeing² (a health-dominated social enterprise, since wound up).



These proved to be part of the journey towards what happened in the autumn of 2017 and from thereon in.

First for Wellbeing was first incorporated in November 2015. Yet within two years the library service, which had been made part of its operations, was earmarked by NCC for ‘review’.

On a rather miserable October day in 2017, I met up with an old friend from our days as librarianship students in London. I told her that our local press had just broken the story that NCC was potentially going to shed 21 libraries from its statutory library system.

It was a good many years since I had worked in public libraries, so I had been taken aback by this sudden proposed change. I was unaware that so many councils had made many of their libraries go down the ‘community managed’ route if they were to have any chance of remaining open.

I wrote to my MP, Michael Ellis. His reply revealed that the alarming news about NCC’s budget problems was indeed likely to impact our libraries.

A school student had already gone to an NCC Cabinet meeting to challenge the potential proposals in September–October 2017. By the time the matter came to a full council meeting in November, there was evidence from many parts of the county of serious public disquiet at the prospect of libraries closing.

A large number of speakers from the public came to speak to councillors at that meeting (me included). Petitions were presented and the public gallery was packed. One lady spoke very movingly of the value of her local library for her as a carer of both an elderly mother and a disabled child.

All of our comments fell on deaf ears. Some councillors did not even have the courtesy to listen properly, preferring instead to look at their mobile phones.

Further evidence of strong public opinion was

also heard at a lively public meeting in the St James area of Northampton. NCC had issued a consultation paper on libraries. The upshot of this meeting was the foundation of an ‘Option 4’ group that wanted the three options in the consultation to have a fourth ‘no change’ option added.

This was a forlorn hope. Although a committee was formed, the personal circumstances of its members meant that the Option 4 campaign was short-lived and unsuccessful.



The consultation period included the Christmas and New Year holidays. Like many another consultation, the whole exercise seemed unlikely to engender anything positive from the point of view of those who wanted to keep their local libraries open.

In December, I met with the lead campaigner from Option 4. I had already been in touch with Geoffrey Dron at The Library Campaign, and he

had advised making an approach to DCMS (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport). He did not feel that it was worth pursuing the prospect of a Judicial Review (JR).

[The Library Campaign's views on DCMS and JR are set out on our website.³]

So, I agreed with Option 4 that they would investigate JR matters and I would concentrate on DCMS.

The library users of Northamptonshire must be forever grateful that the groundwork for a possible JR was laid at this point. Despite the documentation that I sent in to DCMS, no benefit was derived from that approach.

By January 2018, I realised that I needed to devote as much time as possible to contacting councillors, monitoring council papers and attending council meetings. The scrutiny meeting in that month saw me addressing the large number of councillors present. I told them their idea that in just one year they could succeed in transferring 21 libraries to 'community management' was simply unworkable.

I pointed out that neighbouring Leicestershire's plans to transfer large numbers of their libraries to this model had allowed five years for the process. My comments had no effect whatsoever, although the councillors did listen properly.

NCC ploughed on with their budget for 2018-19. The press paid ever more attention to the fact that the council's financial problems were far more serious than had at first appeared.

On a cold winter's afternoon in late February 2018, I and others who wished to support our libraries attended an NCC Cabinet meeting. The room was full, with many councillors present in addition to Cabinet members.

One councillor later told me that auditors had just delivered a devastating report. The effect of that was felt immediately. The Cabinet member whose responsibilities included libraries told the meeting that all options in the libraries consultation were now off the table. NCC was instead making an 'independent library offer' to local communities.

In other words, the council was not prepared to do anything at all to keep the threatened libraries open.

The plan subsequently arrived at, should any community wish to run its own library, meant that certain items could be purchased from the council, in the form of bronze, silver, gold or platinum 'packages', running to several thousands of pounds a year. Such packages

FIVE POINTS FOR CAMPAIGNERS

- ▶ **Councillors are key.**
- ▶ **Council finances are key.**
- ▶ **Campaigners need to stand together.**
- ▶ **Big changes to an authority's public library service will almost certainly cause upset, public outcry and dissatisfaction.**
- ▶ **Don't agree to libraries being subsumed to other largely unrelated services, eg, public health.**

would include provision of some book stock, some training or staff support – but not provision of wi-fi, a library management system or a building.

We therefore started the next financial year (2018-19) facing very bleak prospects indeed for the 21 libraries under threat.

On 18 April, a group of us met for the first time. Some 15 of the 21 libraries were represented. It became clear that we needed to set up a formal organisation so that people could continue to meet and consider how best to meet the challenges ahead for their libraries.

The element of urgency meant that we chose to become a registered community benefit society and not a charity. Our registration as 'The 21 Group Libraries Network' (21GLN) was approved by the Financial Conduct Authority in June 2018.

FIVE POINTS FOR COUNCILLORS

- ▶ **Big changes to an authority's public library service will almost certainly cause upset, public outcry and dissatisfaction.**
- ▶ **Provision of a 'comprehensive and efficient' public library service is required by law, ie, it is statutory.**
- ▶ **Setting up CIC companies and the like will not help libraries unless they are fully focused on that service.**
- ▶ **Your public libraries are the public face of your council. A closed library is the sign of a failed or failing council.**
- ▶ **Handing libraries over to any form of 'community management' is not an easy or quick process.**

I am sometimes asked about the identity of this organisation. The truth is that its profile has changed as circumstances have changed since its inception. The best description I can give is that it is a 'self-help' organisation.

Certainly in the early days our emphasis was on seeking to overturn the 'independent library offer' decision. The lead person involved in seeking a Judicial Review was supported by 21GLN. A strong case was made to Mrs Justice Yip at the High Court in Birmingham on 26-27 July 2018.

One community brought a separate case¹ but the two were heard together. There seemed to be no advantage in not acting collectively.

On the first day of the hearing, three members of the public from the single community and seven of us connected with the collective case all attended court, together with one of our local democracy reporters.

On the second day five of us, all connected with the collective case, were present. It was an interesting and very valuable experience.



On 14 August 2018, Mrs Justice Yip's judgement was handed down. Significant paragraphs include the following:

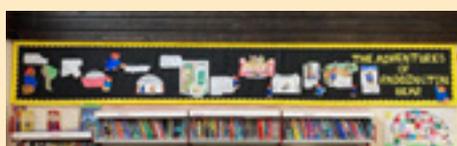
'My provisional view is that the Cabinet decisions of 27 February 2018 and 13 March 2018 should be quashed. I do not believe it would be appropriate to refuse relief on materiality grounds. The flaws in the defendant's decision making which I have identified are such that I consider that the whole question of library provision needs to be revisited by the defendant, paying attention to its legal obligations and all material considerations.

'It appears that the defendant has already commenced some form of review as to what

should happen with the libraries which were proposed to be taken out of statutory provision.

‘I make it clear that I am not deciding any issue as to the merits of any proposed library closures. This remains a matter for the Authority. I do recognise, as indeed the claimants indicated they did, that the defendant may still decide to take the same libraries out of the statutory service, provided that decision is reached lawfully.’

NCC did indeed revisit the ‘whole question of library provision’. It is necessary to understand



the context in which this was done. In February 2018 and again in July, two Section 114 notices had been issued (effectively, a declaration that the council would not have enough funds to cover its projected expenditure).

There was much work to be done to improve the finances. The government had appointed two commissioners to oversee this.

One commissioner called the council’s finances ‘truly perilous’. It had been some 20 years since any local authority had issued a Section 114 notice. The BBC reported as follows⁴:

Shadow communities secretary Andrew Gwynne MP said: “Northamptonshire is a perfect storm of local mismanagement and the crushing pressures of austerity.

“Commissioners will have no option but to slash and burn local services but it’s the people of Northamptonshire that will be forced to pay the price for this neglect.”

THE ONLY WAY

Library supporters in Northamptonshire were left in a quandary. The community managed (CML) model had been mooted in the 2017–18 consultation, and then superseded by the ‘independent library offer’. Some communities were very keen to run CMLs – others not.

But, after months of upset, with NCC gaining not just national, but also international, notoriety for what had happened with its finances, it did appear that to accept the CML model was the only way forward when this was again offered.

In the revised plans a 22nd location was proposed for community management. But five locations were told that if their libraries did not succeed as CMLs, the local authority would return them to the full statutory system. I am referring to this as ‘protected status’.

One requested such a return very rapidly. The other four have become CMLs. In one of those places the library premises have been purchased by the organisation that now runs the library.

The town council in the location of the 22nd library, at Burton Latimer, also purchased the library premises and funds a full-time library manager and two part-time paid assistants.

If any one thing needs to be highlighted in this transition process, it is the fact that NCC refused to supply library premises. Volunteer and other organisations were forced to either buy or rent them for substantial sums unless (as in the cases of one parish council and one community centre) they already owned them, or they had been accorded protected status.

However, the idea that other organisations would pay the council in order to receive book stock, advice from community library coordinators, use of the library management system and a measure of IT support (as per the

bronze etc packages) was abandoned. So that was a small but significant victory.

NCC staff scrutinised business plans, rejecting some and also requiring organisations to sign very detailed and lengthy service level agreements.

There were many hold-ups in the transition process, in particular because of the many issues concerning premises, with the need for much-neglected maintenance issues to be resolved before leases could be signed.

At the time of writing there are still two libraries that are open but for which leases are to be signed, and one other that has yet to re-open as a CML.



At the end of the 2019–20 financial year the first stage in the demise of the county council commenced. The county now has two unitary authorities – North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire.

The Covid lockdown of March 2020 came just before the transition year, when ‘shadow’ authorities operated with Zoom meetings. Elections for the new unitary councillors were held in May 2021, so the new councils have now been in existence for under two years.

In one location, the library made its transition to CML (protected) status at the very start of

April 2020, but could not open its doors to the public at all until Covid restrictions were lifted.

It is, however, worth noting that the CMLs were able to cope with continuing to provide books on a ‘click and collect’ basis – more easily, it seemed, than the council-staffed libraries.

There were concerns that the lockdown periods would lead to a reluctance of library users to return in person to their libraries, but many users seemed to welcome being able to chat with friendly volunteers. In some cases, they were able to receive a more personal service than when their libraries were a full part of the statutory system.

It would be fair to say that trying to start up a CML just before or after the pandemic struck, as well as at a time when one library authority was splitting into two, was undoubtedly fraught with difficulties. Difficulties existed in any case, because the need to engage with either buying or renting premises differed in the various communities.

For example, if your village’s parish council already owned the premises (and had been renting them to NCC) you did not need to worry.

If you were in a community where the library premises were/are owned by NCC or one of its successor councils, it was necessary to either buy or rent from the council.

But in trying to shed so many libraries all at once, there were insufficient staff in property (Place) departments to deal with all the negotiations in a timely fashion.

Rental leases have taken a very long time to be concluded, with some still outstanding.

In some locations, volunteer groups were prepared to run their libraries but until leases were signed, they had to do so under ‘Tenancy at Will’ arrangements, some of which are still in place. Furthermore, some library premises were

in buildings owned by councils other than NCC (e.g., Northampton Borough Council) or even by commercial organisations.

One plan accepted by NCC failed to materialise after the Covid lockdowns. That library ultimately moved to the nearby community centre, where we hope it will be able to grow and flourish.

All other libraries have stayed in their original premises. Many communities were very much attached to the buildings: in some places these had been libraries for eight or nine decades or more.

Where community groups or lower-tier councils have now taken on their libraries, in a number of locations Section 106 money (from developers) has come to them. This has enabled them to improve those buildings. New kitchens have been acquired, small extensions built for storage, meetings or other purposes. In one place there are plans for major roof improvements as well as an extension.

The need to generate income in order to pay for leases, and also staff in some cases, means that the CMLs need to maximise space for meetings and events. Where shelving units were fixed, as many as possible have been fitted with wheels so that flexibility of space is enabled.

Better kitchens and refreshment facilities, special events such as film shows, craft sales, drama and magic shows, as well as sales of donated books or ones discarded from library stock, cake sales and the like are all helping to raise funds and successful grant applications have been made in some cases.



The evidence is that in this varied county, part rural, part urban, and now split into two separate unitary areas, individual communities have rallied to keep their libraries open. They have gained a

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THE LIBRARIES?

Name of Library North Northamptonshire	Status	Type of Organisation in Charge	Any paid staff?
HIGHAM FERRERS	CLOSED	N/A	N/A
BURTON LATIMER	CML	Town Council	Yes
DANESHOLME	CML	Community Group	No
DESBOROUGH	Protected CML	Community Group	Yes
EARLS BARTON	Protected CML	Community Group	No
FINEDON	CML	Community Group	No
IRCHESTER	CML	Parish Council	No
RAUNDS	CML	Community Group	No
ROTHWELL	CML	Community Group	No
THRAPSTON	Protected CML	Community Group	Not yet but planning for this
WOLLASTON	CML	Community Group	No
Name of Library West Northamptonshire	Status	Type of Organisation in Charge	Any Paid staff?
FAR COTTON	CLOSED	N/A	N/A
ABINGTON	CML	Community Group	No
DEANSHANGER	N/A	N/A	Deanshanger returned to the Statutory System
KINGSTHORPE	CML	Parish Council	Not yet open but will have paid staff
LONG BUCKBY	CML	Community Group	Yes
MIDDLETON CHENEY	Protected CML	Community Group	No
MOULTON	CML	Parish Council	Yes
ROADE	CML	Community Group	No
ST JAMES	CML	Community Centre	Centre's paid staff plus volunteers
WOODFORD HALSE	CML	Parish Council	No
WOOTTON	CML	Parish Council	Yes

Notes
Protected CMLs are the ones that would be taken on again by the library authority if they fail as CMLs. Community Groups consist of volunteers. An Academy Trust is also involved at Rothwell and Raunds. Abington has links with the local community centre, especially with regard to a lease.

sense of identity and purpose in making them as relevant as possible to the needs of those communities.

For us the whole process of challenging a library authority's plans, agreeing to the community-managed model (in some cases very reluctantly) and making every effort to make the best of that has left us in an untypical position as library campaigners.

We are pleased that only two libraries have been lost (i.e., closed completely), although we would have much preferred to have seen all of them remain open in some way.

The situation with the now-defunct county council was both shocking and difficult for us. For anyone not living in Northamptonshire it was, and has often remained, almost impossible to 'walk in our shoes'.

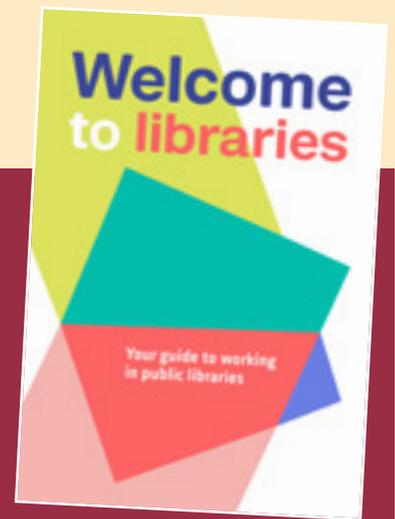
I am well aware that some campaigners may criticise our position in Northamptonshire. I can only say to our critics that you are/were watching from the sidelines. It really was necessary to have been there – in court, in the council chamber, in the many other meetings involved.

If, where you live, you currently find your libraries in a similar position of 'review' by the library authority, you have my sympathy. In making your challenges, I hope that something I have written here may be of use.

Notes

- 1 The Library Campaigner, Issue 96 (Autumn 2018) pp.8-9.
- 2 <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/09857257/filing-history>
- 3 <https://librarycampaign.com/beyond-the-council>
- 4 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-northamptonshire-44937892> Northamptonshire County Council bans spending again – BBC News

Welcome information



New from CILIP is a 'welcome pack' aimed at staff new to public library work. Much of the content, of course, is aimed at librarians thinking about their careers. But even that is worth a glance, for some insights into the kind of development areas that are springing up.

The rest of the pack is full of interesting and useful stuff, from a quick trip through history (from 1440!), to analysis of the effects of Covid, to portraits of some favoured local services. How does yours compare?

All downloadable at: <https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/inductionpack>

The most important asset of any library goes home at night – the library staff.

TIMOTHY HEALY (FORMER PRESIDENT NYC PUBLIC LIBRARY)

Recent history

1885 Andrew Carnegie A Scottish-American industrialist, he started his public library project with a grant to his Scottish hometown, eventually funding 860 public libraries in the UK and over 2,500 worldwide.	1915 Carnegie Trust An early 'thinktank' researching library use and a major catalyst in promoting inter-library cooperation and lending through the funding of regional catalogue development.	1919 Landmark legislation The 1919 Public Libraries Act abolished the 'penny rate' that restricted local taxation use, and enabled county councils to become library authorities which broadened provision.
1919 First Library school The United Kingdom's first library school is founded at the University College London. It continues to this day.	1927 International Federation of Library Associations Formed of 14 national library services, its mission is to build "a strong and united library field powering libraries, informed and participative societies".	1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act The Act still underpins UK public libraries with its statutory obligation to provide a "comprehensive and efficient" service and gives ministers the power to intervene.
2002 CILIP The Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals; formed through a merger of the Library Association and the Institute of Information Scientists.	2011 Selghart Report Independent report featuring a number of recommendations to improve public libraries, including proposals for a Single Digital Presence, and the creation of a libraries taskforce.	2016 Taskforce reports The Libraries Taskforce publishes its <i>Ambition for Public Libraries</i> document, with seven outcomes to be measured over five years.

2018 Libraries Connected The Society of Chief Librarians (previously Federation of Local Authority Chief Librarians) become Libraries Connected and an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.	2019 Arts Council England (ACE) The Libraries Taskforce hands over responsibility for library development to ACE, which remains the development agency for public libraries in England.	2022 Baroness Sanderson Government commissions Baroness Sanderson to chair an independent advisory panel to gather evidence about public libraries ahead of a new public library strategy launching in 2023.
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New technology will open up more opportunities for public libraries – AI, machine learning, digital platforms and blockchain are already with us and have the potential to revolutionise public libraries again.



Liverpool Central Library

Rising up to meet new challenges

When Covid hit, the world changed - and libraries were no exception.

There have been huge changes in what is considered a public library services over recent years, but the nationwide lockdown sparked a dramatic shift in how those services were delivered.

Libraries' response to the crisis went far beyond digital delivery, and public libraries were widely recognised as vitally important to local communities. Here's an overview of how it went.

The pre-Covid landscape

In 2020 there were 4,356 libraries across England, Scotland and Wales; over 20,000 full time equivalent staff, and funding topped £1 billion.

A decade later the picture looked like this:

3,763
Libraries*

15,419
Library staff†

Over **£677m**
Funding for libraries†

170m
Books issued‡

Over **214m**
Visits to a library per year†

* England
† UK
‡ UK excluding NI

7.6m
Active borrowers‡



Reacting to Covid

In March 2020 the Government announced a nationwide lockdown. Libraries were shut and a quarter of library staff were redeployed as part of their local authority pandemic response. But libraries didn't stop - they were deemed an essential activity and many services took on new responsibilities, such as coordination and delivery of shielding operations, arranging food and medicine deliveries.



32%
Increase in membership despite library buildings being closed for 4 months

130,000
phone calls were made by 130 library services†

214m
people were proactively contacted by libraries

Over **30%**
of adults engaged with public library services during lockdown†

Over **75%**
of libraries delivered online events

3.5m
more ebooks were loaned by mid-August



Over **60%**
of services continued their Home Library Service, providing vital comfort and books to very vulnerable users

Almost **1 in 5**
library services operated an enhanced Home Library Service to more people to help combat loneliness and improve digital skills

63%
of people surveyed said that the library service helped them to feel more connected to their community

* England, Northern Ireland and Wales; † UK

Road to recovery

Public libraries proved how adaptable they are, and have emerged from Covid with renewed purpose, central to the needs of their communities. This trend for innovation has positioned the sector well for the next crisis - the rising cost of living.



81%

of library services expect to see an increase in people using libraries to keep warm in winter

38%

signpost users to advice and advocacy organisations

47%

provide help using price comparison websites

56%

host food, clothing or hygiene banks / donation points

38%

of library services have already introduced new services specifically to help people through the cost-of-living crisis

19%

offer personal budgeting classes and workshops



Future plans

Public libraries have strengthened their civic foundations. They have a higher profile among policy-makers, and are now looking at meeting new challenges for their communities.



Digital

Physical visits and loans are still down.

200%

Level of digital lending compared to pre-Covid levels

1

National shop window for services: Single Digital Presence, LibraryOn†

99%

of libraries offer public internet access

Economy

Public libraries support all levels of the employment market.

20

Business and IP Centres in libraries have supported:

66%

of library authorities offer help with Universal Credit claims

12,288

Number of businesses created

86%

of library authorities support the unemployed to get online

7843

Number of new Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs created*

£78m

Amount local economies have been boosted by*



* Estimated

Suffolk's new story

Suffolk's library service adds to its file of research that proves that libraries are a fantastic bargain – even in terms of hard cash.

Suffolk libraries are leading the way in value-for-money research that would impress Scrooge himself. No ghosts are needed. Just facts.

We reported their first study in issue no 100.¹ This looked at just three activity groups – and found they saved £8.04 for every £1 spent. That's after every conceivable outlay is subtracted, right down to the tea and biscuits. Savings came from anything from learning support to reducing use of NHS services.

In 2020, there was research on the value of Suffolk's telephone 'lifeline' during Covid lockdowns. This brought obvious benefits such as reduced loneliness and anxiety, feeling a sense of belonging and connection to the local community, and feeling cared about. In cash terms: £4.24 for every £1 spent.

Mind-crunching

Now there's a new report² that looks at just about everything the libraries do. Different aspects give different returns, but all save money. The overall average is £6.07.

But how do you translate the benefits we all feel into pounds and pence? The main content of the report explains in mind-crunching detail exactly how. It gets gets nul points for being a racy read. But it's convincing.

The comparisons are fun to analyse (see BOX).



PHOTOS: SUFFOLK LIBRARIES

Intriguingly, by far the biggest cash payback comes from the mere existence of libraries as a place to be, and a place for other groups and organisations to do their thing. Any calculable added cost is minimal – the libraries are there anyway.

The report says: 'Service users greatly value libraries as a space to spend time with other people without an explicit agenda, means or purpose. Relationships are often forged on a more casual basis without there being very close ties, but are nevertheless very important for wellbeing.'

'The sense of wellbeing that stakeholders experience due to knowing librarians, meeting library regulars and others who live locally was

This is the payback for every £1 spent:

Groups, clubs and activities	£1: £7.96
Lending resources, guidance, info	£1: £5.69
Access to IT support	£1: £2.28
Space provision and hosted services	£1: £22.91
Talks, walks, performances and hosted events	£1: £1.23
Friends groups and volunteering activities	£1: £5.48
All combined activities	£1: £6.07

profound, and contributes a further explanation as to why libraries are so important for wellbeing.

'If Suffolk Libraries suddenly closed down, over £41m worth of social value outcomes experienced by members of the various local communities would be destroyed.

'This work also provides outcomes to other stakeholders indirectly – not least state agencies. An example of this is value created for the NHS. In one year this amounts to £542,000 for reduced services, eg, fewer GP services, fewer outpatient visits, fewer mental health assessments.'

So, just existing as an accessible public space gives dazzling results. We all know that, but to see it in numbers is illuminating.

Below comes the value of specifically organised 'groups, clubs and activities' – still impressive at £7.96 for spending £1. Taking part gives a feeling of achievement, especially with creative work.



But that is just part of the benefit. People also feel that a regular activity ‘provides some useful structure and anticipation, which can help people to feel more motivated and at ease with their free time, leading to a greater quality of life. This is especially the case for older people...’

And, of course, it gets them into the library. To find all the other things it has to offer, from books to local gossip.

Below comes the core offer of libraries – lending stuff and giving information. At £5.69 it still scores well, because so many people make use of it all. As well as the obvious value of getting books they couldn’t otherwise afford, many appreciate the staff help in finding new reads that they wouldn’t have thought of themselves.

As for information, people get info on ‘all manner of things’, from bus times to NHS guidance ‘after a GP appointment’. This is ‘a valued part of the library experience for many stakeholders... Given the complexity and wide range of trustworthiness about other sources of information, the library was seen as especially trustworthy.

‘This helped stakeholders to feel relieved and reassured ... This is an outcome that has become more important as other services are being reduced or cut down due to budget pressures.’

And just a fraction below that is the value of Friends and volunteers, at £5.48.

Friends groups

Suffolk makes special use of Friends groups. Each library has one, to raise funds, help develop policy and co-plan activities.

They also rely heavily on volunteers - not to replace staff, let alone run the service, but to support the professional staff. The report says: ‘Volunteering has a hugely important role in helping the libraries to function smoothly.

‘There are many activities achieving important outcomes that would simply not take place without the crucial input of volunteers.

‘The noticeably skilled staff group can be justly proud of what is being achieved through this joint effort.

‘Investment in volunteering is relatively low so, as in many volunteering situations, the outcomes are very efficient.’

And, of course, it’s rewarding for the volunteers themselves.

References

1. <https://librarycampaign.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/100-COMplete.pdf>
2. <https://www.suffolklibraries.co.uk/assets/pdf/impact/moore-kingston-smith-impact-report-jan-23.pdf>



TLC AGM AGENDA

- Election of Chair for the meeting
- Apologies for absence
- Annual report for 2022–23
- Accounts for 2022–23 (note that the Campaign financial year closes on 31 March so these will not be the final accounts.)
- Election of trustees:
 - Chair
 - Secretary
 - Treasurer
 - 6 trustees including two from representatives of local Friends or user groups
- Any Other Business. (Please notify us before the start of the meeting if you wish to raise anything.)

ME – A TRUSTEE?

Our constitution allows for nine trustees (plus three co-options.) We have only four at present so we want to improve this and get some new ideas. We have approached some people already, but too many is better than too few!

The legal duties of a trustee are here <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/charity-trustee-whats-involved>. In our experience they are not too onerous. Possibly one that could worry you is the bit about personal liability. However, we have always managed to have trustees who work well together and plan within the limitations of our resources etc, so this has never been a problem.

You may also be concerned about potential conflict of interest between the trustee role and your day job or other interests. Andrew Coburn was Secretary (and trustee) of the Campaign for many years while working for Essex libraries, and had no issues. You can

always recuse yourself from any discussion if something comes up with which you are involved and about which the Campaign is concerned.

We want to have more meetings – possibly quarterly. If we use online tools we could meet more often, perhaps more briefly. And we can use email or Whatsapp to communicate in between.

We don’t necessarily want trustees to do a lot of ‘hands on’ work between meetings. What we would like are current news and ideas. We are approaching people who have skills and /or a background in relevant areas, so if you can contribute we will appreciate the help. We cannot pay you more than expenses to attend meetings.

If you want to know more, please contact thelibrarycampaign@gmail.com.

